

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

SAMUEL G. CRAIG, Editor

H. McALLISTER GRIFFITHS, Managing Editor

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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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but within it; *privilege* lies not without the hedge, but within it; *power* lies not without the hedge, but within it; *liberty* lies not without the hedge but within it.

Ah, but here's the rub, right at this point! We are so sure that we are fit for greater things than Providence permits us to do! so confident of the extent of our talents, so eager for the larger fields that seem to lie just without the hedge! We fret and rebel, when all the time God is simply shutting us in to do the thing He wants done in this narrow little place, and to learn the lessons we never could learn outside the hedge. Here is *Belle Smith*, Gipsy Smith's cousin, an invalid for thirty long years in a bare little back-bedroom in a New York tenement. Hedged in! but helpless, bedridden, she thinks and plans and prays for her poor neighbors until the whole neighborhood wears a path to her door and her little room becomes a sanctuary, gilded with the very light of heaven. And here is a *little woman in Williamsport*, crippled for life—for *this* life—fast in a wheel-chair. Hedged in! But her hands are busy all the time, knitting, sewing, helping the children; she wheels herself to the kitchen and bakes bread for the household, cookies for the youngsters; her lips are full of kindly words; and on her face is the light of heaven. Work, God's own work, to be done within the hedge! little tasks to be done, kindly words to be spoken, good cheer to be spread about, hearts to be warmed, lives to be moulded: plenty to do in the narrowest place!

But here is a third proposition: *Here within the hedge is not my permanent dwelling-place.* What we said about the difference between satisfaction and contentment applies again at this point. None of us lives in ideal circumstances in this world; but here within the hedge God is using us, and preparing us for better, larger things. Some day He will level the hedge about us, and by His grace we shall step forth.

"All my life I still have found—
And I will forget it never—
Every sorrow bath its bound,
And no cross endures forever.
After all the winter's snows
Comes sweet summer back again.
Patient souls ne'er wait in vain;
Joy is given for all their woes.
All things else must have their day;
God's love only lasts for aye."

God does not ask us to be satisfied here: He does ask us to be content, knowing that there are better things ahead. If this life were all, we would be in a bad way: the deprivations, the inequalities, the burdens, the sufferings of life would have no explanation. But God be thanked, this life is not all. Heaven lies beyond. Jesus' word and Jesus' resurrection settle that forever: "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

Here is *Fanny Crosby*, stone-blind all her life, shut within a hedge of darkness. But Fanny Crosby has the certain light of heaven within her heart, and oh, how she sings!

"Some day the silver cord will break,
And I no more as now shall sing;
But oh! the joy when I awake,
Within the palace of the King!
And I shall see Him face to face,
And tell the story, 'Saved by grace!'"

Within the hedge we shall not stay. "Our light afflictions, which are but for the moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." Even here, we catch glimpses of the towers and pinnacles of the Holy City, we hear the sound of voices singing by the crystal sea. Soon the hedge will go down, and we shall be—Home!

And to those who look at life-within-the-hedge in this way, a strange thing happens. Day by day the hedge seems to recede, the space within it to grow larger, the soul becomes less cramped, life grows richer and happier. When Gipsy Smith goes to visit Belle Smith, shut in her tenement room, he asks her, "Belle, have you peace?" And the invalid smiles at him as she answers, "Peace? I have the Author of peace!" There's the secret. The Saviour's presence with us, within the hedge; and work

at hand to do for Him; and Heaven ahead: and the hedge forgotten! We fret no more; our unrest, our envy, our unhappiness have gone. For God does not shut us away from the life we have a right to live; He shuts us in that we may pass our apprenticeship well and learn to work and live. Do not waste time pitying yourself. Look about you. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." And look up and away, beyond the hedge: life eternal is before you. God has planned your career not on the scale of three-score years and ten, but on the scale of eternity. William Carey, at his cobbler's bench, kept the map of India pinned on the wall before his eyes, hoping and expecting to go there when God levelled the hedge. So with you: Keep cheerfully at your cobbling, with the glorious view of heaven before your eyes: and some day God will bring you out, as He brought David, "into a large place." For heaven has no hedges!

"The Gospel of Jesus"

By Wm. Childs Robinson, A.M., Th.D.,

Professor of Church History in Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia

THE phrase "the gospel of Jesus" is being used as a veritable conjurer's wand. The "liberal" religious mind seems to be obsessed by it. If, as ordinarily used today, this phrase were employed to designate the whole of that message from God to man which the canonical gospels attribute to Jesus, its wide-spread use would be a source of much satisfaction to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth. Unfortunately, however, most of those who use this phrase to express "the essence of Christianity" have such an attenuated conception of that essence as to suggest that the word "essence" is being used in an apothecary sense, i.e., as referring to the faint odor left in the bottle after the liquid is all evaporated.

Several forms of this so-called gospel of Jesus may be distinguished. In the first place there is the naive, often unconscious parroting of the old platitudes of Unitarianism, "the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the leadership of Jesus." One of the great orators of a sister denomination recently expended a great deal of eloquence in stating that even the cosmic mind would never outgrow such conceptions; seemingly oblivious to the fact that he was merely parading the old Unitarian shibboleths in new clothes. Another form of the so-called "gospel of Jesus" is that the heart and essence of Jesus' gospel is "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind—and thy neighbor as thyself." A third form of this theme may be described as the Harnack distillation, revamped and popularized by many recent American

writers and preachers. Jesus is a simple and gracious figure, preaching an ethical gospel, emphasizing such notes as, the Fatherhood of God, the duty and joy of self-sacrifice and brotherhood, the inwardness of true religion. Another common type is frequently met with among the leaders of academic religious thought. In these groups international relations or world peace, interracial relations, industrial-economic relations are presented as the substance of Jesus' way of life. Other forms might be mentioned. These, at least, are typical. Concerning such representations the following remarks are offered:

1. Such so-called "Gospels of Jesus" are not Gospels at all. They have no good news in them. In Luther's trenchant words they are wholly Old Testament, commandments, precepts; they have no New Testament in them, no promise. They are what God requires of us; not what God does for us. They ring the changes on "thou shalt," they offer no message of what God has done. Yea, though they demand and command love toward God and toward man; they do not elicit love by declaring that God has so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. If Christ only came to say something and that something innocuous platitudes; or summations of the law already given centuries before, then His mission and His message has no gospel in it. The law that declares "thou shalt love the Lord with all" and "thy neighbor as thyself" pronounces an awful judgment and a solemn curse upon any want of conformity

thereunto—it breathes no good news to the soul who really sees himself in his evil, his sin, his crisis of separation from God.

2. These so-called "Gospels of Jesus" are not historic Christianity. In the course of his class room discussion Dr. G. F. Moore, professor of the History of Religions at Harvard University, took occasion to remark that the liberal gospel of Jesus is not historic Christianity; but first century Judaism; but that the gospel about Jesus is historic Christianity.

Unquestionably Dr. Moore was right in this generalization—a generalization that applies particularly to the second form of the "Gospel of Jesus" indicated above. In Luke 10:27 a first century Jewish lawyer gave expression to the identical summary of the Mosaic law which is now called "the essence of Christianity." What was the need for Jesus if the sum of his message was already so well known?

But if the content of this magical phrase is construed a la Harnack, i.e., as the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the infinite worth of the human soul, then Emil Brunner, in *The Theology of Crisis* is undoubtedly right in characterizing it as later idealistic Stoicism.

Critical historical study justifies the same conclusion. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch—in a church in which Paul was preaching his gospel about Jesus as the crucified Redeemer—making the welkin ring with the glory of his Lord. The Gospel, which gave birth to the name Christian may be most conveniently seen in the Epistle to the Galatians—an epistle written by Paul while he was at Antioch, and regarded by several able scholars as his first epistle. If something radically different from the gospel set forth in Paul's epistles be offered as the gospel, ought not those who offer it be historically, or critically minded enough to disavow with that offer the name of Christian? It was Paul's preaching, Paul's message that resulted in the coining of the epithet "Christian"; if something fundamentally different from Paul's message be preached, is it historically justifiable to call this "other gospel" a re-interpretation of Christianity?

3. The so-called "Gospel of Jesus" is not in any of its forms an historic entity in any proper sense of the phrase. The fundamental dictum for students of historical methodology is, "no documents, no history." Where are the documents for this "gospel of Jesus"? By what process of critical alchemy can they be distilled? Certainly the "gospel of Jesus" was not learned from Roman historians; though possibly three of them casually mention Christianity and Christ (not Jesus). Of the three one mentions the fact that Christian believers sing a hymn antiphonally to Christ as God! Surely the incidental and somewhat doubtful mention in Josephus will not be set up as the documents for this thesis. But if recourse be had to the New Testament, every up-to-date scholar knows that the old distinction between John and Mark has been utterly discredited. Bousset, in *Was Wissen Wir von Jesus?* finds a divine supernatural Son of God even in Mark.

A. T. Robertson shows that it is present in Harnack's reconstruction of the Logia. Rawlinson regards it as generally accepted that every one of the New Testament books is written from the standpoint of faith in Jesus Christ. W. E. Bundy, in *Our Recovery of Jesus* says that "throughout, the New Testament centers exclusively on the Person and work of Jesus as dying Saviour and as Risen Lord."

Writing as a radical critic, Emil Brunner affirms that "the most radical criticism will never succeed in proving that Jesus did not consider himself to be the Messiah, i.e., that he did not make a claim for himself that goes far beyond his humanity—no historical criticism can deny, with any reasonable hope of success, that the first church already revered Jesus as the risen Lord." The shortest Gospel, Mark, is no emasculated "gospel of Jesus"; it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This so-called gospel of Jesus has no documents; therefore, it is not history.

Other Elements Lacking in the "Gospel of Jesus"

In particular the so-called gospel of Jesus leaves out certain elements in Jesus' teaching which on any tenable historical, scientific or critical theory are at least as well attested as are the morals of Jesus. Canon Gore justly charges Harnack with neglecting three of the four main elements in Jesus' ministry (Reconstruction in Belief, pp. 462-3).

A. The so-called "Gospel of Jesus" neglects Jesus' Messianic and Divine self-consciousness.

Passages in which Jesus describes Himself as the Bridegroom, as David's Lord (kurios), and as the Son of Man who shall come with the clouds of heaven in judgment, are common to the three synoptists; and must find a place in any objectively verifiable primitive tradition or primitive sayings. According to the "Primitive Tradition" Jesus in the earliest period of his ministry described Himself as the Bridegroom (Mark 2:19, 20); thus showing that he regarded himself as the Messiah and identified His coming with the Old Testament predictions of the coming of Jehovah, the husband of Israel. It is difficult to find any element in the teaching of Jesus better attested, critically, than His use of the 110th Psalm in the Synoptics, the earliest speeches in Acts and the Epistles. According to the weight of this evidence Jesus described the Messiah as David's Lord (kurios) who sits on the right hand of Jehovah until His enemies are made His footstool. And in His Great Confession to the High Priest, Jesus mingled the two loftiest strains of Messianic anticipation, the Son of Man of Daniel, with the Lord of Psalm 110 and applied this transcendent synthesis to Himself (Mark 14:60-63).

If reference be made to the alleged primitive sayings (Q. as reconstructed by Dr. Harnack), we find that the Messianic consciousness reaches back and rest upon a Divine self-consciousness. Rejoicing in the Holy Spirit, Jesus affirms a uniqueness which equates Himself with the Lord of heaven and earth, in knowledge, sover-

eignty, and revelation (Matt. 11:25-27; Luke 10:21; 22). Every spiritually minded man must acknowledge the truth of Augustine's insight, when addressing the Creator, he confessed: "Thou hast made us for thyself; and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." And yet from the rapture of His unique Sonship Jesus calls weary hearts to find in Him rest for their souls. Scan all the pages of religious history and you will find nothing just like this. Jesus is the heart of His own Gospel. His invitation is: "Hither to Me! Ye shall find rest for your souls."

B. The so-called "Gospel of Jesus" seems utterly oblivious to the apocalyptic and eschatological claims of Jesus in the Gospel, although they stand on as secure a critical foundation as do the moral axioms. The stone which the Ritschlian builders rejected has become the head of the corner.

An age, ushered in with James' pledge to "forge every sentence in the teeth of irreducible and stubborn fact," can never accept liberalism's uncritical forcing of first century Son-of-Man messianism into conformity with nineteenth century German idealism or twentieth century American humanism. The Markan Son of Man must either be interpreted by a wide reference to the causal efficacy of its own irrevocable past, i.e., Daniel 7, the Parables of Enoch, and use made thereof by the Tannaim rabbis; or better still by the sovereignty of its immediate context. So interpreted the Son of Man is seen to be a transcendent, supermundane figure who existed prior to His birth in Bethlehem of Judea. Trailing clouds of unquenchable heavenly glory He comes to the judgment throne of God with the reins of eternal destiny in His grasp. Jesus used this title to suggest the manner of His return as the sequel to His death and resurrection. "Nothing else in the Gospels has so impressed the stamp of the supernatural and the superhuman upon the self-portrayal of Jesus as the parousia Son-of-man passages."

Have those who talk so glibly of the "Gospel of Jesus" ever considered the investigations of the eschatological school, as presented, for example by Schweitzer in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*; or the effect of these findings upon current Anglican criticism, e.g., Canon Gore; or the eschatological conception of the kingdom held both by the Barthians and by the German Positive School; or the soteriological eschatology of Dr. Gerhardus Vos?

Or do they think it scholarly to ignore inconvenient facts? Or are they trying to "high-hat" the premillenarian Bible student who knows just how many times the Lord predicted His Second Coming? That blessed hope is not so easily expunged either from the real Gospels or from the hearts which love His Appearing.

C. The so-called "Gospel of Jesus," in striking contrast to the canonical Gospels, omits entirely our Saviour's reference to His death and our salvation thereby. Roughly speaking, half of Mark is devoted to the death of Jesus. Even such a radical as Rashdall acknowledges

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duty to do so laid down by the law of the Church. In February of 1929, the Supreme Court of Canada delivered judgment, and by a four to one vote confirmed the Presbyterian position in every particular. It decided that the Saltsprings congregation was still outside the United Church; that the "second vote" was null and void; that St. Luke's congregation was still a Presbyterian congregation, bound by "The Rules and Forms of Procedure of the Presbyterian Church in Canada;" and that the provision in the Nova Scotia act allowing a second vote contradicted the Federal act and was therefore also null and void. It overruled the Nova Scotia judgment ordering a "third vote." This was everywhere regarded as a stunning defeat for the United Church. It was pointed out that if the Saltsprings congregation was subject to the "Rules and Forms of Procedure of the Presbyterian Church in Canada" (commonly known as the "Blue Book"), then the Church therein named must be regarded as existing, and as being subject to those rules. To the United Church claim that "The Presbyterian Church in Canada" existed only within the United Church, and that Presbyterians had no right to use that name, it was pointed out that the United Church, having changed its rules and forms, so that they are no longer Presbyterian, was not the "Presbyterian Church in Canada" to whose rules and forms the Supreme Court had referred. The "unionists" had always told non-concurring congregations that they would lose their "ecclesiastical color" by not entering the United Church, and be only isolated congregations, hence not Presbyterian. But the Court declared them still to be a Presbyterian congregation. No outside power or law could take away their Presbyterian convictions or standing without their consent.

Shortly after the judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada, the United Church was granted leave to appeal the case to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, in London. As above noted, the decision of the "Law Lords" was delivered on June 23rd last. In an apparently unanimous judgment, their Lordships affirmed the judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada. They expressed themselves as in general agreement with the Chief Justice of Canada, and were unable to accept the appellants' arguments "notwithstanding the powerful assistance they derive from the dissenting opinion of Mr. Justice Duff."

The Presbyterians thus retain the Saltsprings Church and Manse, but more important, certain great Presbyterian principles have been vindicated despite the forecast of "unionists" that their United Church of Canada Act was "Lawproof." The judgment is also regarded as a personal vindication of Dr. Robert Johnston of Ottawa, and as being in no small measure due to the unflinching industry and skill of the Rev. Frank Baird, D.D., of Pictou, Nova Scotia. Dr. Baird, who was Moderator of the recent General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, has had the responsibility of the case almost from the beginning.

"The Gospel of Jesus"—Concl.

that the basis of the penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement is Paul's interpretation of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. But why not Jesus' interpretation of this passage? He was familiar with it.—Luke 22:37. At His baptism Jesus was identified with the Servant of the second half of Isaiah, the Servant in whom Jehovah is well pleased. Present-day students of the Messianic consciousness freely acknowledge that the Isaianic Servant is one of the most prominent elements therein; the English scholars generally make it the dominant strain. Jesus is represented in Luke as inaugurating His ministry at Nazareth with the declaration that the Isaianic proclamation was fulfilled in Himself. There are references to the same Isaianic terms in His answer to John as given in the synoptists. But, in addition to this general supposition that in identifying Himself with the Isaianic Servant He identified His work with the substitutionary work of the Servant in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, there is the definite statement in the first two gospels that Jesus did so construe His death, in phraseology in which there is clearcut reminiscence of the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. It is true that liberals have tried to draw the fuse from this text and cast it aside as an empty shell, solely because it does not fit their theses. Schweitzer reminds them that it is more critical (therefore more modern) either to take it or leave it as it stands. Whether or no Jesus fits the liberal mould; His words in the real Gospels are: "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom instead of the many." And the great meaning of that text has been reaffirmed by well nigh two millenniums of disciples since, as in obedience to His command recorded four times in the New Testament, they have taken the bread and drunk the cup remembering His words "my blood of the new covenant shed for many for the remission of sins."

Yours for the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, the only hope and refuge for the estranged sinner; God's great work done for the sinner once for all. But may He who did this work for us deliver us from a man-made, man-marred so-called "gospel of Jesus" which proves to be only a counsel of despair.

Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas—Concl.

Jerusalem. He did not know God, but God knew him and made him an effective instrument for good. It may well be that through Gandhi, God is breaking down the barriers of prejudice, hatred, suspicion and contempt which the Hindu raises against Christianity. He who makes even the wrath of man to praise Him may be opening a door to India's salvation through Gandhi's life and influence. If the door is opened, let us pray that missionaries who believe the Gospel and can live according to its holy truth, and only they, will be the representatives of Christ in the mission stations of India.

FRANK H. STEVENSON.

Rights Vs Duties—Concl.

the industrial world alone that this principle offers a solution of our troubles. Everywhere, in the home, in the church, in the club—and where not?—men and women dwell together in peace and happiness and with mutual profit in proportion as they think not only of their own things but also of the things of others.

Here as elsewhere JESUS is our one perfect example. He was not forgetful of His rights or of the recognition due Him. It was in full consciousness of His divine origin and dignity that He performed His task on earth. "JESUS, knowing that the FATHER had given all things into His hands, and that He came forth from God, and goeth unto God, riseth from supper, and layeth aside His garments; and took a towel and girded Himself"—this text expressed the spirit of His life not only on the night when He washed the feet of His disciples but throughout the whole of His ministry. He had the right to live as one whose rank was that of the SON OF GOD, but for our sake and the world's sake He waived that right and lived as one who came not to be ministered unto but to minister. JESUS is an example not of the weak serving the strong, but of the strong serving the weak; not of the unfit serving the fit, but of the fit serving the unfit; not of one zealous of His rights but of one who voluntarily gave up that glory He had had with the FATHER, before the world was, and took upon Him the form of a servant that He might save a lost world. And only as men in an increasing measure walk in His footsteps—not in the sense of doing more than their duty, as did JESUS, but in the sense of doing their duty more adequately—can we hope that peace and contentment with justice and righteousness will prevail on the earth. An outstanding need of this age, as of every age, is men who are more concerned about performing their duties than they are about maintaining their rights.

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