

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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Christianity as a Way of Life: Its Supernaturalism

IN a previous issue we sought to indicate the kind and measure of that supernaturalism that Christianity recognizes and demands. On that occasion (February, 1931) we dealt with the place that the supernatural occupies in Christianity as a mode of thought rather than with the place that it occupies in Christianity as a mode of behaviour. On this occasion we propose to reverse the emphasis and to show that the supernatural is as inextricably implicated in Christianity considered as a way of life as it is in Christianity considered as a creed. In proportion as we succeed in doing this it will become evident that in the struggle for and against supernaturalism it is not merely the Christian creed that is at stake. It will be seen that the Christian ethic, the mode of life that it commands, is equally at stake. Doubtless there have been, and still are, those who have rejected the Christian creed and yet have commended the Christian ethic. But, unless we are altogether mistaken, that is only because they have not realized the extent to which Christianity even as a way of life is through and through supernatural. It is our contention that neither the reasonableness nor the practicability of the Christian way of life can be maintained except as the supernatural as a factor in human life is frankly recognized. We hold, therefore, that if the present attempt to uproot belief in the supernatural should succeed, it would mean the ultimate dis-

appearance of Christianity as a way of living as well as a way of thinking. Some considerations that indicate the part the supernatural plays in Christianity as a way of life follow:

(1) We cannot get into the Christian way of life apart from the supernatural. When we first discover our whereabouts we find ourselves in the broad way that leads to death, not in the narrow way that leads to life. Moreover we find that of ourselves we are unable to forsake the broad way and plant ourselves in the narrow way, not because the way is barred, as it were, by stone walls and iron gates but because of our sheer inability. We might as well suppose that an evil tree

can produce good fruit as suppose that those dead in trespass and sin can by their own will and power set themselves in the path that leads to eternal life. Only as a supernatural power energizes within us does this become possible for us. In other words regeneration, a rebirth through the operation of the Holy Spirit is necessary before we can get into the Christian way of life.

We are aware that a different representation is widely current. We are told rather: "The gates along the way of life stand open; whosoever will may enter in." Moreover such language is employed not merely to express the universality of the gospel offer; it is employed to express belief in man's plenary ability to work out his own salvation. Are we not constantly told that the parable of the Prodigal Son is all the gospel men need? We would be the last to minimize the value of this parable, but we are not blind to the fact that it says nothing of atonement, nothing of the Holy Spirit, not even anything of CHRIST Himself. If this parable contains the whole, or even the core of the gospel, then, we can get up of ourselves and go back to God and assume the position of a child in His household whenever we choose—no questions asked and a warm reception assured. Such a conception is pleasing to many but it is not the Christian conception. It is CHRIST Himself who says: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot

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Books of Religious Significance

SCIENCE AND RELIGION, a Symposium by twelve British scientists and clergymen. Scribners, 1931. Price, \$1.75.

IN the case of a number of the writers of this work there is an evident propriety in their placing "science" first in the title. As Principal Jacks points out, "some of the writers, lay and clerical, give science the leading part in laying down the terms of reconciliation between science and religion. Science is master of the situation. She has won all the engagements that have been fought so far, and, though religion has not been annihilated, she has been taught a sharp lesson. Therefore it is for science to dictate the terms of surrender and for religion to accept them. In case religion refuses a bad time is in store for her. The passports of religion are not valid until they have been stamped and visa'd by the scientific consulate."

In particular Professor Julian Huxley demands that religion become the pliant handmaiden of science and content herself with such menial tasks as the mistress of the situation allows her—i.e., the setting up of a scale of values on the basis of the data furnished by science. Huxley insists that the nature of religion be determined by the science of comparative religion. Accordingly the root elements of religion are declared to be a sense of sacredness, a sense of dependence, and a desire for explanation and comprehension—which last is to be gratified by natural science. God and immortality are "not essential to the nature of religion." Further it is the duty of religion to assimilate the new facts and the possible generalizations offered by science to account for these facts. Religion must modify herself according to Darwin. For, while God and man are treated as relative, evolution is regarded as absolute on this planet. "Nature works according to universal automatic law," preserving her unity and continuity apart from any guidance of matter from without. The energy which moves the tides, drives a motor car, and in man consciously feels, reasons and plans, "is only one world-stuff, only one flow of energy." Again it is the business of religion to mold itself to conform to the sex-psychology of Freud, and the behaviorism of Pavlov.

Without stopping to criticise Huxley in detail, it is important to recognize the service he has rendered in clearing the atmosphere, and in revealing the irrepressible conflict which must continue to exist between historic Christianity and science as he has presented it. Christianity can never accept the terms of reconciliation which the eminent zoologist offers—for when she does she ceases to be Christianity. Anyone who

reads this lecture with an ounce of discrimination must see that Professor Huxley has branded as a particular theology which science is determined to destroy the religion of the sovereign God and of His great and "absolutely unique acts for the redemption of mankind, particularly the sending of His only begotten Son, His death on the cross for the atonement of the world, His resurrection as the beginning of a new God-given life for the redeemed race"—the religion commonly and historically known as the Christian religion. Huxley has also clearly limned a form of the doctrine of evolution—an all too common form of that doctrine—with which supernatural religion can have only war from generation to generation.

Other addresses offer more positive contributions, although too many of the speakers have allowed Huxley to sound the keynote. Eddington finds that the most fundamental postulate derived from scientific inquiry is that in us there is something to which truth matters. Rev. H. R. L. Sheppard forcibly reminds us that in their profound crises men turn to religion rather than to science; and from religion derive their new vitality. Dean Inge points out defects in the Victorian doctrine of universal and automatic progress; Principal Jacks is thought provocative. A Protestant naturally differs from Father O'Hara in his doctrine of Baptism; but in spite of this difference the reviewer regards the Jesuit's article as the most distinctively Christian of any in the series.

WILLIAM CHILDS ROBINSON,
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THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL. By Martin Luther. Translated by Henry Cole, M.A., with slight alteration from Edward T. Vaughan, M.A. Corrected by Henry Atherton. Great Britain: The Sovereign Grace Union, 98 Camberwell Grove, London, S.E. 5, 10/6. United States: W. B. Eerdmans' Pub. Co., 234 Pearl St., N.W., Grand Rapids, Mich., \$3.50.

THE Sovereign Grace Union is doing a valuable service to orthodox Christians by reprinting books of the type now under consideration. Luther's book will remain a classic on the subject of man's free will. It should be remembered that Luther deals with the subject chiefly from an ethical point of view. Accordingly he brings out very forcibly the Scripture doctrine of the "natural man's" total inability to do anything that is good in the sight of God. And what could be more useful for the church today than a reemphasis of this very point? The "wisdom of the world" rebels against this

doctrine constantly. This wisdom seeks to insinuate itself into the church again and again. It is such a hard doctrine to believe that we can do nothing meritorious in the sight of God unless He by His grace operates in our hearts.

The method employed by Luther is that of detailed Scripture explanation. For this reason the book should be very useful for those who are troubled with certain Scripture passages which they think seems to allow some power to the "natural man." Moreover the book is very readable. The fact that it was written long ago should not keep any one from reading it.

Incidentally one may gather many interesting bits of information about the ways and methods of Modernism in this book of Luther. Luther was writing against the famous Modernist of his day, the great Erasmus. Luther shows how Erasmus counseled men from the investigation of deep doctrines. Such investigations could lead to nothing but disharmony and strife according to Erasmus. At the same time the real result of such a policy and the real intent of Erasmus who advised its adoption was that men should turn to an agnostic position. "You call us off, and forbid our endeavouring to know the prescience of God—and counsel us to leave such things, and to avoid and disregard them; and in so doing you at the same time teach us your rash sentiments; that we should seek after an ignorance of God—" p. 45. We may well ask, "Shall a leopard change his spots?" Modernism in the Reformation period sought to insinuate a far-reaching agnosticism into the church in the name of peace and harmony. Is Modernism today doing anything different?

Luther takes pains to call attention to this policy of Erasmus again and again. Nothing seems to him to be so dangerous as the systematic cultivation of ignorance in the name of peace as Modernism engages in it without let or hindrance. Accordingly he wrote his catechisms with which to instruct the youth of the church in the essentials of the Christian faith. Would not the church do well to follow Luther's example in this respect? Orthodox Christians have themselves to blame most of all for the rapid inroads of Modernism in the Church. Modernism thrives wherever ignorance of the church's teachings prevails.

Another point of interest is the confidence with which Luther meets his opponent. He gives Erasmus credit for great learning and culture but does not in the least fear to meet him in the arena of religious debate. In this respect too, it would seem, we can well afford to follow Luther's example. All too often we crouch like "a belaboured

hound beneath his master's lash" when Modernism hurls the dread name of science rather than produce argument. We need to be humbly bold in our fight with Modernism because we have the fullest confidence that truth is on our side.

Many other matters might be mentioned which would prove that the book of Luther makes very profitable reading for any one interested in the progress of the old gospel. We have mentioned only two or three items in order to give an illustration of the great value of the book.

CORNELIUS VAN TIL.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KARL BARTH by the Rev. John McConnachie. Hodder and Stoughton, London. pp. 288.

KARL BARTH: PROPHET OF A NEW CHRISTIANITY? by William Pauck. Harper & Brothers, New York. pp. 228.

THESE two books witness to the growing interest in Barthianism in English speaking circles. The first is from the pen of the Minister of St. John's Church, Dundee, Scotland (see our August issue, p. 16) and is more appreciative than critical. In fact we will hardly do its author an injustice if we speak of him as a disciple of Barth. The second is from the pen of the professor of Church History and Historical Theology at the Chicago Theological Seminary (Congregational) and is more critical than appreciative. For while Professor Pauck finds much of value in Barth he holds that he is the "preacher in the wilderness" not the prophet of the new Christianity. Both these writers have studied under Barth and speak out of a first-hand knowledge of his writings. Their books admirably supplement each other and together constitute a valuable contribution to the literature of Barthianism.

In the first of these books we see Barth through the eyes of one whose theological background is that of a present-day Scottish Presbyterian while in the second we see him through the eyes of one whose theological background is the modernism that derives from Schleiermacker by way of Ritschl, Harnack and Troeltsch. The thoroughly naturalistic viewpoint from which Professor Pauck approaches Barth is indicated not only by his statement that "supernaturalistic metaphysics are offensive to our minds and consciences" (p. 202) but more in detail by such a passage as the following: "No intelligent person will deny the validity of the demand that the church recognize the modern world-view as it has been shaped by the results of scientific research. A defense of the story of the creation as it is told in the first chapters of the Bible against the theory of evolution is an act of blind stubbornness. A denial of the human origin of the Bible and a refusal to investigate the

history of the Church according to the best scholarly methods is dishonest. To retain a theology of yesterday, which does not do justice to modern astronomy, geology, biology and psychology is impossible" (p. 22). We cannot stay to question Professor Pauck's assumptions that scientific research has disproved the Bible story of creation or that the use of the best scholarly methods leads to belief in the purely human origin of the Bible; but we pause to remark that the fact that a man like Professor Pauck finds so much in Barth to praise is fitted to raise the question whether there is as much of good in him as Mr. McConnachie discovers.

In trying to appraise Barth it is imperative that we keep in mind that he attacks both modernism and fundamentalism. Our satisfaction over the vigor and cogency of his attack on modernism is greatly lessened by the fact that he is scarcely less vigorous (we do not say scarcely less cogent) in his attack on fundamentalism—true as it is that his sympathies are with fundamentalism rather than with modernism as shown by the fact that he says that if he had to choose between them he would choose the former. Moreover it is significant in this connection that Barth began as a modernist. This means that he has travelled in the direction of fundamentalism (using the term in its broad sense) and inasmuch as he is still travelling it is by no means impossible that he will yet reach a position more in accord with that of the fundamentalist. Our regret that Barth's own position is as yet so far removed from orthodoxy should, however, not be allowed to conceal from ourselves the fact that the theological movement now most in favor in Germany is strongly anti-modernistic. A few years ago it seemed that the whole theological world insofar as it was not fundamentalist had gone over to the modernist position. Certainly that is not the case today. Today Barth and his friends look upon liberalism as represented by men like Fosdick as belonging to yesterday to a much larger extent than fundamentalism.

Mr. McConnachie maintains that Barth is a reformed theologian and that Barthianism is a revival of Calvinism. It seems to us, however, that Professor Pauck is nearer the facts when he maintains that there is only a small measure of truth in this contention. It is true that Barth holds that Calvinism understood Christianity much better than have the modernists but Calvinism will have to be largely re-defined before we can call Barth a Calvinist.

We hope at some future date to give our readers something like an adequate appraisal of Barthianism but at present we content ourselves with indicating some of the points at which it seems to us fatally defective. In the first place it seems to us that its doctrine of the transcendence of

God is so one-sided as practically to deny that man is made in the image of God. If modernism errs by a too exclusive emphasis on the immanence of God, Barthianism errs by a too one-sided emphasis on the transcendence of God. In the second place its doctrine of the Bible seems to us far removed from the true doctrine. We agree that the Bible cannot rightly claim exemption from historico-critical treatment but we cannot agree that its value as revelation is independent of the results of such criticism. According to Barth the Word of God is in the words of the Bible, but the Word of God is in no real sense to be identified with the words of the Bible. While Barth has repeatedly said that the doctrine of the literal inspiration of the Bible is not easily pushed aside yet he does not hold that position and many of his followers at least accept the conclusions of the most radical critics of the Bible. In the third place its view that faith cannot be built on historical facts seems to us fatally defective inasmuch as it seems to sit loosely to the very things that make Christianity the gospel of salvation. Mr. McConnachie in the name of Barth takes exception to Dr. Machen's statement (*What is Faith* p. 242) that "Christianity is founded squarely . . . upon facts." Barth's desire of course is to secure a basis for Christianity that is independent not only of the psychologism of modernism but of the historicism of fundamentalism. He is attempting the impossible. Christianity is grounded in facts and is neither credible nor possessed of saving significance apart from those facts.

The following passages from Professor Pauck seem to us significant. After stating his own conviction that "our only authority is our venturesome faith as we have been led by a sincere open-minded consideration of the facts of life. God has revealed Himself to us in the present life we are living. We believe in Him because the realities of life compel us to. In these realities He finds us. In this sense faith comes to us; we do not create it" he adds: "our impression is that the ultimate authority on which Barth depends is no other than this, and we cannot avoid the conclusion that he is guilty of a strange self-deception, when he insists on pointing to the immediate revelation of God which is concealed in the Biblical testimony on Jesus Christ. He operates with a conception of revelation which is antiquated, outlived, unreal. It is the old supernaturalism, the old belief in the miraculous intervention of an otherworldly, superhuman, anthropomorphic God which haunts him" (p. 165). We call this passage significant because it indicates to us what seems to us to be an important truth about Barth, viz., that within him two life and world views are struggling for the mastery. Broadly speaking these life and world views are the ones known as naturalism and su-