

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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Being a Christian Today

THE situation confronting Christians at the present time has often been compared, not without warrant, with the situation that existed at the beginning of the Christian era.

During the first three centuries Christians had to make their way against a Pagan culture and civilization. In that day, as later, there were those who counselled compromise with the thought and life of the day; others who, despairing of producing a Christian culture and civilization sought refuge in asceticism. Christians in general, however, realizing that what CHRIST demands of his followers is separation, not from the world but only from what is evil in the world, challenged the right of Paganism to continue to dominate the culture and civilization of mankind. Humanly speaking, their efforts must have seemed more foolhardy than DAVID's challenge to GOLIATH. None the less Christians won that conflict with the result that civilization, as we know it, with all its defects, rests upon and is permeated by Christian principles.

Ever since Christianity's initial triumph over Paganism there have been those who have regretted its victory; but until comparatively recent times they have been too few in number, in Christendom at least, to seriously challenge its rights to continue to reap the fruits of that victory. About 150 years ago however the "Empirico-Scientific" life and world view which professes to explain everything including man, religion and morality without the aid of any supernatural factor made its appearance. Within the last seventy-five

years this movement has made such headway, has been accepted by so many, especially in university and scientific circles that it has gained the courage to openly challenge Christianity's right to dominate the thought and life of the world.

As a result of this rapid spread of naturalistic thought and sentiment, Christians in the second quarter of the

twentieth century face a situation not unlike that which existed during the first three centuries. In the days of our fathers, or at least of our grandfathers, the Christian conception of life and destiny was generally accepted in science, literature, and education, and so by public opinion and the better forms of social intercourse. Generally speaking those who were not Christians felt that they ought to be and expected to become such before they died. On the other hand those who were Christians had the consciousness of being in accord with the dominant thought and life tendencies of the age in which they lived. They were supported and carried along as it were by the spirit of the age and so were like men swimming with rather than against the stream.

Today however, there is hardly a fundamental Christian idea about God, creation, man, sin, redemption, conduct or the future—ideas once all but universally accepted by our not distant forefathers—that is not opposed in the name of science, ridiculed by educators, questioned by public opinion and banished as a topic for serious consideration in many circles. ARNOLD BENNETT in a book written shortly before he died spoke not only for himself but for many of the intellectuals of our age when he said: "I do not believe, and never have at any time believed in the Divinity of CHRIST, the Virgin birth, the Immaculate Conception, Heaven, Hell, the immortality of the soul or the Divine Inspiration of the Bible. These denials of belief are taken for granted in the conversation of the vast majority of my

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Is Presbyterianism Prepared to Surrender the Deity of Christ?

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

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PRESBYTERIANISM has been defined as a system of Church government by courts composed of elders elected by the people; these courts being so related as to preserve the unity of the Church. According to the plain implications of this definition a doctrine is held by Presbyterianism as long as her courts maintain it; and conversely whenever that system of courts is no longer able or willing to vindicate any particular doctrine which may be called in question the Presbyterian Church has virtually surrendered the aforesaid doctrine.

It is evident to those aware of present conditions in the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. that her supreme court and many of her lower courts are no longer able or willing to maintain the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Christ as essential for ministerial ordination. Certain of the steps leading to such a condition may be noted. A group of over twelve hundred ministers affirmed that the Virgin Birth, together with several other doctrines, such as Christ's bodily resurrection and that He offered up Himself a sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice and reconcile us to God, was a mere "theory," which it was not necessary to accept for ordination in the Presbyterian ministry. This Auburn Affirmation was signed December 26, 1923. What a Christmas present for the Head of the Church! The General Assembly of 1925 in a judicial decision reversed the position of the Auburn Affirmation by condemning the ordination of two men who were unable to affirm their acceptance of this doctrine. *Immediately* the Moderator of that Assembly appointed a committee of fifteen to consider the bearing of this decision on the purity, peace, unity and progress of the Church. The effect of the reports of this committee, as even an article devoted to proving the theological soundness of the

U. S. A. Church indicates,⁽¹⁾ has been to minimize the Judicial Decision of 1925 and to support the positions of the Auburn Affirmation.

If further evidence were necessary it might be found in recent articles by Dr. J. G. Machen in *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*, November, 1931 and by Dr. W. F. Eagleson in *The Presbyterian* (Philadelphia), January 14, 1932. According to the former four of the eight ministerial members of the Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly (U. S. A.) are signers of the Auburn Affirmation, while a fifth signed and then withdrew his name. Dr. Eagleson affirms that others are almost of the same viewpoint. In other words, a majority of the ministers on the General Assembly's Judicial Commission have already committed themselves by solemn signature to the position that the Virgin Birth is not essential for Presbyterian ordination. The General Assembly of the largest Presbyterian Church in America is so organized that it cannot vindicate this doctrine as essential to ordination. That is the largest Presbyterian body in the United States has juridically surrendered the doctrine of the Virgin Birth.

Just now the United Presbyterians are planning to place themselves under the wings of this same General Assembly. Reports are rife that influential men in the Southern Presbyterian Church are anxious to join in this union. Certain influential leaders in both these branches of American Presbyterianism, whether wittingly or unwittingly, deponent saith not, are working to that same end, the surrender of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth by Presbyterian courts. The placing of any body under the control of a supreme court which has surrendered the

vindication of this doctrine is a surrender of that truth!

Now naturally and normally the Virgin Birth is an integral part of the doctrine of the Deity of Christ. The writer is, of course, familiar with the "Liberal" hue and cry that the men who denied the Virgin Birth are assuredly sound on the Deity of Christ—"that even we New York 'Liberals' would countenance no uncertain note here." In fact one remembers that a former Moderator of the Southern Assembly understood and interpreted the President of Union Seminary (N. Y.) as avowing that he was determined to bring Union into line on such a great evangelical doctrine as the Deity of Christ.

Since such reports Union Seminary (N. Y.) has retired her professor of Systematic Theology and installed in his place Dr. John Baillie. Dr. Baillie has favored (?) the public with *The Place of Jesus Christ in Modern Christianity*. We picked up the book with avidity to discover how nobly Union was being brought back to evangelical Christianity. Alas! what a crushing disillusionment. This book nowhere affirms that Jesus is God; nowhere affirms His deity; nowhere affirms His divinity; nay, it never even applies to Him the adjective Divine. Evangelical Christianity? Why the doctrine of Christ in this volume is vastly lower than the doctrine taught by William Ellery Channing, the leader of the Unitarian schism. It is lower than the doctrine taught by Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick in the *Modern Use of the Bible*—tho' in all conscience that is desperately low. Channing is generally classed as a high Arian. But even old Arius would denounce this view as a psilanthropist (mere man) doctrine. Dr. Baillie holds that Jesus Christ "is altogether one of ourselves, a man among men, a human brother among us, with the same handi-

(1) *Union Seminary Review*, January, 1931, p. 130.

caps and the same opportunities." In the human search for God "He represents the highest point to which the human race has yet attained." (p. 107-8) "God has been revealed to us in the soul of man" (p. 115) "The Christian gospel is rather that in Christ God *did* something for the human race greater and more splendid than He had ever done before" (p. 116). On the human side Dr. Baillie does not avoid ontological terms: On the other side, in reference to that which should have been the Divine, he uses only functional terms. The sense of the book is that Jesus was a man only in whom God did something unique for the enlightenment and salvation of our race. Even this uniqueness is by no means absolute. God has also acted uniquely in the life of Buddha—indeed He does something unique in every great life. "Jesus Christ is not another name for God but the name for a Man in whom God was and through whom God came to meet us" (p. 201). He is not the eternal Word by whom the vast cosmos was made. No, God has other Words for other worlds; Christ is merely the Word of God for this world. In the eternities there shall be a million alien Gospels, "when, in our turn, we show to them a *Man*." And then perhaps for fear some might not get the full significance of his viewpoint, Dr. Baillie dismisses the doctrine of the Trinity by declaring that the Christian piety of today does not naturally express itself by means of "the old triadic mould." To do so were "to do nothing but lazily perpetuate the mistakes of the great men of the third and fourth centuries." (p. 194-5.)

If the purpose of this article were to refute Dr. Baillie one might begin by remarking that those who study such Trinitarian scholars and thinkers as Dr. B. B. Warfield, E. G. Calvin's *Doctrine of the Trinity in Calvin and Calvinism*, Oxford, 1931; Dr. A. E. Rawlinson and his collaborators in the *Oxford Essays on the Trinity and the Incarnation*; Dr. C. J. C. Webb, *God and Personality*; Dr. F. Gogarten, *Ich Glaube An Den Dreieinigen Gott*, find it difficult, nay impossible, to regard these men as lazy perpetuators of any man's mistakes.

But the purport of this article is rather to call attention to the repre-

sentative character of Dr. Baillie's book and its consequent deadly threat to the doctrine of the Deity of Christ in Presbyterianism. This representative character is, in the first place, instanced by the position which the author occupies. He is professor of systematic theology in Union Theological Seminary, New York, the most influential center of "liberal" thought in the Presbyterian world. Further the implications of the preface to this book are that Dr. Baillie has been elevated to this eminent position on the basis of the acceptability of the lectures which the book contains. That is Dr. Baillie virtually says that his lectures so delighted the Union clientele that he was invited to repeat them—and ultimately to form a permanent part of the Union faculty. Again the title of the book is representative. Dr. Baillie is not merely professing to present his own views—as important as those are in view of his commanding position—but the place of Jesus Christ in Modern Christianity. While this comprehensive title is not to be limited to Presbyterianism, surely Dr. Baillie has in the foreground of his picture the "liberal" or modernistic Presbyterians with whom he has fellowshiped. The introduction of this and his former volume surely warrant the inference that the professor of systematics believes he is representing the Presbyterians (or erstwhile Presbyterian) Modernists of Canada, of Scotland (Edinburgh and the pastor of Cupar-Fife are mentioned) and the Presbyterian "liberals" of the United States particularly of Auburn, Union (N. Y.) and Wooster, Ohio.

Moreover the representative title of the book, the position of the author, its endorsement as the book of the month has secured for it wide reading. Thereby its views have been widely disseminated and are undoubtedly more representative than at the time of its publication. The reading of the volume serves as a means of crystallizing the views of men already uncertain as to the Deity of our Lord. Is this Unitarian volume to be the means of a greater and more serious defection in Calvinistic America than the defection led by Channing? Echoes of the widespread influence of the book are even resounding as far from New York as Arkansas, and that in the

Southern Presbyterian Church. A prominent Little Rock pastor wrote the chairman of the Presbytery's Commission appointed to determine where there was any foundation for rumors as to his theological unsoundness, as follows (March 21, 1930):

"In your letter you ask about my views of the deity of Christ, I have never had any doubt, nor have I ever expressed any about the divinity of Christ—However, I would probably not interpret divinity by means of some of the old categories. I think it is qualitative rather than quantitative. My view is pretty well expressed by Dr. Baillie, in his book, *The Place of Jesus Christ in Modern Christianity*."

"The old categories," e.g. the Westminster Confession, the Thirty-nine Articles, and the Twenty-five Articles declare that Jesus Christ is "very and eternal God." Baillie's volume declares, "Jesus Christ is not another name for God, but the name of a Man in whom God was, and through whom God came to meet us." And on this record a Southern Presbyterian Presbytery satisfied itself that there was no ground for rumors of the theological unsoundness of the prominent pastor!

Dr. Baillie's book has acutely raised the question of the stand of Presbyterianism on the Deity of Christ. For any branch of Presbyterianism to accept these views as satisfactory is to surrender the Deity of our Lord. The challenge cannot long be avoided in any branch of worldwide Presbyterianism. There may be men in the Southern Presbyterian Church who are anxious to be known as progressives. The writer is very loathe to believe that these men are willing to surrender the deity of Jesus Christ. Will not these progressive brethren also add their voice that the Presbytery of Arkansas must go deeper into the question of the orthodoxy even of the pastor of a prominent Church, deep enough to find out whether the aforesaid pastor holds with Baillie's book that Jesus Christ is merely "altogether one of ourselves," or with the Apostle Paul that he is also "God over all, blessed for ever" (Rom. 9:5)?

Coincidentally with Baillie's invita-

tion to lower our doctrine of the Lord Christ there comes a pressing call to all true Presbyterians to an even clearer conception of His glory. According to a recent issue of the *Christian Observer* the Pan-Presbyterian Meeting in Richmond, Va. appealed to all Presbyterians to study the work of our greatest American theologian Dr. B. B. Warfield in his presentation of our theology (*Calvin and Calvinism*, Oxford, 1931). In this volume Dr. Warfield declares that the

history of the efforts of the Church to work out an acceptable statement of the great mystery of the Trinity has been "dominated from the beginning to the end by a single motive—to do full justice to the absolute deity of Christ." (p. 284.)

In this effort the three whose names stand out in high relief are Tertullian, Augustine and Calvin. Calvin held that Christ is God, *a se* (autotheos). From Calvin this doctrine of the self-existent

Deity of Christ (autotheotes) has become a distinctive hall-mark of the Reformed faith. Presbyterian hosts, as you face Him who loved you and gave Himself up for you, will you sink His honor to the depths which the ancient Church never allowed, will you become mere Psilanthropists; or for His glory will you rally anew in the Reformed army of Autotheanites holding against all comers that your Lord and Head is indeed God the self-existent Jehovah?

Religion and Trouble

A Sermon from Life by The Rev. Clarence Edward Macartney D.D., LL.D.
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Job 4:5—"But now it has come upon thee and thou faintest; it toucheth thee and thou art troubled."

THIS is a time when a man either turns to religion or turns against it." So spoke a business man who recently came in to see me, and had been telling me of the difficulties and anxieties through which he was passing.

When trouble comes, some turn to religion; that is, it increases and deepens their faith. The winds of adversity only drive them the nearer to God. But others seem to turn away from religion. If they have been going to church, now they stop going, and disassociate themselves from public worship and from Christian activity; and others again not only turn away from religion and neglect it, but turn against it. Thus there was profound truth in what this business man said to me, that this is a time when a man either turns to religion or turns against it.

The Book of Job is still the incomparable classic on this great subject, suffering and life. Life is always thrusting this question upon us, for whether we desire it to be otherwise or not, man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Without trouble, "life would be sort of a Dead Sea, a sea of bliss in which one could float, but neither swim nor explore." Yet the fact of adversity and trouble always raises difficult questions when we think upon God and his

dominion over our lives. "When I think upon God," said the Psalmist, "I am troubled."

The Book of Job is a very old book, one of the oldest in the world, but you cannot hurt its reputation by saying it is old, anymore than you can hurt the reputation of a rock, or a tree, by saying that it is old. Some of the greatest things of the world will always be the oldest. Here in this book, as Carlyle put it in his "Heroes and Hero Worship," is "sublime sorrow, sublime reconciliation, oldest choral melody as of the heart of mankind, so soft and great; as the summer midnight, as the world with its seas and stars."

From the pinnacle of prosperity, Job had suddenly been hurled into the deepest valley of adversity. One calamity after another had broken over him, and when possessions and family and health have all been stripped from him, we see the desolate patriarch sitting upon the ash heap and cursing the day he was born. Job, indeed, did not curse God nor charge Him foolishly. But he did curse the day he was born, and lamented his existence. But he discovered, as we all do when life hurts, that to curse the day of our birth and to lament existence effects no change and accomplishes no good. The date of our birth cannot thus be expunged from the calendar; life is here and we must face it.

Job had not lived carelessly or fool-

ishly in a fool's paradise, when, as he tells us, his steps were washed in butter and the sun of prosperity was in the mid heavens. He was not unmindful of the fact of the instability and uncertainty of all earthly things, for he says, "I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came." And when trouble did come, and the storm broke over him, in spite of all his preparation and contemplation, Job is shaken by the successive calamities which seem to mock at all his preparation and go beyond all his apprehensions. There is a popular saying spoken with the purpose of keeping people from undue anxiety, that the "things we contemplate seldom happen, and the things that happen we seldom contemplate." But this is only a half-truth. Sometimes the very things which we have contemplated, and perhaps dreaded, come to pass. So it seems to have been with Job, and when the storm was over we behold this God-fearing and right-living man deluged with a wave of misery, not abandoning his faith, it is true, but getting no comfort and little hope out of it.

In his day of trouble, Job had true and faithful friends, and these three friends came and sat with him on his ash heap. Whatever mistakes they made in their theology and in their efforts to justify the ways of God to Job, their intent and purpose was true and honorable. After seven days of sympa-