

THE SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL

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EDITORIAL

What Is The Essence Of The Faith?

One sometimes wonders how a minister can deny the objectivity, the historicity, and the corporeality of that Resurrection and yet maintain that he holds to the essence of the Faith. Plainly, he is not using the Bible as his standard for determining what is of the *esse* of Christian Faith. Probably he is more or less influenced by idealistic philosophy and is reading his Christianity in terms of Platonism. Plato held that history was of no importance since it all seemed to be a changing flux, that only the ideas were the eternal essence of the universe. This depreciation of history is the heritage of the whole idealistic tradition. Standing on the basis of Absolute Idealism, Ernst Troelsch writes: "Dogmatics has the task of setting forth the Christian faith in God, or in other words the ideas involved in essential Christianity, and this in complete independence without the least admixture of historical elements. It expounds our faith in God as something that has reality in present experience and renews itself with each individual in the experience of redemption. It is made up of purely present-day convictions."

For Troelsch God is the world and this whole manifests "itself" in the consciousness of every man without any necessary reference to Jesus Christ. God's revelation is thus turned into an interior experience of man. Revelation becomes simply the religious name for human discovery, the upthrust of the human spirit. God is only known as the imminent cause of human religious thoughts or experiences. The transcendence of God is gone and Christian theology is dissolved in the general philosophy of religion.

Now the minister who holds that the Resurrection of Christ is merely a suggestive idea, a universal idea and not an objective event, not a historical fact, not actual raising of His body must have an idealistic world and life pattern something like that of Troelsch. Walter Lowrie says that the reason so many people leave our evangelical churches for Christian Science is that their pastors have taken them three-fourths of the way toward idealism and so have made the other fourth—the

step to Christian Science—logical, natural, and easy.

The fundamental error of idealism is in not recognizing that man is a fallen and a guilty sinner. Idealism may be a good religion for sinless angels, but general truths can only spell the eternal doom of sinners such as we are. We need Divine intervention—we need God to become man and do something—to do enough—to save us from the just punishment due for our sins. And thus the Christian religion must have not merely general truths, but definite events at its very heart and essence. We are saved by God's becoming man for us men and for our salvation, by Christ dying for our sins according to the Scriptures, by His rising again for our justification, by His ascending to the right hand of the Father, by His intercession for us.

In his recent study on the Trinity, Canon Leonard Hodgson, recognizes that, "The revelation of God is given in deeds." The biblical record of these events is central to the Christian faith and the key to unlock all the mysteries of being. A series of events composing a historical series about as that series is summarized in the Apostles' Creed, is the key feature of a truly Christian philosophy. There is not space to evaluate other aspects of Hodgson's book, but it is well to call attention to this healthy sign of a turn from abstract principles to the concrete events of the birth, life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ by which God acted to rescue the world from sin and eternal woe.

Instead of taking the Platonic position that history is valueless flux and only the eternal ideas count, let us come to the Bible and evaluation of both principles and events. In so doing we find that it is the Father's good pleasure that in all things Christ should have the preeminence. His Incarnation is the focal center of all history and life. His death is the expiation of our sins, His resurrection is our justification, His intercession secures for us the grace of repentance, His return is our hope of glory.

—Wm. C. R.

"The Power Thereof"

"We have become so steeped in forms and liturgies and the ceremonies of worship that we have lost appeal to and contact with the masses." This statement was recently made by a clergyman