

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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The Bodily Resurrection of Our Lord: Its Importance

THE General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed that it is an essential article of Christian faith that our LORD JESUS CHRIST "rose again from the dead with the same body with which He suffered." The fact that the General Assembly has deemed it necessary to make such a pronouncement bears witness to the fact that even within the Presbyterian Church there are many who do not hold this opinion concerning the place that the bodily resurrection of CHRIST occupies in Christian thought and life. Within the memory of living men His resurrection—meaning of course, His bodily resurrection—was regarded by friend and foe alike as an article of a standing or falling Christianity. Our fathers, certainly our grandfathers, whether they were Christians or non-Christians, would have been practically unanimous in approving the representation of the late DR. FAIRBAIRN:

"The resurrection created the church, the risen CHRIST made Christianity, and even now the Christian faith stands or falls with Him. If it be proved that no living CHRIST issued from the tomb of JOSEPH, then that tomb becomes the grave not only of a man, but of a religion, with all the hopes built on it and all the splendid enthusiasms it has inspired."

Today, however, there are many calling themselves Christians—and apparently their number is on the increase—who, so far from looking upon CHRIST's resurrection as an article of a standing or

falling Christianity, maintain that it can be discarded altogether without sacrificing anything essential to Christian faith. This, if we mistake not, is one of the fruits of that anti-supernaturalism of thought and sentiment that has become so dominant in recent years even among those calling themselves Christians. In the nature of the case, just as the "non-miraculous Christianity," so much in vogue today, cannot allow that an event so obviously miraculous is needed to account for the origin of Christianity, so it cannot possibly allow that confidence in its reality is fundamental to the Christian's life and hope. Be this as may, we are fully persuaded that those who take this new attitude toward the resurrection of CHRIST are profoundly mistaken, and that as a matter of fact His resurrection

is so essential to Christian faith and hope as to warrant the strong language of PAUL:

"If CHRIST be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and our faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of GOD; because we have testified of GOD that He raised up CHRIST whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not CHRIST raised: and if CHRIST be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins."

The basic question at issue in this connection is, of course, the question, Did JESUS really rise from the dead? That is not the question before us now, however. The question before us is rather, assuming the reality of this event does it so enter into the substance of Christianity as to constitute an indispensable element in the religion we profess? It need not be overlooked, however, that, if the resurrection of JESUS is essential to Christianity, the whole mass of that evidence that evinces the truth of Christianity also evinces the reality of the resurrection.

It is impossible in the space at our disposal to even mention all the ways in which the resurrection of JESUS enters as a constitutive and indispensable element in making Christianity what it is. All we can hope to do is to direct attention to some of the more outstanding considerations which make clear that the resurrection of CHRIST is essential to Christian faith and hope.

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and yet in a way that contradicts the representation given by the Professor of Church History in Union Seminary of Richmond, when he wrote:

"According to the Auburn Affirmation, there are apparently hundreds of our Ministers who, whatever may be their conception of the nature of their ordination vows, want liberty to hold, 'as explanations' of some of the fundamental 'facts and doctrines of our religion,' 'theories' which not only do not agree with, but flatly contradict, the sense in which our Church has always held these 'facts and doctrines.'" (*The Presbyterian*, Feb. 12, 1931.)

More Recent Events

Dr. THOMPSON also devotes considerable space to the Report of the Special Commission of Fifteen and the reorganization of Princeton Seminary with the purpose of showing that neither of these events afford any warrant for questioning the orthodoxy of the Northern Presbyterian Church. But, as we have already intimated in the case of the reorganization of Princeton Seminary, neither of these events has any independent significance in this connection. Most of the report of the Special Commission is taken up with matters that have no bearing on the matter now before us; and while the Special Commission put on record "its deep conviction that the great body of the Church is sound in the faith, even when that faith is judged by the strictest Standards" yet the question whether that conviction is well-grounded hinges on the nature of the Auburn Affirmation. If the Auburn Affirmation is theologically indifferent that conviction may rest on a solid basis of fact, but if, as we think we have abundantly shown, said Affirmation offers conclusive proof of the theological unsoundness of its signers and sympathizers, that conviction is quite untenable. What is true of the report of the Special Commission is also true of the reorganization of Princeton Seminary. If the placing of that institution under the control of a Board that is acceptable to Auburn Affirmationists involves nothing inimical to the continuance of its historic doctrinal position there may be no warrant for fearing for its future, but if the Auburn Affirmationists are as unsound in the faith as we have represented them it seems quite certain that the future of Princeton Seminary will be quite different from its past.

In concluding his article Dr. THOMPSON makes this significant remark: "We have not reported unsupported charges or criticisms, but have preferred to follow the actions of the Assembly itself, and the reports of responsible committees appointed by the Assembly." We wonder if Dr. THOMPSON is as naive and unsophisticated as this remark would seem to indicate. Apparently he is not aware that the Special Commission of Fifteen, in the judgment of many Pres-

byterians, was hand-picked for the purpose of securing a report that would be acceptable to the Auburn Affirmationists, more particularly that would be acceptable to New York Presbytery and thus prevent a threatened split in the Church. Apparently he is also unaware that the Committee appointed to investigate conditions at Princeton Seminary was a thoroughly partisan committee and that the report it presented was a thoroughly partisan report—a report moreover that has repeatedly been shown to abound in inaccuracies and misrepresentation of the grossest sort. The result is, of course, that Dr. THOMPSON, wittingly or unwittingly, has given us a purely *ex parte* account of these recent events in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.

The Proposed Church Union

Dr. THOMPSON's article, as we have said, is written in the interest of the proposed union of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches. If such a union is consummated, he says, "it will be on the basis of the historic standards; no other basis is considered." Such a representation, as was pointed out in the February issue of

CHRISTIANITY TODAY, is far from accurate inasmuch as the plan as proposed involves a wide departure from the existing standards of the Presbyterian Church (Northern and Southern) as regards both doctrine and polity. According to the historic standards Ministers are required to "receive and adopt the Confession of Faith as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures"; but, according to the proposed plan, they will merely be required to "believe and acknowledge the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith professed by the united church and contained in its standards"—a change so radical that it would virtually mean that Ministers of the united church need not be Calvinists. Again, according to the proposed plan, Ministers must promise to submit themselves in the spirit of meekness to the authority of the courts of the Church and "to follow no divisive courses"—a change that introduces something now lacking in our standards, viz., the doctrine of the infallibility of church courts, in face of the fact that had LUTHER and CALVIN and ZWINGLE and KNOX accepted the decisions of church courts as final there would have been no Presbyterian and Reformed churches.

Let the Orthodox in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. Unite!

A Plea for a "Reformation Fellowship"

By the Rev. John Clover Monsma
Formerly Editor of "The Ministers' Monthly"

THAT the morale of the orthodox forces in American Protestantism has been seriously impaired no honest observer, however staunch in the faith and sanguine as to its ultimate victory, can well deny.

There are certain deep-lying causes which could be dwelt on extensively. But that would carry us too far afield. In a book which the present writer has now in preparation and which Rae D. Henkle, Inc., Publishers, New York City, will bring out early next fall under the title "Principles and Methods of Church Reformation" the question of causes and remedies will be more broadly discussed.

There are a number of tactical mistakes, however, that in the writer's opinion the orthodox in their contest with the liberals have been constantly making and that have contributed not a little to the present doleful situation, and it is to these that the reader's attention is directed just now. That the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., is singled out as the special field of observation and action should not affect the interest of readers of other communions. Much of the comment, we believe, will be found applicable to Protestantism in general.

One of the tactical mistakes referred to is the general habit of the orthodox to refer to themselves as "conservatives." There is an unfavorable tang to that name. It is frequently considered synonymous with non-progressives, stand-patters, religious anti-quaries, or something to that effect. It strikes people as being incongruous with our mentality, our peculiar national psychology. We are progressive, forward-looking. Why not use the name "orthodox," which simply means right and sound in doctrine, and which does not preclude, even by inference, true progress along straight lines and ambitious, lofty building on bed rock foundations? After all, we are far more aggressive in our plans and ideals than the liberals, liberal propaganda notwithstanding. Any other notion must be curbed, rather than thoughtlessly and carelessly helped along.

We of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., make another very serious mistake. We are frightfully careless in our choice of office-bearers, of pulpit-committees, and especially of commissioners to the General Assembly. The writer has been urged on several occasions to vote for this or that man as a commissioner to General Assembly because

of his "fine qualities," because he had relatives in the city where the Assembly was being held, because he was anxious to take the trip, etc. Candidates for commissioner will themselves solicit votes, on occasions. And thus we form our august, all-controlling Assemblies! Presbyteries usually find themselves in Stygian darkness regarding the principles and convictions of the delegates they send out; only the "councils" and "committees" seem to know.

A further mistake is our failure to make use of our constitutional rights of dissent, protest, complaint, etc. Why don't our professors, Ministers, editors, elders, yes, and even ordinary church members, make use of those rights? Why don't they provide the dockets of sessions, presbyteries, synods and assemblies with material strong and martial enough to force those bodies away from their mechanical contrivances, statistics and routine, out of their spiritual doldrums, and into the fresh, full winds of God?

Furthermore, there is a matter of an altogether different nature. By our inaction as orthodox people we have allowed others to become our mouthpieces—men and women with a burning love for the Gospel, it is true, but oftentimes having wrong, un-Presbyterian conceptions of the Gospel they love, and with little or no knowledge at all of historic, orthodox theology. "Fundamentalism" today is a term that covers a host of sects, persuasions, movements, opinions and vagaries. And historic Presbyterians, who mean to build on the scholarly foundations laid by the fathers, who still glory in the majestic elevations and unplumbed depths of the Standards of Westminster, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and other similar products of the Reformation—find themselves judged by the trumpeting of all the "fundamentalists" in America and thereupon with a kindly smile pronounced unscholarly, not worthy of serious attention.

Closely akin to this is the accusation that we are too "otherworldly," and our mistake in letting that accusation stand. There is no group of Christians so thoroughly, vitally interested in this present, ordinary, workaday world, with all its difficulties and problems, its laughter and tears, than the historic Presbyterians, or Calvinists, if you will. Their doctrine makes it so. We need only point to the Netherlands, where Presbyterianism came to a new outburst of life during the past half-century, as the result, under God, of the reformatory efforts of Abraham Kuyper and associates. Beginning with church reformation, the great Dutchman soon broke into other fields—those of education, society, and politics. The end of the struggle saw Kuyper at the head of the Dutch cabinet—Prime Minister of Holland and The Dutch East Indies, controlling to a large extent the spiritual and worldly circumstances of some fifty-seven millions of people. All that happened just recently.

Still another mistake we have made. We have allowed the curricula of our theological seminaries—the fountainheads of the Church's thought-life—to become cluttered up with modernistic subjects. The subject to which our fathers gave first place, that of systematic theology, has been well nigh crowded out. When our preachers enter the ministry they know less about doctrine than thousands of laymen do in the churches of Scotland or in the Free Reformed churches of the Netherlands. We have also failed to preserve another subject of tremendous importance—that of the principles of church polity and government. We are "machine-ridden" because hundreds of our Ministers do not know the first thing about the Scriptural principles of ecclesiastical polity, and simply function as agents of the Boards. Dr. Charles Hodge has well said, now almost a century ago: "As our Church became lax in matters of government, it became, *pari passu* [with corresponding speed], lax in doctrine." (Princeton Review, 1838, p. 463.)

We have also suffered from a lack of concerted action. Tens of thousands of orthodox Presbyterian church people are scattered from the Atlantic to the Pacific, but they fail to be a support to one another because of their lack of cohesion, their failure to stand and act unitedly, their tragic supineness in ecclesiastical life. We hear enough of dirges and lamentations, as though David had reference to the liberals when he sang, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power," or when he jubilated in another psalm, "The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it." The liberals, yes! For while some of the orthodox were in a deep swoon, and others were making funeral song and music, the liberals put their heads together, held conferences, made graphs and blue-prints, laid out plans of strategy; occupied their places behind the officers' tables at church councils, and by a variety of well-thought-out devices captured the ecclesiastical strongholds.

That we need a general, thoroughgoing reformation no loyal disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ and faithful member of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., will deny. But there has been too much talk in late years and no strong, well-planned action. If we wish to save our precious heritage there must be action. Christ will take care of his Church in general. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. But church organizations as such have not that promise. They may deteriorate and collapse. They may be wiped out of existence entirely or continue only in name. Church history teaches frightful lessons in this connection. And think of the fate of countless immortal souls when such a calamity happens! And—what is far more—think of the honor of the King Supreme to whom such church organizations had once sworn perpetual allegiance!

There is, of course, the extremely import-

ant question of the *character* of our reformation. Shall we make a general spiritual revival our goal? That, of course, is an essential, an absolute prerequisite. Shall we emphasize evangelism of an interdenominational sort? Shall we seek purity in doctrine only and ignore church polity and the exercise of church discipline?

It seems to this writer that anything short of a complete, thoroughgoing, Calvinistic reformation would not meet the situation. As a Presbyterian people we confess to have a religious heritage that represents Christianity in its purest and noblest expression. We humbly believe—and we say it with a full measure of love for our fellow-Protestants of other communions—that with all our shortcomings and imperfections we come closest in our system of faith and government to the perfect and eternal Word of God. We believe to be closest to the Truth Divine. And we also believe, as a maxim eternally valid, that truth admits of no compromise.

As Presbyterians we should be untrue to God, to the fathers in various lands who shed their life blood for our particular faith, to the hundreds of scholarly men of history who devoted their lives to the development of our system, to our own consciences also, if in the reformatory work that God calls us to do we should roughhew our path, be indifferent as to particulars, ignore the "non-essential" elements of our faith and polity, tone down here and whittle down there for the sake of union with non-Calvinistic believers, and after all continue to move in the murky, misty atmosphere that has enveloped American ecclesiastical life, lo, these many, many decades.

To have our Presbyterian Church continue what it was, a strong, important, powerfully functioning section of the Church universal, our orthodox men and women—laymen as well as preachers—must be up and doing. There is no time to be lost! God the Holy Spirit desires to use us this very instant!

There is one first great step to be taken. It is to ascertain our strength. Elijah thought he was the only one who had not yet bowed his knee to Baal. God revealed to him that there were seven thousand others besides. At times our God cares very little about figures. Sometimes, not the least in extraordinary crises, He cares a great deal.

We must find out the numerical strength of those still true to Jehovah and to the Christ of the Gospel. We have been beating the air so far, in that respect. This writer has a lurking suspicion that our opponents might not welcome the information.

To procure this information we suggest the organization of a "Reformation Fellowship." All those favoring a reformation could join it, both preachers and laymen, both men and women. Such a Fellowship would hold the following advantages:

(a) As stated before, it would reveal our numerical strength. Though we could not expect to reach every last orthodox member

of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., yet it would cause the fog to lift sufficiently to enable us to observe the layout of our ecclesiastical landscape.

(b) The mere fact of the organization of such a Fellowship, but especially the facts revealed after it got to functioning, would raise our morale, which is now so deplorably low.

(c) It would open the way for concerted action—the very thing we have been lacking up to the present time.

(d) Congresses could be held under its auspices in such large centers as New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Minneapolis, Seattle, and San Francisco or Los Angeles, where able, orthodox church men could deliver spiritual and scholarly lectures dealing with reformation problems, followed by general discussions.

(e) Under its leadership we could gradually seek to eliminate the various "tactical mistakes" mentioned in this article. At least, we could make determined efforts in that direction.

(f) The Fellowship could prepare for a thoroughgoing reformation. This would involve a great deal. It would involve far more than a correction of "tactical mistakes." Space limits forbid us to enter into details at this point.

(g) With its leaders aglow for Jesus Christ and his truth the Fellowship could become a spiritual radiation center for the whole Church, to the glory of the triune God.

In suggesting and urging the organization of such a Fellowship we would stress particularly the great need of constantly show-

ing true love for those who differ from us. The majority of those who have left the paths of the fathers have done so in ignorance. We are convinced of that. In the case of many, many others the situation may be accounted for by the fact that they lack faith and spiritual vitality. Only a handful, comparatively, are making premeditated and determined attempts to wreck that which was bequeathed to us. But even with regard to that "handful"—though our attitude in defense of the truth should be most determined and aggressive—the Law of Love should reign. We must fight them to save them.

The writer would invite all those who sympathize with the idea of a "Reformation Fellowship"—both men and women—to write to him. He may be addressed at Oostburg, Wisconsin.

What Is Truth?

A Sermon

By the Rev. R. B. Kuiper, D.D.
President of Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich.

*Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?
John 18:38.*

JUST what did Pilate mean when he asked, *What Is Truth?* What was he driving at? In what tone of voice did he put the question? Did he ask it seriously or sneeringly? Did he mean to say: "I hear thee speak of the truth, King of the Jews. Thou sayest that thou camest to bear witness to the truth. Now that interests me keenly. I have long been an earnest seeker after the truth. Thus far, however, I have failed to find it. Canst thou really tell me what it is? If so, pray speak"? Or did he have in mind something like this: "Do I hear thee speak of the truth, thou Jewish Rabbi? But what's the use? Haven't men been searching for the truth for ages, and haven't they uniformly failed to find it? It is perfectly evident by this time that man cannot know the truth. Then let's quit talking about it."

To us it seems that Pilate asked his question in the latter spirit: not seriously, but sneeringly and scornfully.

It is a matter of common observation that a person whose education has been very limited will often speak with much more confidence about the truth than one with a broad liberal education. Here is a man who never graduated from the eighth grade, whose reading is confined to the daily paper, and who has never traveled outside his own state. When he answers the question *What Is Truth?* he does it with so much confidence, cocksureness even, that one can

hardly escape the impression that he knows it all or at any rate thinks he does. And here is a university graduate whose reading is remarkably comprehensive, and who has traveled around the globe. When he tries to answer the question *What Is Truth?* he does it with so much hesitation that after a little you begin to wonder whether he knows anything at all.

The explanation of this seemingly strange phenomenon is easily discovered. The uneducated man has only his own ideas and it never occurs to him to call them into question. The educated man, on the other hand, is in touch with the ideas of others, has made the discovery that others know something too. He has observed that when opinions clash it is frequently very difficult to decide which is right. And so he finds the question *What Is Truth?* a hard one to answer.

Now let us apply this to Pontius Pilate.

He was a Roman. He was an educated Roman. He was an educated Roman of the first century of the Christian era. The Romans had subdued the world. The Roman eagle had flapped its wings over the whole of the then known world. In their conquests the Romans had come into contact with all kinds of peoples, all kinds of philosophies, all kinds of religions, all kinds of answers to the question *What Is Truth?* They had made the discovery that they, the Romans, did not know it all, that other peoples knew something too. It had even occurred to them that the gods of the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the Greeks

might be just as real and just as great as their own. They had begun to question whether the traditional Roman definition of the truth was quite correct. The Roman mind had been thrown into a state of quandary. Educated Romans especially had lost their moorings. Agnosticism was the philosophy of the day. And no doubt it was in the spirit of agnosticism that Pilate put the question *What Is Truth?* He meant to say: "What it is anyhow? Nobody knows."

We of the year of our Lord 1931 are as compared with previous generations well educated. Education is much more general today than even a generation ago. Today almost everybody gets a high school education and the demand for a college education is so general that many colleges have had to place a limit on the number of their students. Almost all of us do considerable reading, though likely the quality has not kept pace with the quantity. Modern conveyances have made travelers, at least tourists, of most of us. The radio broadcasts much information and many views. May that not be one reason why many find it increasingly difficult to answer the question *What Is Truth?* If we were less well educated the problem might appear simpler.

Then too, our age is hardly one of traditionalism. Time there was when a young man was pretty sure to be a Republican if his father was, and a young lady would almost certainly join the Methodist church if her mother belonged there. But this time is rapidly passing. Nowadays young people