

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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Editorial Notes and Comments

UNITED PRESBYTERIANS REJECT MERGER

IT SHOULD be a source of satisfaction to all intelligent and informed Presbyterians that the Plan of Union proposed by the Joint Committee on Organic Union has failed. The consummation of this union, as we have consistently maintained, would not have been for the best interest of either of these churches. It would not have been for the best interest of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. because it would have been obtained at the cost of a serious lowering of its doctrinal standards and under conditions that would have made further revision in the direction of Modernism relatively easy. It would not have been for the best interest of the United Presbyterian Church because it would have resulted in a church which on the whole is seemingly soundly evangelical in a Reformed sense—despite the reduced and in some respects erroneous creed which—we are at a loss to know why—it adopted a few years ago, being swallowed up by a church which, whatever may be true of many of the rank and file of its ministers and members, is dominated and controlled by a modernist-indifferentist group that is not only hostile to or indifferent to the system of doctrine taught in the Bible and in the Westminster Standards, but which is seeking to wrest from its members as a whole their constitutional and Christian liberties. CHRISTIANITY TODAY is the only paper in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. that has opposed the plan of union proposed by the Joint Committee. While it seemed a foregone conclusion that it would receive the endorsement of our General Assembly, we have all along thought it likely that the United Presbyterian Assembly would reject it. Our already high opinion of the United Presbyterians has thereby been increased.

The vote in the United Presbyterian Assembly was 113 for and 123 against with a two-thirds vote required for approval. It has been repeatedly alleged in the press that the vote against the merger in our Assembly was only twenty. That is unquestionably a misrepresentation. It is more accurate to say that approximately one hundred voted against it with a considerable number not voting because it was obvious that the opposition was hopelessly outvoted. But even if the vote against it had been less than twenty, it would still be true that this was one of the many cases in which the minority has been right and the majority wrong.

The United Presbyterians dismissed their Committee on Organic Union. It would seem to be high time for the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. to do likewise. The department on Church Cooperation and Union should be abolished or at least have its personnel changed and its functions modified. It certainly has proved itself an expensive as well as an inefficient department. The abolishment of this department would not mean

that the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. is averse to union with other churches. It would be much better, it seems to us, to appoint special committees to consider particular proposals of union rather than have a standing department. Such a department feels that it must do something to justify its existence and so is under constant pressure to promote mergers even where there is no real demand for them on the part of the rank and file of the churches concerned.

"GOD GETS SECOND PLACE"

UNDER the above title *Church Management* for July contains the following editorial comment on the last General Assembly:

"If you like family fights you should have been at the meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. which recently met in Cleveland. A fundamentalist group headed by PROF. J. GRESHAM MACHEN, believing that the foreign board has grown modernist, has organized its own board of foreign missions. This the church fathers agreed is all wrong. So they served notice, in no indifferent way, that every minister and officer in affiliation with the new board must withdraw. If they failed to do so in ninety days they must stand trial before their respective presbyteries.

"The little group fought back, appealing that it had an obligation to God and conscience which must come ahead of the ruling of the Assembly. But it was overruled. The Presbyterian Church is a constitutional body. The right of conscience can be granted only so far as it does not interfere with the law of the church.

"Several days later the same assembly debated war. But what a difference? Now it held that 'Christians owe an allegiance to the Kingdom of God superior to loyalty to their own country.'

"So as far as this assembly is concerned it appears that the Presbyterian Church comes first, God and conscience next, while the nation must take third place."

The editorial we have just cited contains about the most illuminating press comment on the last General Assembly that we have noted. Most of these comments are suggestive of many if not most present-day sermons. Just as one might listen indefinitely to these sermons without obtaining any real understanding of what Christianity is or the purpose for which it was established—even those that do not give a positively false conception of the nature and purpose of the Christian religion—so these comments even when not positively misleading (as many of them are) are strangely blind to the significance of what took place at Cleveland. Here, however, is an editorial that has been written with insight and understanding. We are glad to be able to pass it on to our readers.

Book Reviews

English Deism: Its Roots and Its Fruits

by
JOHN ORR, A.B., A.M., B.D., Ph.D.
Professor of Bible, Westminster College
New Wilmington, Pa., U. S. A.
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company
Grand Rapids, Michigan
1934

DR. ORR has given us a useful book. From the story of English Deism as he has told it in this book we can learn how easy it is for men to find objections to Christianity, but how difficult it is to put something better in its place! The Deists of the seventeenth and eighteenth century made much the same objections against Christianity that Celsus and other critics of the early church made. The critics of Christianity at the present time are making much the same objections that the Deists made.

The Deists had very little that they could offer as a substitute for Christianity. They spoke vaguely of some principles in nature and in man, though they dignified these principles with the name of God. So, many philosophers and scientists today speak of various sorts of principles and call them God. The Deists had no solution for the problem of sin and evil, though they ridiculed the Christian doctrine of the atonement through the blood of the cross. Philosophers today have no solution for sin and evil, though many of them, too, ridicule the cross of Christ. It is becoming clearer that the only alternative to Christianity is hopeless despair.

Dr. Orr has not put the matter in just this way. His primary desire was to give a careful study of the writings of the Deists. In this he has, so far as we can judge, succeeded admirably. Studies such as these, though not undertaken with an immediate apologetic objective in mind, are very useful for the Christian apologist. As Benjamin Franklin said that he was to a great extent convinced of the truth of Deism when he read the writings of its opponents so many who read this story of the attack of Deism on Christianity may well become convinced of the truth of Christianity.

C. VAN TIL.

And the Life Everlasting

by
JOHN BAILLIE, D.Litt. (Edin.),
D.D. (Edin.), D.D. (Toronto)
Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933
\$2.50
(The Ayer Lectures of the Colgate-Rochester
Divinity School for 1931-32)

THIS is a book on immortality and the resurrection. The writer, who is the Roosevelt Professor of Systematic Theology in Union Theological Seminary, New York,

has had sufficient training in theology and philosophy to enable him to deal comprehensively with these subjects. One would expect to find erudition and breadth of scholarship in such a book by such a writer even though one might disagree with the point of view and the conclusions, and as a matter of fact we find both in this book.

The point of view of the Writer seems to be that of modern religious liberalism as one would expect from one who is a professor in Union Seminary. He seems to accept the documentary and development hypotheses of the Old Testament, and the evolutionary view of the development of religion (cf. pp. 74, 81, 90, 91, 103, 119, 120, 149, 155, 161). His idea of the resurrection of Christ is that the question of the empty tomb is really immaterial (p. 178), and quotes with approval a statement from Dr. Coffin's book, *The Meaning of the Cross*, to the effect that the resurrection was not an event in the physical world as ordinarily understood (p. 175). In fact, he seems to accept a modified form of the vision theory of the resurrection of Christ, and classes the resurrection appearances with the many other visions and revelations of the Bible. These visions, however, give revelations of really genuine reality back of them (p. 182, 183). We are told, moreover, that while these visions were indeed not properly speaking objectives, they nevertheless were probably not illusory (185). In regard to the New Testament, parts at least are not inspired and a book like *The Revelation* is based on Jewish apocalyptic literature (p. 238). We would hardly expect our author to believe in a literal Hell, but we are rather surprised to find that he seems to reject the idea of eternal punishment and accept some form of universalism which he is not quite sure has yet been discovered (p. 294). Somewhat after the Barthian system, the Last Day, instead of being a definite Judgment Day in the future, is thought of as really immanent over the believer all the time (p. 299). On this same page the author seems to hold that our bodies will not really be raised in any real resurrection corporeal form (p. 299 ff.).

We would not give the impression that the book as a whole is bad apart from these above mentioned parts to which we take exception. Naturally we cannot accept this Liberal point of view, but on the subject of immortality there is much that is true and admirably said. The argument against the radical psychological theory which would deny any persisting personality to individuals is excellent in the main (p. 104 ff.). In fact, the argument for the immortality of the souls of Christians consisting in communion with God and the redeemed is mostly satisfying and beautifully set forth (p.

112 ff., Chap. VI, particularly p. 227 ff.). His insistence on the *quality* rather than the *quantity* of eternal life is very cogently expressed (p. 244 ff.).

The really disappointing thing about such a book as this is that although much that is true and fine is said, one is left with the uncomfortable feeling that all his arguments are at best only capable of giving us probability because they are not solidly grounded on a Christ who actually *broke* the bonds of death and by a historical act which left the tomb actually empty, proved once for all that He was the victor over death and therefore could be trusted when he gave us the precious words in the fourteenth chapter of John, for example. A mere vision of a living Christ, if His body was really in the tomb, could never convince the world that the recipients of the vision were not the victims of mere illusion or hallucination. If that is all we have on which to base our hope of immortality, then that hope is still only a hope. Moreover if the Bible is not completely trustworthy and inspired by God, then doubt is cast on all statements about the future life and we can be sure of nothing beyond what our reason can tell us, at the best only a probable persistence which we *hope* will be with God. The Christian who believes in his Bible as God's Word, *knows* that his Saviour is indeed the Captain of his salvation because He has once for all conquered death, and can be trusted in His statements as to what will happen to the believer in the future.

FLOYD E. HAMILTON.

Letters to the Editor

Editors of CHRISTIANITY TODAY:

I HOPE that a few words from me, a member of another denomination (Lutheran), on the present situation in the Presbyterian Church will not be looked upon as meddling. Let me say frankly and kindly just how the situation in your church impresses me.

Some time ago a large number of Presbyterian ministers signed what is known as the Auburn Affirmation, which is so obviously out of harmony with the Presbyterian confessional system that no argument is needed to prove it so. But not one of those signers has ever been censured by the General Assembly, nor has there been the least sign of a movement to discipline any of them.

Again, it has been clearly proven that there is Modernism connected with the personnel of the official Board of Foreign Missions. Yet no effort has been made by the General Assembly to call the Modernists to account, or to discipline them, or even to investigate the charges made against