

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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

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The Revolt Against Christian Moral Standards

PRESENT-DAY repudiation of Christianity is not confined to a rejection of its creed. It includes a rejection of its ethics, of the mode of behaviour it commends. That was not the case fifty years ago. Our fathers, not to mention our grandfathers, did not have to defend their ethical conceptions. Practically everybody admitted their superiority. In those days, even those who rejected the doctrines of Christianity vied with those who accepted them in extolling the superiority of its ethics. The oft-quoted words of JOHN STUART MILL (written in 1873) express what was then, and for a considerable number of years thereafter, the prevailing view even among those most pronounced in their rejection of the supernaturalism of the Christian creed:

"The most valuable part of the effect on character which Christianity has produced by holding up in a divine person a standard of excellence and a model of imitation is available even to the absolute unbeliever, and can never more be lost to humanity. . . Whatever else may be taken from us by rational criticism, CHRIST is still left; a unique figure, not more unlike all His precursors than all His followers, even those who had the direct benefit of His personal preaching. . . Religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this Man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity; nor even yet would it be

easy, even for the unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to so live that CHRIST would approve our life."

It is quite otherwise now, however. Today there is no part of Christianity more openly assailed or more expressly repudiated than its ethics. In apparently ever-widening circles the Christian type of man is no longer regarded as the highest type of man. NIETZSCHE was the first outstanding person to openly attack the Christian ideal of conduct. Moreover he counted it as one of his chief claims to greatness that he had "unmasked Christian morality," which he declared to be "the most malignant form of all false-

hood, the actual CIRCE of humanity, that which has corrupted mankind." H. G. WELLS, BERNARD SHAW, BERTRAND RUSSELL, BENJAMIN B. LINDSEY, WALTER LIPPMANN—not to mention others, including even preachers and theological professors—may as a rule express themselves more mildly but it must be obvious to all informed persons that they repudiate Christianity as a way of life as truly as they repudiate it as a system of thought and belief. The decade that has passed since FIGGIS wrote the following words has but served to add to their significance:

"On all hands we hear preached a revival of Paganism. Christianity as an ethical ideal is contemned. Formerly Christians were charged with hypocrisy because they fell short of their ideal. The charge was false, although the fact was true. We do fail, fail miserably, to come up to our ideal, and always shall, so long as it remains an ideal. Nowadays the Christian is attacked not because he fails, but in as far as he succeeds. Our LORD Himself is scorned, not because He is not the revealer of love, but because He is. Hardly a single specifically Christian value is left as it was."

How shall we explain this change of attitude towards the Christian ideal of character and conduct? What lies at the root of the fact that the present-day attacks on Christianity are aimed at the morals it inculcates as well as the doc-

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Books of Religious Significance

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. A Handbook of Christian Ethics. By Joseph Stump, D.D., LL.D., L.H.D., President of Northwestern Lutheran Theological Seminary. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1930. \$2.50.

BY presenting Christianity as an ideal way of life and Jesus as the most perfect man while neglecting to show the supernatural foundation of these facts Modernism gains many an easy convert. The "natural man" does not object to having a beautiful ideal of life placed before him any more than he objects to visiting an art gallery. As long as you recognize his as essentially sound in heart and mind you may say anything to the "natural man." As soon, however, as you place the cross of Christ with its implication of man's complete corruption in heart and mind before the eyes of men they will turn away in disgust. Modernism's popularity is due to the fact that it is based upon the evolution hypothesis which holds to man's essential and inherent goodness. Thus the "offence of the cross" is removed and anybody whether truly regenerated or not can call himself a Christian. It follows that the term "Christian" has thus lost or changed its meaning. Modernism loves to speak of regeneration, but by regeneration it does no longer signify the implanting of new life into the heart of the sinner by the Holy Spirit but a new resolve on the part of man to live better. And thus one might mention other terms to show that Modernism continues to use all the old terms so dear to the heart of Christians but changes their meaning completely. Now add to this the fact that most churches have sadly neglected the thorough catechetical instruction of its young people and it is no marvel that Modernism makes so many converts. When people have lost their power of discrimination between the true and false the mere use of the old terms will make a modernist preacher acceptable to an orthodox congregation.

For these reasons we are happy to welcome the book of President Stump. He does not hesitate to make it plain that a truly Christian life must spring from a regenerated heart in the old sense of the term. There is no true purity of motive unless man truly loves God and man cannot truly love God unless he be regenerated. Accordingly we are not to think of the Christian life and of the Christian virtues as a superstructure based upon the foundation laid by the Greeks. This is the way Modernism construes the matter. We are to realize however with respect to paganism that, "While in form this teaching approaches that of Christianity, in content it is different" (P. 21). The conclusion is inevitable that the "Christian life" of the Modernist

only outwardly resembles the "Christian life" of the Christian while in content the two are radically different.

In consonance with the author's insistence upon the need of regeneration is his discussion of man's original state. He has not been frightened by the scarecrow of evolution. He does not menially apologize for believing that, "The original state of man was one of harmony and fellowship with God; but through sin it was replaced with one of enmity and alienation from God by wicked works (Col. 1:21)." (P. 41.) We rejoice in this bold uncompromising stand. That man lived originally in a state of perfection has not been and cannot be disproved by evolution and the various sciences based upon it. That man was created perfect is a doctrine which stands or falls with theism and Christianity. On the other hand Christianity and theism stand or fall with the doctrine of man's original goodness. If God is God he created a world that was "good."

In the second place our author makes clear that the standard by which we are to measure the Christian life is the will of God as expressed in the Scripture. Also on this point President Stump has taken sides against the Modernist. The Modernist's standard of life is his own feeling of right and wrong. Newman Smyth, for instance, in his book on "Christian Ethics," attempts to place the Bible and the "Christian Consciousness" on the same level but does not succeed in doing so. The Christian consciousness always has the determining vote. The Russellite tells us that because "you would not send a dog to hell," the Scripture teaching of eternal punishment must be wrong. All this teaching of Modernism is based once more upon the assumed truth of the evolution hypothesis which says that all law, human and divine, has somehow evolved from sheer emptiness. Laws are, upon this basis, useful expedients for a complicated society and it was a happy idea of our pious forefathers to call those laws divine in order to gain more respect for them. Even now Modernism speaks of the "sacredness" of law though it believes in no God that could make law sacred. Do we wonder at the amount of disrespect for law in our day even among church people? We ought to marvel that there is not more disrespect for law since Modernism has robbed law of its genuine "sacredness."

We do not agree with the author's Arminianism. His free will doctrine we believe to be inconsistent with his emphasis upon the need of regeneration. Moreover Arminianism affords a back-door entrance to Modernism in as much as it gives man an independence of God that is flatly contradictory to the doctrine of creation. Still

further we are convinced that Reformed Ethics are more fortunate than Lutheran ethics in as much as with the Reformed doctrine of common grace we can appreciate as good for this life the deeds of men that are not regenerate without saying that they are qualitatively the same as the deeds of regenerate men. We have no desire to cover up these differences. But this enables us the better to appreciate the value of books on the Christian life such as we have before us. As orthodox believers we stand side by side against a common foe.

C. VAN TIL.

THE MYSTERIOUS UNIVERSE by Sir James Jeans. The Macmillan Company. pp. 160. \$2.25.

THIS much discussed book will appeal to the more scholarly of our readers who are interested in the latest teachings in the sphere of physical science (especially astronomy) in their bearing on our outlook on the universe as a whole and our estimate of the significance of human life. In the first four chapters its distinguished author treats of some of the more striking modern developments in the sphere of physical science. In the fifth and final chapter he indicates his view of the bearing of these developments on the philosophy of the universe.

The most outstanding characteristic of these developments seems to be their rejection of the mechanistic theory of the universe and their advocacy of a "principle of indeterminacy" that allows some play for free will in the production of events. Sir James Jeans advocates a "mathematical" rather than a "mechanical" theory of the universe, but whether there is any fundamental difference between his view and the view he sets aside is not altogether clear. He invokes the theory of probability but apparently only when the knowledge of the conditions involved is not sufficient to allow of a mechanical explanation. Be this as it may, it does not seem to us that there is anything in his theory of the universe to bring much comfort to the evangelical Christian. No doubt the Christian has cause to rejoice at the blows that are being dealt to the mechanistic theory of the universe, but to supplant it by a theory into which what is distinctive of Christianity will fit as little as in a mechanistic theory does not help matters much. At the same time it is well to know that Sir James Jeans says that "the universe shows evidence of a designing or controlling power that has something in common with our own individual minds."

One can hardly read this book without being struck with the highly speculative character of much that goes under the name of physical science. In fact if our solar system is relatively so insignificant—the