

THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

BY REV. RUFUS W. WEAVER, TH.D., BALTIMORE, MD.

The quest of the intellectual leaders of our times in every department of human knowledge is for synthesizing principles, for fundamental laws, for ultimate truths. The first clause in the credo of science reads: "I believe that the Universe is grounded in reason, and is, therefore, intelligible." Upon this basis scientists organize knowledge, form the curricula of the various schools, and seek through experiment and observation to discover the underlying principles and the universal laws of the world about us.

The most interesting of all the sciences is the most recent—the science that deals with the laws and the processes by which the human mind acquires knowledge. To this is given the name of Psychology. The study includes not only the observation of mental phenomena, the discovery of mental laws, the processes by which the mind acquires knowledge, but also the conditions that make knowledge possible. These conditions are the primary subjects of study for the student who desires to understand either Philosophy or Religion.

Every part of the Universe from the atom to the solar system is in ceaseless motion. The whole creation is subjected to transitoriness—the law of change. The outer world as ceaseless motion makes possible the inner world of thought, for consciousness is conditioned upon an ever changing environment. Feeling exists only in a world of inequalities. Freedom is possible only in the presence of moral peril. Shut in within the narrow limits that are horizoned by birth and death, bound down by laws that he did not make, and can never hope to change, living

upon a revolving sphere, half light and half shadow, with its endless procession of day and night, driven to toil by pangs of hunger, and eating only to hunger again. Man with his narrow, fretting mind, with his untaught will, restless within the limit of his perilous freedom, with his little heart-beat whose systole and diastole are measured by selfishness and love, stands among God's creatures the highest in divine favor only of what he may become. "For man was made to grow, not stop."

Motion is the originating condition of thought. Struggle is the originating condition of growth. Responsiveness to environment is the originating condition of life. Man, the crown of creation, was made to think, and thinking is possible only in the presence of ceaseless motion. Man was made to love, and love is possible only amid the recognized inequalities of personal life. Man was made to develop in moral power, and ethical action is possible only when the freedom extends to the privilege of doing something less than the best—to miss the mark—and to miss the mark is sin. If it be true, and of this there can be no doubt, that man was made for growth in thought, for growth in love, for growth in righteousness, then the conditions of life we so often deplore, struggle, suffering, sin are necessary to the upward progress of man toward personal moral perfection. This world may not be as Leibnitz claimed "the best possible world." It certainly is not as von Hartman claimed, the worst possible. But, this world for its purpose—for the development of man into the moral likeness of God—is the best possible world that Infinite Wisdom could plan and Infinite Power create. The true theodicy can be written only when the scope and purpose of God in the development of man is made its very foundation.

The second thesis in the credo of science is, "the Universe is so built around man that life for him is intelligent correspondence with his environment." Emerson somewhere says, "When God sought to secure certain ends in mankind, He wrought His purpose into the very

structure of the human mind." If Emerson be true, the structure of the human mind is a revelation of the will of God. The possibility of religion is to be found in God's likeness to man, as much as man's likeness to God. Indeed the most wonderful and certainly the most intimate revelation of God is that which is made to man through man himself. Wrought into the very structure of the mind of man as the sense of dependence, the appreciation of perfection and the loneliness of soul that is unsatisfied until the soul rests in God. Man is inevitably religious.

The Psalmist cries "What is man that Thou are mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visiteth him?" What are those wonderful powers that enable man to extend hospitality to God and elevate him to the degree that he is continually in the thought of God? His sphere of knowledge is limited to consciousness and extension. His powers of creation are limited to the present moment, and are measured by the span of life which begins in helplessness and ends in helplessness. His appreciations are limited to the comparisons, sensations that come to him through some one of the gateways of the mind, or the comparisons of ideas for which he has learned some symbols to imagine and describe. And the Maker of Heaven and earth seeks to enter into relations with man! Why? Because man has the potency of becoming a son of God just as the unhatched bird has the potency of flight.

Religion is a relation, limited in its expressions to man's apperceptions. The superhuman relations of humanity are everywhere apperceived in a three-fold way: The first is the cosmological application of the law of cause and effect, seeking a cause or causes behind the things that appear. Polytheism is the product of unenlightened minds creating gods and goddesses to account for the forces of nature. The second universal apperception grows out of the sense of dependence, and the devotees of every religion attribute to their God or gods authority over their lives. Out of this experience,

emerges the consciousness of moral order, the law written in the heart of every man. The third apperception is the personification of the object of worship. Humanity attributes personality to stone and graven images as well as to Him who is spiritual and demands a worship that is spiritual. Out of this apperception arise all the forms of worship, gifts, sacrifices and the infinite variety of religious services from the dances of the Pueblo Indians to the simple worship of the Quaker Meeting-house. This feeling after God is the impressive evidence that man is incurably religious.

There are religions, false and true. False religions are perpetuated by the same method as true religions. Error gathers her worshipers in the same way that Truth gathers her worshipers and often Error crushes Truth to earth. The God who sends the rain upon the just and the unjust alike has so constructed the human mind that it receives ideas that belong to the realm of religion alike whether they be true or false. Every religion reduced to its simplest form is a group of ideas perpetuated from one individual to another individual. Religion, therefore, in its simplest form is communicated idea. The religious experiences of individuals are determined by the ideas of religion communicated to him. The readjustment the individual makes to these ideas determines the expressions of his religious life. Religion is a phase of psychology. The truthfulness of a religion is established by three successive modes of proof. First, that the revelation, the group of communicated ideas, is true. Second, that the mind is empowered to apperceive this revelation. this group of communicated ideas, is true. Third, that the mind is strengthened to express this apperception of truth in worship, conduct and character.

The Christian Religion presents a revelation to man of the *Power that produced him, the Authority that is over him and the Unseen Being with whom he is capable of communing, as tthe God and Father of our Lord Jesus

*See W. N. Clark's *Outlines of Christian Teeology.*

Christ, and extends to him the invitation to enter into relationship with God, so that he may say, "Abba, Father." Christianity in its simplest form is a communicated idea, called the Gospel, and the supreme mission of Christianity is the spreading of the idea, declaring it unto all the nations.

How does Christianity meet the three-fold test of religion? (1) the truthfulness of the revelation; (2) the certainty of its being accurately apperceived; (3) the bestowal of the power for its accurate expression? First, what proof does Christianity offer that this revelation is true? The revelation which Christianity offers is Jesus Christ. The highest forms of truth can only be expressed in personality. Language fails. Jesus Christ stands before the world as the most perfect moral example, the supreme teacher in ethics, claiming to be "the only begotten of the Father," and seeking to bring humanity into filial relation with God. The strongest evidence of the truthfulness of his revelation appears in His resurrection—God Himself in this bearing witness that the revelation made by Jesus Christ is true. The personal experience of him who receives the Gospel is confirmatory evidence of its truthfulness—God, in this experience bearing witness to the truthfulness of the Gospel through the witness of the Holy Spirit. The truthfulness of the revelation is further established by its meeting all the needs of the soul, bestowing not only the forgiveness of sins, but releasing the soul from the dominion of sin, but also awakening in the consciousness a realization of the new relations, new incentives, new capacities, creating a new test in that the Gospel idea is so simple, so human, so spiritual environment. Christianity meets the second divine that wherever received by personalities differing ever so widely, it produces essentially the same effects. The Christian consciousness of primitive Christians is identical with the Christian consciousness of the modern Christian. The higher righteousness that characterizes the life of a Christian after his conversion is the living

truth that new strength is given to express his new relation to God, showing that new spiritual energy has been imparted—and thus the third test is met.

Christianity is the true religion because its Founder is incarnate Truth, because its message exactly fits man's capacity to understand, and meets man's unsatisfied needs, because through it a divine reinforcement enters into his life, enabling him to triumph in the struggle with his lower nature, and to live in the consciousness of a new and permanent relationship with God.

The essence of Christianity is communicated idea. The Gospel which we preach in its simplest form is an idea in process of communication. There are two conceptions of Christianity in Christendom. The one is communicated actuality and the other is communicated idea. The one emphasizes the sensuous appeal and the other emphasizes the thoughtful appeal. The first is based upon the fallacious belief that spiritual reality may be actually transformed into material reality. The fundamental fallacy of the Roman Church is not to be found in its doctrine of the Church, but in its dogma of the bodily presence of Christ in the host and the actual presence of his blood in the wine. If the Roman priest actually reproduces the sacrifice of Christ, then all the claims of the Church can be easily verified. If he can prove that Christianity in its simplest form is not an idea communicated from person to person he is in a position to overthrow the Protestant religion; for the Protestant position, philosophical, psychological and theological has for its foundation the following thesis: "The Universe is so organized that it is possible for man to think, to grow, to choose, and to enter voluntarily into relations with his God—that the prayer of man, groping after God, is answered in God's revelation, whose final word is an invitation to man to enter into filial relation with God as his Father, and everyone who enters into this relation is commanded to communicate the invitation to others."

Jesus brought the Good News. He proclaimed it with

His lips in healing words. He proclaimed it with His hands in loving ministeries. He proclaimed it with His life in unwearied love. He proclaimed it through His death in behalf of humanity. And, when He was raised from the dead, He committed His mission to His disciples, saying, "As the Father hath sent Me, even so, send I you." In the teachings of Jesus there is no intimation of a dependence upon the New Testament or any other book for the perpetuation of His Gospel. There is not even the suggestion that the New Testament was destined to come into existence. It is dangerous to argue from silence, yet, it is a reasonable presumption that if Jesus had considered the New Testament necessary for the establishing of His Kingdom He would have bidden His disciples to write as well as preach. If He had considered a literature an adequate expression of the revelation He had come to make, would not Jesus Himself have written a book? Can the highest forms of Truth be expressed in the symbols of language and literature? Can the necessity of the incarnation be established upon any other claim save that of the inadequacy of human speech and human literature to manifest the truths of deity? Jesus trusted His revelation to be reincarnated in His followers rather than embodied in a literature, for there were elements in that revelation that can never be put into words, elements that can be experienced but never fully described. Jesus choose that the group of ideas composing His revelation should be communicated only by men who had experienced the transforming power that followed the acceptance of these ideas. The fundamental principle of Christianity is "experience precedes expression."

Jesus upon Mount Olivet gave to His disciples the Good Tidings, commissioning them to tell His message, His Gospel, to all the nations of the earth. Without that message the nations should grope on in darkness, searching after God, lifting lame hands of faith toward specters of the divine reality, but not finding Him—their Father

—God. Jesus had prepared His followers fully for the perpetuation of His work, the enlightening and redeeming of the world. In His great commission He bids His disciples to go, disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever He commanded, and closing with the words “and lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the age.” Jesus had fully equipped His disciples for the divine task. He had given to them the message. He had promised them the endowment with power from above. He bade them go.

The group of awed disciples returned with a strange sense of loneliness to the upper room. There had been left to them the mission of communicating the message of Jesus to the world, and that message existed in their thoughts and experiences. Did it exist in any other form? Thirty years were destined to pass before any part of the words of Jesus would be enshrined in literature. Did Jesus leave the world with His message deposited in the minds of frail, tempted men, and with no assurance that it would be accurately proclaimed, except the promised leading of the Holy Spirit? Let us study anew the Great Commission. In it there is a three-fold movement. First, the discipling of the nations; Second, baptizing them into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; Third, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever He had commanded. In the study of the three-fold mission there is but one fixed, ordained requirement—the act of baptism. There was then, and there ever has been variety in the way that men have been brought to be disciples. There was then, and there ever has been variety in the way that the teachings of Jesus have been given to men. It breaks upon us with startling force that Jesus risked this enterprise in magnitude most extensive, in its importance of priceless value, in its momentous nature, a matter of life and death, involving the destiny of mankind, and risked it in the hands of a company of ordinary men, of little scholar-

ship, of manifold prejudices, slow of heart to believe and slower still in recognizing the significance of their world-wide mission. There is but one explanation: Jesus conceived His message to be sufficiently guarded and preserved in the symbol of baptism.

The place of baptism in the teachings of Jesus is an offense to millions who declare that they honor His name. They turn from it, saying that it is only a form, and it does not matter whether it be performed in the way that He commanded or not. This declaration is one of the most subtle assaults upon the sanity of Jesus ever made by those who claim to honor His intellectuality. Did He introduce this command as one of the three that should embody the mission of all Christians for all succeeding time, giving to it a place so that it should appropriately stand between the two great experiences of the spiritual life—the one of regeneration, becoming disciples, and the other of sanctification, growth in grace and the knowledge of Christ? What explanation of baptism can be made that will give to it the right to its lofty position? For this explanation we seek the oldest of the Christian writings, the New Testament. In it, we are told, baptism embodies three ideas; (1) the idea of the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ—historical Christianity; (2) the idea of regeneration, buried with Him by baptism unto death, raised to walk in newness of life, the spiritual experience of the individual—living Christianity; (3) the idea of the resurrection of the body through the spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, quickening the mortal body—prophetic Christianity. These three tenses of Christianity, the past, present and future, were deposited in baptism. Various writers of the New Testament recognize their presence in their discussions of baptism. The ordinance of baptism became for the early Christians the visible expression of the message of Christianity. All that is essential in the revelation of Christ is here epitomized. The Gospel was destined to be communicated in other languages than those in which Jesus

and His disciples spoke. There was a necessity that it be preserved in a fixed, unchanged form that should epitomize all the essential elements of Christianity, there is no one that so readily, so beautifully, so completely expresses the essential ideas in Christianity as the act of baptism. It is not too much to say that baptism is the Bible which Jesus prepared and that every immersion and emersion in the name of the Triune God is a newly printed copy of the Book. Jesus intended that Christianity should be communicated through personalities that had experienced the transforming power of His message and their confessions be made in this form which He ordained. There is in baptism a sufficient revelation for the perpetuation of Christianity if every Bible were destroyed and every Church leveled to the ground, provided that the revelation were made by two persons, the one administering it, having had its required experience and the other submitting to it, proclaiming anew that experience. The union in Christianity which we all seek for can be realized when Christianity returns to Jesus and submits, as He submitted for the fulfillment of righteousness to the confession of baptism. Then Christians recognizing the essence of Christianity, will agree upon the expression of that agreement in this visible form, more beautiful than any figures of speech, more accurate than any statement of the lips, more complete than the articles of any creed.

Among the modern groups of Christianity who practice the mode of baptism commanded by Jesus are two, who in point of intelligence and numbers are conspicuous; the Disciples and the Baptists. These two bodies are each year growing closer and closer together. To-day we are placing the emphasis upon the points of agreement rather than the points of disagreement, and we rejoice that the points of disagreement are lessening in number. Baptists began their historical career by emphasizing the new birth as a prerequisite to church membership. Later the emphasis fell upon the form of baptism. The strong-

est contention so far has been for the restoration of immersion as the only form of Christian baptism. The basis of this contention has been obedience to Christ—loyalty to Christ. Baptists hold that salvation is secured by faith in Jesus Christ and that this faith manifests itself in obedience to Christ in which baptism is an incident, not necessary to salvation, but necessary to church fellowship, and they have refused to recognize churches that fail to practice immersion as properly organized churches. The weakness of the Baptist position has been the failure to emphasize the meaning, and therefore the ethical value of baptism. We have defended it successfully as a form, but our claim that it is not necessary to salvation has greatly weakened our appeal to the Pedobaptist world. The position of the intelligent Pedobaptist is, “you have proved immersion, but what of it? You admit that it is merely a form, and one form is as good as another if it be used as a confession of faith in Christ.” The Disciples have maintained that the form of baptism is immersion, and that it is intimately associated with the forgiveness of sins. This is based upon the Scripture regarding “baptism for the remission of sins.” This has led many Disciple leaders to insist that baptism is necessary to salvation, there being no remission of sins without baptism. Others hold the position that no confession of Christ is complete without baptism and that the promise that Christ makes, “Whosoever will confess Me before men, him also will I confess My Father who is in Heaven?” is one which gives assurance only to the baptized. It appears to me that Baptists and Disciples are both right in their beliefs; the one that baptism by immersion is necessary to obedience and the other that baptism by immersion is closely associated with the forgiveness of sins. But beyond the command of Christ, Baptists have failed to present convincing argument for the form, and Disciples have failed to establish that the forgiveness of sins is inseparably connected with baptism. If it be accepted as true that Chris-

tianity in its simplest form is a group of ideas that gather about death and resurrection and that Christian baptism is the visible expression of these ideas, the argument for baptism among Baptists is transferred from the command to the *raison d'être* of the command, and the necessity for its observation as a Christian revelation becomes equally urgent, if not more urgent than the necessity for the preservation of the New Testament. If baptism be the Gospel idea enshrined in a form that rises triumphant over the division of races, the separation of languages and the changes of time, it possesses a value as a vehicle for the communication of the Gospel, surpassing all the symbols of speech and literature. If this conception of baptism be accepted by Disciples, they will have ample argument to prove that the act of baptism is intimately associated with the forgiveness of sins. Baptism becomes the perfect confession of Christ, and as the visible form of the Gospel is intimately associated with the forgiveness of sins.

Baptists hold that regeneration is mediated by the Holy Spirit. Disciples hold that regeneration is mediated by the Word. The tendency of the one has been to emphasize the emotional experience; the tendency of the other has been to emphasize the intellectual experience. If the emphasis be properly distributed, we would find that the intellectual experience, the apprehension of the Gospel, comes first. The emotional experience, the response to the Gospel, comes second, while the profession before the world in the ordinance of baptism, is third. The Holy Spirit is acting throughout each of the three movements. Thus, the Pauline phrase "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" is the accurate, scientific account of the genesis of the Christian life; the Lord is the incarnation of the Gospel; the faith is the response of the soul to the Gospel, and the baptism is the profession of the power and the verity of Gospel. Baptism may appropriately be called the Creed of Christ; for baptism is the visible of the essence of the Christian message. Baptism is God's final

revelation to men enshrined in beautiful symbolism.

An address delivered by President E. Y. Mullins, D.D., before the Baptist World Congress entitled, "The Trend of Modern Theology" has created widespread interest. He concluded the address with six axioms for which Baptists stand. Axioms are self-evident statements made in view of and because some mathematical proposition or theorem has been indubitably proved. These axioms of President Mullins demand some such basis; and in his masterly discussion he fails to furnish definitely that Christian theorem. This theorem I find in baptism; and presenting as the primary axiom, the psychological axiom: "A certain likeness of God to man makes possible a divine revelation to man," I subscribe heartily to the six axioms that follow: The Theological axiom; "The holy and loving God has the right to be sovereign;" The religious axiom: "All men have an equal right to direct access to God;" The ecclesiastical axiom: "All believers have equal privileges in the Church;" The moral axiom: "To be responsible man must be free;" The social axiom: "Love your neighbor as yourself;" The religio-civic axiom: "A free Church in a free State." These seven self-evident principles inhere in baptism as the seven colors inhere in white light, and the light is the light of the Gospel of the Son of God, the Message of Christianity.

So far I have said nothing regarding the Lord's Supper. As baptism epitomizes the Christian message, so the Lord's Supper epitomizes the Christian experience. The Gospel is visibly portrayed in baptism and the effects of the Gospel are visibly portrayed in the Lord's Supper. They sustain to each other the relation of cause and effect. In baptism is symbolized the genesis of the Christian life. In the Lord's Supper is symbolized the growth of the Christian life. Christian Theology is the biology of the eternal life. The clearest and simplest statement of the biology of the eternal life is given in these symbols, which we are accustomed to call, the or-

dinances. As in baptism we have the three tenses of the Christian message, so in the Lord's Supper we have the three tenses of the Christian experience. The death of our Lord, symbolized in the broken bread and poured out wine, is the historical fact that makes possible the Christian experience of regeneration. The partaking of the bread that nourisheth and the wine that strengtheneth portrays the present spiritual experience of the soul, nourished and strengthened through Christ. The anticipations of the Lord's Supper refers to His second coming, for which we are ever expectant, and to the feast in the Kingdom of God, when our Lord will sit down with those whom He has redeemed. The Lord's Supper epitomizes for us the Christian experience. Baptism and the Lord's Supper contain the essential ideas of Christianity. Together they form the primary revelation and possess for us a unique value, because they represent to us in the forms which Christ Himself chose to be the permanent expression of His revelation. Baptism and the Lord's Supper together present to us the Essence of Christianity in visible symbols. The New Testament is but the enlargement of these ideas in baptism and in the Lord's Supper, giving fuller definitions, clearer applications, and increasing illustrations of the meaning of these ideas as holy men of God acting under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit were led to write.

Jesus founded His Church upon the rock-principle—"experience precedes expression." The confession of Peter was the outward expression of an inward experience. Upon this rock-foundation, Christ and His disciples builded the impregnable fortress of the Church. Two massive towers were planned and reared by the Master Himself; the one standing at the entrance and the other within. The one tower is named Christian baptism and the other tower is named the Lord's Supper. The walls of the Church were reared by the Apostles and Prophets. They are the New Testament Scriptures. Thus, rose the Church of Christ against which the gates of

death cannot prevail. If the walls ever should be thrown down, and sooner we may expect the stars to be flung from their orbits and chaos to reign, there would remain the impregnable and time-conquering towers, reared by the divine Logos, the eternal Christ; and these towers guard and preserve the Christian message and the Christian experience; and these towers are for us and for the ages to come the visible expression of the Essence of Christianity.