

The Philosophical Basis of Christianity

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MUCH has been said and written about the philosophical basis of Christianity. It is doubtful if such terms should be used in accurate speech. It is chiefly when Christianity is conceived as a purely subjective phenomenon, or where the subjective elements prevail, that the term finds largest use.

There is indeed a philosophical basis for many men's *conceptions* or *representations of Christianity*. Christianity has often been tinged and warped by philosophical approach. From the Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism of the early centuries to the present-day evolutionary approach, Christianity has suffered from philosophical viewpoints. But the objective facts of Christianity are to be considered historically rather than philosophically. The factual basis of Christianity, to use Professor Machen's terms, is not to be evaporated in the cauldron of philosophical ebullition. It is true that men often minimize or distort the facts by reason of philosophical preconceptions, and thus produce a mongrel Christianity; but the facts of Christianity constitute the true basis rather than the philosophical accretions or interpretations.

It may be said that, in looking at and evaluating the facts of Christianity, we only substitute one philosophy for another with which we disagree. It is perhaps inevitable that a man will be influenced by whatever philosophy he holds, even in so important a matter as his estimate of Christianity and his presentation of the same. Still it is true, aside from every philosophical bias, that the true basis lies in the facts, and we may say, the historical facts; because Christianity is a historical religion. This philosophical bias is what is meant by the term "approach," so glibly used to-day. We are told that the "approach" to the Scriptures and the "approach" to Christianity is entirely different in these modern days, giving us an entirely new view, and requiring a new statement of Christian doctrine, and a reconstruction of religion. These terms are familiar enough and are sure symptoms of an infectious modernism.

Many have been the attempts to re-state Christianity in the terms of philosophical postulates. Schleiermacher's approach to the Scriptures and to Christianity was from the standpoint of Pantheism. Hence he left the doctrine of a personal God as an open question; repudiated the Old Testament, and dealt in a perfectly arbitrary way with the New Testament. Religious authority was entirely subjective; the effect of the atonement was a moral influence; Christ bore the sins of men only in his fellow feeling and sympathy for them in their struggles and suffering on account of sin. This sympathy draws us into fellowship with Christ to our greater good and blessedness—thus Christ becomes a Saviour and substitute. Christ was divine only in a purely pantheistic sense, being the man who most of all realized his oneness with the Eternal, or possessed, what was called a God-consciousness. Thus philosophy was the basis of Schleiermacher's *perversion* of Christianity.

Kant's transcendentalism gave new impetus to idealistic speculation, and resulted in the philosophies of the Absolute. On the basis of Kant's metaphysical aberrations, his pupil Fichte declared that "the moral order of the universe is God and that there is no other God." Schelling went a step farther and combined the subject and object in the process of thought, and obliterated the distinction between God and man. That philosophy has impinged on man's *conception* of Christianity the history of the world bears only too sad evidence. We are glad to have been brought up under the healthy Realism of Dr. James McCosh, far from the mists and mysteries and mud of such philosophies. The world by wisdom knew not God; but the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork. At the present time, the world is under the spell of an evolutionary philosophy. That which at first

seemed but a mere fragment of science, has, since the days of Herbert Spencer, turned out to be a full-fledged philosophy. Spencer has sought to account for all things in the heavens above and in the earth beneath on the principle of evolution. In doing so, he has pushed God so far away, so far into the somewhere, into the something, into the Unknown and Unknowable that the common man cannot find him. Well may the unsophisticated dweller among realities lament: They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. Of what value to the common man is a God whose chief, if not only, attribute is his unknowableness?

The evolutionary philosophy has given us a mechanistic universe, a sensuous and impressionist metaphysic, a materialistic consciousness, and has reduced psychology to physiology. It has not only obscured the reality of God, but the reality of the soul. But no man can explain mind in terms of matter without first assuming the existence of the mind which the matter is supposed to explain. Metaphysics are not transmuted into physics by being stated in material terms. To reduce psychology to physiology is to hark back to the philosophy of David Hume and John Stuart Mill, with all their skepticism. Mill defined matter as “a permanent possibility of sensation”; and mind as “a permanent possibility of feeling.” Sane thinking must raise the inquiry how such a permanent possibility can exist without a permanent something in which the potentiality inheres.

That the life of this globe was created by an infinite Will is too miraculous for the materialistic evolutionist ; but to assume that this life sprang from dead matter is to endow that same dead matter with miraculous potency to the very highest degree. Consistency, thou art a jewel. The more evolution stresses the omnipotence of the process, the more certain it is that some Omnipotence stands back of and antedates the process. And it is a fact in present-day scientific circles that the more heredity and natural selection are studied, the less adequate they prove themselves to be. Evolution as a philosophy or as a working hypothesis does not fill the bill on scientific grounds alone.

But the Christian system has a philosophy, and the only philosophy which satisfies both the common man and the highest intellectualism. He who gets his philosophy from the Scriptures gets it from God. It is a philosophy which involves the reality of both the infinite and the finite. God is not the Unknown and Unknowable, but the First Cause and Father of us all. Man is not a string of physical sensations, but an immortal soul. And the universe is not a mere mechanism that started without a starter, and ends, if ever, without an *end*—without First Cause or final cause or *raison d'etre*.

Better than a philosophic basis of Christianity is a Christian basis of philosophy.