

The Presbyterian Guardian

March 25, 1941

VOLUME 9, NO. 6

J. Gresham Machen
Editor 1936-1937

One Year—\$1.50

Published Twice Each Month—Ten Cents a Copy

Eight Months—\$1.00

1505 Race Street
Philadelphia, Penna.

EDITORIAL COUNCIL

John P. Clelland
Leslie W. Sloat

John Patton Galbraith
Ned B. Stonehouse

Edwin H. Rian

Thomas R. Birch
Managing Editor

Christian Realism

By the REV. LESLIE W. SLOAT

A SHORT time ago we saw in a newspaper the picture of a house. Or rather, it had been a house—now it was only the second story. The first story had been stolen. The house was in the poorer section of town and unoccupied. Apparently neighborhood vagabonds had torn away the first floor piece by piece to use as firewood, and there the second story remained, with nothing under it, supported only by its attachment to the houses on either side of it in the row.

This is an excellent illustration of what has been happening to Christianity of late. The second story may be likened to the moral and spiritual benefits, the fruitage in life and conduct, of Christianity. The first floor, then, is like the basic realities of Christian truth, the root and foundation from which all else proceeds.

In our day there is a tendency—and more than a tendency—to justify the Christian religion on the basis of its ethical fruitage in the life of the individual and the state. We do not object to this in its proper place. But unfortunately the matter has reached the point where this fruitage is presented as itself Christianity. Christianity consists, so we are told, merely of the high ideals of conduct, and of the striving of the individual to realize these ideals. All the rest which we commonly associate with traditional orthodoxy is all right if we want to keep it, but it is not necessary, and if we wish to be up to date it may well be cast aside. We are told that real Christianity, or the realism of Christianity, is the practice of goodness and truth and beauty and justice and honesty which are so desirable among men

and for which we should strive with all our powers.

But the second story of that house stayed up, you remember, only because it was supported by houses on each side. And this foundationless Christianity continues to exist only through the accidental support it receives from the common morality of our civilization. By itself it would quickly fall in pieces, as it has fallen in many places of the earth. It is important, therefore, that we look to the foundations of our faith, to the realities which are absolutely basic in Christianity and without which all else is much like smoke waiting to be dispersed by the first strong wind.

The first reality with which we are confronted in our Christian faith is the reality of God. Have you ever sat back and just faced the simple, straightforward, inescapable fact that God exists? Yes, He does! We take Him too much for granted, even we who claim to believe in Him. He is not an idol made by men's hands, nor an idea fashioned by men's minds, nor even a definition in the Shorter Catechism. He is a really existing, spiritual Being. He knows and sees and understands. He is far greater than you or I, or than the universe about us. He is also entirely different from these. None of them could exist were it not for Him. He brought all things into being, and He continues to have oversight of them. Yet He is not to be identified with what He has made. He is distinct from them. In and of and by Himself, *He exists!*

We feel it necessary to stress the truth of this. It is the basic and primary reality of our Christian faith,

yet it is not always admitted.

Recently a book was published under the title, "Is God Emeritus." A minister, you recall, becomes emeritus when he grows too old for active service but still receives respect and a small salary from his former congregation. Is God then emeritus? We have not read this book, but a brief review of it declares, "The answer to the title is 'yes' wherever God is identified with outworn patterns of thought or transcendental orthodoxies. . . . Substitute gods take the place of the emeritus God, *e.g.*, gods of business, success, culture, nationalism, and the like. The other answer is 'no' wherever the term 'God' squares with the religious feeling compatible with the new scientific culture. . . . The term 'God' represents what we know as a cosmic tendency to produce personalities and the categories applicable to them—which also is real Christianity" (*sic*). Apparently the author of this book thinks we should believe in God, but not that we should believe in the existence of God.

This distinction between believing in God and believing that God exists is not new. Did not the writer of the letter to the Hebrews say that one who would believe in God must believe that He is. . . ?

It is a notable fact, which has often been remarked upon, that the Bible nowhere attempts to prove the existence of God. Everywhere this is assumed. When the book opens we find our starting point the beginning of the world. God is already on the scene. And when Moses meets his Maker at the burning bush and asks His name, the reply comes, "I AM THAT I AM." Absolute, self-sufficient, self-conscious existence is of the very essence of the nature of God. He is real.

It would be possible to dwell long upon this fact. Once we come to grips with it, everything else loses meaning except as it is related to it. We can well see how the Psalmist could meditate upon Him and His will day and night. But there is another reality which, for us, is no less important than this first one. Again it is a thing generally, though not always, assumed. And again it is a thing to which little thought is normally given. It is the fact that human beings exist—you exist, I exist. Yes, we do! Believe it

or not!

This fact is most important. Whatever else may be true of the world about us, however many other beings there may be, this much is certain: There are two beings who exist. One is God; the other is yourself.

Now where two such beings exist, both self-conscious persons, there must be a relationship between them. In this case there is. You individually and personally are related to God. God is related to you. We cannot emphasize too much that this is a real, intimate, personal affair. God does not look on you as merely a minute portion of the human race, or as merely a dust speck in the cosmos. He looks upon you as just what you are—YOU. And you should not look upon God as a mere idea, a vague notion back of which there is probably something. You must look upon God also for just what He is—GOD.

God and myself—these are for me the two basic realities which confront me in Christianity. The two are related. Of course, in that relationship, the one is original and the other is created. One is infinite, the other limited; one is unchangeable and eternal, the other changeable, temporal, conditioned. The one is the source and standard of all moral ideals, the other the morally accountable person who must live up to the standards.

Once we grasp this truth we are

overwhelmed by a virtual flood of associated truths. There is the holiness and perfection of God, and the absoluteness of His moral law. There is the reality of our personal responsibility to Him. Responsibility means little when that to which we must render account is vague and undefined. But when we must come face to face with the eternal, holy, omnipotent Person, responsibility means a very great deal indeed.

Then there is the reality of sin and guilt. It is no small thing to transgress the unchangeable laws of the all-seeing God, and it is no small thing to be guilty before Him. This guilt is real. Remember, He is not an idea. He is a Person. He is creator and governor of the world. The destiny of your immortal soul is in His hand. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

There is also the reality of judgment and of eternal punishment. Some pseudo-Christian religions deny the existence of hell. Our Lord Jesus did not deny it. He rather affirmed it in the most solemn words. And He even suggested a description of it in one of His parables. A writer has said of Jonathan Edwards that he made hell so real you could find it on the map. We may not know where hell is, but we do know on God's authority that it is. And we also know on the same authority that sinners are destined to spend an eternity of punishment there, the just sentence of the true and holy God.

The reality of these things concerns you and me with dreadful seriousness, for we are the sinners, we are the guilty ones. We do well to be afraid. Jesus said we should be afraid; He said we should fear Him "that hath power to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Now we can appreciate and rejoice in other realities which confront us in Christianity. There is the reality of God's love and mercy. It is personal, this love. And its reality stands out the more when we consider also the redeeming work of Christ which it prompted. This is real too. The death of Christ was not merely an illustration of the supreme sacrifice of love. There at the cross the punishment of God was meted out against sin upon the One who represented sin

(Please Turn to Page 88)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

March 25, 1941

Christian Realism	81
Leslie W. Sloat	
An Open Door in New England	83
Charles E. Stanton	
On Interpreting Prophecy	85
Edward J. Young	
The Deformed Faith in New England	87
Thomas R. Birch	
Editorial Page	89
The Necessity of Scripture	90
John Murray	
An Humble Confession	92
Burton L. Goddard	
Orthodox Presbyterian Church News	94

shrug off his responsibility. The fact that publications by the commission do not appear over his signature cannot, so long as he remains an active member of the commission, relieve him of his responsibility. We fail to see wherein the mechanics of a Congregational commission differ in any respect from those of a Presbyterian commission, even though the two forms of government are radically different. Moreover, Dr. Ockenga is still bound by his Presbyterian ordination vows, and those vows will remain binding upon him no matter how many other loose affiliations of churches he may choose to join.

The type of evangelism and devotional life advocated by the Congregationalists has long been at work in New England. That is why the ministers of the gospel, laboring under the Committee for the Propagation of the Reformed Faith in New England, have been able to gain an entrance into many Congregational churches that had died from the slow poison of such unbelief, and to revive them with the gospel of sovereign grace. That is why the need in New England is so great, and why so many young men in the past few years have given sacrificially of their time and energies to carry the good news of salvation to those who were dying under the blight of Congregational "evangelism." The work of the Committee for the Propagation of the Reformed Faith in New England is a pioneer missionary work that merits the prayers and support of every member of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, for nowhere else in these United States has unbelief so completely killed all spiritual life and nowhere is the need for the quickening power of the Reformed Faith greater.

Christian Realism

(Concluded From Page 82)

ners. In actual fact, the justice of God found satisfaction on Golgotha's heights. And something happened there to the relationship between God and myself, if I am one of His. Something happened there, and now God can in all justice forgive the sinner and pardon his sin, for His own holy demands have been met.

Here is the reality of faith. Our trust in Jesus is not merely a respect

The Separated Life

REPRINTS of "The Bible Doctrine of the Separated Life," by Johannes G. Vos, will soon be available. Orders should be sent now to The Presbyterian Guardian. The price will be ten cents each, or one dollar a dozen.

for his own character, or a vague desire to follow in his steps of righteousness. No! Our faith is that act whereby we entrust our soul's eternal destiny to One who on our behalf met the demands of God concerning us. It is our acknowledgment of our own sinfulness, and our petition to Him to save us. It is real, this faith. It is the simple trust of one person in another to do something for him. God has appointed this faith as the channel through which the benefits of what Christ has done are actually and in principle communicated to us. Through faith we are saved. This salvation too is real. It removes us from under the wrath of God and makes us the objects of His love and favor for Jesus' sake. It is our reception into the home and family, as it were, of God, and our reception there as real members of that home and family.

So our hope is also real. For there are assured unto us in Christ all the benefits that can be involved in the unchanging and eternal favor of God toward us. Heaven is a reality. Eternal life is a reality. And they belong to us. Yes, we do well to tremble at the terrible reality of hell. We also do well, as Christians, to rejoice in the abiding glory and blessedness of heaven. Christian joy is not merely an emotional sentimentality. It is a solid and sane appreciation of that which God has actually done, and of those real blessings which He will most certainly give to His children.

In our present-day world, with its wars and tumult, its chaos and desolation, its material and physical advances and its moral and spiritual bankruptcy, its indifference to the past and its uncertainty concerning the fu-

ture, the souls of men grow weary. Some there are who would throw away all of the past, including the heritage of our Christian faith. Our own day, they say, must supply our soul's needs.

But nowhere save in Christianity do we meet with what is absolutely and unchangeably real. This world offers nothing. The things which are seen are temporal. One generation passes on and another takes its place. And the very turmoil of life drives us to demand assurance in these basic questions of existence. Christianity has an answer. It has the only answer, for it speaks of that which is real and abiding. It speaks the truth. Here the soul faces eternity and here the soul finds rest and is at peace.

This brings us to two further and final points. First is the tremendous importance of the church and the ministry. God has chosen to have His truth preached. And He has chosen, through the seeming foolishness of this proclaimed truth, to save those who believe. Because Paul knew the terror of the Lord he sought to persuade men. He was an ambassador of Christ. Ambassadors these days are important in the affairs of this world, but he who serves as ambassador from the great and holy One, bearing the message of eternal truth, partakes of the highest and noblest calling human men have ever known. No wonder Paul denounced as accursed that one, whoever he be, who shall presume to bring another gospel. How earnestly the Christian community must support the work of its teaching elder, making Christian truth so plain to those outside, and showing so clearly the fruitage of faith, that there shall be a combined witness that is unmistakable and perforce irresistible! For all who name the name of Christ have been called with an holy calling.

Secondly, how solemn is the warning and how wonderful the invitation of the gospel! Every individual must face for himself in the silent depths of his own heart the issues of an eternal destiny. The gospel is clear. The invitation is plain. And there is just you, and God. If this issue has not been settled yet, we as ambassadors of Christ beseech you with all earnestness, Be reconciled unto God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Here is Christianity's realism.