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YEAR END

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THE PROTESTANT FAITH

The end of the year is a time for examining our attitudes, and this is all the more necessary for Christians because the attitudes we unconsciously absorb from everyday life and from society are diverging more and more from the Christian outlook and we are often unaware of the direction in which we are drifting.

In the early days of Christianity when a person was converted he consciously accepted the Christian world view and based his life on it. Everybody knew that the Christian world view was radically different from the attitude of the pagan society from which he had been converted. Because the society in which we live is drifting away from the Christian world view towards a humanistic, that is to say towards the old pagan world view, and because this drift is not always clearly recognised, we ought to examine ourselves to find out to what extent we ourselves have drifted away from the world view of the Christian religion, that is, from the attitude and outlook which Christ and His apostles held and taught and lived by.

Christianity is through and through a supernatural religion. It believes in a supernatural God who is above nature and its Creator. Through His will the world which we know, and we ourselves, has come into being. Life has the form which He wills, and it continues to exist because of His continuing will. God is not only the

supernatural Creator but also the sovereign Lord of His creation. The world has not got away from His control. Jesus Himself, as well as the whole of Scripture, teaches that no event takes place in the world or in our lives which is outside of God's control. How does our world view compare? Do we believe in ultimate chance and luck, or do we have the view of Jesus who said that not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from God.

Christianity not only believes in a supernatural Creator and sovereign Lord of the world but also believes in a supernatural event, the centre of history, the cross of Calvary. The cross dealt with evil. Evil finds its expression in the evil will of men and of the devil. We know that evil is a reality, we experience it around us and we experience its temptations and effects within us. It is the most difficult and intransigent element in our experience. For example, science can conquer space but we do not know how to deal with the evil hearts of men who use this knowledge. It was the evil will, and the evil heart, which God dealt with and conquered through the life and death of Jesus, and this conflict and victory culminated in the crucifixion. At every point our Lord Jesus repulsed evil. He bore in Himself the consequences and penalty of the evil and sins of mankind. "He bore our sins in His body on the cross" as St Peter put it. This was supernatural victory, because

it was a victory not only over the trials of human life but also over the unseen spiritual enemies of God which operate through the wills and lives of sinful men. Christ conquered, and His victory was sealed by the resurrection - a supernatural event in the sense that it is unparalleled in our experience, but it followed naturally on the complete victory of Christ.

Christianity believes in the supernatural Person of Jesus. God came into relationship with man by taking our nature and living with us and dying for us. It is God's purpose that we should be in fellowship with Him, and this fellowship is made possible firstly by the forgiveness of our sins and the removal of the barrier which excludes us from fellowship with God, and our fellowship is sealed by the presence of the Holy Spirit, God Himself within the lives and personalities of those who acknowledge Him as Lord and Saviour. The presence of the Holy Spirit is a supernatural fact. It has to be denied by the humanist, but yet its experience is true and undeniable by the Christian. So the gift of the Spirit confirms the supernatural character of our faith. God calls us into fellowship with Himself and this purpose is an eternal purpose and we begin to experience it now through the forgiveness of our sins when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord.

All these and many other supernatural aspects of our religion which

Christians know to be true, are ignored or denied outright by the dominant trends of modern society and thought. Any religion which the modern world acknowledges is entirely naturalistic. We find this trend within ourselves, and it is diametrically opposed to the concepts of the Bible which tell us of a supernatural God standing over against us and speaking to us a word of revelation in the Holy Scriptures, a God who is our Saviour, who for our sakes became man, who died and rose again and is bringing His purposes to completion, and the second coming of Christ and the judgment which will follow when every man's life will be assessed. We Christians should be eagerly looking for and hastening that day of judgment when God's righteousness will be vindicated. Yet, as I say, these are concepts which are ignored or explicitly denied by modern society, and the values which flow from them are shouldered aside. Because of this we need to take every opportunity to re-examine the values by which our own lives are shaped and our hopes based and there is no better time than the end of the year to do this.

Jesus pointed to the sense of values which springs from our Christian faith when He commanded "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and do not be anxious about what you shall eat or what you shall drink or what you shall wear, for these latter things the nations

seek, but your Heavenly Father knows your needs and will supply them". How do we stand with regard to this commandment? Do you seek first His sovereign rule and kingdom and His righteousness?

On another occasion Jesus warned "Take heed and beware of all covetousness". I suppose covetousness is the characteristic sin of human society when organised apart from God. The desire to have, and the trust in possessions, whether these are material possessions or the security of a job or of friends and influence. St Paul describes covetousness as idolatry. This is strange at first sight, but true when you come to think of it, because the presence of covetousness shows that you are really trusting in material things; you are desiring material things because you trust them, you think they are going to bring you benefit. But Christians are to put their faith only in God; they are to seek first His kingdom. This is the obvious corollary of belief in a supernatural God who is also a Heavenly Father, so caring for us that He Himself became man for our sins and died and rose again to give to us the greatest of all benefits, eternal fellowship with Him. This is the God in whom we believe and the proper consequence of such belief is complete trust in Him and a turning of our back on trust in and desire for things that are less than God. "Seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness" said our Lord "and do not be anxious for

this, that and the other thing. God knows your needs and will supply them, but seek first His Lordship and the doing of His will". This command is the natural consequence of our Christian faith, a belief in our supernatural Lord and Father. But the world has quite different values and we have been warned to take heed and to beware of them, for if we are heedless they will swallow us up and absorb our heart till there is no room left for trust in God and the honouring and hallowing of His Name in our lives.

The end of the year is a time for stocktaking. How our attitudes of life are shaping is the most important stocktaking that Christians can undertake.

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