

EMIL BRUNNER'S CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY.

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THE DIVINE IMPERATIVE ; A STUDY IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS. By Emil Brunner, Professor of Theology in Zürich. Translated by Olive Wyon and published by the *Lutterworth Press*. 25s.

THIS is a large book of 730 closely printed pages, full of matter, hard to digest, and ranging over a vast number of subjects. A reviewer is simply helpless when confronted by such a complex of themes. Under the splendid title *The Divine Imperative*, which recalls the golden rule of Christ and the categorical imperative of Kant, we have such varied subjects discussed as labour and civilization ; science ; the Church in Action ; State Church, National Church, Free Church ; the nature of the Church ; the acting Christian in the acting State ; the nature of the State ; the Christian in the present Economic order ; the nature and task of the Economic order ; individual problems connected with marriage ; the fundamental problem of marriage ; the natural forms of community ; life in love ; religious and moral practice as limiting cases of the moral ; the individual and the community ; success and progress ; autonomy, natural law and love ; the hallowing of the means by the end ; the active life as a gift and a demand ; service as an "office" and as a personal relation ; the calling ; service ; the better righteousness ; self-affirmation and self-denial ; the threefold meaning of the law ; the unity and the variety of the Divine command ; the Divine command as gift and demand ; the Will of God as the basis and norm of the Good ; the Christian Ethic—past and present ; the definition of the Christian Ethic ; justification by grace alone ; the rationalization of the moral in philosophical ethics ; morality and the religions of the world ; the phases of the immanent moral understanding of the self. Such are some of the headings in this truly colossal work—what the Romans would call a "dubia cena," bewildering the guests by the variety of the dishes and courses. We have printed a rather long list, but it is only fair to an author to give his readers some idea of the contents of his publication. The work is intended to give the Christian directions for his conduct in all the relations and circumstances of the modern world. He deduces a doctrine of Christian conduct directly from the central affirmations of evangelical faith. He follows the method of Spinoza, without

having the clarity of thought and diction of that great philosopher. He opens every chapter of the second book with a proposition, which he proceeds to develop and apply in some detail. For instance, Chapter XI is headed so—"Proposition: We know God's Will only through His revelation, in His own Word. Therefore His command is also primarily a gift, and as such a demand." That in front of Chapter XII is: "Since the Divine command is absolutely concrete, it cannot be formulated in general terms. But since the Will of God which demands obedience is the same as His Will which gives, He cannot command anything but the obedient imitation of His activity as Creator and Redeemer." He well says, in his explanation of this difficult and ponderous proposition, which is by no means self-evident, that "if it is dangerous to be in bondage to the legalism of orthodoxy, it is just as dangerous to fall into the opposite error of a fanatical antinomianism, which holds that it is impossible to lay down any rules at all, that it is impossible to have any knowledge beforehand of the content of the Divine Command. The Will of God, which alone is the Good, is made known to us in His action, in His *revelation*. This Divine process of revelation, however, is not only present, nor is it only past; in fact, it is present, based on the past. We know God through His present speech—in the Holy Scriptures. He is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever and this not only in what He gives but also in what He demands. But in His historical revelation He has made Himself known to us as the Creator and Redeemer. Thus in this unity of His revelation, He is the God of the Bible, the God who is revealed to us in Jesus Christ. As Creator He is the beginning and ground of all existence, the source of all life; as Redeemer He is the End, the Goal, towards which all existence tends."

Dr. Brunner's attitude to the Scriptures is thus conservative. He finds God's will there. We are familiar with the expression of the eschatological school for the ethics of the New Testament—"interim ethic," a rather contemptuous slogan for its conditional and imperfect nature. Brunner says they have actually singled out the characteristic aspect of every genuine system of Christian Ethics. The ethical element is essentially an "interim ethic," being provisional, for the time between the Fall and the Resurrection, the way of life of the pilgrim who must make resolves, because things have not yet been decided. But the Christian ethic is the only system which—because it is aware of this fact of a decision still in the future—the Judgment—treats this "interim" period seriously as a period for decision (p. 602). This passage, which recalls Barth's philosophy of crisis, gives an index to the system of Brunner. It is thoroughly evangelical and protestant in the old-fashioned way. In fact, the title of the second edition was *Entwurf einer protestantisch-theologischen Ethik*. Outline of a protestant theological Ethik. There is also much to say about his notes and appendices which display a vast range of reading, and explain obscure references in the text. They are by no means the least valuable part of the work. For instance, he has an acute note on Kant's maxim or categorical imperative (p. 48). He also praises Barth (p. 699) for having

asserted this indispensable idea of Plato and Kant that reason can only realize itself in freedom (p. 483), that is in the fact that man seizes the opportunity provided by his own powers, in the fact that he transcends the given in reaching out after that which is not given—"the idea." This freedom he asserts is the life-element, indeed the real substance of reason. Without this freedom to raise himself in free self-determination, above what is given, man, as man, cannot be imagined. It is precisely this freedom which previously we called formal freedom—which is characteristic of man: this freedom lives in every rational act, in the creation of the artist and the thought of the scientist. It is one aspect of the fact that man was made in the image of God. This formal freedom man cannot lose without ceasing to be man; but in the material sense freedom can be lost by sin. "This distinction between formal and material freedom," he says, "helps to explain the relation between reason and revelation, faith and culture." He says that Kant's analysis of radical evil is the nearest approach in philosophy to the Christian conception of original sin (p. 606). On page 607 he has a note on *syn-eidesis*, *conscientia*. He says the *syn* in the word—which means knowledge with—never refers to God, but in the first place to other human beings who shared this knowledge, and that later it referred to a human subject divided into two parts, one which instructs and one which is instructed, and the word ought to be rendered self-consciousness. Kähler, he says, is right in "stating that the conception of conscience is not central to the thought of the New Testament, that it is a connective idea taken over from Hellenism."

It is clear to the present writer after a long study of Philo, that St. Paul got his idea of *syneidesis*, as well as a host of others, from Philo, who used that term not seldom but most frequently *syneidos*. In fact, the term "convicted by their own conscience" is frequently in Philo, who was deeply studied by St. Paul. Among other subjects discussed in the voluminous work are Gandhi's passive resistance; and Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity. He says that the latter was right in holding that the distinctive element of the Christian Ethos is self-denial, and surrender, passive love. Which would result in the development of a one-sided, half-formed character, a psychological deformity.

The excellence of the book consists in its numerous references to, and remarks upon, the writings of the philosophers of the various German schools, past and present; in the position to which it assigns the Bible as the revelation and Word of God, and in many shrewd criticisms of modern ideas and opinions scattered all over the work; which we may regard as always clever without always considering them convincing. He is evidently a pacifist—not, however, of the "absolutist variety" which he condemns—one who extols the passive element: but our Lord was no pacifist, neither was St. Paul. The one whipped people out of the temple: the other was a born fighter, one who contended with beast-like men in Ephesus. It is true that patience is a moral virtue which was exhibited by Christian martyrs; but Christianity also founded chivalry and the protection of the weak.

The chief weakness of the book is the conception of Christianity as a code of laws, or of deductions from one great law. He called the work *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen* (the command and the directions).

Christianity is something more than a code of laws. It is a *spirit*. To follow Christ's example is not Christianity in the highest sense; neither is obedience to His precepts, neither is carrying out His golden rule. But to have the Spirit of Christ is Christianity. It is to have the character, the *ethos* of Christ Himself. To make out a list of Christian virtues, to draw up a list of Christian duties, to lay down a series of Christian propositions were an excellent work indeed, if there were not a better one still—to have the Spirit of Christ. We cannot reduce that Life as depicted in the Four Gospels to a series of propositions. As has been said, we can no more analyse it into its constituent parts than we can the glory of the rainbow. The difference between the followers of Plato or any Greek or Hindu philosopher and followers of Christ is this—that for those the teaching of the master was all important, whereas for the Christian the all important factor is the Master of the teaching. At the same time, Brunner is right in insisting that a sound belief, a true grasp of sound ethical principles is a necessary foundation for good conduct. A sound faith and belief do stand for much; and help men to stand much for Christ: whereas those who hold that it matters not what one believes, provided one does what is right, if they act upon that maxim, will find that it is no prop in adversity; and no help in a difficulty. Right thinking or belief is the basis of right conduct. Brunner does not like mysticism. He considers that the influence of mystical ideas upon the faith obscured the social side of man's development, and "made Christianity, fundamentally, a monastic business" (cxxviii). He holds (wrongly, we believe) that the Church was led astray by Greek ethic into making the threefold scale of—God—the self—the world (the neighbour). This scale was based upon the principle of duty; the Christian's first duty being the life of the soul with God, the second as a higher kind of religious duty, preoccupation with his duty to himself, and thirdly with his duty to his neighbour. This seems correct logically and also in accordance with the Scripture if we remember the Greek saying that one's neighbour is another self. But Brunner does not start from the idea of duty, but of grace. He is correct there, to some extent, for we must begin with God. It is God seeking man that comes first, then man seeking God. That is God's grace bringing man into a right relation with himself, but it is man's duty to respond to the call of God: and he must if he desires justification. In mysticism the world (the neighbour) is not an obtruding element. The soul is communing with God, set right with God or justified by His grace and its faith responding to that grace. Of course, if over-emphasized it leads to abandonment of the world (the neighbour) and its duties. Accordingly, the individual ethic is inferior to the social ethic—with which Aristotle himself began, saying that "man is a social animal." At the same time mysticism or preoccupation with our duty to God, has an important place in the Christian life. Every soul should have its mystical moments if it is to stand the

wear and tear of the world—and to carry out its duties to the neighbour. A social ethic which leaves no place for the development of the individual soul and the cultivation of spiritual gifts and graces must in time become ineffectual and effete. Brunner's theory is one-sided and partial and, therefore, illogical. Notwithstanding, he is always interesting and instructive.

In conclusion, we could recommend this book to all readers of *THE CHURCHMAN* whose own good sense and intelligence will guide them in their selection of what to take into, and their rejection of what to leave out of, their own ethical and religious system.

CHRISTIANITY, COMMUNISM AND THE IDEAL SOCIETY. By James Feibleman. *Allen & Unwin*. 12s. 6d.

All down the ages, thinkers have outlined their ideals for the life of society. Many voices are heard in these days, and Mr. Feibleman has added his in a study which bears the sub-title "A Philosophical Approach to Modern Politics." The author sees contemporary history as a strife between Christianity and Communism. "The choice, then, between the teachings of Christ and those of Marx seems to the modern man to be the exclusive one that is facing him. But the choice is one that he is loth to make, and the reasons why he hesitates are easy to grasp" (p. 69). However, Mr. Feibleman seeks a third order of society in which the best of both systems shall be preserved, whilst that which is deemed to be ill is rejected. Pursuing this eclectic path in reaching the desired end both Christianity and Communism are examined. It is unfortunate that Christianity is almost entirely identified with Roman Catholicism. Protestantism is not fairly treated. "The Protestant sects are not religious in the sense that the Catholics are religious. Protestantism merely retires the religious element in human life to special services and holidays" (p. 188). One scrap of credit is thrown to Protestantism. "There is one good effect of the Protestant reform which we must not overlook. The return to the origins of Christianity, to the Bible as the source of revelations, threw a renewed emphasis on the person of Jesus Christ and on the truth of His teachings" (p. 188). If the examination of Christianity had been made from the point of view of Christ Himself, it is possible that this study might have presented a different set of conclusions. During the examination of Communism, much is found as deserving censure and rejection, yet certain elements are accepted as worthy of entry into his Ideal Society, where science finds its place alongside the rest. This society is an ideal for the future to be realized in an "unlimited society" which "shares with Jesus Christ a belief in human destiny and the hope and promise of reason" (p. 348).