

“Liberalism promised to save Christianity from the so-called corruption of Greek thought, which she said was evident in a Nicene trinity and a Chalcedonian Christ. But J. Gresham Machen had the courage to stand up and say that the liberal project will leave the church bankrupt. *Christianity & Liberalism* must be resurrected today so that the next generation moves beyond the wasteland of the liberal project to the lush garden of classical Christianity.”

—MATTHEW BARRETT, Professor of Christian Theology,  
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Machen’s classic, *Christianity & Liberalism*, is in many ways needed more now than when it was penned a century ago. In this long-treasured and much-needed work, he applied the keen edge of the truth to theological liberalism to clarify that it is not a more open-minded expression of Christianity but a different religion altogether. Therefore, the battle against liberalism is not really a fight for ‘conservatism,’ but for Christianity itself. If you’ve never read this book, get it and read it now; if you have read it, read it again!”

—JOEL R. BEEKE, President, Puritan Reformed Theological  
Seminary

“In a day when the lines have become blurred regarding what constitutes orthodox Christianity, *Christianity & Liberalism* serves the church as a roadmap crying, ‘This is the way, walk here.’ With the precision of a surgeon’s scalpel, J. Gresham Machen strikes blow after blow against the premise of liberal theology and warns of its dangers if tolerated. Though written in 1923, *Christianity & Liberalism* remains relevant today as



Machen, though long gone, continues to sift the wheat from the tares in this classic defense of orthodox Christianity.”

—DUSTIN BENGE, Fellow of The Andrew Fuller Center  
for Baptist Studies

“Unbeknownst to Western Christianity at the time, in 1923 Machen prophetically predicted the deterioration of the Protestant Mainline project and, by extension, the deleterious impacts of such on the whole of society. Machen draws out the logical conclusions and practical consequences of a Christian faith that sacrifices supernaturalism on the altar of naturalism. With surgical precision, everything Machen predicted 100 years ago is now a reality.”

—ANTHONY B. BRADLEY, Professor of Religious Studies,  
The King’s College



“No book is more prescient for our anti-Christian age than Machen’s *Christianity & Liberalism*, a book that extols the Gospel’s distinctive power. In this powerful book, Machen boldly took on the heretics of his day, leaving for us a model of Christian courage.”

—ROSARIA BUTTERFIELD, author, *The Gospel Comes with a Housekey*



“Machen’s *Christianity & Liberalism* is a classic that was prescient in its time, and is even more relevant in ours. As he warned, but not without hope, Christianity is fighting ‘a great battle’ against liberalism over the nature and meaning of humanity, authority, sin and redemption — over the very essence and meaning of the Gospel. Most alarmingly these lines of conflict are drawn within



the church and across Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox communions.”

—THE VENERABLE ALAN R. CRIPPEN II, Rector, Holy Trinity Parish, Hillsdale, MI

“100 years ago, this book first appeared. In it, the New Testament professor and Presbyterian minister J. Gresham Machen argued that the ‘liberal Christianity’ of his day was, in fact, not a kind of Christianity, but an entirely different religion. That’s the first two chapters. In the remainder of the book, he traces out the differences between these two competing religions, including their differing views of the Bible, Jesus Christ, Salvation, and the Church. Read it, and Machen might convince you of the important differences that are still confusing many today.”

—MARK DEVER, Pastor, Capitol Hill Baptist Church

“I first read Machen’s *Christianity & Liberalism* in my early 20s, about 40 years ago. It crystallized convictions that had been forming in me in my university years in the midst of the theological tumult of those days (the late 1970s and early 1980s were a time in which the doctrine of Scripture was a focal point of debate in historic Protestant colleges, universities, seminaries, and graduate schools, as well as denominations). Re-reading it closely this year, for the first time in four decades, I am struck by its continued importance. It is truly seminal. For instance, I think that I find in a few pages of Machen’s Introduction the core idea of David Wells’ whole *No Place for Truth* project stated in a few sentences, but 70 years in advance. It is my hope that this new edition will encourage the younger generation of confessional Reformed Protestants to hold fast to historic,

Bible-believing, theologically orthodox Christianity, and to recognize and resist the appropriation of theological liberalism in evangelical circles.”

—LIGON DUNCAN, Chancellor and CEO, Reformed  
Theological Seminary

“The clarity of spiritual sight and theological thought in these pages has nourished generations of faithful gospel ministers. May it continue to do so for generations to come.”

—DAVID GIBSON, Minister, Trinity Church, Aberdeen

“The events of the last 100 years have proved Machen’s claim that orthodox and liberal Christians were adherents of two different religions. This book describes the differences between orthodoxy and its alternative—and helps us understand the differences that are now dividing evangelicals.”

—CRAWFORD GRIBBEN, Professor of History, Queen’s  
University Belfast

“*Christianity & Liberalism* could have been written last Thursday. Many of Machen’s descriptions of mainline Protestantism are surprisingly close to trends in evangelicalism today. Even many non-Christian reviewers concluded Machen demonstrated that theological liberalism represents a different religion from Christianity. This is a classic and should be read by anyone who wants to understand the great Protestant apostasy.”

—MICHAEL S. HORTON, J. Gresham Machen Professor  
of Systematic Theology & Apologetics, Westminster  
Seminary California



“A century ago, J. Gresham Machen declared that Christianity is not whatever we decide it is. It is an objective thing: defined but not diluted, passed down but not made up. In the words of the great Rich Mullins, ‘I did not make it, it is making me.’ *Christianity & Liberalism* is a model polemic, as careful as it is thorough. Most of all, though, it is a classic work of Christian theology that reminds us with each passing year that the biblical gospel is beautiful, supernatural, contra-modern, and still the power of God to save any who will believe. I’m very grateful to see new publishing life breathed into this invaluable book.”

—SAMUEL D. JAMES, author, *Digital Liturgies*

“J. Gresham Machen’s *Christianity & Liberalism* is one of the most important Christian works of the twentieth century. It remains as pertinent today as it was a century ago. I commend Westminster Seminary Press and Kevin DeYoung for preparing a new edition of *Christianity & Liberalism* for a new generation.”

—THOMAS S. KIDD, Research Professor of Church History,  
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Few books are read a century after they were written and even fewer of those are as relevant in the present as when they were first published; J. Gresham Machen’s *Christianity & Liberalism* is just such a book. Machen’s classic supersedes all others in prophetically describing the contours of and differences between Christianity and its counterfeit, liberal Christianity.

—MICHAEL J. LYNCH, Teaching Fellow, Davenant  
Institute





“*Christianity & Liberalism* is one of the most important religious works of the twentieth century. Many twenty-first century readers will want to engage its lucid arguments.”

—GEORGE MARSDEN, Emeritus Professor of History,  
University of Notre Dame

“J. Gresham Machen’s *Christianity & Liberalism* is one of the most perceptive and instructive Christian books of the twentieth century. But it is far more than just a historical artifact. Machen diagnoses errors that are still with us today; in so doing, he presents a crystal clear witness to the truth and beauty of historic Christian teaching.”

—JONATHAN L. MASTER, President, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

“J. Gresham Machen’s *Christianity & Liberalism* is a watershed text of church history, eloquently defining where Christianity departs from the reigning tenets of modernity. It can still serve as a guiding light to Christians in a later phase of modernity—readers will be surprised how relevant the battles of the 20th century are to those of the 21st! I happily welcome this new edition!”

—GAVIN ORTLUND, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church  
of Ojai

“Is our Christianity today the Christianity of the New Testament? Let’s not assume that it is. Let’s examine whether it is. J. Gresham Machen’s profound classic, *Christianity & Liberalism*, can help us face this urgent question with courage and clarity.



And may God grant us wonderful rediscoveries of his grace in Christ, ushering in a new era of reformation and revival.”

—RAY ORTLUND, Renewal Ministries

“J. Gresham Machen’s writing models what we should all hope to achieve: learned, clear, and reliable communication. Showing what makes Christianity, well, Christianity, this book implements all three as a *tour de force* of why we must be committed to Scripture’s supernatural religion of salvation rather than caving to the world’s domesticated reinventions of God, Christ, and the gospel.”

—HARRISON PERKINS, Pastor, Oakland Hills Community Church

“*Christianity & Liberalism* is a timeless classic that reads like today’s newspaper. Machen writes with near-perfect prescience as he tackles head-on the insidious nature of theological liberalism. What makes his critique so poignant is not just his comprehension of the error in his own day, but also his diagnosis of how to war against it even today. There is nothing else quite like this book.”

—NATE PICKOWICZ, Pastor, Harvest Bible Church

“I have read *Christianity & Liberalism* by J. Gresham Machen multiple times for multiple reasons. Each time has been a blessing for my life and ministry. I am astonished at how relevant it is for the challenges facing the evangelical and reformed church today.”

—HARRY L. REEDER, III, Pastor Teacher, Briarwood Presbyterian Church

“Machen’s *Christianity & Liberalism* is a potent reminder that every generation must struggle to retain and defend the great truths of the gospel. May we follow his example of urgently contending for the joyful message of sin, redemption, and restoration.”

—NEIL SHENVI, Author, *Why Believe?*

“I read this book for the first time 23 years ago as a senior in college when I was a four-year-old Christian. Machen’s words in his book impacted me in more ways than I could express then as a new believer, and they continue to impact me now as a New Testament scholar of 15 years in my 26th year of following Christ. As others have pointed out, Machen’s point in the book is clear: Biblical orthodoxy is Christianity, not Protestant liberalism! The latter, says Machen, is a ‘modern non-redemptive religion.’ Machen grounded his argument for Orthodox Christianity in scripture (God’s inspired, inerrant, infallible, and authoritative word). . . Machen’s work is more important and even more relevant today than it was 100 years ago as one denomination after another continues to move further and further away from what Machen describes as historic, Orthodox, and biblical Christianity. With this anniversary edition of this classic book, Machen’s labor will continue to produce gospel fruit for many more years to come until Jesus returns, [helping] the next generation of Christians read, teach, and apply afresh his case for historic, Orthodox, and biblical Christianity.”

—JARVIS J. WILLIAMS, Associate Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary



# CHRISTIANITY & LIBERALISM



CHRIST

J. GRESHAM MACHEN | 100TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

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FOREWORD BY KEVIN DEYOUNG

& LIBER

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**WSP** WESTMINSTER  
SEMINARY PRESS

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*To My Mother*



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## FOREWORD

It's been said that the most important word in the title *Christianity and Liberalism* is “and.” With that little word, Machen made the central thesis of his book unmistakable: there is Christianity, *and* there is liberalism. They are not the same thing. Whether individual liberals might possess saving faith in Christ was not a question Machen presumed he could answer. “But one thing is perfectly plain,” he wrote, “whether or no liberals are Christians, it is at any rate perfectly clear that liberalism is not Christianity.”<sup>1</sup>

If Machen's “and” seems provocative, it's worth understanding the context in which his book was published. In February 1920, an ill-conceived plan of union precipitated Machen's bold disjunction. Representatives from eighteen denominations met in Philadelphia as the “Council on Organic Union of Evangelical Churches in the United States.” The resulting Philadelphia Plan called for the mainline denominations to unite as the United Churches of Christ in America. The 1920 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Machen's denomination at the time, embraced the plan of union and sent the proposal to the presbyteries for approval. This was Machen's first General Assembly as a commissioner—he had only been ordained in 1915—and he was astonished by how little the proposal was debated and how quickly it was pushed through the Assembly for a vote. Both Machen and his Princeton Seminary colleague

1. See page 164 in this volume.



B. B. Warfield strongly opposed the Philadelphia Plan, arguing that the creed on which the union was based contained nothing truly evangelical, let alone distinctly Presbyterian.

Like many pleas for ecclesiastical unity before and since, the 1920 plan was steeped in vague, shallow, and imprecise language. Although it failed to achieve the support of the majority of presbyteries, a line had been crossed. By seeking union with many non-Reformed denominations, and by including Christian traditions as diverse as Methodists, Quakers, and Moravians, the “Philadelphia Plan” effectively displaced the Westminster Standards and rendered elements of historic Christianity as *adiaphora* (things indifferent). The theological language which held such a union together was essentially liberal and modernist.

It’s worth noting that by “liberalism” Machen was not thinking of the classic liberalism of John Locke and Adam Smith or the political liberalism of more recent vintage. He was thinking of the well-established tradition of theological liberalism which grew up in German soil and was blossoming in the mainline denominations of America in the early part of the twentieth century. From Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who argued that the essence of true religion is a feeling of absolute dependence, to Albert Ritschl (1822–1889), who emphasized the kingdom of God as moral progress, to Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) who insisted that the development of doctrine marked the abandonment of true Christianity, to Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918) who advocated the social gospel of deeds over creeds, liberalism was its own tradition, with its own heroes, its own core beliefs, and its own ecclesiastical vision. Machen didn’t employ “liberalism” as a theological swear word or a cheap putdown. He understood that liberal-



ism had its own internal cohesion and external aims. He didn't think liberalism was silly or stupid. He just didn't think it was Christianity either.

*Christianity and Liberalism* did not start out as a book. It began as an address, given on November 3, 1921, before the Ruling Elders' Association of Chester Presbytery, outside of Philadelphia. Perhaps this genesis helps explain why Machen's book, even today, is so trenchant in expression, so clear in order and articulation, and so accessible to regular Christians. In 1922, the address was published in *The Princeton Theological Review*. That article was then expanded and augmented with some of Machen's brief articles from *The Presbyterian*, a popular magazine at the time, to become the small book published in 1923, whose hundredth anniversary this edition is meant to commemorate.

The bulk of Machen's book is taken up with the exploration of five essential doctrines of the faith: the doctrine of man, the doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of salvation, and the doctrine of the church. In each category, Machen demonstrates that the liberal conception of the faith is fundamentally out of step with historic, biblical Christianity: Where liberalism teaches the goodness of man and the universal fatherhood of God, Christianity insists that Jesus did not come into the world to call the righteous to be better citizens but to save sinners and bring them into the family of God. Where liberalism teaches that true faith is founded on spiritual experience, Christianity insists that true religious experience depends upon the veracity of the historical events in the Bible. Where liberalism lauds Christ as a great teacher and our moral exemplar, Christianity insists that faith in Christ does not make sense apart from a supernatural, sinless, and divine Christ. Where liberalism



finds salvation in man's upward journey to spiritual betterment based on the noble self-sacrifice of Jesus, Christianity proclaims good news based on the propitiatory work of Christ to redeem sinners and save all those who put their faith in him. Where liberalism conceives of the church as a gathering of generally spiritual persons coming together to effect social transformation, Christianity holds forth the church as a group of redeemed men and women (and, for Machen, their children) gathering together to humbly give thanks to Christ for his grace and to find unity in the truth as they worship Christ and him crucified.

Even from this brief overview, we can see that the issues we face today are not all that different from the ones Machen faced one hundred years ago. To be sure, we do not want to engage in Machen-envy and exaggerate our own plight or cast every contemporary disagreement in apocalyptic terms. Thankfully, there are many denominations today which, despite all their struggles, are not questioning the utter sinfulness of man, the authority of the Bible, the full deity of Christ, the substitutionary work of Christ, or the nature of the church as God's called-out ones. And yet, even if the issues are not exactly the same, the spirit of this century is not unlike the spirit of the last century. There are many lessons we can learn (or re-remember) from Machen's classic work:

- True unity must be grounded in more than shared mission and shared experience.
- The church must not lose sight of its unique mission in the world, to announce the good news of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ.
- Definitions matter. We must not settle for theological ambiguity.



- It is not enough to say what is true; we must also make clear what is false.
- Beware of all theologies that do not begin with the utter holiness of God and the utter lostness of man.
- We must never stop preaching and singing about the cross—not just as an example of God’s love, but as the place where, in love, God’s Son bore the curse, died in our place, and sustained on our behalf the wrath of God for sin.
- Efforts to “rescue” Christianity from its supposed irrelevance in our day, inevitably make Christianity look outdated and impotent in the days ahead.

It could be argued that more than anything *Christianity and Liberalism* is about the doctrine of doctrine itself. If there is one recurring theme throughout the book it is that the church of Jesus Christ cannot be sustained—and indeed never was founded—on doctrinal indifferentism. From the very beginning, Machen argues, the Christian movement was not just a way of life, but a way of life founded upon a message. “It was based, not upon mere feeling, not upon a mere program of work, but upon an account of facts. In other words it was based upon doctrine.”<sup>2</sup> At the root of liberalism is the contention that the way of Christ’s life should not be sullied with over-precise wrangling about the person and work of Christ, or dogmatic insistence upon certain beliefs in order to belong to Christ. While few Christians today care what Harry Emerson Fosdick said a hundred years ago (or have even heard of him), the spirit of his theological latitudinarianism and his insistence on Christianity chiefly as a way of a life

2. See page 21 in this volume.



and a means of cultural reform—these emphases are alive and well in evangelical and Presbyterian churches in America and around the world.

In the end *Christianity and Liberalism* still matters not only because people need truth but because people need rest. The pulpit that preaches the good news of the cross is proclaiming the only message that can truly bring peace. Ironically, the more the church tries to mimic the world, the less the church has to offer the world. “Is there no place of refreshing where a man can prepare for the battle of life?”<sup>3</sup> Machen asks in the last paragraph of the book. Is there no place where the sunken-down sinner can find grace and gratitude at the foot of the cross? Is there no place where people can be united in the only truths and in the only One who can truly bring divided people together? “If there be such a place,” Machen concludes, “then that is the house of God and that the gate of heaven. And from under the threshold of that house will go forth a river that will revive the weary world.”<sup>4</sup> That’s as true today as it was one hundred years ago.

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January 2023

3. See page 184 in this volume.
4. See page 184 in this volume.



## PREFACE

On November 3, 1921, the author of the present book delivered before the Ruling Elders' Association of Chester Presbytery an address which was subsequently published in *The Princeton Theological Review*, vol. xx, 1922, pp. 93-117, under the title "Liberalism or Christianity." The interest with which the published address was received has encouraged the author to undertake a more extensive presentation of the same subject. By courtesy of *The Princeton Theological Review*, free use has been made of the address, which may be regarded as the nucleus of the present book. Grateful acknowledgment is also due to the editor of *The Presbyterian* for kind permission to use various brief articles which were published in that journal. The principal divisions of the subject were originally suggested to the author by a conversation which he held in 1921 with the Rev. Paul Martin of Princeton, who has not, however, been consulted as to the method of treatment.





# CHRISTIANITY & LIBERALISM



# INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is not to decide the religious issue of the present day, but merely to present the issue as sharply and clearly as possible, in order that the reader may be aided in deciding it for himself. Presenting an issue sharply is indeed by no means a popular business at the present time; there are many who prefer to fight their intellectual battles in what Dr. Francis L. Patton has aptly called a “condition of low visibility.”<sup>1</sup> Clear-cut definition of terms in religious matters, bold facing of the logical implications of religious views, is by many persons regarded as an impious proceeding. May it not discourage contribution to mission boards? May it not hinder the progress of consolidation, and produce a poor showing in columns of Church statistics? But with such persons we cannot possibly bring ourselves to agree. Light may seem at times to be an impertinent intruder, but it is always beneficial in the end. The type of religion which rejoices in the pious sound of traditional phrases, regardless of their meanings, or shrinks from “controversial” matters, will never stand amid the shocks of life. In the sphere of religion, as in other spheres, the things about which men are agreed are apt to be the things that are least worth holding; the really important things are the things about which men will fight.

1. Francis L. Patton, in the introduction to William Hallock Johnson, *The Christian Faith Under Modern Searchlights*, [1916], p. 7.



In the sphere of religion, in particular, the present time is a time of conflict; the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religion is called “modernism” or “liberalism.” Both names are unsatisfactory; the latter, in particular, is question-begging. The movement designated as “liberalism” is regarded as “liberal” only by its friends; to its opponents it seems to involve a narrow ignoring of many relevant facts. And indeed the movement is so various in its manifestations that one may almost despair of finding any common name which will apply to all its forms. But manifold as are the forms in which the movement appears, the root of the movement is one; the many varieties of modern liberal religion are rooted in naturalism—that is, in the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection with the origin of Christianity. The word “naturalism” is here used in a sense somewhat different from its philosophical meaning. In this non-philosophical sense it describes with fair accuracy the real root of what is called, by what may turn out to be a degradation of an originally noble word, “liberal” religion.

The rise of this modern naturalistic liberalism has not come by chance, but has been occasioned by important changes which have recently taken place in the conditions of life. The past one hundred years have witnessed the beginning of a new era in human history, which may conceivably be regretted, but certainly cannot be ignored, by the most obstinate conservatism. The change is not something that lies beneath the surface and





might be visible only to the discerning eye; on the contrary it forces itself upon the attention of the plain man at a hundred points. Modern inventions and the industrialism that has been built upon them have given us in many respects a new world to live in; we can no more remove ourselves from that world than we can escape from the atmosphere that we breathe.

But such changes in the material conditions of life do not stand alone; they have been produced by mighty changes in the human mind, as in their turn they themselves give rise to further spiritual changes. The industrial world of to-day has been produced not by blind forces of nature but by the conscious activity of the human spirit; it has been produced by the achievements of science. The outstanding feature of recent history is an enormous widening of human knowledge, which has gone hand in hand with such perfecting of the instrument of investigation that scarcely any limits can be assigned to future progress in the material realm.

The application of modern scientific methods is almost as broad as the universe in which we live. Though the most palpable achievements are in the sphere of physics and chemistry, the sphere of human life cannot be isolated from the rest, and with the other sciences there has appeared, for example, a modern science of history, which, with psychology and sociology and the like, claims, even if it does not deserve, full equality with its sister sciences. No department of knowledge can maintain its isolation from the modern lust of scientific conquest; treaties of inviolability, though hallowed by all the sanctions of age-long tradition, are being flung ruthlessly to the winds.

In such an age, it is obvious that every inheritance from the past must be subject to searching criticism; and as a matter of





fact some convictions of the human race have crumbled to pieces in the test. Indeed, dependence of any institution upon the past is now sometimes even regarded as furnishing a presumption, not in favor of it, but against it. So many convictions have had to be abandoned that men have sometimes come to believe that all convictions must go.

If such an attitude be justifiable, then no institution is faced by a stronger hostile presumption than the institution of the Christian religion, for no institution has based itself more squarely upon the authority of a by-gone age. We are not now inquiring whether such policy is wise or historically justifiable; in any case the fact itself is plain, that Christianity during many centuries has consistently appealed for the truth of its claims, not merely and not even primarily to current experience, but to certain ancient books the most recent of which was written some nineteen hundred years ago. It is no wonder that that appeal is being criticized to-day; for the writers of the books in question were no doubt men of their own age, whose outlook upon the material world, judged by modern standards, must have been of the crudest and most elementary kind. Inevitably the question arises whether the opinions of such men can ever be normative for men of the present day; in other words, whether first-century religion can ever stand in company with twentieth-century science.

However the question may be answered, it presents a serious problem to the modern Church. Attempts are indeed sometimes made to make the answer easier than at first sight it appears to be. Religion, it is said, is so entirely separate from science, that the two, rightly defined, cannot possibly come into conflict. This attempt at separation, as it is hoped the following pages may show, is open to objections of the most serious kind. But what





must now be observed is that even if the separation is justifiable it cannot be effected without effort; the removal of the problem of religion and science itself constitutes a problem. For, rightly or wrongly, religion during the centuries has as a matter of fact connected itself with a host of convictions, especially in the sphere of history, which may form the subject of scientific investigation; just as scientific investigators, on the other hand, have sometimes attached themselves, again rightly or wrongly, to conclusions which impinge upon the innermost domain of philosophy and of religion. For example, if any simple Christian of one hundred years ago, or even of to-day, were asked what would become of his religion if history should prove indubitably that no man called Jesus ever lived and died in the first century of our era, he would undoubtedly answer that his religion would fall away. Yet the investigation of events in the first century in Judæa, just as much as in Italy or in Greece, belongs to the sphere of scientific history. In other words, our simple Christian, whether rightly or wrongly, whether wisely or unwisely, has as a matter of fact connected his religion, in a way that to him seems indissoluble, with convictions about which science also has a right to speak. If, then, those convictions, ostensibly religious, which belong to the sphere of science, are not really religious at all, the demonstration of that fact is itself no trifling task. Even if the problem of science and religion reduces itself to the problem of disentangling religion from pseudo-scientific accretions, the seriousness of the problem is not thereby diminished. From every point of view, therefore, the problem in question is the most serious concern of the Church. What is the relation between Christianity and modern culture; may Christianity be maintained in a scientific age?





It is this problem which modern liberalism attempts to solve. Admitting that scientific objections may arise against the particularities of the Christian religion—against the Christian doctrines of the person of Christ, and of redemption through His death and resurrection—the liberal theologian seeks to rescue certain of the general principles of religion, of which these particularities are thought to be mere temporary symbols, and these general principles he regards as constituting “the essence of Christianity.”

It may well be questioned, however, whether this method of defence will really prove to be efficacious; for after the apologist has abandoned his outer defences to the enemy and withdrawn into some inner citadel, he will probably discover that the enemy pursues him even there. Modern materialism, especially in the realm of psychology, is not content with occupying the lower quarters of the Christian city, but pushes its way into all the higher reaches of life; it is just as much opposed to the philosophical idealism of the liberal preacher as to the Biblical doctrines that the liberal preacher has abandoned in the interests of peace. Mere concessiveness, therefore, will never succeed in avoiding the intellectual conflict. In the intellectual battle of the present day there can be no “peace without victory”; one side or the other must win.

As a matter of fact, however, it may appear that the figure which has just been used is altogether misleading; it may appear that what the liberal theologian has retained after abandoning to the enemy one Christian doctrine after another is not Christianity at all, but a religion which is so entirely different from Christianity as to belong in a distinct category. It may appear further that the fears of the modern man as to Christianity were entirely ungrounded, and that in abandoning the embattled walls of the





city of God he has fled in needless panic into the open plains of a vague natural religion only to fall an easy victim to the enemy who ever lies in ambush there.

Two lines of criticism, then, are possible with respect to the liberal attempt at reconciling science and Christianity. Modern liberalism may be criticized (1) on the ground that it is un-Christian and (2) on the ground that it is unscientific. We shall concern ourselves here chiefly with the former line of criticism; we shall be interested in showing that despite the liberal use of traditional phraseology modern liberalism not only is a different religion from Christianity but belongs in a totally different class of religions. But in showing that the liberal attempt at rescuing Christianity is false we are not showing that there is no way of rescuing Christianity at all; on the contrary, it may appear incidentally, even in the present little book, that it is not the Christianity of the New Testament which is in conflict with science, but the supposed Christianity of the modern liberal Church, and that the real city of God, and that city alone, has defences which are capable of warding off the assaults of modern unbelief. However, our immediate concern is with the other side of the problem; our principal concern just now is to show that the liberal attempt at reconciling Christianity with modern science has really relinquished everything distinctive of Christianity, so that what remains is in essentials only that same indefinite type of religious aspiration which was in the world before Christianity came upon the scene. In trying to remove from Christianity everything that could possibly be objected to in the name of science, in trying to bribe off the enemy by those concessions which the enemy most desires, the apologist has really abandoned what he started out to defend. Here as in many other departments of life it appears that



the things that are sometimes thought to be hardest to defend are also the things that are most worth defending.

In maintaining that liberalism in the modern Church represents a return to an un-Christian and sub-Christian form of the religious life, we are particularly anxious not to be misunderstood. “Un-Christian” in such a connection is sometimes taken as a term of opprobrium. We do not mean it at all as such. Socrates was not a Christian, neither was Goethe; yet we share to the full the respect with which their names are regarded. They tower immeasurably above the common run of men; if he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than they, he is certainly greater not by any inherent superiority, but by virtue of an undeserved privilege which ought to make him humble rather than contemptuous.

Such considerations, however, should not be allowed to obscure the vital importance of the question at issue. If a condition could be conceived in which all the preaching of the Church should be controlled by the liberalism which in many quarters has already become preponderant, then, we believe, Christianity would at last have perished from the earth and the gospel would have sounded forth for the last time. If so, it follows that the inquiry with which we are now concerned is immeasurably the most important of all those with which the Church has to deal. Vastly more important than all questions with regard to methods of preaching is the root question as to what it is that shall be preached.

Many, no doubt, will turn in impatience from the inquiry—all those, namely, who have settled the question in such a way that they cannot even conceive of its being reopened. Such, for example, are the pietists, of whom there are still many. “What,” they say, “is the need of argument in defence of the Bible? Is it



not the Word of God, and does it not carry with it an immediate certitude of its truth which could only be obscured by defence? If science comes into contradiction with the Bible so much the worse for science!" For these persons we have the highest respect, for we believe that they are right in the main point; they have arrived by a direct and easy road at a conviction which for other men is attained only through intellectual struggle. But we cannot reasonably expect them to be interested in what we have to say.

Another class of uninterested persons is much more numerous. It consists of those who have definitely settled the question in the opposite way. By them this little book, if it ever comes into their hands, will soon be flung aside as only another attempt at defence of a position already hopelessly lost. There are still individuals, they will say, who believe that the earth is flat; there are also individuals who defend the Christianity of the Church, miracles and atonement and all. In either case, it will be said, the phenomenon is interesting as a curious example of arrested development, but it is nothing more.

Such a closing of the question, however, whether it approve itself finally or no, is in its present form based upon a very imperfect view of the situation; it is based upon a grossly exaggerated estimate of the achievements of modern science. Scientific investigation, as has already been observed, has certainly accomplished much; it has in many respects produced a new world. But there is another aspect of the picture which should not be ignored. The modern world represents in some respects an enormous improvement over the world in which our ancestors lived; but in other respects it exhibits a lamentable decline. The improvement appears in the physical conditions of life, but in the spiritual realm there is a corresponding loss. The loss is clearest,



perhaps, in the realm of art. Despite the mighty revolution which has been produced in the external conditions of life, no great poet is now living to celebrate the change; humanity has suddenly become dumb. Gone, too, are the great painters and the great musicians and the great sculptors. The art that still subsists is largely imitative, and where it is not imitative it is usually bizarre. Even the appreciation of the glories of the past is gradually being lost, under the influence of a utilitarian education that concerns itself only with the production of physical well-being. The "Outline of History" of Mr. H. G. Wells, with its contemptuous neglect of all the higher ranges of human life, is a thoroughly modern book.

This unprecedented decline in literature and art is only one manifestation of a more far-reaching phenomenon; it is only one instance of that narrowing of the range of personality which has been going on in the modern world. The whole development of modern society has tended mightily toward the limitation of the realm of freedom for the individual man. The tendency is most clearly seen in socialism; a socialistic state would mean the reduction to a minimum of the sphere of individual choice. Labor and recreation, under a socialistic government, would both be prescribed, and individual liberty would be gone. But the same tendency exhibits itself to-day even in those communities where the name of socialism is most abhorred. When once the majority has determined that a certain régime is beneficial, that régime without further hesitation is forced ruthlessly upon the individual man. It never seems to occur to modern legislatures that although "welfare" is good, forced welfare may be bad. In other words, utilitarianism is being carried out to its logical conclusions; in the interests of physical well-being the great principles of liberty are being thrown ruthlessly to the winds.



The result is an unparalleled impoverishment of human life. Personality can only be developed in the realm of individual choice. And that realm, in the modern state, is being slowly but steadily contracted. The tendency is making itself felt especially in the sphere of education. The object of education, it is now assumed, is the production of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. But the greatest happiness for the greatest number, it is assumed further, can be defined only by the will of the majority. Idiosyncrasies in education, therefore, it is said, must be avoided, and the choice of schools must be taken away from the individual parent and placed in the hands of the state. The state then exercises its authority through the instruments that are ready to hand, and at once, therefore, the child is placed under the control of psychological experts, themselves without the slightest acquaintance with the higher realms of human life, who proceed to prevent any such acquaintance being gained by those who come under their care. Such a result is being slightly delayed in America by the remnants of Anglo-Saxon individualism, but the signs of the times are all contrary to the maintenance of this half-way position; liberty is certainly held by but a precarious tenure when once its underlying principles have been lost. For a time it looked as though the utilitarianism which came into vogue in the middle of the nineteenth century would be a purely academic matter, without influence upon daily life. But such appearances have proved to be deceptive. The dominant tendency, even in a country like America, which formerly prided itself on its freedom from bureaucratic regulation of the details of life, is toward a drab utilitarianism in which all higher aspirations are to be lost.

Manifestations of such a tendency can easily be seen. In the state of Nebraska, for example, a law is now in force according to



which no instruction in any school in the state, public or private, is to be given through the medium of a language other than English, and no language other than English is to be studied even as a language until the child has passed an examination before the county superintendent of education showing that the eighth grade has been passed.<sup>2</sup> In other words, no foreign language, apparently not even Latin or Greek, is to be studied until the child is too old to learn it well. It is in this way that modern collectivism deals with a kind of study which is absolutely essential to all genuine mental advance. The minds of the people of Nebraska, and of any other states where similar laws prevail,<sup>3</sup> are to be kept by the power of the state in a permanent condition of arrested development.

It might seem as though with such laws obscurantism had reached its lowest possible depths. But there are depths lower still. In the state of Oregon, on Election Day, 1922, a law was passed by a referendum vote in accordance with which all children in the state are required to attend the public schools. Christian schools and private schools, at least in the all-important lower grades, are thus wiped out of existence. Such laws, which if the present temper of the people prevails will probably soon be extended far beyond the bounds of one state,<sup>4</sup> mean of course the ultimate destruction of all real education. When one considers what the public schools of America in many places already

2. See *Laws, Resolutions and Memorials* passed by the Legislature of the State of Nebraska at the Thirty-Seventh Session, 1919, Chapter 249, p. 1019.

3. Compare, for example, *Legislative Acts* of the General Assembly of Ohio, Vol. cviii, 1919, pp. 614f.; and *Acts and Joint Resolutions* of the General Assembly of Iowa, 1919, Chapter 198, p. 219.

4. In Michigan, a bill similar to the one now passed in Oregon recently received an enormous vote at a referendum, and an agitation looking at least in the same general direction is said to be continuing.



are—their materialism, their discouragement of any sustained intellectual effort, their encouragement of the dangerous pseudo-scientific fads of experimental psychology—one can only be appalled by the thought of a commonwealth in which there is no escape from such a soul-killing system. But the principle of such laws and their ultimate tendency are far worse than the immediate results.<sup>5</sup> A public-school system, in itself, is indeed

5. The evil principle is seen with special clearness in the so-called “Lusk Laws” in the state of New York. One of these refers to teachers in the public schools. The other provides that “No person, firm, corporation or society shall conduct, maintain or operate any school, institute, class or course of instruction in any subjects whatever without making application for and being granted a license from the university of the state of New York to so conduct, maintain or operate such institute, school, class or course.” It is further provided that “A school, institute, class or course licensed as provided in this section shall be subject to visitation by officers and employees of the university of the state of New York.” See *Laws of the State of New York*, 1921, Vol. III, Chapter 667, pp. 2049–2051. This law is so broadly worded that it could not possibly be enforced, even by the whole German army in its pre-war efficiency or by all the espionage system of the Czar. The exact measure of enforcement is left to the discretion of officials, and the citizens are placed in constant danger of that intolerable interference with private life which a real enforcement of the provision about “courses of instruction in any subjects whatever” would mean. One of the exemptions is in principle particularly bad. “Nor shall such license be required,” the law provides, “by schools now or hereafter established and maintained by a religious denomination or sect well recognized as such at the time this section takes effect.” One can certainly rejoice that the existing churches are freed, for the time being, from the menace involved in the law. But in principle the limitation of the exemption to the existing churches really runs counter to the fundamental idea of religious liberty; for it sets up a distinction between established religions and those that are not established. There was always tolerance for established religious bodies, even in the Roman Empire; but religious liberty consists in equal rights for religious bodies that are new. The other exemptions do not remove in the slightest the oppressive character of the law. Bad as the law must be in its immediate effects, it is far more alarming in what it reveals about the temper of the people. A people which tolerates such preposterous legislation upon the statute books is a people that has wandered far away from the principles of American liberty. True patriotism will not conceal the menace, but will rather seek to recall the citizens to those great principles for which our fathers, in America and in England, were willing to bleed and die. There are some encouraging indications that the Lusk Laws may soon be repealed. If they are repealed, they will still serve as a warning that only by constant watchfulness can liberty be preserved.

of enormous benefit to the race. But it is of benefit only if it is kept healthy at every moment by the absolutely free possibility of the competition of private schools. A public-school system, if it means the providing of free education for those who desire it, is a noteworthy and beneficent achievement of modern times; but when once it becomes monopolistic it is the most perfect instrument of tyranny which has yet been devised. Freedom of thought in the middle ages was combated by the Inquisition, but the modern method is far more effective. Place the lives of children in their formative years, despite the convictions of their parents, under the intimate control of experts appointed by the state, force them then to attend schools where the higher aspirations of humanity are crushed out, and where the mind is filled with the materialism of the day, and it is difficult to see how even the remnants of liberty can subsist. Such a tyranny, supported as it is by a perverse technique used as the instrument in destroying human souls, is certainly far more dangerous than the crude tyrannies of the past, which despite their weapons of fire and sword permitted thought at least to be free.

The truth is that the materialistic paternalism of the present day, if allowed to go on unchecked, will rapidly make of America one huge "Main Street," where spiritual adventure will be discouraged and democracy will be regarded as consisting in the reduction of all mankind to the proportions of the narrowest and least gifted of the citizens. God grant that there may come a reaction, and that the great principles of Anglo-Saxon liberty may be rediscovered before it is too late! But whatever solution be found for the educational and social problems of our own country, a lamentable condition must be detected in the world at large. It





cannot be denied that great men are few or non-existent, and that there has been a general contracting of the area of personal life. Material betterment has gone hand in hand with spiritual decline.

Such a condition of the world ought to cause the choice between modernism and traditionalism, liberalism and conservatism, to be approached without any of the prejudice which is too often displayed. In view of the lamentable defects of modern life, a type of religion certainly should not be commended simply because it is modern or condemned simply because it is old. On the contrary, the condition of mankind is such that one may well ask what it is that made the men of past generations so great and the men of the present generation so small. In the midst of all the material achievements of modern life, one may well ask the question whether in gaining the whole world we have not lost our own soul. Are we forever condemned to live the sordid life of utilitarianism? Or is there some lost secret which if rediscovered will restore to mankind something of the glories of the past?

Such a secret the writer of this little book would discover in the Christian religion. But the Christian religion which is meant is certainly not the religion of the modern liberal Church, but a message of divine grace, almost forgotten now, as it was in the middle ages, but destined to burst forth once more in God's good time, in a new Reformation, and bring light and freedom to mankind. What that message is can be made clear, as is the case with all definition, only by way of exclusion, by way of contrast. In setting forth the current liberalism, now almost dominant in the Church, over against Christianity, we are animated,





therefore, by no merely negative or polemic purpose; on the contrary, by showing what Christianity is not we hope to be able to show what Christianity is, in order that men may be led to turn from the weak and beggarly elements and have recourse again to the grace of God.

