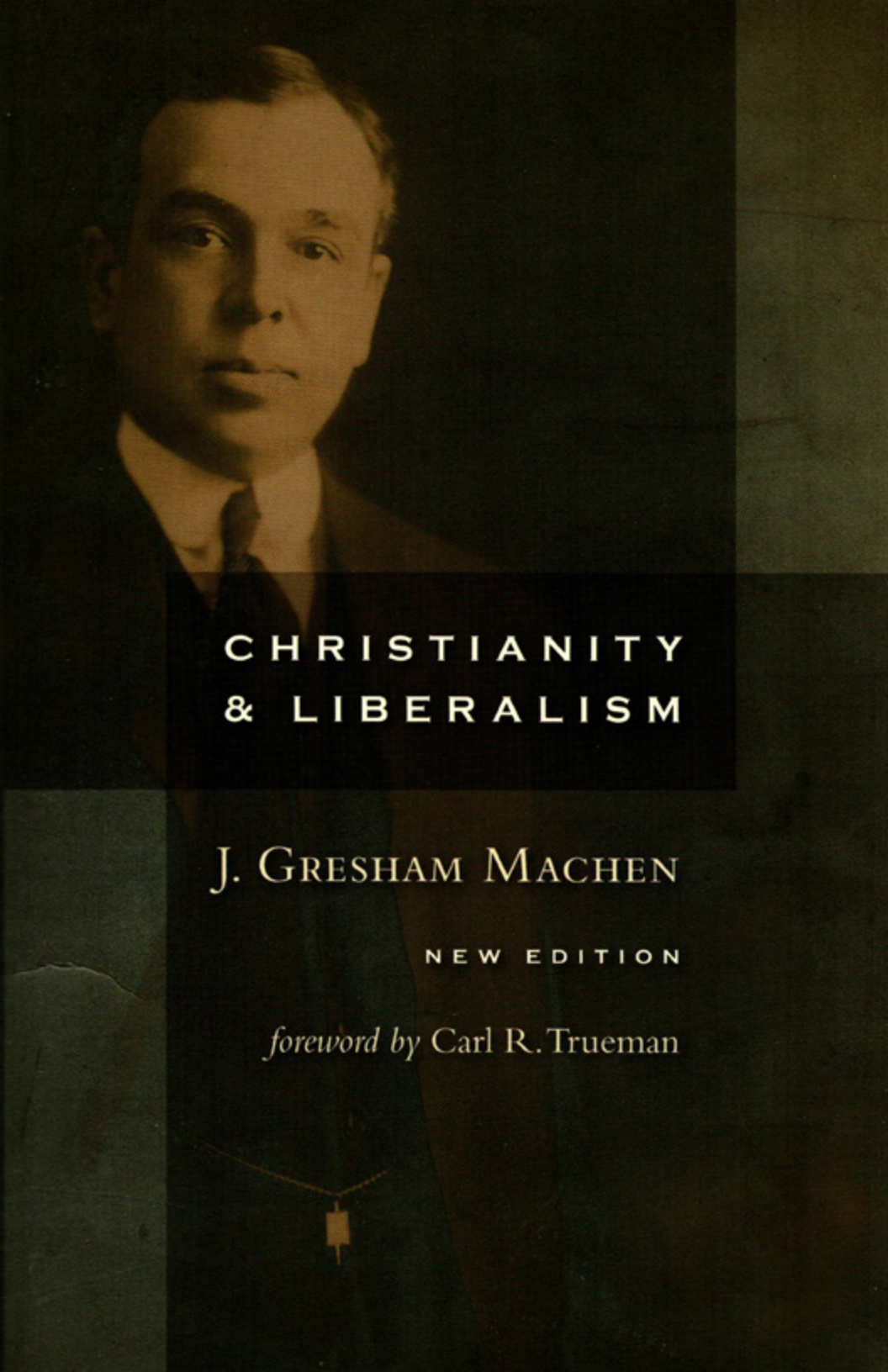

CHRISTIANITY & LIBERALISM

J. GRESHAM MACHEN

NEW EDITION

foreword by Carl R. Trueman

Christianity and Liberalism

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J. GRESHAM MACHEN, D.D.

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To My Mother

Contents

Foreword

Those few people today who have heard of the name J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937) almost certainly know him as the author of the book that is reprinted here, *Christianity and Liberalism*. In his own time, he had a somewhat broader reputation: as a controversial Presbyterian churchman; as a New Testament scholar (whose Greek primer is still in print); as a Princeton Theological Seminary professor; as a thorn in the flesh of both the seminary board and his denomination; as the opponent of the Nobel Laureate, Pearl Buck; as a libertarian litigant on the issue of jay walking; and as the founder of two institutions that survive to this day, Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The context of *Christianity and Liberalism* (the so-called modernist-fundamentalist battles of the early twentieth century) and its central thesis (that liberalism is not a legitimate form of historic Christianity but rather a different religion entirely[1]) meant

1. Machen summed up his thesis in a letter to *The British Weekly*, September 11, 1924: "The truth is that the manifold religious life of the present day, despite interlocking of the branches and much interaction, does not spring from one root but from two. One root is Christianity; the other is a naturalistic or agnostic modernism which, despite Christian influences in detail, is fundamentally hostile to the Christian faith."

that, from the moment of its publication, it was seen as a piece of religious fundamentalism, albeit well written and originating from the pen of an academic whose intellectual and scholarly credentials could not be questioned. Such, for example, was the opinion of *The British Weekly*, which cited the book in an article in 1924 entitled "Fundamentalism: False and True."[2] While this characterization has continued in much of the relevant scholarly literature, it has been carefully argued by D. G. Hart that the categories underlying this analysis are simplistic. While Machen and the fundamentalists shared basic concerns for supernatural Christianity and traditional doctrinal formulations, not only were there significant differences between the two on major cultural platforms (e.g., the use of alcohol and prohibition), but Machen's churchmanship also separated him from the typical fundamentalist mainstream. He was thus not so much a fundamentalist as a confessional Presbyterian. Of course, much depends on how one defines "fundamentalist," but Hart's critique is undoubtedly helpful in highlighting the different intellectual and cultural milieu and mindset of the Princeton professor. Fundamentalism and Machen may well have been, to use the modern term, cobelligerents and even allies, but the latter cannot simply be subsumed under the former.[3]

Today, of course, we live in a time when many influential theologians, not least some among the evangelical constituency, have called for the church to move beyond the old impasse of the liberal-fundamentalist dilemmas and dichotomies. Such claims seem to be rooted in the idea that the kind of antithesis symbolized by Machen's little book and the kind of divisions that one might almost say littered his life both as churchman and seminary professor are in fact rooted in category mistakes that can be resolved variously by applying communitarian linguistic theories, postmodern appropriations of Karl Barth, and other, less

2. *The British Weekly*, June 19, 1924.

3. See D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003).

sophisticated, means. Yet it is my conviction that Machen's book can still speak today. If the labyrinthine prose and complicated thought of Karl Barth is seen by some as still being of use to the church in the here and now, I would respond by saying how much more is that the case with the clear thinking and concise (albeit somewhat antiquated) prose of Machen. Love him or hate him, he had a gift possessed by too few theologians: plain speaking combined with straightforward comprehensibility, and that of a kind which, with its passion, forces the reader, even the hostile reader, to reflect upon his or her own convictions.

But Machen's usefulness is not restricted simply to his clarity and passion. Even for those who do not agree with his central thesis, *Christianity and Liberalism* can still be understood as representing one of the literary artifacts of a generation that had come to see liberalism as leading inexorably to a sentimentalized religion that had nothing to do with the God of the Bible or, indeed, with real life. From this perspective, I would argue, Machen is worth bracketing with two other theologians with whom he might not typically be connected.

The first is Peter Taylor Forsyth (1848-1921), the Scottish congregational theologian who spent time studying under the leading German theologian, Albrecht Ritschl. Initially, in his ministry, Forsyth preached the typical liberalism that he had imbibed from his German master; but pastoring in a poor, working-class environment precipitated something of an intellectual and spiritual crisis that caused him to repudiate his earlier theology. This he replaced with a radical emphasis upon God as revealed in the cross, a God who could not be accommodated to human categories, a God of wrath and of grace. Like Augustine, Forsyth abandoned the mere love of love and came to new understanding of human beings as objects of grace, and in the process all of the vacuous liberal talk about God as love was replaced by a focus on what he himself referred to famously as "the cruciality of the cross." The sentimental God of Ritschl was simply incapable of being reconciled either with the God of the Bible or with the experience of the poor and the suffering in Forsyth's church.

The second theologian needs no introduction from me. Karl

Barth (1886-1968), too, had a Ritschl connection, studying under Ritschl's own brilliant pupil, Wilhelm Herrmann, and also under Adolf von Harnack. For Barth, like Forsyth, pastoral experience challenged him to rethink his liberal theology. As a minister in the mining town of Safenwil in Switzerland, he was confronted with the horrors of life in a way that was impossible to reconcile with the sentimentalized God of the Ritschlian school. In addition, the support of his theological mentors for the German war effort in 1914 caused something of a crisis of conscience. Thus was born the dramatic theology of his famous commentary on Romans, where the sources of his thinking became less the polite liberals of his university days and more the dramatic outsider figures of Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard, and Franz Overbeck. The result has sometimes been characterized as a "theology of crisis." I have neither the time nor the expertise to parse and expound the theology of Barth; suffice it to say that it represented a wholesale reaction to Ritschlian sentimentalism.

Strange to tell, Machen too had a Ritschl connection, studying under Wilhelm Herrmann at the University of Gõttingen. Letters to his mother from this time indicate that Machen was swept away by the passionate zeal of the wild-eyed – and wild-haired! – Herrmann, to the point where this conservative Southern gentleman seems to have had something of a crisis of confidence in the faith his mother had taught him. Machen came through the crisis, and, indeed, he spends considerable energy in *Christianity and Liberalism* attacking precisely the kind of sentimentalism he saw the liberalism of his German professor as encouraging. Here, for example, are some statements from the chapter on salvation:

> How do you know that God is all love and kindness? Surely not through nature, for it is full of horrors. Human suffering may be unpleasant, but it is real, and God must have something to do with it.
>
> Religion cannot be made joyful simply by looking on the bright side of God. For a one-sided God is not a real God,

> and it is the real God alone who can satisfy the longing of the soul. God is love, but is he only love? God is love, but is love God? Seek joy alone, then, seek joy at any cost, and you will not find it.

Like Forsyth before him, Machen also saw this sentimentalism as manifested in attitudes toward the cross, symbolized by the words of popular hymns. In the same chapter as the quotations above, he criticized the use of the word "cross" in the hymn "Nearer My God to Thee," not because he considered the hymn untruthful – suffering can bring one closer to God – but because this sentiment was seen as somehow making the hymn distinctively Christian, while the cross in Christian theology is first and foremost a reference to the vicarious suffering of Christ on our behalf. "One can only be sorry," he concludes, "that the people on the *Titanic* could not find a better hymn to use in the last solemn hour of their lives."

This is perhaps where Machen still speaks most obviously to our own times. While some would claim that sentimentalism has been trumped by postmodern cynicism, it is arguable that such is not the case. The saccharine schmaltz that fills many light entertainment programs is a staple of popular culture; commercials that play on romanticized notions of family, even if they add a hint of irony here and there, are still meant to pull at the heart strings and resonate with something deep inside the audience that encourages us to buy into the dream. And all the talk that comes from some circles about Christianity's not being a set of beliefs but a way of life, that we should not believe in Jesus but follow him, seems to arise out of a view of Christianity as sentiment, and even to bear uncanny linguistic resemblance to precisely the kind of nineteenth-century liberalism against which Forsyth, Barth, and Machen railed with such passion and persistence. Further, one has only to open a typical book of contemporary praise songs or listen to a sermon by a typical televangelist to see how the values of the world pervade the liturgics and the homiletics of contemporary church life. One might also mention the many pop-evangelical preachers for whom Chris-

tianity and the interests of a particular nation or a particular political ideology are one and the same. Again, this jingoism is just another kind of sentimentalism, and it is as alive and well today as it was in the days when Machen wrote his little book.

Nor should we be quick to exempt the cocksure cynicism of postmodernism from such anti-sentimental strictures. Indeed, there is good reason to see the sensibilities of postmodernism as the triumph of the Nietzschean notion that truth is a function of taste. The new atheism of Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and company is rooted not so much in the kind of arguments about the fundamental incoherence of theism or the nonsensical nature of theological language that were so beloved by earlier generations. Rather, their objection to religion is in large part a matter of taste: religion causes oppression of women, suicide bombings, and anti-social fanaticism, and these results are *distasteful* in the contemporary cultural context, the bitter fruit of a poisoned tree. If such is the case, if taste is truth in the postmodern world, it is arguable that what we are witnessing is indeed continuous with late Victorian sentimentalism: mere human aspirations and values invested with transcendent, mystical significance, this time in the idiom of aesthetics, spiced with irony, instead of sentimentality further sweetened with schmaltz.

Thus, the world of today is perhaps not so different from that faced by Forsyth, Barth, and Machen. Human beings still try to make God in their own image, still project their own values onto the divine, and still operate as theologians of glory, to use Luther's famous term from his Heidelberg Disputation. Yet in closing this introduction, I must mark one significant difference between the argument of Machen and the arguments of Forsyth and Barth: for Machen, the only consistent way to oppose sentimentalism in religion was to maintain the truth of Christianity as an historical religion; and that could be done only on the basis of a Bible that was authoritative because it was divinely, verbally inspired. Anything less made Christianity uncertain, and Christian theology little more than those bits of the Bible's teaching with which the individual feels comfortable. A matter, indeed, of taste and sentiment. On this point, he offers a fundamentally

different approach to Christianity from that found in Forsyth and Barth, and the significance of this cannot be overestimated, particularly in the current context where a revival of evangelical appropriation of Barth's theology is seen by many as offering prophetic possibilities for the church—possibilities that, if Machen is right, will ultimately prove at best inadequate for the task of truly confronting the world's wisdom and at worst an idiom for the very expression of such.

Indeed, Machen's commitment to a high doctrine of inspiration was one of the key points that led to the founding of Westminster Theological Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It is also the challenge to us today. In a world absorbed with matters of taste, a world that needs to hear the prophetic challenge of God's word, calling us to repentance and to faith, we need to ask ourselves whether this can be done on the basis of a view of Scripture less robust than that offered by Machen. The answer to that question is surely critical to the well-being of the church in the next decade and is perhaps the most pressing question faced today by churches and seminaries. As critical as the issue was for Machen in the 1920s, how much more urgent is it for those of us who live over eighty years later in a world more deeply secular and ignorant of the most basic of biblical truths – even of the whole notion of transcendent truth? A gospel rooted in Scripture and based on the historical action of God in Christ is still the primary need of the world around us. Anything less is not just inadequate; it is in reality not historic, redemptive Christianity in any meaningful sense. As Machen himself set up the contrast:

> It is no wonder, then, that liberalism is totally different from Christianity, for the foundation is different. Christianity is founded upon the Bible. It bases upon the Bible both its thinking and its life. Liberalism on the other hand is founded upon the shifting emotions of sinful men.

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Westminster Theological Seminary, PA
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Lastly, it is also appropriate to thank Mrs. Hazel Sinclair, and her daughter Carolyn, whose generosity has made the project financially viable. This new edition is dedicated with love and affection to the memory of Hazel's late husband, George, the last member of Westminster's Board of Trustees to have known J. Gresham Machen personally. Shalom, George, shalom.

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.

CHAPTER I

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."[1] 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

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

to be the things that are least worth holding; the really important things are the things about which men will fight.

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 indissolu-

ble, 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.[2] 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,[3] 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

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.

extended far beyond the bounds of one state,[4] mean of course the ultimate destruction of all real education. When one considers what the public schools of America in many places already 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.[5] A public-school system, in itself, is in-

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.

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

deed 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

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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.

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.

CHAPTER II

Doctrine

Modern liberalism in the Church, whatever judgment may be passed upon it, is at any rate no longer merely an academic matter. It is no longer a matter merely of theological seminaries or universities. On the contrary its attack upon the fundamentals of the Christian faith is being carried on vigorously by Sunday-School "lesson-helps," by the pulpit, and by the religious press. If such an attack be unjustified, the remedy is not to be found, as some devout persons have suggested, in the abolition of theological seminaries, or the abandonment of scientific theology, but rather in a more earnest search after truth and a more loyal devotion to it when once it is found.

At the theological seminaries and universities, however, the roots of the great issue are more clearly seen than in the world at large; among students the reassuring employment of traditional phrases is often abandoned, and the advocates of a new religion are not at pains, as they are in the Church at large, to maintain an appearance of conformity with the past. But such frankness, we are convinced, ought to be extended to the people as a whole. Few desires on the part of religious teachers have been more harmfully exaggerated than the desire to "avoid giving offence." Only too often that desire has come perilously near dishonesty; the religious teacher, in his heart of hearts, is well aware of the

radicalism of his views, but is unwilling to relinquish his place in the hallowed atmosphere of the Church by speaking his whole mind. Against all such policy of concealment or palliation, our sympathies are altogether with those men, whether radicals or conservatives, who have a passion for light.

What then, at bottom, when the traditional phrases have all been stripped away, is the real meaning of the present revolt against the fundamentals of the Christian faith? What, in brief, are the teachings of modern liberalism as over against the teachings of Christianity?

At the outset, we are met with an objection. "Teachings," it is said, "are unimportant; the exposition of the teachings of liberalism and the teachings of Christianity, therefore, can arouse no interest at the present day; creeds are merely the changing expression of a unitary Christian experience, and provided only they express that experience they are all equally good. The teachings of liberalism, therefore, might be as far removed as possible from the teachings of historic Christianity, and yet the two might be at bottom the same."

Such is the way in which expression is often given to the modern hostility to "doctrine." But is it really doctrine as such that is objected to, and not rather one particular doctrine in the interests of another? Undoubtedly, in many forms of liberalism it is the latter alternative which fits the case. There are doctrines of modern liberalism, just as tenaciously and intolerantly upheld as any doctrines that find a place in the historic creeds. Such for example are the liberal doctrines of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man. These doctrines are, as we shall see, contrary to the doctrines of the Christian religion. But doctrines they are all the same, and as such they require intellectual defence. In seeming to object to all theology, the liberal preacher is often merely objecting to one system of theology in the interests of another. And the desired immunity from theological controversy has not yet been attained.

Sometimes, however, the modern objection to doctrine is more seriously meant. And whether the objection be well-founded or not, the real meaning of it should at least be faced.

That meaning is perfectly plain. The objection involves an out-and-out skepticism. If all creeds are equally true, then since they are contradictory to one another, they are all equally false, or at least equally uncertain. We are indulging, therefore, in a mere juggling with words. To say that all creeds are equally true, and that they are based upon experience, is merely to fall back upon that agnosticism which fifty years ago was regarded as the deadliest enemy of the Church. The enemy has not really been changed into a friend merely because he has been received within the camp. Very different is the Christian conception of a creed. According to the Christian conception, a creed is not a mere expression of Christian experience, but on the contrary it is a setting forth of those facts upon which experience is based.

But, it will be said, Christianity is a life, not a doctrine. The assertion is often made, and it has an appearance of godliness. But it is radically false, and to detect its falsity one does not even need to be a Christian. For to say that "Christianity is a life" is to make an assertion in the sphere of history. The assertion does not lie in the sphere of ideals; it is far different from saying that Christianity ought to be a life, or that the ideal religion is a life. The assertion that Christianity is a life is subject to historical investigation exactly as is the assertion that the Roman Empire under Nero was a free democracy. Possibly the Roman Empire under Nero would have been better if it had been a free democracy, but the historical question is simply whether as a matter of fact it was a free democracy or no. Christianity is an historical phenomenon, like the Roman Empire, or the Kingdom of Prussia, or the United States of America. And as an historical phenomenon it must be investigated on the basis of historical evidence.

Is it true, then, that Christianity is not a doctrine but a life? The question can be settled only by an examination of the beginnings of Christianity. Recognition of that fact does not involve any acceptance of Christian belief; it is merely a matter of common sense and common honesty. At the foundation of the life of every corporation is the incorporation paper, in which the objects of the corporation are set forth. Other objects may be vastly more desirable than those objects, but if the directors use the

THIS CLASSIC DEFENSE of orthodox Christianity, written to counter the liberalism that arose in the early 1900s, establishes the importance of scriptural doctrine and contrasts the teachings of liberalism and orthodoxy on God and man, the Bible, Christ, salvation, and the church. J. Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* has remained relevant through the years ever since its original publication in 1923. It was named one of the top 100 books of the millennium by *World* magazine and one of the top 100 books of the twentieth century by *Christianity Today.*

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— CARL R. TRUEMAN (from the foreword)
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