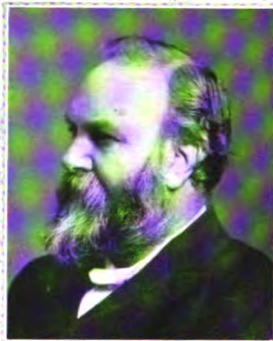




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# The Church, The People, and the Age

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## *Analysis and Summary*

BY

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FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY

NEW YORK AND LONDON

1914

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*Published March, 1914*



**[PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA]**

These are the words of the Greeks, but they have no meaning in the original!

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Late professor of theological encyclopedia and symbolics at Union Theological Seminary, New York, since 1904; born in New York, Jan. 15, 1841; died June 8, 1918; studied at the University of Virginia, 1857-60; Union Theological Seminary, 1861-63; University of Berlin, 1866-69; ordained Presbyterian minister, 1870; pastor at Roselle, N. J., 1870-74; professor of Hebrew and cognate languages at Union Theological Seminary, 1874-1891; professor of Biblical theology, 1891-1904; author of *Biblical Study*; *American Presbyterianism*; *Messianic Prophecy*; *Whither? A Theological Question for the Times*; *The Authority of Holy Scripture*; *The Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch*; *The Bible, the Church and the Reason*; *The Messiah of the Apostles*; *The Messiah of the Gospels*; *The Case of Dr. Briggs*, 3 parts; *General Introduction to the Study of Holy Scripture*; *The Incarnation of the Lord*; *New Light on the Life of Jesus*; *Ethical Teaching of Jesus*; *Commentary on the Psalms*; *Church Unity*; *New Hebrew Lexicon* (with Francis Brown and S. R. Driver); *The Papal Commission and the Pentateuch*; editor of the *International Critical Commentary*, *International Theological Library*.

**QUALIFICATIONS FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

IN response to the question asked whether "the sole qualification for membership in the Christian Church should be the statement of the substance of both law and gospel, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself:'" I do not hesitate to say, that no church could make this the sole qualification for membership without divesting itself of its Christianity, and ceasing to be a Christian Church.

1. It is not true that this ethical summary is a sum-

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mary of the gospel. There is nothing peculiar to the gospel in it. Jesus, in his use of it (Matt. 22: 34-40; Mark 12: 28-34; Luke 10: 25-28) was simply replying to the question of a lawyer: "What is the great commandment of the law?" He answers: "What is written in the law? How readest thou?" and then quotes Deut. 6: 5, and Lev. 19: 18, giving thereby a summary of the law from itself. To this the lawyer assents; and so every Jew acknowledges these words of Jesus as valid. Jews, Mohammedans, and, if I am not mistaken, any pious monotheist of ancient or modern times, would agree to this summary of the ethical law. It might be suitable as an ethical basis for a syncretistic religion, but there is nothing specifically Christian in it. The Christian principle of love is infinitely higher than this. It is Christlike love (John 13: 34; 15: 12); Godlike love (Matt. 5: 43-48); self-sacrificing love; a love not merely of neighbors, but of enemies and persecutors, seeking above all things their salvation; a love not measured by self, but by God and Christ.

2. This ethical summary of the law given by Jesus is based, in Deut. 6: 4 ff. and in the earliest narrative of this conversation with the lawyer, Mark 12: 28-34, upon the fundamental doctrine of the faith of the Jews: "Hear, O Israel; the Lord (Yahweh) our God, the Lord is One."

This doctrine of the unity of God implies, in the original passage, and in the universal interpretation of Jew, Christian, and Mohammedan, faith in the reality, unity, and personality of God as the God of love and salvation, excluding every kind of atheism, polytheism, pantheism, mere deism, and agnosticism. But even with these excluded, devout monotheists could subscribe to

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this faith, and there is nothing specifically Christian in it. The God of the Christian is not only the God of the Old Testament, but the Father of his only Son Jesus Christ. There can be no Christianity without Jesus Christ. No one can be a Christian and be entitled to entrance into the Christian Church, who does not believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour.

This was required of the apostles themselves, and of all Christians from the beginning until the present day. Furthermore this faith in Jesus Christ as Son of God, Saviour, always has implied that he is the divine Saviour. Christianity stands for this as its essential principle, without which it could not be Christianity at all. The Koran distinctly recognizes Moses and Christ as prophets, and many Jews have done the same. If a man cannot rise above the humanity of Christ to his divinity, he cannot be entitled to membership in a Christian church. The Church cannot renounce her divine Saviour without renouncing her Christianity; and those who cannot accept Christ as such, cannot be admitted to the Church without unfaithfulness on the part of the Church itself.

3. The apostles were commanded by our Lord to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the divine Spirit upon them before they began the work he entrusted to them (Acts 1-2). The Christian Church is built on the pentecostal gift of the divine Spirit. Therefore faith in the divine Spirit became the third great principle of the Christian creed, implying, with the divine Father and divine Son, the Christian Trinity in unity. Christianity is now, as it always has been, trinitarian. The Church cannot relinquish her trinitarian creed without ceasing to be Christian. Those who cannot acknowledge the

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holy Trinity, have no right or title in the Christian Church. *with them and their people, leagues Christians!*

4. Our Lord recognized with the Jews the divine inspiration and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures. He commissioned his apostles to teach the world his gospel. The teachings of the apostles, as recorded in the apostolic writings of the New Testament, have always been regarded by the Christian Church as alike divinely inspired and authoritative with the Old Testament. Even apostolic tradition unrecorded, so far as it can be authenticated, has been regarded as authoritative; although there is a difference of opinion as to the measure of its authority. The Bible is the written constitution of the Church, which it cannot lay aside without infidelity to the divine Master. There are different theories as to the inspiration of the Scriptures; but these differences do not involve a departure from the apostolic doctrine of their real divine authority as the rule of faith and practice.

Those who cannot accept the authority of the Christian Bible, rule themselves out of membership in the Christian Church. *Quod licet, non licet!*

5. Our Lord commissioned his apostles to organize his Church, to admit members by baptism and retain them in the Christian communion by participation in the eucharist; and they ordained properly qualified men to assist them and to succeed them in the ministry of the Church. The Church has always had an ordained ministry, and the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Any church that divests itself of these ceases to be a church; and if any one unites with such a society, he does not really unite with the Christian Church.

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6. The Christian Church at a very early date found it necessary to instruct converts and prepare them for holy baptism. The Apostles' Creed was formulated as the baptismal creed, which all Christian churches have confessed from the early second century until the present time. It gives nothing more than the simplest teachings of Holy Scripture; faith in the three persons of the holy Trinity, the six great saving acts of Jesus Christ, and the three most important works of the divine Spirit. The Christian Church cannot put aside its Apostles' Creed simply because some people cannot reconcile their speculations with the virgin birth of our Lord and his bodily resurrection. The Church may tolerate those who, in the stress of modern controversy, have doubts about these doctrines, or certain explanations of them which have been given. But these doctrines are so essential, that the Church could not reject them without ceasing thereby to be a Christian church.

7. The Christian Church in the fourth century had to define the faith, taught by the apostles in the New Testament, in the Holy Trinity and the incarnation, over against monarchian, Arian, and semi-Arian, Apollinarian, Nestorian and Eutychian heresies. The Nicene Creed, as further interpreted in the Constantinopolitan and the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon, was composed for this purpose; and the Christian Church in all its divisions has stood firmly on this creed ever since. Its statements are faithful to the teaching of Jesus Christ and his apostles; and the Church cannot put it aside without ceasing to be Christian. These monarchian theories have been revived by modern Ritschians; and Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, and all the ancient heresies, by various modern thinkers.



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The modern Christian Church cannot tolerate them, any more than could the ancient and medieval Church; because they undermine and destroy Christianity itself.

It is significant that these moderns propose no new heresy, no new explanation of the mysteries of the Holy Trinity and of the incarnation of our Lord. It is quite evident that they cannot. The debate was exhausted, and settled once for all in the fourth Christian century; and they must either acquiesce, or separate eventually from the Christian Church. I do not mean to imply that every one who unites with the Christian Church should fully understand these great mysteries. It is sufficient that they accept them, as the teaching of the apostles and the Church, in a humble, teachable spirit. But the Church cannot lawfully receive and tolerate those who deliberately and aggressively reject these doctrines. *What is to be done?*

8. Jesus Christ required something more fundamental still than these ethical, doctrinal and institutional principles; namely, regeneration (John 3: 3-7) and a new life in vital union with him (Gal. 2: 20), and under the guidance of the divine Spirit (Gal. 5: 25). The Church often fails by its exaggeration of external religion and its comparative neglect of vital religion; its undue emphasis upon forms in the direction of scholasticism, ecclesiasticism and ceremonialism, often at the expense of vital religion. This common fault is due to the weakness of human nature, which finds an external religion easier than a vital and spiritual one.

The Church has, in its pity for poor sinners, been exceedingly tolerant as regards piety and morals, and has even extended that toleration to the ministry. At the same time it has often been exceedingly rigid in its

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formal requirements. The Church cannot win men to Christ by lowering the Christian ideal to that of the dominant world-spirit of any particular period of history, or to the theories of any set of men, whether they call themselves philosophers, or scientists, or men of affairs. It is the vital piety, the heroic element of consecration to Christ and the salvation of men, and faithful adherence to the institutions and doctrines of Christ and his apostles in spite of every obstacle, that alone will satisfy real Christians. Merely nominal Christians the Church has no use for; and it cannot receive them without peril to them and to itself. It was the faithful, heroic Church that conquered the Roman Empire, notwithstanding centuries of oft-repeated persecution. That is what conquered the hordes of barbarians that overran the empire and brought on what are known as the dark ages. That is what enabled Christianity to resist the Mohammedan domination in the East, and to remain faithful for centuries in the midst of seemingly intolerable situations.

9. It is quite true that a Christian theology cannot "be unassailable and final that does not accord with the assured results of science," and that "a message to be effective must stand for and teach those things that constitute the sum total of the values of human life, whatever their source may be." I have always maintained that position. Indeed it is the statement of the Council of the Vatican with which all Christian Churches agree:

"But although faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason, since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith, has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind; and God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contra-

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dict truth. The false appearance of such a contradiction is mainly due, either to the dogmas of faith not having been understood and expounded according to the mind of the Church, or to the inventions of opinion having been taken for the verdicts of reason."

After upwards of eighteen centuries of fidelity to the Christian faith and the consensus of Christianity, both in doctrine and in institution, can any one suppose that the Church will in these late days lower its standard in the dust, merely to adapt itself to modern theorists, and give them an equal place in her ranks with holy apostles, saints and martyrs? What great presumption these modern theorists must have to challenge this consensus of Christianity for eighteen centuries, because it cannot be reconciled to their novelties. Let them first win consent to their speculations in philosophy, science, sociology, and other departments of human thought and life from competent scholars of their own calling, before they dare to challenge the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church of Christ abides firm on her everlasting consensus; and these modern speculators, who value their own opinions more than the faith of centuries, can do nothing more than undermine the faith of the weak and the ignorant, and annoy timid believers, for which they will be called to a strict account before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. *(i.e. the church is Sacrosanct)*

It is well known that I have contended for many years for liberty of opinion and practice in the non-essentials of Christianity, for the reunion of Christ's Church on the basis of its historic consensus, for charity in all things, and the recognition of real Christians outside of the organization of the Church in various heretical and sectarian bodies; but I must resist the ex-

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tension of liberty of opinion on the part of office-holders of the historic churches into the realm of the essentials; for these constitute the historic basis upon which it is alone possible to reunite Christ's Church, and upon their maintenance depends the continued existence and extension of Christianity itself.

— *Q. Thoreau, 1840, "The Church"* —