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GENUINE AND COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANITY

Among the extra-canonical sayings ascribed to Jesus, best entitled to be regarded as genuine, is the saying, "Show yourselves approved money-changers." Many of the Church fathers made use of this saying to explain the words, "Prove all things: hold fast that which is good," believing that underlying both exhortations is the figure of a money-changer testing the coins submitted to him to ascertain whether they are genuine or counterfeit. Whether or not this saying was an actual utterance of Jesus, and was present to Paul's mind when he penned his well-known exhortation, it directs attention to a qualification much needed by Christians today.

It may seem strange, passing strange, that nearly two thousand years after the death of Christ men should be discussing the question, What is Christianity? None the less the question is being everywhere debated; and the most divergent answers given and passionately defended, even among those calling themselves Christians. So-called liberal Christians, as a rule, define Christianity as "the religion of Jesus," meaning the religion that Jesus taught and practised, and so value Him exclusively as teacher and example. So-called conservative Christians, however, define Christianity as the religion that has Jesus as its object, and while yielding to none in their esteem of Him as teacher and example yet value Him most of all as Lord and Redeemer. Who is right? Among individuals having more or less of a following, we find that Royce identified Christianity with the sentiment of loyalty, that Sabatier held it to be only a high form of altruism, that Macintosh of the Yale Divinity School says it is nothing but morality of a Christ-like

sort, that Cross of Rochester Theological Seminary identifies it with the highest manifestations of man's religious and ethical life to such an extent that he says the only true Christianity lies in the future. It is difficult to exaggerate the differences between the things called Christianity today. Some preach a non-miraculous Christianity; others tell us that Christianity bereft of its miracles is Christianity extinct. Some hold a non-doctrinal Christianity; others are convinced that since Christianity is an historical religion a non-doctrinal Christianity is an absurdity. Some commend a Christless Christianity, or at least a Christianity in which Christ is not indispensable; others assure us that such a Christianity is nothing short of a contradiction in terms. And as though nothing were too extreme to lack advocates, there are even those who offer us an atheistic Christianity. This is not so surprising when we remind ourselves that a Christianity without God is not precluded by those who identify it with loyalty or morality or altruism. For can not even an atheist be loyal or moral or altruistic, after a fashion at least?

We have made no effort to list the things called Christianity today. In that case we would have to make mention of Christian Science, and Theosophy, and Russellism, and Mormonism, and Spiritualism, and New Thought, and what not? In fact we live in an age in which nearly every system of thought and life designates itself essential Christianity. Surely, enough has been said, however, to justify the statement that there has never been a generation of Christians who more needed to give heed to the exhortation, "Show yourselves approved money-changers," than the one of which we are a part. At the same time it is questionable whether there has ever been a generation less qualified for the task. If proof be needed, it may be found in two significant books published shortly after the conclusion of the Great War, dealing with the religious situation among the British¹ and

¹ *The Army and Religion*, edited by D. S. Cairns.

American² soldiers during that conflict. Both of these books report the results of first hand investigations, and perhaps the most appalling discovery of all was the almost unbelievable ignorance of Christ and Christianity on the part of these soldiers, most of whom had been reared under the influence of Christian churches and called themselves Christians. These soldiers were a cross-section of these nations, possibly the two most Christian nations in the world, young men probably somewhat above the average intellectually as well as physically, so that what was true of them was at least equally true of those of similar age who remained at home. Do we need to look further to explain the fact that so many members of Christian churches fall easy victims to every popular expounder of a new Ism, provided he or she labels it with the Christian name? The pity of it is that multitudes are embracing systems of thought and life that lack every essential of historical Christianity, nay more, that are positively hostile to all that is most distinctive of historical Christianity, who yet cherish the notion that they are Christianity's purest confessors and exemplars, and as such its beneficiaries and heirs.

We are not indeed to suppose that our age is the only age that has debated the question, What is Christianity? In the nature of the case this question takes precedence of all others. Such questions as, Is Christianity true? What is the value of Christianity? What claims has Christianity on our belief and acceptance? are blind and unmeaning unless we know what Christianity is. Wherever Christianity has been discussed, therefore, this question has been central. It was the storm center between Paul and the Judaizers in the first century, between Augustine and Pelagius in the fifth century, between the Reformers and the Romanists in the sixteenth century, between the Evangelicals and the Deists in the eighteenth century. There is this difference, however, between the situation in former periods and the situation

² *Religion among American Men*, edited by the Committee on the War and Religious Outlook.

today. In former periods the issue was, for the most part, between more or less perfect and more or less imperfect answers to our question. Today, to a degree unparalleled in former periods, the issue is between answers that involve the very right of Christianity, as Christianity has all but universally been understood, to exist. This is true to such a degree, for instance, that the heirs of the Reformers, while as unflinchingly opposed to Rome as were their fathers, see in Roman Catholics their allies as over against a common enemy—an enemy that retains nothing distinctive of Christianity but the name.

We do not want to paint the situation in too somber colors. Many as are those who retain nothing of Christianity but the name, they are a small people, we believe, as compared with those who retain the thing itself. It is not always safe to judge the size of a crowd by the noise it makes. It seems evident, however, not only that the question, What is Christianity? is the primary question before Christendom today, but that it is not altogether easy to discover the right answer. It might be supposed that in the pulpits of professedly Christian churches, and in the halls of professedly Christian schools of learning, the right answer would readily be found. Such is not the case. If we seek the answer in the churches, we find the most diverse sorts of answers being given. The situation is somewhat different in Roman Catholic churches, but one who goes about the Protestant churches seeking an answer will certainly obtain a very confused notion of what Christianity is. Even within the same denomination, absolutely contradictory representations of Christianity are being preached. What is true of the pulpits is equally true of the theological class rooms. Learned professors differ, as never before, in the answers they give to this question. Only imagine an inquirer interviewing our theological instructors, and out of the interviews obtained endeavoring to construct a consistent notion of what Christianity is. When the doctors disagree, what is the plain man to do? No wonder Mr. W. R. Matthews in view

of that "impression of incoherent diversity" created by the existing situation should be led to say, "I can imagine a man exclaiming, in no flippant spirit, that it is more difficult to discover what Christianity is than to believe it when it be discovered!"³ This does not mean that Mr. Matthews despairs of discovering what Christianity is. Neither do we mean to imply that, in our judgment, it is beyond the power of the plain man to discover what Christianity is. Notwithstanding the different things called Christianity to-day we do not think it requires any great scholarship or any extraordinary ability to discover what real Christianity is. The situation is indeed confusing, because so many sorts of coins, bearing the image and superscription of Christianity, are in circulation, and yet we think it possible for even the plain man by the use of such ordinary care and discretion, as characterizes him in the ordinary walks of life, to distinguish between the genuine and the counterfeit.

It is of primary importance as we seek an answer to the question, What is Christianity? that we realize that we are dealing with a historical question. We are seeking to ascertain the nature, not of a "spontaneous" but of a "historical," or "founded," or "positive" religion, a religion that had a definite beginning in the life, teaching, and work of a particular person. The question, What is Christianity? does not differ in kind from the question, What is Darwinism? or What is Mormonism? How do we go about it to learn what Darwinism is? Is it not by reading the writings of Darwin and by considering the views of his representative disciples? How do we find out what Mormonism is? Is it not by reading the Book of Mormon and by considering the views of representative Mormons? And how otherwise can we discover what Christianity is? It cannot be too much emphasized, or too often reiterated, that the question, What is Christianity? is first, last and always an historical question. Such questions as, Is Christianity true? Is Christianity of value? Is Christianity acceptable to the

³ *Studies in Christian Philosophy*, p. 36.

modern man? should be held strictly in abeyance until we learn what Christianity is. Christianity may be false as Haeckel supposed, as harmful as Nietzsche supposed, as unacceptable to the modern man as George Burman Foster supposed; but what has that to do with the question what manner of thing is it?

Many, perhaps most, of the wrong answers given to this question are due to an initial failure to realize its historical nature. As a result the historical question, What is Christianity? is confused with the rational question, What is true? or the ethical question, What is right? or the practical question, What is valuable? or the philosophical question, What is the highest ideal? Christianity may or may not be true—how can we judge that until we know what it is? Its contents may be moral or immoral—are we in a position to say until we know what they are? It may be worthless or beyond price—how can we appraise it until we know what it is? It may be a manifestation of the ideal or of a comparatively inferior religion—how can we say until we at least know what sort of religion it is? An illustration may be found in an article entitled, “What is the Christian Religion”? by Professor D. C. Macintosh.⁴ In the early part of this article it is said that redemption in the blood of Christ as a sacrifice for sin is “not only not essential to Christianity, because contrary to reason, but moreover essentially unchristian, because opposed to the principles of sound morality” (p. 18). Later it is contended that the Christian religion “must be in essence whatever in actual phenomenal Christianity is necessary for the realization of the true ideal of human spiritual life in general and of human religion in particular” (p. 27). It is somewhat difficult to understand, however, just why any conception is unchristian merely because it does not agree with our notion of what is rational or moral or the true ideal. It is no doubt interesting to know what Professor Macintosh regards as rational and moral, as well as his conception of the ideal religion, but it is not so

⁴ *Harvard Theological Review*, January, 1914.

clear that this addition to our knowledge furthers our understanding of what Christianity is. Of course, if we find in Christianity irrational or immoral or unideal elements we shall, to that extent at least, reject it—no one advocates the acceptance of Christianity whether or not it is irrational or immoral. But surely we are not warranted on such grounds to say that these, to us, irrational or immoral or unideal elements are no part of Christianity. The result can only be, as in Professor Macintosh's case, that what is presented as Christianity is not so much Christianity as our individual conception of what is rational and moral and the true ideal. As a matter of fact we have no more right to approach the question, What is Christianity? with the assumption that it is rational and moral and the ideal religion than we have to approach the question, What is Mormonism? with the same assumption. Such questions as, Is Christianity true? Is it moral? Is it of value? Does it possess the element of finality? Is it acceptable to the modern mind? are supremely important but they should be disregarded when we are considering the question, What is Christianity? It is conceivable that the time is ripe to abandon the religion founded by Jesus and practiced ever since by His disciples, and to substitute some other religion for it, but at any rate we can discover what is truly Christian, what is legitimately called Christianity, only by historical study.

It has been much debated whether we are to get our conception of Christianity exclusively from its early presentation in the New Testament or from its whole historical manifestation. It is obvious that Christianity, or at least what is called Christianity, not only existed in the first century but exists today; and that if this were not the case few of us would have any interest in the question, What is Christianity? It is clear also that unless Christianity in some of its historical manifestations has adhered to its original type, so that there is such a thing as a fundamental type of Christianity which has remained essentially the same in the midst of its ever-changing environment and

through all the forms it has assumed, there is not only no Christianity in the world at present essentially the same as New Testament Christianity, but all conceptions of Christianity derived from its historical manifestation as a whole are essentially wrong conceptions. In that case we can obtain even a relatively right estimate of Christianity only as we confine our attention to its New Testament presentation. But on the assumption that Christianity has adhered to type closely enough to warrant Warfield in saying that "impure as the development of Christianity has been, imperfect as has always been its manifestation, corrupt as has often been its expression, it has always presented itself to the world, as a whole, substantially under one unvarying form,"⁵ it is evident that we can obtain a more or less adequate conception of the Christian religion by considering its historical manifestation as a world phenomenon.

If we had to choose between getting our conception of Christianity from its New Testament manifestation and its historical manifestation as a whole, unquestionably we should get it from the former. As a "founded" religion Christianity derives its specific content from its founders, Christ and His apostles. As such nothing can be regarded as belonging to its essential content that does not appear in New Testament Christianity or cannot be legitimately deduced from it. Not only may nothing be insisted on as essential to Christianity that lacks New Testament support, but all its later manifestations are to be classified as pure or corrupt, as adequate or inadequate, by reference to this original content. Moreover as judged by this standard all later manifestations are imperfect and some of them largely apostate. And yet, while we ought to attach primary significance to the New Testament presentation in formulating our conception of Christianity, we ought not to neglect its later historical manifestations. It is conceivable, no doubt that at an early date Christianity departed so radically from type that historical Christianity as a whole is a totally different religion from the religion of the

⁵ *Harvard Theological Review*, October, 1912, p. 462.

New Testament, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to believe that such is the case and at the same time believe that the religion of the New Testament is a God-given religion and its founder the Son of God. It is scarcely supposable that nineteen centuries elapsed before Christ's promise of His Spirit to guide His disciples into truth began to be fulfilled. And unless practically the whole historical development of Christianity has been a departure from type, it is altogether probable that this historical development has some help to offer to those desirous of ascertaining its essential content.

Granted that there has been corruption, is it not also reasonable to expect explication? In fact apart from the explication afforded by its whole historical manifestation no one of us today would have any adequate conception of what Christianity is. The deposit of divine truth in the teachings of Christ and His apostles has not supplied merely the starting-point in the development of doctrine in the church; it has rather supplied the goal towards which we are still slowly and painfully striving. It is an illusion to suppose that any of us have gotten our conception of Christianity direct from the New Testament uninfluenced by the later historical developments. We no more draw our conception of Christianity at first hand from the New Testament than we draw our scientific knowledge direct from nature, unaided by text-books, or the laborious researches of others. Athanasius and Augustine and Anselm, and Luther and Calvin, not to mention others, have not labored in vain. And it is because we have entered into their labors that we have a more adequate conception of Christianity than did the Christians of the second century. This is not to deny, rather it is to affirm, that everything presented as an essential element of Christianity must be able to present New Testament credentials; but it is to maintain that actually our conception of Christianity is derived both from its New Testament presentation and its whole historical manifestation. Granted that the New Testament is our original and only authoritative source of knowledge, and that we must be constantly on our guard when

considering the later developments lest we look upon perversions or even falsifications of Christianity as being in the line of true development, it is none the less true that we, for the most part at least, have been so largely influenced in our interpretation of the New Testament by the teaching of the existing churches as expressed in their creeds and especially as expressed by their accredited teachers that unless Christianity has adhered somewhat closely to type there is little reason to suppose that there is much real Christiaunity in the world today.

The assumption that Christianity has, broadly speaking, conformed to type does not pass unchallenged. It is denied by two influential schools of thought. For want of better names, yet with substantial accuracy, they may be called the liberal and the modernist schools. According to the "Liberals," composed of such men as Harnack, Bousset, Wrede, and their host of followers, almost the entire historical manifestation of Christianity has been a radical departure from type. Almost immediately after the death of Christ, they tell us, the "religion of Jesus" was transformed, refashioned, made over, radically altered, under the influence of the pre-Christian beliefs of His earliest followers. The religion of the "primitive community" was in turn overlaid and transformed by the theological constructions of Paul, with the result that it is Paulinism rather than Christianity with which Church history for the most part concerns itself. These scholars all but unanimously admit that the Christianity that has dominated the ages is essentially one with Paulinism; hence that since Paul Christianity has conformed rather closely to type. They maintain, however, that there are two high mountains through which we must tunnel, if we are to pass from Paulinism to the Christianity of Jesus. The first mountain lies between Paulinism and the religion of the "primitive community"; the second between the religion of the "primitive community" and the "religion of Jesus." Henry C. Vedder is only repeating the view that has become traditional in "Liberal" circles when he writes: "The

publication of the words of Jesus in the Gospels found men's minds preoccupied with other ideas, and his teachings made little impression. The Christians of A.D. 80, and afterward, supposed they were following closely in the footsteps of the Master, when they had really cast aside the most important of his instructions and adopted an ideal of life altogether foreign to his. It required nineteen centuries after that for men to catch sight once more of what Jesus intended and hoped to accomplish."⁶

Did Christianity thus early depart from type? Did the "primitive community" more or less unconsciously transform the teachings of Jesus into something quite different? Was Paul rather than Jesus the founder of historical Christianity? It is becoming increasingly clear that insuperable obstacles lie in the way of this thesis. Paul certainly did not regard himself as the founder of a new religion; he explicitly denies that he preached any other Gospel than that which had been preached. Harnack himself admits that Paul was not the originator of the Gospel he preached. To the great surprise of many "Liberals," to whom it had become traditional that Paul was "the second founder" of Christianity, he said in the address which he delivered before the Fifth International Congress of Free Christianity and Religious Progress:

The declaration that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" Paul indicates to be a traditional, therefore a generally, accepted article of faith of the first rank; and he says the same concerning the resurrection of Christ. According to this it is certain that the first apostles also, as well as the congregation at Jerusalem, shared this conviction and doctrine. This is also proved by the first chapters of the Book of Acts, the credibility of which is indisputable in this respect. Therefore the problem must be moved back chronologically from Paul to the first disciples of Christ, who had already preached the dying of Christ for sin and His resurrection. If they preached it, however, they recognized it at once as the main factor, therefore as "the Gospel" within the Gospel, and this indeed is clearly shown in the oldest written Gospel that we have, namely that of Mark. The whole work of Mark is so disposed and composed

⁶ *The Fundamentals of Christianity*, p. 97.

that death and resurrection appear as the aim of the entire presentation. Even if Mark was admittedly influenced by the preaching of Paul, yet the Gospel specially written for the Jews, that according to Matthew, has the same form. It could not then have been new to the Christians of Palestine.⁷

It is to be regretted that Harnack does not see that what Paul received from the "primitive community," the "primitive community" received from Jesus himself; but that is no reason why we should not. We have abundant reason for so doing. It has proved impossible to discover a more primitive Gospel than that of the "primitive community." Not only is it clearer than ever that the same Christ meets us in all the books of the New Testament, so that the Christ of Paul and John does not differ essentially from the Christ of the Synoptists, but literary and historical criticism has failed to discover any Christ more primitive than the Christ of the New Testament. The choice at the end of the day is seen to be between the Christ of the New Testament and no Christ at all. On the basis of a detailed examination of the relevant evidence James Denney affirmed, and all sound scholarship supports the affirmation, that "Christianity never existed in the world as a religion in which men shared the faith of Jesus, but was from the very beginning, and amid all undeniable diversities, a religion in which Jesus was the object of faith."⁸ The only sound conclusion, therefore, is that not only in the mind of Paul but in the mind of the "primitive community," and not only in the mind of the "primitive community" but in the mind of Jesus himself, the religion He founded is in fundamental accord with historical Christianity.⁹

⁷ *Proceedings and Papers of the Fifth International Congress of Free Christianity and Religious Progress*, p. 101.

⁸ *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 12.

⁹ For detailed support of this judgment the following references among others may be consulted. *The Lord of Glory* by B. B. Warfield, especially pages 146-173; *Jesus and the Gospel* by James Denney, especially pages 1-90; *The Origin of Paul's Religion* by J. Gresham Machen. Prof. Machen's book is specially important in this connection as it contains, it seems to us, a triumphant refutation of the leading

That Christianity has not held at all closely to type is also maintained by the "Modernists" in both Catholic and Protestant circles. According to the "Modernists" the Christianity of Jesus was but the germ out of which later Christianity has grown. Their attitude toward the New Testament literature is often more radical even than that of the "Liberals," but when they have discovered the "Christianity of Christ" they do not identify this with true Christianity and use it as a norm to discriminate between its pure and its corrupt manifestations; they treat it merely as the seed out of which the tree of Christianity has grown. While the "Liberals" show a tendency to treat the historical developments of Christianity as though they had no bearing on the question, What is Christianity? the "Modernists" show a tendency to treat its earliest manifestations as seen in Jesus and his immediate disciples as a more or less negligible quantity in answering this question. With them Christianity is a living and growing thing; and the important matter is not what it was nearly two thousand years ago but what it is today. Lyman Abbott was writing under the influence of this point of view—the pioneer and perhaps the best representative of which is Loisy¹⁰—when he wrote: "The Christianity of the Twentieth Century is not the same as the Christianity of Jesus Christ; and it ought not to be. For Christianity is a life, and after nineteen centuries of growth it can no more be the same it was in the First Century than an oak is the same as an acorn!"¹¹ Harry Emerson Fosdick under the same influence writes: "The progressiveness of Christianity is not simply its response to a progressive age; the progressiveness of Christianity springs from its own inherent vitality. So far is this from being regrettable, that a modern Christian rejoices in it and gladly recognizes not only that he is thinking thoughts and undertaking

explanations of Paulinism that regard it as other than the religion Jesus founded.

¹⁰ *The Gospel and the Church.*

¹¹ *What Christianity means to me*, Prologue, p. vii.

enterprises which his fathers would not have understood, but also that his children after him will differ quite as much in teaching and practice from the modernity of today."¹² George Cross gives expression to the same point of view when he makes such statements as these: "It must not be assumed that there are available for our use any *fixed* standard tests for the final determination of what is truly Christian as distinct from that which claims to be Christian"; "It is even possible—and we say it with the very deepest reverence for him in our hearts—that if all the teachings of Jesus were brought together in the exact form in which he gave them there might be found among them some that would not commend themselves as fixed and final to the most intelligent and devout Christians of the present day"; "We know of nothing that has remained or can remain unchanged from the inception of the Christian faith down to the present"; "The Christianity of yesterday was creative of the Christianity of today at the same time the Christianity of today is more and somewhat other than the Christianity of yesterday. For it recreates that which came from the past and makes it new."¹³

In order that we may believe, in the face of the "Modernists," that there is such a thing as a fundamental type of Christianity that has persisted throughout the ages, it is not necessary that we consider the tenability of their evolutionism—the dominating concept under which they operate. If we were discussing the finality of Christianity that might be necessary; but not when we are merely asking, What is Christianity? For our present purpose, it is enough if we can show that since its origin some nineteen hundred years ago it has held so closely to type that much of the Christianity of today is essentially the same as the Christianity of Christ and His apostles. We readily admit that if some of the things called Christianity today can substantiate their claim to the name, Christianity has radically departed from type.

¹² *Christianity and Progress*, p. 164.

¹³ *Creative Christianity*, pp. 26, 34, 47 and 52.

What however if these things are rightly spoken of as Christianity falsely so-called? No doubt the "Modernists" can make a more or less plausible defense of their thesis; but we are confident that they do this only by ignoring the distinction between fluctuations and mutations in the history of Christianity. Ignoring this distinction they treat the currents and eddies along the edge as though they were the main stream of Christian history. Thus they create the impression of a departure from type where none exists.

The real issue raised by the "Modernists" is whether Christianity as a world-phenomenon has held fundamentally to type, and whatever the fluctuations that have marked its history has shown an unmistakable tendency to revert to its fundamental type as seen in its founders, Christ and His apostles. We have already indicated our reasons for supposing that Paulinism is one with original Christianity; hence all that we need to do to show that Christianity, broadly speaking, has not departed fundamentally from type is to show that historical or traditional Christianity is essentially one with Paulinism. This is not difficult to do. It is not even necessary in dealing with the "Liberals." They are all but unanimous in admitting it. So outstanding a representative as Bousset charges "the orthodox" with "basing the truth of their whole system and the form of their faith on a fantastic mythical-dogmatic interpretation of the life of Jesus by Paul."¹⁴ And Wrede says it was Paul who "introduced into Christianity the ideas whose influence on its history up to the present time has been deepest and most far-reaching."¹⁵ Neither is it necessary in the case of the ordinary Christian. The rank and file of those calling themselves Christians are not conscious of any fundamental discrepancy between their own religion and Paulinism. They may like Peter find "some things hard to be understood" in Paul's writings but

¹⁴ The Significance of the Personality of Jesus Christ for Belief in *Proceedings and Papers of the Fifth International Congress of Free Christianity and Religious Progress*, p. 209.

¹⁵ *Paul*, p. 179.

as far as they understand them his teachings find a ready response in their souls. Even a non-Christian can scarcely read a volume like Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom* without realizing that while these creeds express Paulinism with various degrees of purity yet they are expressions of Paulinism.

The sharp contrasts, so frequently made by "Modernists," between the later and the earliest forms of Christianity should not be taken very seriously. To estimate them at their true value we need only remember that what they are contrasting is not later Christianity and Paulinism, or even pre-Pauline Christianity, but later Christianity and the Christianity they find in the early Christian literature after that literature has been reconstructed on the basis of their naturalistic postulates. While they professedly contrast later Christianity and the "religion of Jesus"; yet what they call the "religion of Jesus," is about as different from the religion that Jesus actually founded as any religion could possibly be. It is not maintained, of course, that there is no contrast between the religion that Jesus founded and later Christianity—imperfect and degenerate types meet us always and everywhere in later Christianity; nowhere do we find absolutely pure Christianity—but it is maintained without fear of successful contradiction that on the whole Christianity has held closely enough to type to enable the plain man to see and feel the gulf between Christianity and all other forms of religion.

It is sometimes assumed that we can obtain a sufficiently exact answer to the question, What is Christianity? merely by ascertaining what is common to those professing and calling themselves Christians, what is common being regarded as essential and what is not common as unessential. Accordingly some tell us that Christianity is what has been held by those professing and calling themselves Christians during the past nineteen hundred years, while others, more under the influence of evolution, tell us that the Christianity of any age, including our own age, is what is held by those

of that age who profess and call themselves Christians. Whether we taken the problem chronologically or geographically, the method is fatally inadequate. Suppose that any considerable number of those that have called, or do call, themselves Christians were, or are, not really Christians at all. Then what has been, or is, held in common contains nothing specifically Christian; also the non-Christian forms of thought would be left out. But even if we suppose that all those who have called, or do call, themselves Christians were, or are, really Christians, such a mode of procedure would only give us the minimum of Christianity, the very least a man can hold and still call himself a Christian. Otherwise the most attenuated forms of Christianity of which we have knowledge would be excluded. Suppose we ask the question, What is a man? Do we merely want to know what all men have, or have had, in common? If so we are trying to discover the poorest, meanest, least developed specimen, physically, intellectually and morally, that has existed, or does exist, entitled to be called a man. Do we not rather want to know what a normal or representative man is? Surely it is not otherwise when we ask, What is Christianity? We are inquiring what normal, representative Christianity is, not the most attenuated, contentless form of thought that can possibly call itself Christianity. At its very best this method can only give us the minimum of Christianity. But unless we are wholly wrong in supposing that there has been—and especially that there is—much counterfeit Christianity in the world, it will not even give us this. It will merely give us what Christianity has in common with natural religion. Unquestionably Christianity and natural religion have much in common. They may both teach faith in God and duty and immortality but what they teach in common will not include anything distinctly Christian.

If now we approach the question, What is Christianity? with these two assumptions (1) that it is a “founded” religion that has a specific content of its own derived ultimately from Jesus Christ and (2) that since its founding it has, broadly

speaking, not "run wild" but adhered to type—and apart from these assumptions Christianity is a word without definite meaning—what do we discover?

If we approach the question in that purely objective manner which alone befits our approach to an historical question, we will discover, first of all, whether we consider the Christianity of the New Testament or the whole of its historical manifestation, that it is a religion that ascribes its beginning and its continuance to the person of Jesus Christ. Christianity is not the only religion that ascribes its origin to the life, teaching and work of a person—Buddhism and Mohammedanism do the same, to mention no others—but in no other religion does its founder occupy such a position as Jesus occupies in Christianity. For Christianity Jesus is much more than founder: He is also a present object of worship. He is conceived not only as one who was but as one who is, not only as one who lived and worked in the past but as one who lives and works still, so that Christianity has been as dependent on Him through the ages—is as dependent on Him today—as when He trod the earth. Buddha and Mohammed might be forgotten and the religions they founded remain essentially what they are, because the bond that binds their followers together is not so much loyalty to their persons, much as they have been honored as more or less deified persons, as loyalty to the principles and precepts they taught and exemplified. Could they behold the things done on earth, they would be satisfied if they saw the principles they taught ruling in the hearts of men. It is far otherwise in the case of Christ. He promised to be with His disciples to the end of the world, and desires the love, trust, obedience and worship of mankind. He is not satisfied to see men observing the things He commanded, even if they observe them in a spirit of love, unless they act out of a consideration for Himself. Paul expressed the mind and hope of Christ for all mankind when he wrote to the Colossians: "And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to

God the Father through Him." Where He is forgotten or ignored, even if His spirit lives on in individuals or even communities and much of what He taught is known and done, Christianity does not exist. For Christ is Christianity itself. He does not merely point out the way to God and salvation: He is the Way itself.

We discover in the next place, as a no less outstanding characteristic of Christianity, that it is a redemptive religion—a redemptive religion not in the vague sense characteristic of other religions but in the particular sense that it offers salvation from sin, conceived as guilt and power and pollution, through the expiatory death of Jesus Christ. The object of Christian faith has never been Christ *simpliciter* but always Christ *as crucified*. It may even be said that the thought of Christianity as a redemptive religion in this specific sense is more prominent than the thought of it as a religion that ascribes its origin and continuance to Christ—Christ being valued most of all because of His redeeming work. It has ever been recognized that all that Christ experienced on earth, all He said and did during that period, contributed toward giving Him as the living one the significance He possesses; but unquestionably it has always been recognized that what contributed most was His death on the Cross. It has always been confessed, and not only confessed but placed in the very center of the Christian confession, that apart from that death He would not be qualified to be our redeemer, to grant unto us the forgiveness of our sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified through faith in Him. With Paul the Church Universal has proclaimed as the most important fact of all that Christ died for our sins. Every great branch of the Christian Church has assigned to His death, regarded as an expiatory sacrifice, the place of primary importance. This appears whether we regard the writings of their representative theologians, the statements of their official creeds, or their hymns and spiritual songs. Greek Catholics and Roman Catholics and Protestants have at least been united

in accepting the Cross as the symbol of Christianity and in singing the praises of the "Lamb that was slain."

In view of the anti-supernaturalism of the age there is need of stressing a third characteristic, viz., the supernaturalism of Christianity. In the nature of the case a religion that looks upon a historical person not only as having lived in the past but as living in the present, and living as an object of faith, is supernaturalistic to the core. It is equally evident that a religion that offers salvation from sin, felt as guilt and power and pollution, on the basis of the death of this object of worship is through and through a supernatural religion—both as regards what happened two thousand years ago and what takes place in human hearts today. It should be added perhaps that we must consider the future as well as the past and present, if we would adequately appreciate the supernaturalism of Christianity. It is not enough that we recognize the supernatural in the sense of creative acts of God in human history that have brought about, and are bringing about, in human history phenomena impossible through the unaided operation of natural causes, however divinely guided: there must also be a frank recognition of the fact that the immortality that Christianity posits both for the individual and the race cannot be realized apart from similar manifestations of the supernatural. The eschatological interest is not an appendage to Christian experience; it is essential to its very being. The salvation the Christian embraces is a salvation for the life to come even more than for the life that now is. As a result the center of gravity for Christian thought and life is in the world to come. A religion whose circumference does not extend beyond the present life and the present world, and which does not have a supernaturalistic eschatological outlook, lacks one of the outstanding characteristics of historic and especially New Testament Christianity. In describing Christianity as a world-phenomenon it will not do to say, therefore, that although the supernatural element has never been absent from its proclamation, yet it has always been an element near the periphery of its message. Such a representation is so inadequate as to

be palpably misleading. It is only because men insist on applying the name "Christianity" to things that lack all that is distinctive of historical Christianity that such a representation is possible. Whatever our personal attitude toward the supernatural, there is no occasion for concealing from ourselves, or of seeking to conceal from others, the fact that the supernatural so enters into the very substance of Christianity as a world-phenomenon that Christianity de-supernaturalized is Christianity extinct.

So pronounced, so wide-spread is that naturalism of thought and sentiment characteristic of the present age that we are apt to forget that it is of comparatively recent origin. Previous to the so-called "Enlightenment" of the eighteenth century all life and world views, both within and without Christian circles, were supernaturalistic. Then appeared for the first time the so-called empirico-scientific conception which professes to explain the entire world, including man and religion and morality, without the aid of any supernatural factor, purely from resident forces and according to unvarying laws. It is only within the last fifty years, however, that it has grown to such proportions as to have the courage to contest the right of historical Christianity to dominate the thought and life of the future. It was only to be expected that an increasing effort to naturalize Christianity would go hand in hand with the increasing acceptance of this anti-supernaturalistic life and world view. A galaxy of brilliant scholars have devoted themselves to the task. If they have failed, as we believe they have, it has only been because they were attempting the impossible. It admits of no denial that historical Christianity, including the Christianity of New Testament times, claims to be supernatural. Men used to argue in an amusingly learned way that, whatever might be true of Paul and John, the Synoptists present us with an essentially human Jesus. That day is past. Even Bousset says: "For the belief of the community, which is shared already by the oldest evangelist, Jesus is the miraculous Son of God, on whom men believe,

whom men put wholly on the side of God.”¹⁶ The Jesus of the first three Gospels is a supernatural Jesus. At this point, then, radical and conservative scholarship agree. The movement of thought in the attempt to naturalize Christianity, therefore, seems to be something like this. The Jesus even of Mark, assumed to be the oldest Gospel, is a supernatural Jesus. But the supernatural as a factor in human life is a figment of the imagination. Hence there must be a Jesus more primitive than the Jesus of the evangelists, and this Jesus must be a purely natural Jesus. The natural and the supernatural elements in the narratives, however, are so inextricably interwoven as to be inseparable. The supernatural elements are as well attested as the natural elements. It is not surprising, therefore, that the more radical—should we not say the more consistent?—of the naturalistic critics are denying that Jesus ever existed. At any rate there seems to be as good reason for saying that there was no Jesus at all behind the Jesus of the evangelists as that back of the Jesus of the evangelists there was a purely human Jesus. All the historical evidence we have at least points to a supernatural Jesus.

But even supposing it were possible to get back of the Jesus of the evangelists to a more primitive Jesus, Christianity would still remain unexplained. The Jesus that even the more conservative of the naturalistic critics rescue for us—the fanatic or paranoid Jesus of some is worse than no Jesus at all—is useless as an explanation of the origin and continuance of historic Christianity. If the Jesus of the evangelists is essentially a fictitious character, how has it come about that He has exerted as great an influence in history as if He were historical? As the late Professor A. M. Fairbairn put it: “We have not solved, we have not even stated and defined, the problem as to the person of Jesus when we have written the life of Jesus, for that problem is raised less by the Gospels than by Christ’s place and function in the collective history of man.” “Christ has to be fitted

¹⁶ *Was Wissen wir von Jesus*, p. 57.

into our scheme of things, and we have to explain (1) how His historical action has corresponded to His fictitious rather than His real character; and (2) what sort of blind accident or ironical indifference to right can reign in a universe which has allowed to fiction greater powers than have been granted to truth."¹⁷ In arguing that it requires the supernatural Jesus of the New Testament to account for the Christianity of history we are not appealing to the argument from effects because we are sceptical of the ability of historical criticism to give us not only an actual but a supernatural Jesus. We are merely pointing out an additional reason for believing in a supernatural Jesus. As a matter of fact either the Jesus of the New Testament is the primitive, the only historical Jesus, or all knowledge of such a Jesus is lost beyond recovery. We have been hearing a good deal of the mythical Jesus; we need not hesitate to affirm however that it is "the desupernaturalized Jesus which is the mythical Jesus, who never had any existence, the postulation of the existence of whom explains nothing and leaves the whole historical development hanging in the air."

Since the only Christianity discoverable in the first century is a supernatural Christianity, and since this is the only Christianity that has been dominant in later ages, it seems clear that when we are asked, What is Christianity? we must reply that it is through and through a supernatural religion. We may or may not like supernaturalism, but it is scarcely open to us to deny that it is essential to Christianity.

If then we investigate Christianity, whether as it appears in its founders or as it appears during its whole historical manifestation, intent merely on learning *what* it is, we discover that, whatever else it may be, Christianity is that specific religion that had its origin and finds its continuance in the life, work and teachings of Jesus Christ, He being conceived of so highly, after so supernatural a fashion, that He is placed side by side with God as a proper object of worship. More particularly it is that redemptive religion that

¹⁷ *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 13-14.

provides for mankind a salvation from sin, felt as guilt and power and pollution, through the expiatory death of this God-man—both for this life and the life to come.

Men may like or they may dislike such a religion. They may think it rational or irrational, moral or immoral. They may esteem it their chief treasure, that without which they would be utterly undone; or they may appraise it as a thing of no value, or even as a thing to be destroyed because positively harmful. Be their judgment of it what it may, true or false, moral or immoral, valuable or worthless, it is vain and futile for them—in the presence of those who have the earliest Christian writings in one hand and a reliable history of Christian thought in the other—to deny that as a matter of fact this is the sort of religion which Christianity is.

We do not claim that the definition of Christianity just given specifies all that makes Christianity what it is. We do not even allege that Christianity is to be found wherever any, or even all, of the things mentioned in this definition are believed. No doubt Christianity is to be found wherever these things are confessed in their New Testament meaning and with their New Testament accompaniments. They have been so frequently confessed, however, in connection with beliefs that practically nullify their significance as to preclude our finding either in logic or history warrant for saying that Christianity is to be found wherever these things are believed. But while we cannot always say of those who confess these things that they have an adequate Christianity, or even any real Christianity at all, we can and do say that where these things are not believed there is no Christianity. That is to say, though the presence of these things does not necessarily spell Christianity, their absence does spell something other than Christianity. In the light of the whole historical manifestation of Christianity it cannot be denied that it has been all but unanimously recognized that without these things there is no Christianity. It has been reserved for the "Liberals" and the "Modernists" of the present age

to commend as Christianity a somewhat that lacks these characteristics. Previous to their appearance on the stage no considerable group of those calling themselves Christians commended a non-miraculous Christianity or a Christianity without a Christ who ranked with God or a Christianity without a place for the Cross as an atoning sacrifice. So firmly did the founders of Christianity stamp these things on the religion they established, or rather to such a degree do these things constitute its substance, that, until recently, it was all but universally true that even the most debased and corrupted forms of Christianity have recognized them as essential elements of Christianity. Even the "Liberals" and "Modernists" do not deny that the Christianity of the ages is derived in this respect directly from the New Testament. In order to find in history any real warrant for their conceptions of Christianity they are compelled, as we have pointed out, to maintain that the New Testament represents a falsification of true Christianity. They have failed, however, to find a more primitive Christianity than that of the New Testament; in fact, their efforts have served to make increasingly clear that New Testament Christianity is primitive Christianity. We are more fully warranted than ever therefore in affirming—if such language can be used without exaggeration—that the things specified in our definition of Christianity are things without which there is no Christianity.

Before making use of our definition as a means of discovering whether any of the things widely called Christianity are falsely so called, it may be well to anticipate a serious and far reaching objection that is sure to be made to our method. It will be objected that the test we apply is a doctrinal one and that doctrines are not essential to Christianity. This objection has two forms. Sometimes it is said that Christianity consists in its facts not its doctrines; more frequently that Christianity is life not doctrines. If the objection in either of its forms is valid the test we commend

is valueless. For unquestionably the test we propose is a doctrinal one in the sense meant by these objectors.

We are told that Christianity consists in its facts not its doctrines. But what are Christian doctrines if not interpretations of its facts? Will the facts alone give us Christianity? Certainly the facts are of primary importance. Doctrines which are not interpretations of facts are at the best myths and at the worst lies. And yet the facts alone are dumb and unmeaning. Give the facts no interpretation and they will not give us Christianity; give them an interpretation other than that of the New Testament and they will yield us something other than Christianity. Where a fact and its proper interpretation are under discussion men may differ as to which is the proper interpretation; but it is idle to suppose that they can agree as to the fact and its value while differing as to its interpretation, or that they can agree to be content with no interpretation at all. It seems to us that James Denney did not go too far when he wrote: "A fact of which there is absolutely no theory is a fact which stands out of relation to everything in the universe, a fact which has no connection with any part of our experience; it is a blank unintelligibility, a rock in the sky, a mere irrelevance in the mind of man. There is no such thing conceivable as a fact of which there is no theory, or even a fact of which *we* have no theory; such a thing could not enter *our* world at all; if there could be such a thing, it would be so far from having the virtue to redeem us from sin, that it would have no interest for us and no effect upon us at all."¹⁸ But whether he did or not, it is evident that the distinction between facts and their interpretations has no application when we are concerned with that concrete phenomenon we call Christianity. This at any rate is a somewhat constituted not merely by its facts, but by its facts as understood in a particular way, that is to say by its doctrines as well as its facts. Neither alone give us Christianity as it meets us in history; hence as long as

¹⁸ *Studies in Theology*, p. 106.

our primary aim is to discover not the truth or the value of Christianity but merely what it is, any and all discussion of the validity of the distinction between facts and doctrines is wholly irrelevant. Be the validity of the distinction what it may, Christianity as it appears in its founders and as a world-phenomenon goes to pieces when either its facts or its doctrines are eliminated, for in it the two are inextricably intertwined.

We have yet to consider the objection in its other form, the form in which it makes its widest appeal. Christianity, we are told, is life not doctrines. Christian doctrines are products rather than producers of the Christian life. They are the changing intellectual expression of the life that precedes them, logically and chronologically. As such they come and go, but new ones constantly take their place as the product of that life that is found in living Christian men and women. As such they possess no absolute significance, and provided they express the life one set of doctrines is as good as the other. The life is the principal thing, the one thing of vital importance; as long as it flourishes the doctrines may be left to take care of themselves. The doctrines have a certain value as the intellectual expression of the life and as a means of cultivating the life; but their place is always secondary never primary. Expressed in this form the objection has a pious ring. It is true that Christianity is a life—no one ever denied it—but is it so clear that this life is the mother of its doctrines? What if the life is the product of the doctrines rather than the doctrines the product of the life? In that case to say that the doctrines are of secondary importance is like saying that apple trees are of secondary importance as compared with the apples they bear.

Is it true that Christianity is life not doctrines? Such a statement belongs manifestly in the sphere of history and must, therefore, be subject to historical investigation. It is a declaration the same in kind as if we were to say that Voltaire was a Christian philosopher. We may believe that he ought to have been a Christian philosopher, that it would

have been better if he had been a Christian philosopher, but when we consider the matter historically we are merely concerned to find out whether such was actually the case. And if we investigate Christianity as an historical phenomenon, whether in its earlier or later manifestations, we find that as a matter of fact it is not a life in the sense meant. The first Christian missionaries as little as later ones, looked upon Christianity as merely a way of life. They were not primarily exhorters but heralds of a message—a message that had to do first of all not with the wonderful “life” of Jesus or themselves but with the significance of something that had happened, particularly the death and resurrection of Jesus. We may think it regrettable that Christianity has ascribed the primacy to doctrines, that from the very beginning it has looked upon itself not merely as a life but as a life based on a message about its founder, and so has always placed this message in the forefront; but we should not permit our dissatisfaction with this course to lead us to misrepresent the real nature of this religion. We may believe that the time has come to substitute another religion for Christianity; but history affords us no warrant for saying that Christianity is a life in the modern meaning of the expression. Whether it is psychologically sound to say that life precedes doctrines, or the contrary, it may not be questioned that according to Christianity doctrines do logically precede life. We do not allege, of course, that the religion Jesus founded consists only of doctrines—who does not know that such a representation is a baseless caricature? What we allege is that Christians doctrines are indispensable to the production and maintenance of the Christian life, that the life is the expression of the doctrine, that while Christianity is both a life and a doctrine yet logically the life follows the doctrine and can no more rise above it than a stream above its source. If by the assertion that Christianity is life not doctrine it were merely meant that doctrines are not an end in themselves, or that doctrines have no power to produce life apart from the creative operations of

the Holy Spirit, we would readily concur. What is meant by the assertion as currently made, however, is that the Christian life is first not only in importance but logically and psychologically and as such more or less independent of Christian doctrines. In this sense the assertion lacks historical support—unless we look upon modern religious liberalism as a manifestation of genuine Christianity.

We, therefore, see no reason why we should turn aside from our purpose of making use of our definition of Christianity to ascertain whether certain of the things called Christianity today are really Christianity, because, forsooth, it involves the application of a doctrinal test. Since Christianity is a historical religion a non-doctrinal Christianity is an absurdity. No sound objection can be made against a doctrinal test. It is inevitable that a religion that bases itself on facts that have occurred will be a doctrinal religion, seeing that these facts are meaningless unless interpreted. Everything calling itself Christianity should be willing to submit to the particular test we have proposed. Does it confess not only the historicity but the supernaturalness of Jesus? Does it confess Jesus as a present object of worship and as such indispensable to its very being? Does it find in this divine Jesus a supernatural redemption, grounded in the fact that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures"? A satisfactory answer to these questions will not prove that it is 100 per cent Christian—additional tests will be needed to ascertain the purity and adequacy of its Christianity—but an unsatisfactory answer to all, or even any, of them makes clear that it falls short of being genuine Christianity.

Those who recognize the validity of our test, but who have been assuming that all or nearly all of the things called Christianity are what they are labeled, will certainly be amazed—no matter how charitably disposed they may be—if without fear or favor they apply it to the things spoken of as Christianity in these days.

They will not be long in discovering that some of the

so-called Christianity of today does not even posit the historicity of any Jesus, that more of it does not posit the historicity of a supernatural Jesus, that still more of it does not posit Jesus as a present object of worship and as such the source of its present vitality. It is not enough, as we have said, to trace the origin of Christianity to Jesus unless we also see in Him a person who not only lived and worked in the past but who lives and works in the present, to such an extent that Christianity is as dependent on Him today as when He tabernacled in the flesh. It makes no great difference, therefore, whether we say with Arthur Drews and W. B. Smith that Jesus never existed; or whether we say with Harnack and Bousset and Eucken and their multitudinous followers that Jesus existed as a subject but not as an object of religion; or whether we say with the rationalists and mystics as a class that religion cannot be dependent on historical facts, and so on Jesus as an historical fact as little as any other historical fact; in either case we are proclaiming a Christianity that, if need be, can get along without Jesus. But surely a Christianity that even entertains the thought that Jesus Christ is not indispensable is just no Christianity at all. Those who define Christianity as morality of a Christlike sort, or as loyalty, or as altruism, or as spirituality, or as the "religion of Jesus" meaning the religion that Jesus practiced, may honor Jesus as the founder of Christianity, as the one who set it going, as still the classic teacher and exemplar of these things, as one from whose memory they draw inspiration, but it is evident that Jesus occupies no absolutely essential place in their Christianity, for such a Christianity could continue to exist and flourish if He should be forgotten or even if historical research could prove that He never existed. Those who so define Christianity may say with Eucken, "We may revere him as a leader, a hero, a martyr," but it is inevitable that they will also add as does Eucken, "but we cannot forthwith bind and pledge ourselves to him and yield him unconditional submission; still less can we make him the center

of a cult, for that would now be nothing else than an intolerable idolatry."¹⁹ It is clear that such Christianity is only indirectly dependent on Jesus Christ, that it does not ascribe both its origin and continuance to Him, that it as-signs to Him a place in Christianity essentially the same as Martin Luther occupies in Lutheranism and John Wesley in Methodism. Surely all such Christianity is Christianity falsely so-called.

They will discover no less quickly that much of the so-called Christianity of today has definitely broken with the idea of the Cross as an expiatory sacrifice for sin. No idea is less acceptable to the "modern mind." As we put the question to this and that professed Christian teacher, we can scarcely escape the impression that the majority of our would-be Christian guides, whether academic or popular, have not only broken with it but assumed an attitude of open hostility to it. No language seems too strong with which to pillory it. It is said to be immoral, contradictory to every sense of justice, blasphemous even to suggest that there was need of an expiation of sin through the death of Jesus Christ before God could or would forgive sin. God is love, we are constantly told, and as such freely forgives on condition of repentance alone. Everywhere we are being told that the parable of the Prodigal Son contains the very core of the Gospel, even the whole Gospel, and this finds its explanation most of all in the fact that it makes no mention of an atonement—though one might have supposed that some at least of those who find the whole Gospel in the parable of the Prodigal Son would have stayed to notice that it also makes no mention of Christ or the Holy Spirit. Certainly if we judge only from current religious literature, and from the utterances of those religious teachers who seem to have been most successful in gaining the attention of the public, it would not be strange if we concluded that the idea of the Cross as an expiatory sacrifice for sin is obsolescent if not obsolete. Fortunately such a judgment is not warranted;

¹⁹ *Can We Still be Christians?*, p. 34.

the doctrine still has able defenders in academic circles, is still the common possession of the great majority of those who call themselves Christians. If it were warranted we should be forced to the conclusion that genuine Christianity has practically vanished from the earth, because, whatever we may think of the truth or value of the doctrine, it is altogether certain that it is a fundamental element—we may even say the most fundamental element—in Christianity as Christianity has been all but universally understood by its professors, until recently at least. The object of the Christian's faith is and ever has been Jesus *as crucified*. A Christianity that knows nothing of Jesus as crucified for sin has no more right to call itself Christianity than has a Christianity that knows nothing of a divine Jesus. To speak of a Christianity without Christ is no more a contradiction in terms than to speak of a Christianity without an atoning Christ. The testimony not only of the founders of Christianity but of that vast multitude who throughout the Christian centuries have witnessed the good confession can be cited in support of Warfield when he wrote:²⁰

Unquestionably, Christianity is a redemptive religion, having as its fundamental presupposition the fact of sin, felt both as guilt and as pollution, and offering as its central good, from which all other goods proceed, salvation from sin through the historical expiation wrought by the God-man Jesus Christ. The essence of Christianity has always been to its adherents the sinner's experience of reconciliation with God through the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ. According to the Synoptic tradition Jesus himself represented himself as having come to seek and save that which is lost, and described his salvation as a ransoming of many by the gift of his life, embodying the conception, moreover, in the ritual which he commanded his disciples to perform in remembrance of him. Certainly his first followers with single-hearted unanimity proclaimed the great fact of redemption in the blood of Christ as the heart of their gospel: to them Jesus is the propitiation for sin, a sacrificial lamb without blemish, and all their message is summed up in the simple formula of Jesus Christ and him crucified." Nor has the church he founded ever drifted away from this fundamental point of view, as witness the central place of the mass in the worship of its elder branches, and the formative place of justification by faith

in Protestant life. No doubt parties have from time to time arisen who have wished to construe Christianity otherwise. But they have always occupied a place on the periphery of the Christian movement, and have never constituted its main stream.

We can well understand that one swirling aside in an eddy and yet wishing to think of himself as travelling with the current—or even perhaps as breaking for it a new and better channel—should attempt to define Christianity so widely or so vaguely as to make it embrace him also. The attempt has never been and can never be successful. He is a Christian, in the sense of the founders of the Christian religion, and in the sense of its whole historical manifestation as a world-phenomenon, who, conscious of his sin, and smitten by a sense of the wrath of God impending over him, turns in faith to Jesus Christ as the propitiation for his sins, through whose blood and righteousness he may be made acceptable to God and be received into the number of those admitted to communion with him. If we demand the right to call ourselves Christians because it is by the teaching of Jesus that we have learned to know God as he really is, or because it is by his example that we have been led into a life of faithful trust in God, or because it is by the inspiration of his “inner life,” dimly discerned through the obscuring legends that have grown up about him, that we are quickened to a like religious hope and aspiration,—we are entering claims that have never been recognized and can never be recognized as valid by the main current of Christianity. Christianity as a world-movement is the body of those who have been redeemed from their sins by the blood of Jesus Christ, dying for them on the cross. The cross is its symbol; and at its heart sounds the great jubilation of the Apocalypse: “Unto Him that loveth us and loosed us from our sins by his blood; and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priest unto his God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”²⁰

Whether, therefore, it be Sabatier or Harnack or Bousset or Troeltsch or Eucken or Oliver Lodge or Conan Doyle or Ralph Waldo Trine or Mary Baker Eddy or D. C. Macintosh or G. B. Smith or G. B. Foster or George Cross or Henry C. Vedder or Harry Emerson Fosdick or Lyman Abbott or Walter Rauschenbusch or Charles A. Ellwood—whoever they may be who scorn or make light of or ignore the cross of Christ as an expiatory sacrifice for sin, we say to them all alike that the fullest recognition of the truth

²⁰ “Christless Christianity,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, Oct. 1912, p. 462.

and value of much that they commend will not permit us to look upon them as teachers of Genuine Christianity. Practically none of those we have mentioned by name see in Jesus a present object of worship—in fact faith in the real deity of Jesus is rarely if ever found in those who deny the expiatory nature of His death—but even if they did, that of itself would not entitle them to call themselves Christian teachers, because, as we have sought to show, a Christianity that knows nothing of Christ's death as an atoning sacrifice is just no Christianity at all.

It seems superfluous to add that they will also discover that much of what is called Christianity rejects supernaturalism, denies even that there have been creative acts of God in human history. This is a matter that is shouted from the house-tops. We must be deaf as a post and blind as a bat—in the world but not of it in a sense not commended in the Scriptures—if we are not aware that not only in the writings of the learned but in the pages of popular books, magazines and newspapers, not to mention many pulpits and classrooms, we are told and re-told that the supernaturalism of Christianity is the one great obstacle that keeps the modern man from accepting it. We must preach a non-supernatural Christianity, they tell us, if we are to win the modern world. If such is the case things are certainly in a bad way as regards genuine Christianity. For, as we have seen, it is through and through a supernatural religion so that as regards it the choice is not between a supernatural and a non-supernatural Christianity but between a supernatural Christianity and no Christianity at all. Even if it be admitted that genuine though truncated Christianity may exist where there is no adequate recognition of the supernatural, it cannot be allowed that there is anything that can honestly be called Christianity where all recognition of the supernatural is lacking. Men may preach a desupernaturalized "Christianity" and still preach much that is attractive and worthy of attention, but it is impossible to justify their right to call it Christianity. Only those who are interested in names

rather than realities will obtain any comfort from the retention of the word "Christianity" if the thing it has stood for through all the Christian centuries is cast away as rubbish. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but calling a thing a rose does not cause it to exhale a rose's fragrance.

Our main task in this article has been to indicate what Christianity is, so that we might show that many of the things called Christianity are falsely so called. We have not raised the question of the truth of Christianity, except to guard against the mistake of supposing that it should be taken into consideration when we are seeking to discover what Christianity is. This is due, of course, to the limited task we have assigned ourselves, not to any indifference to the query itself. When once we have discovered what Christianity is, its truthfulness becomes, whether we will or no, the matter of supreme importance. We would have only an historical interest in the question, What is Christianity? if we regarded it as untrue. Further the question, What is the value of Christianity? would seem idle and fictitious. It is impossible to believe with those of a too practical or a too intellectualistic or a too mystical tendency that the value of Christianity is independent of its truth in the sense of conformity to fact. It argues a radical misunderstanding of the nature of Christianity to maintain that its facts have value only as they express some idea or principle or symbolize some religious experience. According to Christianity we are saved not by works or knowledge or religious experience—though not without them—but by a person, and that person Jesus Christ. We can be indifferent to its truthfulness in the sense of conformity to fact only as we are indifferent to the question whether the salvation He offers from sin as guilt and pollution is a real salvation. For a religion that objectively saves from sin "value-judgments" which are not based on "fact-judgments" lack all saving significance. A religion that grounds itself in the conviction that God has wrought wonders in history for the salvation of His people must maintain that we "make lies our refuge

and hide ourselves under falsehood" if we suppose that it is all the same whether its facts occurred or not.

It is not our present purpose to defend the truth of Christianity; the space at our disposal does not permit. We want to say, however, that no discussion of the question, Is Christianity true? will be fruitful of results unless the parties to the discussion are agreed as to what Christianity is. Nothing is doing more to make matters "confused and confusing," in the realm of religious discussion, than the loose and contradictory senses in which the word Christianity is employed. Men equally intelligent and sincere, it may be, come to no agreement because the suppressed premise of the one contradicts the suppressed premise of the other. The suppressed premise is a different, often a radically different, conception of what Christianity is. To a superficial observer it might seem as though Christianity were approaching a complete victory in the forum of the world's thought. Nearly everyone of much importance calls himself a Christian. We need only consider the divergent answers given to the question, What is Christianity? however to perceive how deceptive appearances are at this point. It is no comfort to us to have a man tell us he believes in Christianity if what he calls Christianity lacks all the distinctive marks of what we regard as Christianity. When he affirms that Christianity is true, meaning a Christianity in which Christ occupies no indispensable place, or in which His atoning death has no place at all, he says in substance that Christianity as we understand it is false. It is the truth of a particular religion, not of everything labeled Christianity, that concerns us when we discuss the question, Is Christianity true? And if anyone retorts that he has as good a right to define Christianity in his way as we have in our way, we flatly deny the claim, unless he can show that his definition has as good historical sanction as our own. This he cannot do.

Is Christianity, as we have defined it, true in the sense indicated? It has been so contended by the Church of the ages. In that conviction it was established, in that conviction it has

spread, and only as that conviction is maintained can we hope that it will escape decay and go on from strength to strength. We must at least have a religion we believe to be true. If we are to believe in Christianity we will do so because such faith is rational, not though it be irrational. We are not fearful, however, lest advancing knowledge will disprove the claim of Christianity, as we have defined Christianity, to be true. Those who are fearful, or hopeful, of this result cannot be aware, it seems to us, of the weight of the evidence by which the claim is supported. More especially they overlook or ignore the fact that Christianity has a definite content of its own that rests on its own basis and is buttressed by its own independent evidence. Consequently they are unduly disturbed, or encouraged, by the teachings of modern philosophy and modern science. That abstraction "the modern mind" becomes a bugaboo that frightens them or a mirage that engenders false hopes. Because Christianity is not in harmony with the teachings of many modern philosophers and scientists, they fear or hope that it is no longer tenable. Their fears or hopes, however, would largely disappear if they would distinguish between the voice of Philosophy and Science and the voices of the philosophers and scientists; and if they would keep clearly before them the fact that the voice of Philosophy and Science is heard only through the voices of the philosophers and scientists, and that the voices of the philosophers and scientists speak only quarter-truths or half-truths. What W. R. Matthews says of modern philosophy is applicable also to modern science. "The actual state of the philosophical world," he writes, "is one of unexampled confusion. Idealism, Pluralism, Logical Atomism, New Realism, Vitalism, all these in widely variant versions claim our acceptance. There is no modern philosophy, there are only modern philosophers."²¹ In the better day when philosophers and scientists speak whole-truths, but only then, may their voices be identified with the voice of Philosophy and Science.

For the present there is no warrant for saying that Chris-

²¹ *Studies in Christian Philosophy*, pp. 74-76.

tianity is untenable because it is more or less out of harmony with the teaching of much modern philosophy and science. These things have not yet reached their final form, so that nothing is more certain than that if Christianity were in harmony with the philosophy and science of today it would be out of harmony with the philosophy and science of tomorrow. There is a big difference between saying that Christianity is out of harmony with the dominant philosophy or science of the day, and saying that there is a conflict between Christianity and Philosophy or Christianity and Science. We may admit the first while altogether denying the second. Hence in proportion as we realize that Christianity has a definite content of its own, obtained independently of philosophy and science and independently evidenced as true, we may possess our souls in patience, amid the discordant voices of modern thought, in the firm assurance that when the unity of truth has been vindicated it will appear to all that both the fact-content and the truth-content of Christianity are integral arcs in the circle of truth. Facts are stubborn things and if we have adequate evidence—as we believe we have—for the conviction that history presents us not only with an actual but with a supernatural Christ, and in this Christ a supernatural redemption, we must either deny the unity of truth or we must affirm that every theory in which these great facts do not find a natural and logical place is inadequate if not false. There is something manifestly wrong with any theory that is compelled to treat solid facts as though they were wax or putty.

There is no greater evil in the Church of today than the evil of divided conviction and divided testimony. Though the primary task of the Church is to be a witness—"Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"—the testimony being given throughout the Church is discordant and contradictory. Everywhere throughout the churches, and especially throughout the Protestant churches, what one man proclaims as saving truth another man denounces as fatal

error. Hence the distraction and confusion. The main line of cleavage throughout Christendom no longer follows denominational lines, does not even follow the line between Catholics and Protestants. It follows the line between those who are Christians and those who merely call themselves Christians, between the heralds of a genuine and the heralds of a counterfeit Christianity. Those to whom Jesus is not a present object of worship, and who have no consciousness of themselves as sinners redeemed by His blood, are of a totally different religion from those to whom He is an object of faith and whose hope for time and eternity is grounded in the conviction that He bore their sins in His own body on the tree. It is the latter, and they alone, who constitute the true Church of Christ; in them, humanly speaking the future of Christianity lies; and only as they by divine grace are faithful stewards of the saving Gospel will Christ see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. If matters be allowed to go from bad to worse, if the former be allowed to obtain control of the churches as organizations and make them subservient to their purposes, there would be nothing left for the latter to do except to form new organizations in which to enjoy the fellowship of like-minded persons and through which to function as propagandists of genuine Christianity. We do not anticipate that such a situation will arrive. Certainly it will not arrive unless the Lord's people are derelict to duty. Numerous as are "the false brethren" in the churches of today, and influential as are the seats they occupy, the great majority of church members, we believe, are Christians in fact as well as in name.

It is high time for those who love the Lord in all sincerity and heartiness to awake to the fact that within the churches themselves, even within the ministry of the evangelical churches, there are considerable numbers who not only reject the Gospel but are busily engaged—and with no small measure of success—in propagating essentially pagan conceptions of life and destiny. By using orthodox language to express unorthodox conceptions, by representing essential dif-

ferences as only minor differences of interpretation, by crying "Peace, peace; when there is no peace," they have long kept most Christians in ignorance of the fact that the foundations are being undermined by those of their own household. Partly because of the efforts of those who have realized the situation, partly because many of these "false brethren" have grown so bold that they no longer feel the need of speaking cautiously about the Bible as the Word of God and the Cross as an atoning sacrifice, there are increasing indications that the true Church of Christ is becoming aroused to the peril that threatens. Many even of its leaders, however, are still so little suspicious of danger that they esteem those who sound an alarm as little better than mischief-makers. The task of the Church, in its conflict with encroaching modernism or renewed paganism, would be difficult enough if those who name the name of Christ were unitedly gathered about the Cross, singing praises to their King, and witnessing in word and deed to the essential truths of Christianity. As a matter of fact, however, there are many not only in the ranks but among the leaders who can look on Calvary and see only a good man crowned with thorns and with a spear wound in his side, who refuse to bow the knee in the presence of Jesus Christ, and who as mouth-pieces of the Church are commending pagan thoughts and pagan ideals. "If the trumpet give an uncertain voice, who shall prepare himself for war?" There is no more pressing need, therefore, than the creation of a situation—whether by the conversion or the voluntary withdrawal or the exclusion of these "false witnesses"—wherein the Church of Christ, as far as possible, will bear undivided testimony to the Gospel of the grace of God. All things should be done in love. Love itself, however, should be subservient to the purity of the faith and will never sanction any paltering with truth. Surely it is worse to offend God than it is to offend our neighbor. No Christian will deny that when it is impossible to please both we ought to seek to please Christ rather than men. Moreover, we should not forget in this connection that the Church is a voluntary organization;

no one is required to belong to it; more especially no one is compelled, willingly or unwillingly, to minister in its sanctuary or to teach and defend its message. Hence no specious plea for tolerance should be permitted to persuade us to give even a tacit consent to anything, in worship or teaching, dishonoring to our Lord in the Church He purchased with His own blood.

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