

Christianity & Liberalism

The Church

By [John Gresham Machen](#)

It has just been observed that Christianity, as well as liberalism, is interested in social institutions. But the most important institution has not yet been mentioned — it is the institution of the Church. When, according to Christian belief, lost souls are saved, the saved ones become united in the Christian Church. It is only by a baseless caricature that Christian missionaries are represented as though they had no interest in education or in the maintenance of a social life in this world; it is not true that they are interested only in saving individual souls and when the souls are saved leave them to their own devices. On the contrary true Christians must everywhere be united in the brotherhood of the Christian Church.

Very different is this Christian conception of brotherhood from the liberal doctrine of the "brotherhood of man." The modern liberal doctrine is that all men everywhere, no matter what their race or creed, are brothers. There is a sense in which this doctrine can be accepted by the Christian. The relation in which all men stand to one another is analogous in some important respects to the relation of brotherhood. All men have the same Creator and the same nature. The Christian man can accept all that the modern liberal means by the brotherhood of man. But the Christian knows also of a relationship far more intimate than that general relationship of man to man, and it is for this more intimate relationship that he reserves the term "brother." The true brotherhood, according to Christian teaching, is the brotherhood of the redeemed.

There is nothing narrow about such teaching; for the Christian brotherhood is open without distinction to all; and the Christian man seeks to bring all men in. Christian service, it is true, is not limited to the household of faith; all men, whether Christians or not, are our neighbors if they be in need. But if we really love our fellowmen we shall never be content with binding up their wounds or pouring on oil and wine or rendering them any such lesser service. We shall indeed do such things for them. But the main business of our lives will be to bring them to the Saviour of their souls.

It is upon this brotherhood of twice-born sinners, this brotherhood of the redeemed, that the Christian founds the hope of society. He finds no solid hope in the improvement of earthly conditions, or the molding of human institutions under the influence of the Golden Rule. These things indeed are to be welcomed. They may so palliate the symptoms of sin that there may be time to apply the

true remedy; they may serve to produce conditions upon the earth favorable to the propagation of the gospel message; they are even valuable for their own sake. But in themselves their value, to the Christian, is certainly small. A solid building cannot be constructed when all the materials are faulty; a blessed society cannot be formed out of men who are still under the curse of sin. Human institutions are really to be molded, not by Christian principles accepted by the unsaved, but by Christian men; the true transformation of society will come by the influence of those who have themselves been redeemed.

Thus Christianity differs from liberalism in the way in which the transformation of society is conceived. But according to Christian belief, as well as according to liberalism, there is really to be a transformation of society; it is not true that the Christian evangelist is interested in the salvation of individuals without being interested in the salvation of the race. And even before the salvation of all society has been achieved, there is already a society of those who have been saved. That society is the Church. The Church is the highest Christian answer to the social needs of man.

And the Church invisible, the true company of the redeemed, finds expression in the companies of Christians who constitute the visible Church to-day. But what is the trouble with the visible Church? What is the reason for its obvious weakness? There are perhaps many causes of weakness. But one cause is perfectly plain — the Church of to-day has been unfaithful to her Lord by admitting great companies of non-Christian persons, not only into her membership, but into her teaching agencies. It is indeed inevitable that some persons who are not truly Christian shall find their way into the visible Church; fallible men cannot discern the heart, and many a profession of faith which seems to be genuine may really be false. But it is not this kind of error to which we now refer. What is now meant is not the admission of individuals whose confessions of faith may not be sincere, but the admission of great companies of persons who have never made any really adequate confession of faith at all and whose entire attitude toward the gospel is the very reverse of the Christian attitude. Such persons, moreover, have been admitted not merely to the membership, but to the ministry of the Church, and to an increasing extent have been allowed to dominate its councils and determine its teaching. The greatest menace to the Christian Church to-day comes not from the enemies outside, but from the enemies within; it comes from the presence within the Church of a type of faith and practice that is anti-Christian to the core.

We are not dealing here with delicate personal questions; we are not presuming to say whether such and such an individual man is a Christian or not. God only can decide such questions; no man can say with assurance whether the attitude of certain individual "liberals" toward Christ is saving faith or not. But one thing is perfectly plain — whether or not liberals are Christians, it is at any rate perfectly clear that liberalism is not Christianity.

And that being the case, it is highly undesirable that liberalism and Christianity should continue to be propagated within the bounds of the same organization. A separation between the two parties in the Church is the crying need of the hour.

Many indeed are seeking to avoid the separation. Why, they say, may not brethren dwell together in unity? The Church, we are told, has room both for liberals and for conservatives. The conservatives may be allowed to remain if they will keep trifling matters in the background and attend chiefly to "the weightier matters of the law." And among the things thus designated as "trifling" is found the Cross of Christ, as a really vicarious atonement for sin.

Such obscuration of the issue attests a really astonishing narrowness on the part of the liberal preacher. Narrowness does not consist in definite devotion to certain convictions or in definite rejection of others. But the narrow man is the man who rejects the other man's convictions without first endeavoring to understand them, the man who makes no effort to look at things from the other man's point of view. For example, it is not narrow to reject the Roman Catholic doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church. It is not narrow to try to convince Roman Catholics that that doctrine is wrong. But it would be very narrow to say to a Roman Catholic: "You may go on holding your doctrine about the Church and I shall hold mine, but let us unite in our Christian work, since despite such trifling differences we are agreed about the matters that concern the welfare of the soul." For of course such an utterance would simply beg the question; the Roman Catholic could not possibly both hold his doctrine of the Church and at the same time reject it, as would be required by the program of Church unity just suggested. A Protestant who would speak in that way would be narrow, because quite independent of the question whether he or the Roman Catholic is right about the Church he would show plainly that he had not made the slightest effort to understand the Roman Catholic point of view.

The case is similar with the liberal program for unity in the Church. It could never be advocated by anyone who had made the slightest effort to understand the point of view of his opponent in the controversy. The liberal preacher says to the conservative party in the Church: "Let us unite in the same congregation, since of course doctrinal differences are trifles." But it is the very essence of "conservatism" in the Church to regard doctrinal differences as no trifles but as the matters of supreme moment. A man cannot possibly be an "evangelical" or a "conservative" (or, as he himself would say, simply a Christian) and regard the Cross of Christ as a trifle. To suppose that he can is the extreme of narrowness. It is not necessarily "narrow" to reject the vicarious sacrifice of our Lord as the sole means of salvation. It may be very wrong (and we believe that it is), but it is not necessarily narrow. But to suppose that a man can hold to the vicarious sacrifice of Christ and at the same time belittle that doctrine, to suppose that a man can believe that the eternal Son of God really bore the guilt of men's sins on the Cross and at the same time regard that belief as a "trifle" without bearing upon the welfare of men's souls — that is very narrow and very absurd. We shall

really get nowhere in this controversy unless we make a sincere effort to understand the other man's point of view.

But for another reason also the effort to sink doctrinal differences and unite the Church on a program of Christian service is unsatisfactory. It is unsatisfactory because, in its usual contemporary form, it is dishonest. Whatever may be thought of Christian doctrine, it can hardly be denied that honesty is one of the "weightier matters of the law." Yet honesty is being relinquished in wholesale fashion by the liberal party in many ecclesiastical bodies to-day.

To recognize that fact one does not need to take sides at all with regard to the doctrinal or historical questions. Suppose it be true that devotion to a creed is a sign of narrowness or intolerance, suppose the Church ought to be founded upon devotion to the ideal of Jesus or upon the desire to put His spirit into operation in the world, and not at all upon a confession of faith with regard to His redeeming work. Even if all this were true, even if a creedal Church were an undesirable thing, it would still remain true that as a matter of fact many (indeed in spirit really all) evangelical churches are creedal churches, and that if a man does not accept their creed he has no right to a place in their teaching ministry. The creedal character of the churches is differently expressed in the different evangelical bodies, but the example of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America may perhaps serve to illustrate what is meant. It is required of all officers in the Presbyterian Church, including the ministers, that at their ordination they make answer "plainly" to a series of questions which begins with the two following:

"Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?"

"Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?"

If these "constitutional questions" do not fix clearly the creedal basis of the Presbyterian Church, it is difficult to see how any human language could possibly do so. Yet immediately after making such a solemn declaration, immediately after declaring that the Westminster Confession contains the system of doctrine taught in infallible Scriptures, many ministers of the Presbyterian Church will proceed to decry that same Confession and that doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture to which they have just solemnly subscribed!

We are not now speaking of the membership of the Church, but of the ministry, and we are not speaking of the man who is troubled by grave doubts and wonders whether with his doubts he can honestly continue his membership in the Church. For great hosts of such troubled souls the Church offers bountifully its fellowship and its aid; it would be a crime to cast them out. There are many men

of little faith in our troublous times. It is not of them that we speak. God grant that they may obtain comfort and help through the ministrations of the Church!

But we are speaking of men very different from these men of little faith - from these men who are troubled by doubts and are seeking earnestly for the truth. The men whom we mean are seeking not membership in the Church, but a place in the ministry, and they desire not to learn but to teach. They are not men who say, "I believe, help mine unbelief," but men who are proud in the possession of the knowledge of this world, and seek a place in the ministry that they may teach what is directly contrary to the Confession of Faith to which they subscribe. For that course of action various excuses are made the growth of custom by which the constitutional questions are supposed to have become a dead letter, various mental reservations, various "interpretations" of the declaration (which of course mean a complete reversal of the meaning). But no such excuses can change the essential fact. Whether it be desirable or not, the ordination declaration is part of the constitution of the Church. If a man can stand on that platform he may be an officer in the Presbyterian Church; if he cannot stand on it he has no right to be an officer in the Presbyterian Church. And the case is no doubt essentially similar in other evangelical Churches. Whether we like it or not, these Churches are founded upon a creed; they are organized for the propagation of a message. If a man desires to combat that message instead of propagating it, he has no right, no matter how false the message may be, to gain a vantage ground for combating it by making a declaration of his faith which — be it plainly spoken — is not true.

But if such a course of action is wrong, another course of action is perfectly open to the man who desires to propagate "liberal Christianity." Finding the existing "evangelical" churches to be bound up to a creed which he does not accept, he may either unite himself with some other existing body or else found a new body to suit himself. There are of course certain obvious disadvantages in such a course — the abandonment of church buildings to which one is attached, the break in family traditions, the injury to sentiment of various kinds. But there is one supreme advantage which far overbalances all such disadvantages. It is the advantage of honesty. The path of honesty in such matters may be rough and thorny, but it can be trod. And it has already been trod — for example, by the Unitarian Church. The Unitarian Church is frankly and honestly just the kind of church that the liberal preacher desires — namely, a church without an authoritative Bible, without doctrinal requirements, and without a creed.

Honesty, despite all that can be said and done, is not a trifle, but one of the weightier matters of the law. Certainly it has a value of its own, a value quite independent of consequences. But the consequences of honesty would in the case now under discussion not be unsatisfactory; here as elsewhere honesty would probably prove to be the best policy. By withdrawing from the confessional churches - - those churches that are founded upon a creed derived from Scripture - the liberal preacher would indeed sacrifice the opportunity, almost

within his grasp, of so obtaining control of those confessional churches as to change their fundamental character. The sacrifice of that opportunity would mean that the hope of turning the resources of the evangelical churches into the propagation of liberalism would be gone. But liberalism would certainly not suffer in the end. There would at least be no more need of using equivocal language, no more need of avoiding offence. The liberal preacher would obtain the full personal respect even of his opponents, and the whole discussion would be placed on higher ground. All would be perfectly straightforward and above-board. And if liberalism is true, the mere loss of physical resources would not prevent it from making its way.

At this point a question may arise. If there ought to be a separation between the liberals and the conservatives in the Church, why should not the conservatives be the ones to withdraw? Certainly it may come to that. If the liberal party really obtains full control of the councils of the Church, then no evangelical Christian can continue to support the Church's work. If a man believes that salvation from sin comes only through the atoning death of Jesus, then he cannot honestly support by his gifts and by his presence a propaganda which is intended to produce an exactly opposite impression. To do so would mean the most terrible bloodguiltiness which it is possible to conceive. If the liberal party, therefore, really obtains control of the Church, evangelical Christians must be prepared to withdraw no matter what it costs. Our Lord has died for us, and surely we must not deny Him for favor of men. But up to the present time such a situation has not yet appeared; the creedal basis still stands firm in the constitutions of evangelical churches. And there is a very real reason why it is not the "conservatives" who ought to withdraw. The reason is found in the trust which the churches hold. That trust includes trust funds of the most definite kind. And contrary to what seems to be the prevailing opinion, we venture to regard a trust as a sacred thing. The funds of the evangelical churches are held under a very definite trust; they are committed to the various bodies for the propagation of the gospel as set forth in the Bible and in the confessions of faith. To devote them to any other purpose, even though that other purpose should be in itself far more desirable, would be a violation of trust.

It must be admitted that the present situation is anomalous. Funds dedicated to the propagation of the gospel by godly men and women of previous generations or given by thoroughly evangelical congregations to-day are in nearly all the churches being used partly in the propagation of what is diametrically opposed to the evangelical faith. Certainly that situation ought not to continue; it is an offence to every thoughtfully honest man whether he be Christian or not. But in remaining in the existing churches the conservatives are in a fundamentally different position from the liberals; for the conservatives are in agreement with the plain constitutions of the churches, while the liberal party can maintain itself only by an equivocal subscription to declarations which it does not really believe.

But how shall so anomalous a situation be brought to an end? The best way would undoubtedly be the voluntary withdrawal of the liberal ministers from those confessional churches whose confessions they do not, in the plain historical sense, accept. And we have not altogether abandoned hope of such a solution. Our differences with the liberal party in the Church are indeed profound, but with regard to the obligation of simple honesty of speech, some agreement might surely be attained. Certainly the withdrawal of liberal ministers from the creedal churches would be enormously in the interests of harmony and co-operation. Nothing engenders strife so much as a forced unity, within the same organization, of those who disagree fundamentally in aim.

But is not advocacy of such separation a flagrant instance of intolerance? The objection is often raised. But it ignores altogether the difference between involuntary and voluntary organizations. Involuntary organizations ought to be tolerant, but voluntary organizations, so far as the fundamental purpose of their existence is concerned, must be intolerant or else cease to exist. The state is an involuntary organization; a man is forced to be a member of it whether he will or no. It is therefore an interference with liberty for the state to prescribe any one type of opinion or any one type of education for its citizens. But within the state, individual citizens who desire to unite for some special purpose should be permitted to do so. Especially in the sphere of religion, such permission of individuals to unite is one of the rights which lie at the very foundation of our civil and religious liberty. The state does not scrutinize the rightness or wrongness of the religious purpose for which such voluntary religious associations are formed if it did undertake such scrutiny all religious liberty would be gone — but it merely protects the right of individuals to unite for any religious purpose which they may choose.

Among such voluntary associations are to be found the evangelical churches. An evangelical church is composed of a number of persons who have come to agreement in a certain message about Christ and who desire to unite in the propagation of that message, as it is set forth in their creed on the basis of the Bible. No one is forced to unite himself with the body thus formed; and because of this total absence of compulsion there can be no interference with liberty in the maintenance of any specific purpose — for example, the propagation of a message — as a fundamental purpose of the association. If other persons desire to form a religious association with some purpose other than the propagation of a message — for example, the purpose of promoting in the world, simply by exhortation and by the inspiration of the example of Jesus, a certain type of life — they are at perfect liberty to do so. But for an organization which is founded with the fundamental purpose of propagating a message to commit its resources and its name to those who are engaged in combating the message is not tolerance but simple dishonesty. Yet it is exactly this course of action that is advocated by those who would allow non-doctrinal religion to be taught in the name of doctrinal churches — churches that are plainly doctrinal both in their

constitutions and in the declarations which they require of every candidate for ordination.

The matter may be made plain by an illustration from secular life. Suppose in a political campaign in America there be formed a Democratic club for the purpose of furthering the cause of the Democratic party. Suppose there are certain other citizens who are opposed to the tenets of the Democratic club and in opposition desire to support the Republican party. What is the honest way for them to accomplish their purpose? Plainly it is simply the formation of a Republican club which shall carry on a propaganda in favor of Republican principles. But suppose, instead of pursuing this simple course of action, the advocates of Republican principles should conceive the notion of making a declaration of conformity to Democratic principles, thus gaining an entrance into the Democratic club and finally turning its resources into an anti-Democratic propaganda. That plan might be ingenious. But would it be honest? Yet it is just exactly such a plan which is adopted by advocates of a non-doctrinal religion who by subscription to a creed gain an entrance into the teaching ministry of doctrinal or evangelical churches. Let no one be offended by the illustration taken from ordinary life. We are not for a moment suggesting that the Church is no more than a political club. But the fact that the Church is more than a political club does not mean that in ecclesiastical affairs there is any abrogation of the homely principles of honesty. The Church may possibly be more honest, but certainly it ought not to be less honest, than a political club.

Certainly the essentially creedal character of evangelical churches is firmly fixed. A man may disagree with the Westminster Confession, for example, but he can hardly fail to see what it means; at least he can hardly fail to understand the "system of doctrine" which is taught in it. The Confession, whatever its faults may be, is certainly not lacking in definiteness. And certainly a man who solemnly accepts that system of doctrine as his own cannot at the same time be an advocate of a non-doctrinal religion which regards as a trifling thing that which is the very sum and substance of the Confession and the very centre and core of the Bible upon which it is based. Similar is the case in other evangelical churches. The Protestant Episcopal Church, some of whose members, it is true, might resent the distinctive title of "evangelical," is clearly founded upon a creed, and that creed, including the exultant supernaturalism of the New Testament and the redemption offered by Christ, is plainly involved in the Book of Common Prayer which every priest in his own name and in the name of the congregation must read.

The separation of naturalistic liberalism from the evangelical churches would no doubt greatly diminish the size of the churches. But Gideon's three hundred were more powerful than the thirty-two thousand with which the march against the Midianites began.

Certainly the present situation is fraught with deadly weak-ness. Christian men have been redeemed from sin, without merit of their own, by the sacrifice of Christ. But every man who has been truly redeemed from sin longs to carry to others the same blessed gospel through which he himself has been saved. The propagation of the gospel is clearly the joy as well as the duty of every Christian man. But how shall the gospel be propagated? The natural answer is that it shall be propagated through the agencies of the Church — boards of missions and the like. An obvious duty, therefore, rests upon the Christian man of contributing to the agencies of the Church. But at this point the perplexity arises. The Christian man discovers to his consternation that the agencies of the Church are propagating not only the gospel as found in the Bible and in the historic creeds, but also a type of religious teaching which is at every conceivable point the diametrical opposite of the gospel. The question naturally arises whether there is any reason for contributing to such agencies at all. Of every dollar contributed to them, perhaps half goes to the support of true missionaries of the Cross, while the other half goes to the support of those who are persuading men that the message of the Cross is unnecessary or wrong. If part of our gifts is to be used to neutralize the other part, is not contribution to mission boards altogether absurd? The question may at least very naturally be raised. It should not indeed be answered hastily in a way hostile to contribution to mission boards. Perhaps it is better that the gospel should be both preached and combated by the same agencies than that it should not be preached at all. At any rate, the true missionaries of the Cross, even though the mission boards which support them should turn out to be very bad, must not be allowed to be in want. But the situation, from the point of view of the evangelical Christian, is unsatisfactory in the extreme. Many Christians seek to relieve the situation by "designating" their gifts, instead of allowing them to be distributed by the mission agencies. But at this point one encounters the centralization of power which is going on in the modern Church. On account of that centralization the designation of gifts is often found to be illusory. If gifts are devoted by the donors to one mission known to be evangelical, that does not always really increase the resources of that mission; for the mission boards can simply cut down the proportion assigned to that mission from the undesignated funds, and the final result is exactly the same as if there had been no designation of the gift at all.

The existence and the necessity of mission boards and the like prevents, in general, one obvious solution of the present difficulty in the Church — the solution offered by local autonomy of the congregation. It might be suggested that each congregation should determine its own confession of faith or its own program of work. Then each congregation might seem to be responsible only for itself, and might seem to be relieved from the odious task of judging others. But the suggestion is impracticable. Aside from the question whether a purely congregational system of church government is desirable in itself, it is impossible where mission agencies are concerned. In the support of such agencies, many congregations obviously must unite; and the question arises whether evangelical

congregations can honestly support agencies which are opposed to the evangelical faith.

At any rate, the situation cannot be helped by ignoring facts. The plain fact is that liberalism, whether it be true or false, is no mere "heresy" - no mere divergence at isolated points from Christian teaching. On the contrary it proceeds from a totally different root, and it constitutes, in essentials, a unitary system of its own. That does not mean that all liberals hold all parts of the system, or that Christians who have been affected by liberal teaching at one point have been affected at all points. There is sometimes a salutary lack of logic which prevents the whole of a man's faith being destroyed when he has given up a part. But the true way in which to examine a spiritual movement is in its logical relations; logic is the great dynamic, and the logical implications of any way of thinking are sooner or later certain to be worked out. And taken as a whole, even as it actually exists to-day, naturalistic liberalism is a fairly unitary phenomenon; it is tending more and more to eliminate from itself illogical remnants of Christian belief. It differs from Christianity in its view of God, of man, of the seat of authority and of the way of salvation.

And it differs from Christianity not only in theology but in the whole of life. It is indeed sometimes said that there can be communion in feeling where communion in thinking is gone, a communion of the heart as distinguished from a communion of the head. But with respect to the present controversy, such a distinction certainly does not apply. On the contrary, in reading the books and listening to the sermons of recent liberal teachers — so untroubled by the problem of sin, so devoid of all sympathy for guilty humanity, so prone to abuse and ridicule the things dearest to the heart of every Christian man- one can only confess that if liberalism is to return into the Christian communion there must be a change of heart fully as much as a change of mind. God grant that such a change of heart may come! But meanwhile the present situation must not be ignored but faced. Christianity is being attacked from within by a movement which is anti-Christian to the core.

What is the duty of Christian men at such a time? What is the duty, in particular, of Christian officers in the Church? In the first place, they should encourage those who are engaging in the intellectual and spiritual struggle. They should not say, in the sense in which some laymen say it, that more time should be devoted to the propagation of Christianity, and less to the defence of Christianity. Certainly there should be propagation of Christianity. Believers should certainly not content themselves with warding off attacks, but should also unfold in an orderly and positive way the full riches of the gospel. But far more is usually meant by those who call for less defence and more propagation. What they really intend is the discouragement of the whole intellectual defence of the faith. And their words come as a blow in the face of those who are fighting the great battle. As a matter of fact, not less time, but more time, should be devoted to the defence of the gospel. Indeed, truth cannot be stated clearly at all without being

set over against error. Thus a large part of the New Testament is polemic; the enunciation of evangelical truth was occasioned by the errors which had arisen in the churches. So it will always be, on account of the fundamental laws of the human mind. Moreover, the present crisis must be taken into account. There may have been a day when there could be propagation of Christianity without defence. But such a day at any rate is past. At the present time, when the opponents of the gospel are almost in control of our churches, the slightest avoidance of the defence of the gospel is just sheer unfaithfulness to the Lord. There have been previous great crises in the history of the Church, crises almost comparable to this. One appeared in the second century, when the very life of Christendom was threatened by the Gnostics. Another came in the Middle Ages when the gospel of God's grace seemed forgotten. In such times of crisis, God has always saved the Church. But He has always saved it not by theological pacifists, but by sturdy contenders for the truth.

In the second place, Christian officers in the Church should perform their duty in deciding upon the qualifications of candidates for the ministry. The question "For Christ or against Him?" constantly arises in the examination of candidates for ordination. Attempts are often made to obscure the issue. It is often said: "The candidate will no doubt move in the direction of the truth; let him now be sent out to learn as well as to preach." And so another opponent of the gospel enters the councils of the Church, and another false prophet goes forth to encourage sinners to come before the judgment seat of God clad in the miserable rags of their own righteousness. Such action is not really "kind" to the candidate himself. It is never kind to encourage a man to enter into a life of dishonesty. The fact often seems to be forgotten that the evangelical Churches are purely voluntary organizations; no one is required to enter into their service. If a man cannot accept the belief of such churches, there are other ecclesiastical bodies in which he can find a place. The belief of the Presbyterian Church, for example, is plainly set forth in the Confession of Faith, and the Church will never afford any warmth of communion or engage with any real vigor in her work until her ministers are in whole-hearted agreement with that belief. It is strange how in the interests of an utterly false kindness to men, Christians are sometimes willing to relinquish their loyalty to the crucified Lord.

In the third place, Christian officers in the Church should show their loyalty to Christ in their capacity as members of the individual congregations. The issue often arises in connection with the choice of a pastor. Such and such a man, it is said, is a brilliant preacher. But what is the content of his preaching? Is his preaching full of the gospel of Christ? The answer is often evasive. The preacher in question, it is said, is of good standing in the Church, and he has never denied the doctrines or grace. Therefore, it is urged, he should be called to the pastorate. But shall we be satisfied with such negative assurances? Shall we be satisfied with preachers who merely "do not deny" the Cross of Christ? God grant that such satisfaction may be broken down! The people are perishing under the ministrations of those who "do not deny" the Cross of Christ. Surely something

more than that is needed. God send us ministers who, instead of merely avoiding denial of the Cross shall be on fire with the Cross, whose whole life shall be one burning sacrifice of gratitude to the blessed Saviour who loved them and gave Himself for them!

In the fourth place - the most important thing of all — there must be a renewal of Christian education. The rejection of Christianity is due to various causes. But a very potent cause is simple ignorance. In countless cases, Christianity is rejected simply because men have not the slightest notion of what Christianity is. An outstanding fact of recent Church history is the appalling growth of ignorance in the Church. Various causes, no doubt, can be assigned for this lamentable development. The development is due partly to the general decline of education — at least so far as literature and history are concerned. The schools of the present day are being ruined by the absurd notion that education should follow the line of least resistance, and that something can be "drawn out" of the mind before anything is put in. They are also being ruined by an exaggerated emphasis on methodology at the expense of content and on what is materially useful at the expense of the high spiritual heritage of mankind. These lamentable tendencies, more-over, are in danger of being made permanent through the sinister extension of state control. But something more than the general decline in education is needed to account for the special growth of ignorance in the Church. The growth of ignorance in the Church is the logical and inevitable result of the false notion that Christianity is a life and not also a doctrine; if Christianity is not a doctrine then of course teaching is not necessary to Christianity. But whatever be the causes for the growth of ignorance in the Church, the evil must be remedied. It must be remedied primarily by the renewal of Christian education in the family, but also by the use of whatever other educational agencies the Church can find. Christian education is the chief business of the hour for every earnest Christian man. Christianity cannot subsist unless men know what Christianity is; and the fair and logical thing is to learn what Christianity is, not from its opponents, but from those who themselves are Christians. That method of procedure would be the only fair method in the case of any movement. But it is still more in place in the case of a movement such as Christianity which has laid the foundation of all that we hold most dear. Men have abundant opportunity to-day to learn what can be said against Christianity, and it is only fair that they should also learn something about the thing that is being attacked.

Such measures are needed to-day. The present is a time not for ease or pleasure, but for earnest and prayerful work. A terrible crisis unquestionably has arisen in the Church. In the ministry of evangelical churches are to be found hosts of those who reject the gospel of Christ. By the equivocal use of traditional phrases, by the representation of differences of opinion as though they were only differences about the interpretation of the Bible, entrance into the Church was secured for those who are hostile to the very foundations of the faith. And now there are some indications that the fiction of conformity to the past is to be thrown off, and the real meaning of what has been taking place is to be allowed to

appear. The Church, it is now apparently supposed, has almost been educated up to the point where the shackles of the Bible can openly be cast away and the doctrine of the Cross of Christ can be relegated to the limbo of discarded subtleties.

Yet there is in the Christian life no room for despair. Only, our hopefulness should not be founded on the sand. It should be founded, not upon a blind ignorance of the danger, but solely upon the precious promises of God. Laymen, as well as ministers, should return, in these trying days, with new earnestness, to the study of the Word of God.

If the Word of God be heeded, the Christian battle will be fought both with love and with faithfulness. Party passions and personal animosities will be put away, but on the other hand, even angels from heaven will be rejected if they preach a gospel different from the blessed gospel of the Cross. Every man must decide upon which side he will stand. God grant that we may decide aright!

What the immediate future may bring we cannot presume to say. The final result indeed is clear. God has not deserted His Church; He has brought her through even darker hours than those which try our courage now, yet the darkest hour has always come before the dawn. We have to-day the entrance of paganism into the Church in the name of Christianity. But in the second century a similar battle was fought and won. From another point of view, modern liberalism is like the legalism of the middle ages, with its dependence upon the merit of man. And another Reformation in God's good time will come.

But meanwhile our souls are tried. We can only try to do our duty in humility and in sole reliance upon the Saviour who bought us with His blood. The future is in God's hand, and we do not know the means that He will use in the accomplishment of His will. It may be that the present evangelical churches will face the facts, and regain their integrity while yet there is time. If that solution is to be adopted there is no time to lose, since the forces opposed to the gospel are now almost in control. It is possible that the existing churches may be given over altogether to naturalism, that men may then see that the fundamental needs of the soul are to be satisfied not inside but outside of the existing churches, and that thus new Christian groups may be formed.

But whatever solution there may be, one thing is clear. There must be somewhere groups of redeemed men and women who can gather together humbly in the name of Christ, to give thanks to Him for His unspeakable gift and to worship the Father through Him. Such groups alone can satisfy the needs of the soul. At the present time, there is one longing of the human heart which is often forgotten — it is the deep, pathetic longing of the Christian for fellowship with his brethren. One hears much, it is true, about Christian union and harmony and co-operation. But the union that is meant is often a union with the world against the Lord, or at best a forced union of machinery and tyrannical

committees. How different is the true unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace! Sometimes, it is true, the longing for Christian fellowship is satisfied. There are congregations, even in the present age of conflict, that are really gathered around the table of the crucified Lord; there are pastors that are pastors in-deed. But such congregations, in many cities, are difficult to find. Weary with the conflicts of the world, one goes into the Church to seek refreshment for the soul. And what does one find? Alas, too often, one finds only the turmoil of the world. The preacher comes forward, not out of a secret place of meditation and power, not with the authority of God's Word permeating his message, not with human wisdom pushed far into the background by the glory of the Cross, but with human opinions about the social problems of the hour or easy solutions of the vast problem of sin. Such is the sermon. And then perhaps the service is closed by one of those hymns breathing out the angry passions of 1861, which are to be found in the back part of the hymnals. Thus the warfare of the world has entered even into the house of God. And sad indeed is the heart of the man who has come seeking peace.

Is there no refuge from strife? Is there no place of refreshing where a man can prepare for the battle of life? Is there no place where two or three can gather in Jesus' name, to forget for the moment all those things that divide nation from nation and race from race, to forget human pride, to forget the passions of war, to forget the puzzling problems of industrial strife, and to unite in overflowing gratitude at the foot of the Cross? If there be such a place, then that is the house of God and that the gate of heaven. And from under the threshold of that house will go forth a river that will revive the weary world.

John Gresham Machen (1881-1937) was an American Presbyterian New Testament scholar, who led a revolt against modernist theology at Princeton, and founded Westminster Theological Seminary as well as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He wrote Christianity & Liberalism in 1923 as an answer to the controversies of his day.

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