

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE II.

ESSENTIAL CHRISTIANITY.

BY REV. J. W. WEDDELL, CHICAGO, ILL.

“NOT every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord,” said Jesus, “shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.”¹ Profession is not necessarily salvation. Can the opposite be affirmed? Not all who gain entrance to the kingdom shall say to the Master “Lord, Lord.” That is, salvation is not necessarily profession.

This some ardently hope; and this indeed we might all with devoutness wish. There are those who will continue to trust that the many who “shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,”² shall include not a few who have never heard the name of Jesus, and so could not have called him “Lord.” This we know, the grace of God is past human defining. There may be something yet beyond what our imperfect knowledge has grasped of divine mercy. At any rate, it is the happy lot of mortals that their case is submitted to a juster and kindlier tribunal than earth can show. We may all utter with meek sincerity, for that great day, the words of David to his prophet: “Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are great, and let me not fall into the hand of man.”³

This, we say, may be made subject for hope. It is not, however, the hope of the gospel. It is other than the preaching with which we have been commissioned from heaven. The word of that trust is plain, and there is no mistaking the import of the proclamation. There is that which engendereth speculation, but it is to be found elsewhere than in the words of the divine command, clear, direct, imperative: “Go ye into

¹ Matt. vii. 21.² Matt. viii. 11.³ 2 Sam. xxiv. 14.

all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”¹ The gospel! Here is our theme! What is said in the following paragraphs refers to its explicit sanctions and limitations. That there is other truth beyond this, we believe; that there is other escape from sin and all its woe, many of us may hope; but here there is something that we *know*. We have revealed to us in clearest characters, which he that runs may read, a scheme for man’s redemption. It is simple; it is adequate. If our minds and hearts can lay hold of this in all its gracious fulness, let us be satisfied.

Christianity is too dear a name to be unconditionally disowned. Even those who have lost its spirit, yea, even, are possessed of the spirit of its opposite, would continue to speak in its fair name. Ludwig Feuerbach wrote a book some forty years ago whose animus and aim was unmitigated antagonism to the Christian religion. There is, he said, no external religion, no heaven, no hell, God is man idealized. To use his own expressive words: “Such as are a man’s thoughts and dispositions, such is his God; so much worth as a man has, so much and no more has his God. Consciousness of God is self-consciousness; knowledge of God is self-knowledge. By his God thou knowest the man, and by the man his God; the two are identical.”² And now observe, our German iconoclast does not call this, what in very truth it is, the centre and core of infidelity and irreligion. He names his work, *The Essence of Christianity*. Feuerbach has had a numerous train of followers, not only as regards the theory he expounds, but as pertaining to the method of attack which he adopts.

Of Christianity, in a peculiar sense, it may be said: “A man’s foes shall be they of his own household,”³ of Christ, “I was wounded in the house of my friends.”⁴ A book to destroy the historic Jesus Christ of Nazareth is conceived, and it is named, *The Life of Jesus*. A work whose design it is to take away the children’s Scriptures is constructed, and

¹ Mark xvi. 15.

³ Matt. x. 36.

VOL. XLI. No. 161.

² Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, p. 12.

⁴ Zech. xiii. 6.

it is called *The Bible for Learners*. Verily our old enemy comes to us in the garb of a friend, and we can no longer tell life and loyalty by the livery they wear.

We come down, however, to the development of latitudinarian tendencies within the church, and we find the same or a kindred spirit largely displayed. It is very natural that the old name should be clung to. The parent roof is still quite friendly. Brother and sister may frown, but the home-fires burn large and genial, and there is yet no shelter so pleasant as the old. Reformed Judaism is a decidedly different thing from the orthodoxy of the synagogue, but witness how ardently the new liberalistic faith clings to the garments of the mother. Wherever we look, the most serious digressions of late have been made in the name of the true faith, and the seceder has called himself not a rebel, but a patriot and a pietist.

A reasonable degree of divergence is to be expected. Every circle has its tangential lines, whether marked or not. And the circumference which is unscored with these encloses a dead area wherein there are no true radii. But the lines must ever be called divergent lines. They are never else than tangents, and need not be carried far to be proven such. If they continue on they cease to be part of the old system, except as they impinge upon it. They go to make up another figure and to circle about some other centre.

We take the new movement within the church at something like its own estimation. It does not renounce, though it hesitates not to denounce, the old. It will hold on to the substance or heart of the old, and with a nice discernment it will label that which is to be esteemed vital and indispensable. It finds for us the essential faith, the essential work, and the essential Christ. Let it, then, be called, and, we may say, at its own suggestion, *essential Christianity*; and let us, with a mind to gather up the fragments that nothing be lost, look to see what is left when essential Christianity has taken all it desires and departed.

Under the caption which heads this paper may properly

be considered several forms of recent religious dissent; viz. that which includes under it the wide protest against old ideas of Scripture authenticity and authority; that comprehending the denial of the long-accepted outlines of ordinance and service; that finally conveying the declinature to receive former ideas of the atonement and its promulgation. These refer in a general way to the creed, the church, and the Christ. For convenience sake, no less than for brevity, we may view the various departures after a triple division of this sort.

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT CREED.

The basis of all Christian creed is the Bible. We might almost say that creed and Scripture are identical. One sect, at least, there is which professes to make the simple word of God its sole body of beliefs, and accepts the scriptural statement as sufficiently explicit. But manifestly progressive interpretation plays an important part in all our fellowships of faith, so that it is only safe to say that creed and Scripture are fundamentally the same. This, however, we may affirm with assurance that the contention with creed is in reality a contention with the Bible—the Bible of our faithful fathers and of our trustful younger selves. The blow which is delivered in the face of the statement of belief is intentionally to take effect upon some text of Scripture. Were it not for this, indeed, we should accept the stroke in all good feeling; for well we know that our propositions, drawn howsoever close from scripture truth, are all too faulty. But we know, too, that it is the Bible behind all that has provoked the attack, and we are naturally very jealous for our Bible.

There are several phases of this movement. Recent literature keeps bringing them before us once and again. There is the position of *extreme antagonism*, which assaults the Bible *in toto*. Miracle, prophecy, revelation, incarnation,—all the salient items of scripture doctrine,—are combated. A certain Mr. Westbrook, who refuses with a delicate con-

scientiousness to prefix the title "Rev." to his name, yet is very careful to append the cabalistic sign "D.D.," has recently written a work called *The Bible, Whence and What?* He wrote the question with the answer ready. The Bible, he says, is from man; part fiction, part fancy, part fraud — all an imposition on humanity. In his shadow or preceding him are others with a like voice to lift up in behalf of Bible-ridden man. They generally close, as they begin, with a prayer for the religion of humanity; and, whilst they describe it in Christian terms, they long for its emancipation from creed and superstition, that it may then go on to brighter days and more beneficent deeds. That brighter days with goodlier deeds may come we, too, shall hope with them; yet shall we expect to see the sun of that day still rising in the east.

There is an intermediate position — a kind of *modified hostility* to the traditional Bible — which has of late found copious exposition at the hands of the rector of All Souls' Church, New York.¹ His volume of March 1, 1883, in elucidation of the view, is admirable, so far as perspicuity and rhetorical strength are concerned. *Right and Wrong Uses of the Bible*, is his theme. What he esteems these to be his reported sermons have not permitted the public to remain in entire ignorance of. Some most excellent uses he recommends — uses to which all good books should be put. When he comes, however, to speak of the unique, spiritual design of the Scriptures, his uses are verily abuses. He is withstanding what he calls "the traditional view"; he means the popular conception of a written revelation. "We must exorcise a superstition," he says, "to save a faith. We must part with the unreal Bible, if we would hold the real Bible." He then proceeds to literally tear to pieces the so-called "unreal Bible," which is the Bible of the common people. The "real Bible" is thereupon constructed from the fragments which remain. This clever synthesis comprehends no direct revelation from God, but a series of interesting historical

¹ Rev. R. Heber Newton.

leaves, wherein we may read, yet only as it were between the lines, the faintly discernible mind of God. And thus are we taught, albeit by indirection, lessons of wisdom and righteousness for life and immortality. It is suggestive to read that a troubled woman said to the rector of All Souls' Church: "My children don't know anything about the Bible. I cannot read it to them, for I do not know what to say when they ask me questions. I no longer believe as I was taught about it. What, then, can I teach them?"¹ "What then," indeed! The mother's words are pathetic; they are at the same time instructive. What else than such distress will the new preaching bring to parental hearts?

What is most noteworthy in this work, and in other books of its class, is the manifest endeavor to build up an anti-biblical structure on a kind of biblical basis. Christ is exalted in strong, evangelical terms, as "the power of the Bible." The word is named, in literal accordance with Scripture, "a lamp" for the feet, and "a light" for the path; and its constant perusal is urged upon the church with words of earnestness. And yet the means of study employed would, for ordinary readers, rob the book of its power. Let Christianity adopt such principles, and she will soon be without an authoritative creed. This peril the writer alluded to recognizes as a present difficulty when he declares: "A crying need of our day is a hand-book to the Bible, in which the new critical knowledge shall blend, as it may blend, with the old spiritual reverence."² "A crying need," our friend may have also observed, there is for blending infidelity with piety, atheism with morality, and error in general with the fair accompaniments of truth and virtue.

A third phase of this especial controversy is to be found in the argumentative stand-point of what has been termed, though perhaps incorrectly, the *new critical school*. It was instituted, or at least re-instituted, in Germany, many years ago, by such headlong critics as Graf and his compeers. Ewald made numerous additions to it; Wellhausen interpreted

¹ Right and Wrong Uses of the Bible, p. 10.

² Ibid., p. 165.

it for later readers, and gave it more explicit signification. Colenso startled the world of English readers with it. Ort and Kuenen applied it in such a sweeping manner as to make it offensive to many who might otherwise have been drawn toward it. On British shores such elegant writers and acute interpreters as Professor Robertson Smith and Rev. T. K. Cheyne gave its somewhat modified, we may say anglicized, form their sanction and their voice; and its less combative features have obtained some acceptance from certain seminary chairs of our own country.

The view as regards its plain, logical trend may be summarized thus: The Pentateuch a post-exilic composition; Judges and Joshua the annals of lawless nomads, or little better; the prophecies, collections of the fragmentary utterances of men intensely religious and large in their hope, their writings "grouped under the name of some great prophet";¹ the Psalms, songs of Israel, mainly composed after the return from Babylon; Ezekiel, a sermon to bolster up the newly-fabricated law; Ezra and Nehemiah, a history of the institution of the new Mosaic economy; Haggai, Zechariah, and the later prophets, preachers of the novel priestly dispensation, though sometimes with denunciation. We come across to the times of the New Testament, and there we find writings growing up under the literary activity of a new reformatory period conducive to originality. Christ was a voice in behalf of the spirituality of the ancient prophets and in rebuke of the later priestly usurpation; the Gospels were partial summaries of a wonderful Life, but in themselves wholly uncritical and unreliable in their references to the Old Testament; the Acts, a record of the churches emancipated from Jewish exclusiveness; the Epistles, the remnants saved from the numerous writings of the early preachers of Christianity.

This perhaps sketches the ultimatum of the critical movement. It will doubtless not be acknowledged by all who have, nevertheless, determinedly pitched their tents that way.

¹ Rev. R. Heber Newton.

Taking the names of adherents mentioned above, and beginning with the mild American attitude, we have an ascending scale of doctrinal departure, extending, step by step, from a liberal orthodoxy to the boldest and most reckless latitudinarianism. Let us hope that this does not represent, even in similitude, the vital tendencies of scriptural criticism. The next two decades of interpretation will declare. The point to be noticed here is, that from one end of the line to the other the names are those of a Christian professorship or a Christian pulpit. The Bible is to be recast, but it is on the foundations of Christian loyalty and in the interest of the kingdom of earth's Redeemer. The critic is not seeking to undermine Scripture confidence, but is striving, we are told, to find an intelligent basis for latter-day credence.

Why not accept it? It is indeed a beautiful theory. No hypothesis of the theological schools has lately been broached which can afford such varied entertainment to the scholar. It holds within its length and breadth many genuine and important truths. Yet it cannot safely be espoused. The obstacles in the way of Christian adoption have already been clearly and cogently set forth by other pens. We need only here reiterate that there is one thing for which the Christian heart has a greater reverence than for schools of interpretation and schemes of criticism. It is the Bible itself. Rather than see that discredited and gradually destroyed it will turn a deaf ear and a cold shoulder to historical researches however discriminating, and philosophical speculations however refined. It has its Bible left, and that is enough.

Christianity without a creed, a perspicuous and authoritative summary of belief, a planet without an orbit, a republic without a constitution, shall we ever see such? Christianity without a Bible, clearly authenticated, pure and acceptable in all its parts, truthful, infallible, decisive, the Bible of the Christian ages, much abused, much neglected, but ever the Bible of the human heart, would be a pitiful thing indeed. A ship at sea with a rudder, but that broken; a compass, but the needle gone; a course unknown, and a destination un-

fixed — essential Christianity — Christianity without its Bible — there can be no such thing under the benign heavens.

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE CHURCH.

Creedless Christianity must fail. Bishop Littlejohn was right when speaking before the students of Cambridge he called this an intensely practical age, one which insists on solid ground to tread upon. "It requires," he says, "a theology resting on outward realities, not on man's notions; on what the living God has said of himself and inclusively of man, not on what man has thought or felt, reasoned or conjectured about himself and inferentially or inclusively of a God."¹ Hence it is that the elimination of the supernatural from Christian documents will scarcely be tolerated. Hence, too, the separation of the supernatural from Christian worship will not be borne with equanimity.

There is such a thing as churchless Christianity, at least in the visions of men — Christianity apart from an institution. The so-called bars and hinderances imposed by the establishment of a definite organization are to be cast off. The kingdom of Christ must be made to dwell entirely in men's hearts. No need of external or of outward manifestations, save those which creature comfort or beneficence occasions. No forms, no ordinances, none at least from a divine source, nothing but the inbred principles of Christianity producing in society at large the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

The Unitarian movement in theology, in its most conspicuous features, was of this character. It found deeper occasion for difference and showed more lengthened lines of departure, but to the popular eye it was nothing more nor less than a recoil from institutionalism in religion. True, there are other denominations which have ever held to simplicity in ecclesiastical relationships, but these insist still, for the most part, upon the existence of the local church, and they urge the Christly and apostolical injunctions for such an institution. When we come to the later developments of the

¹ See Littlejohn on Individualism.

anti-ordinance movement we find even the simple forms which belonged to the early church refused. It will worship God and adore Christ without the help or hampering of outward sign and symbol. The individual heart the only shrine, the Christian life the sole sacrifice, and love the minister. "Love to God and man is Christianity. Not institutions, not successions, not sacraments, not faith, not works, but love."¹

Dean Stanley, speaking of Christian Institutions, sums them up in one place² as the sacraments, the clergy, the pope, the creed. The pope is a case of manifest usurpation. We may omit such a name from our list of the institutions of Christianity. There may be added, however, to the above summary the church itself, an all-embracing institution, whose reality and necessity are to-day denied.

One of the strangest anomalies of modern times is the foundation of churches which testily disallow in their articles of confederation the churchly idea.³ The members who associate together believe in no baptism, save, in their peculiar conception thereof — the baptism of the Holy Spirit, no table of the Lord, no separate pastoral office, no authoritative code of belief, no divinely-ordained society; yet do they assemble together and call themselves a church. They have a professional and formally consecrated preacher, they sometimes partake together in the name of Christian brotherhood, and perhaps with robes and roses and much of aesthetical paraphernalia go through the pleasing motions of other Christian services. Here is essential Christianity — Christianity denying the institution yet acceding to it at times from conventional motives — to gratify human whim rather than obey divine will.

East and west in our land may be found congregations of this sort, or tending in this direction. There is nothing to be said here of so-called ethical societies, whether founded on the agnostic or evolutionary basis. Such are outspoken

¹ Christianity the Science of Manhood. By M. J. Savage, p. 53.

² Christian Institutions. Preface. ³ E.g. The Unitarian Church, Theistic. Vol. XLI. No. 161.

in their opposition to the Christian system. What we speak of in this connection is that form of antagonism which goes under Christian colors—variance within the church. In New York our literary friend Mr. Frothingham carried some such organization forward for a while, and by his brilliant rhetoric held it together. In Brooklyn John Chadwick, of similar gifts, has made himself the centre of a respectable circle of such worshippers. In Chicago Professor Swing and Dr. Thomas in their respective theatre-halls preach, Sabbath by Sabbath, to large and somewhat enthusiastic throngs, and here and there in our various larger cities there are congregations gathered whose forms of service are concessions and conveniences rather than ordinances and rites.

The first-named gentleman, his utterances of late years, perhaps, more acceptable to evangelical workers than formerly, still indulges in reflections not wholly agreeable to the Christian mind. In a late number of the *North American Review* he makes some curious gratuitous concessions regarding Christianity.¹ He takes the position that in heart and soul it is above criticism; it cannot be touched in its essential elements with the pruning knife. Men, he implies, may even disbelieve in Christ, in ordinances, in the church; yet will Christianity remain. It has a constituent genesis and incentive in all hearts.

Does Mr. Frothingham mean by this what he intended when in a former essay on *Modern Irreligion* he said; "Banish the doubts, let the questions go answerless; let the fears subside; let God stand for the best we can imagine; let immortality stand for the best we can anticipate; let religion stand for all educating, refining, soothing, animating, resting, inspiring, consoling influences; let religious belief be considered as the most complete statement faith can make to-day, without distrust of the finer statement she will make to-morrow; let religious usages be considered in the light of aids, useful in the pressing emergency; let the ministers of religion lay aside their sacerdotal character and

¹ *Criticism and Christianity*, *North American Review*, April 1883.

base on sincerity and goodness their claim to human respect; let the administration of religion be generous, sympathetic, wise, and tender; in a word, let religion take its place frankly among the human and humanizing agencies of society, and the dread of it will be dispelled."¹

Mr. Chadwick probably signifies the same when he exclaims in a January sermon of '79; "Banish the religions, each and all, but only that religion may the more remain!"² And he adds: "that which has so long been coming to maturity will never perish in the night." This utterance may be understood as following in the wake of Dean Stanley's more liberal tendencies. The institutions of religion have done good service in the past. They are now to be discarded, yet merely as vestments outgrown. Not so, however, another class, who seem to find in the fixed religious forms of the centuries simply shackles and fetters. Amongst those who mourn over the received offices of religion we may place Matthew Arnold as prominent. His contention is for conduct, the three-fourths of life, good conduct, an upright and self-denying behavior. This, he says, is the "natural truth of Christianity." It is what we find in the "more reasonable Jesus;" in the tempest which sweeps away "traditional religion" it abides. The church of England — and he would doubtless include the Christian churches of other name — will grow by "opening itself to the glow of the old and true ideal of the Christian gospel, by fidelity to reason, by placing the stress of its religion on goodness, by cultivating grace and peace."³ That is, Christianity will live as a spirit in the hearts of men; the straitness of ecclesiastical creed and practice which nurture dissent — and how Matthew Arnold loathes dissent! — being allowed to pass away.

The idea of the new religion as expounded by Professor Swing, at Central Music Hall in Chicago, is a contempt of authoritative form and dogma, and an exaltation of the underlying essential of Christianity. All is mutation as re

¹ Creed and Conduct, p. 70.

² The Faith of Reason, p. 48.

³ Last Essays on Church and Religion, p. 188.

gards externals. "The revivals, the service, the sermons, the prayers, the hymns, the music, the ceremonies change like the toilets of the worshippers. More than this, doctrines change," etc.¹ "True liberalism" does its duty in rejecting that which is outward and penetrating to the inner substance of religion, thus at last becoming able to "worship in all temples;"² In the famous ecclesiastical trial wherein Professor Swing's doctrinal departures were considered there were two charges, one having reference to the words of Scripture, the other relating to the articles of the Presbyterian church. In neither case was the offence the mere teaching of error, but the promulgation of what was esteemed to be error under old names which were not applicable. Unitarianism in the name of Presbyterianism, the "new religion" in the name of Biblical Christianity. And it was this same distaste for misnomers in matters of religion which drove the Rock River conference, when Dr. Thomas was seeking in his sermons to find what he called "that middle-ground theology where the faith of mankind will at last find rest," to request their clerical brother to withdraw from Methodist auspices. His teachings regarding future punishment, inspiration, and the atonement, though acceptable to many, were hardly consistent with his ordination vows. "Middle-ground theology" was something else than Wesleyanism.

These quotations might be still farther extended. But enough has been cited. It is to be seen that in the end we are to be given a Christianity without formal establishment; no divine sanctions, no divine ordinances, no divinely-accredited ministers, simply a regulated mode of life, a scheme of humanitarian reform. It is in short Christianity without the church. There may indeed come a time when filialism will be rated above fidelity, when liberality will be preferred to loyalty. But first Christianity must lose its Scriptures, and forget that it has a history. In a sermon preached before the students of Yale College, and afterward published in the

¹ Truths for To-day. Second Series, p. 280.

² Ibid., p. 289.

New Englander (July 1869), the venerable Dr. Woolsey drew a picture of what this emasculated "religion of the future" might be expected to do for mankind. No history to tell, no authority to inculcate, no doctrine to preach, no church to uphold, much that is visionary, naught that is positive and sure, "the world of the future will be doomed, and the religion of the future will turn out a miserable raft, unfit, after the shipwreck of Christianity to carry the hopes and welfare of mankind down the ages."¹

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT CHRIST.

The tragedy of King Lear with the distressed monarch left out would scarcely be tolerated on the stage or between book-covers. A not less absurd idea is that which exists among us as a more or less pronounced endeavor to give us Christianity without its king and hero, a body without its soul. In consequence of this attempt, in some latitudes all too accessible, not a few sad hearts are saying to-day, each for himself, what the woman spake, albeit unwittingly: "They have taken away the Lord."²

Christianity without creed, without revelation, and without authoritative belief is bad enough; Christianity without the institutions of the church, without direction or limitation, without divinely-appointed form and symbol is augmented evil; Christianity without Christ is impotency and disheartenment itself. Said Schelling: "The chief matter of Christianity is Christ himself."³ Leave out the Christ, and what have we left? The grave-clothes, forsooth; and we are asked to be satisfied with these. With these, or with another embodiment clothed upon of these. Hence, Herbert in the *New Republic* speaks of "our modern atheism trying to hide its own nakedness for the benefit of the more prudish part of the public in the cast-off grave-clothes of a Christ, who, whether he be risen or no, is certainly not here."

There are varying phases of this position, some of them

¹ Religion of the Present and Future. Last Discourse.

² John xx. 2.

³ Lorimer's *Isms Old and New*. Sermon on Liberalism.

diverging but slightly from the strictest orthodoxy. The real animus of the movement, wherever discoverable, is a denial of the historical-divine element in Christianity, a disregard of the Christ of the Gospels. However far short of such an allegation some of the disciples of this school of thought may come, the stream of tendency to which they have joined themselves, it may be remotely, is started in the hills of unbelief, and is set toward the sea of an open disavowal of the Son of God.

It need barely be mentioned that the estimation of the work of Christ adopted by a number of our theological brethren, and called "the moral theory" of the atonement, is a decided step in this direction. If Jesus is man, even though he be called divine man, and yet is not God with us, suffering in man's stead as well as in man's behalf, then be this sent-one never so perfect and never so God-like, he is still not Christ, and the Christianity which adopts such a view has put away its Saviour. It may justly be denominated, in its ultimate result at least, Christianity without Christ.

But aside from this wide departure which yet retains much of the truth — too much for us to say it nay till yet its fruits may more fully be seen — there is a more insidious form of detraction from the world's hope and trust in Christ. It began, perhaps, with Chillingworth's famous tract, *Christianity as Old as Creation*, or the Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature. According to the old English essayist, faith in God is identical with faith in the one whom God sends.¹ "Natural and revealed religion," he says, "only differ as to the manner of their being constituted."² Elsewhere he expatiates: "It follows that the *Christian* religion has existed from the Beginning, and that God both *Then* and *Ever since* has continued to give all Mankind sufficient Means to know it; and that 'tis their duty to know, believe, profess, and practise it; so that *Christianity*, tho' the Name is of later Date, must be as old and as extensive as human nature, and as the Law of our Creation, must have been Then im-

¹ Chillingworth, p. 41.

² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

planted in us by God himself.”¹ Why, then, one naturally inquires should Christ die? Were his suffering and death not extravagant expenditure? Such an objection Chillingworth anticipates by saying that Jesus came for the sake of those who could not be saved through the influences of natural religion. He came to “the lost,” that is, as he avers, only a part; the Christ was a concession to the weak. This is Christianity before Christ. Manifestly it describes also a Christianity without Christ.

There were two acknowledgments of Christ during his days in the flesh. One was the partial acknowledgment of the multitude. In answer to the query, “Who is this?” “the multitude said: This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.”² And we may believe it was this same huzzaing people who a few days later preferred Barabbas. Peter’s was the full and blessed confession: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”;³ and Peter was one of those who, tradition says, died for his Lord.

That there should be some to-day who yield to Christ a half-way acquiescence surprises no one. There stands in India Keshub Chunder Sen, the Hindu sage. He accepts of Christianity, and cheerfully gives it a place in his religious mosaic. The principle he follows is to be found in his “Proclamation to the Church Universal.” “Gather ye,” he exclaims, “the wisdom of the East and the West, and accept and assimilate the examples of the saints of all ages.” The effect of this will be to “merge all differences in universal brotherhood”; and hence his exhortation, in the same deliverance: “Beloved brethren, accept our love, and give us yours, and let the East and the West with one heart celebrate the jubilee of the New Dispensation.” And Chunder Sen has learned, what some of our English-speaking brethren know so well to do, to use the terms of a warm devotion to the Christ, yet to withhold supreme allegiance. Jesus is to him but one of the prophets. But a divided fealty is no fealty with Christ; a measured homage is mock homage—

¹ Chillingworth, p. 4.

² Matt. xxi. 10, 11.

³ Matt. xvi. 16.

sacrilege. And so an astute critic¹ is doubtless correct in speaking of the religion of the Indian preacher as wanting, among other items, in two fundamental respects, viz. it affords no effective method for deliverance from the guilt of sin; it does not manifest the power to deliver men from the love of sin. And why? It knows of Christ. Yes; but it knows not the uncompromising Christ of the New Testament.

Yet we can see very little difference between this "Dispensation" which the liberal Chunder Sen is endeavoring to make universal and the residuum of faith which the author of *Fecce Homo*, it would appear, and other apostles of "natural religion," would commend to Christendom. Eliminate the supernatural, and you have a religion very easy to accept. Leave out the healing simples, and you make a cordial pleasant enough to the palate; but it is medicine no longer. Omit the supernatural, omit Christ. Christianity with the Christ left out is the emptiest imposture that ever came petitioning the patronage of men.

Allusion might properly be made here to the "unconscious Christianity" which some exceedingly tender-hearted biographers have discovered in the writings of the heathen philosophers, Marcus Aurelius, Plutarch, Plato, etc. These in their sayings indicate an acquaintance with the Christ spirit, though an apparent ignorance or indifference regarding the Christ man. That the later ones among these were indebted to the new light which had dawned, and unconfessedly so, and that the earlier writers caught something of the prophecy which was in all the air, may be readily admitted. At the same time, a glance into their completed writings and into their private conduct might be sufficient to convince us how utterly vain and inoperative a thing unconscious Christianity actually is. There have been good words said, and good deeds done; yet, alas, as yet history testifies, what the Scripture sadly intimates, that only he that hath seen the Son hath seen the Father, and proveth that knowledge through life, with head and hand and heart.

¹ Joseph Cook, Monday Lectures.

“Spiritual Christianity” is another sort of religious denial that it would not be fitting to pass by without a word. This has not so much come short of Christ, as gone beyond him. It is a highly elaborated scheme of religion, quite esoteric in character, using the historical Christ simply by condescension to “anchor or define” a higher spiritual thought. Its Christ has “no existence or personality” apart from “the divine love and wisdom in union with every soul of man.” Says Henry James, Sr.: “Spiritual Christianity drops out the carnal Jesus, or no longer sees Christ after the flesh. It drops the man born of the Virgin Mary, — six feet high more or less, of an uncomely aspect, bent and seamed with sorrow, — to see henceforth the glorified or divine man, who is the intimate and omnipresent secret of creation. Spiritually viewed, Christ is the inmost and vital selfhood of every individual bosom, bond or free, rich or poor, good or evil, whether such bosom be reflectively conscious of the truth or not.”¹

What sort of Christianity would this be? There is nothing like it in God’s word. There has appeared nothing like it in history. To forget Christ in his human nature, “the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” is to forget the soul of the gospel; to neglect the one “smitten of God and afflicted,”² to get beyond “Christ and him crucified,”³ is to despise the gospel itself, and the “power of God unto salvation.”⁴

There, too, is the Christ of the “Christian consciousness,” so called, — the Christ of “faith.” We should look for this conception in the highly wrought idealism of Dorner and his school. The Christ of the Christian consciousness is longer lived in his redemptive mission than the Christ of Scripture. It is for this very reason that the former may be denominated a usurper. He overshadows and crowds out the Christ of history. There is, says Dorner, both “an historical and an ideal-divine side to Christianity.” Scripture

¹ Henry James’s *Christianity the Logic of Creation*, p. 6. ² Isa. liii. 3, 4.

³ 1 Cor. ii. 2.

⁴ Rom. i. 16.

gives us the first; faith, of equal authority, gives us the latter. It is by a use of faith, or the Christian conscience, that we determine what is Scripture, and what is the essence of Christianity. To use the words of a reviewer, who is at the same time a disciple: "It is not enough for a doctrine that it be apparently contained in Scripture; it needs also to be recognized as Christian by faith, as sooner or later all the contents of revelation will become also part of the life of faith; for both are of God. Faith wrought in the soul by the Holy Ghost is 'the eye for that which is Christian in the Scripture.'"¹ It is this newly-discovered organ which reveals to us, along with other things, the second Christ — a Jesus after death. Let us accept of the disclosures of this so-called infallible eye of faith, and adjust our steps to its dictation. Whither shall we be led? No one can tell. But this we may dismally expect: it will be away from the path in which simple Scripture confidence has been content to run heretofore. We shall go seeking a plan of redemption better suited to our half-sanctified sensibilities, following a religious will-o'-the-wisp. "Only those views should be rejected which prevent faith," is the dictum ascribed to Dörner. Yes, we will accept it, if the positive principle is added, or rather premised: Only those views should be adopted which accredit Scripture. For faith itself is lame and halt without the word.

Neither can we see in the Christ of a highly illuminated consciousness, the Jesus of the death-vision, anything else than a supplanter of the true Christ. *Post mortem* or *inter mortem*, it is other than the Christ of this life, the Jesus of Nazareth; "and in none other is there salvation."² "The essential Christ," they choose to call this; essential *anti-Christ*, it is. For once let man hope in such a fictitious Saviour, and through these waking days of earth he has no ear for that One who said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock."³ Essential Christianity in its various forms is pecu-

¹ Newman Smyth, Dörner on the Future State, p. 12.

² Acts iv. 12, N. V.

³ Rev. iii. 20.

liarly an American growth. Germany has its distinctive phase of unbelief; France, its special species of unfaith; English-speaking liberalism, and especially that of the cis-Atlantic complexion, has its own plainly-marked features. It is quite iconoclastic as regards old doctrines; it is very reverential as respects old names. The work of the present is to bring American latitudinarianism to its logical confession. Then, with its position clearly stated and its ground fairly taken, let it stand or fall. But away with deceitful banners!

For the pure Christianity of the centuries we have no fear. It has two witnesses and wardens on earth—the common acceptance of honest-hearted Christian men and women; the strong, clear endorsement of the simple Scripture. Yea, and the everlasting arms are around about it. It is a Christianity with a creed that the past assumes; a Christianity of the heaven-appointed church that the present with its deed and doctrine enforces; a Christianity of the Christ “that liveth and was dead”;¹ this the future with its increasing fruits will more and more disclose. Men may speculate as to “essential Christianity.” The Christianity that saves will be the Christianity that lasts, and that not a few will continue to believe is the Christianity of the creed, and of the church, and of the Christ.

¹ Rev. i. 18.