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Closing the Book: Julius Wellhausen

DAVID W. BREESE

The Suicide of the West!

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That is the title of a book by James Burnham we would all do well to read. It is the statement also of a condition that Burnham sees as coming to pass in our time. One of the interesting points in Burnham's book is the assertion that the West remembers enough about Christianity to feel guilty for its sins but not enough to recall where forgiveness comes from. He believes there is evidence of a profound deterioration in the most important entity on the face of the earth today, an entity the world cannot do without, the Christian religion.

There are many who now convincingly argue that the Christian religion, as it exists in the world today, is but a shadow of its once proud former self. In examining the recent past to see if this charge is really true, one is forced to consider deeply a near-death blow that came upon the church in the last century, the debilitating influence of which has remained with us until today.

From whence came this near-fatal attack on Christianity? What was its nature, and how do its results continue with us? To discover the answers to these questions, we must once again look east, in the direction of Europe. Many have been a part of the development that so changed Christianity, but none more prominent or more influential than a group that might be called "the European intellectuals."

Europe, we do well to remember, was the home of both the Reformation and the Enlightenment. Those two streams—the secular and the sacred—battled one another through the years of the previous century. They contended on many a campus and many a cloister with their alternative views of the basic questions of life.

Rousseau, with his bizarre notions about nearly everything, was often called the father of the Enlightenment. Belying this dignified title, Rousseau's ideas about the nature of man, the reason for government, and the wellsprings of human destiny became the bizarre set of contradictory notions that, as we have seen, were as responsible as anything else for producing the French Revolution.

Not only so, but the intellectual ferment of the eighteenth century set up a new climate of thought for the nineteenth century. Everything was to be questioned. The truths or the convictions of yesteryear were not to be reviewed, and even the meaning of "meaning"

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was the object of many new questions. In the nineteenth century, the answer to such questions as, What is man? Who is God? What is government? and, Why are we here? changed under the revolutions of that convoluted time. The revolutions also took the form of the mental, the moral, the spiritual, and in a new way the contending forces of thought involved themselves in the battle for the minds of men. As we might well expect, religion itself was not spared. This reshaping of basic concepts produced new, but not necessarily better, thinking about everything.

Until perhaps the middle of the last century, if a person in the West called himself “religious” it meant something. He would normally have been an Orthodox Protestant, an Orthodox Catholic, or an Orthodox Jew. There was a well-accepted general understanding as to what those words meant. The Bible was the authoritative book, the government was to be respected, order in society was to be kept—that’s the way it was.

But that is not the way it was for long, for in the nineteenth century the view was adopted that things in this world are subject to change without notice.

One of the most fundamental of those changes was the one that occurred within that long-standing and sacred entity called the Christian religion. That change was so dramatic, so fundamental, so far-reaching that it can be said that because of it the Christian religion, though retaining its external form, became a fundamentally different thing on the inside. At the close of the century, the churches were still there, the choirs still sang, the babies were still baptized, and the candles continued to burn, but the substance, the core—yes, the life—of Christianity was gone. The idea that God was in the midst of it all and that He had revealed Himself in His inspired, infallible Word—that idea, that life, slipped through the fingers of an unsuspecting church in those days.

What happened? The answer is clear.

Religious liberalism was born. It happened in rather simple fashion. A German rationalist scholar stepped to the fore.

His name was Julius Wellhausen.

Wellhausen was an Old Testament scholar, an intellectual, and a theologian. Wellhausen became the object of great interest and produced a colossal change within the church by presenting to the Christian community a new, and he would say better, way of understanding the Bible.

Before Wellhausen came on the scene the Bible was generally accepted as the revealed, true, and inerrant Word of God. Christians everywhere believed that all of Scripture was given by inspiration of God; it was breathed by the Lord Himself and was therefore

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totally dependable and useful for all matters of doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. In the Bible we had a book we could trust. Man's reason may be incorrect at certain points, but the Bible was infallible.

Wellhausen, along with other German rationalist theologians, turned all of that around. He held instead that human reason was totally dependable and insisted that it was the Bible that could not seriously be trusted. He presented the idea that the Bible, far from being the Word of God, was in fact a sublime collection of human documents. For instance, he insisted that we must not hold that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Rather, this history of early man was given to us by a number of writers, whose views were compiled to form what we now call the Pentateuch. Therefore, the story of Adam and Eve is a lovely myth that can illustrate certain truths, but it surely does not represent the actual story of people whom God called "Adam" and "Eve."

Wellhausen also insisted that the subsequent account of various events given to us in the Old Testament was a product of evolutionary thinking, rather than divine inspiration. Until the advent of Wellhausen and the German rationalists, the answer to the question, Can I trust my Bible? was Yes, a thousand times yes! After that, the answer was Of course not. You can trust human reason, but certainly not the Bible, to be the sole dependable source of divine revelation.

Wellhausen presented his views to the world in *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, calling for a new understanding of the nature of the revelation of God in the Bible. At this point, 1878, a new wind began to blow through the churches, the schools, and the homes of Germany and Europe. It was the cold wind of doubt, distrust of God, and spiritual disquiet, and it has continued to blow from then until now.

That cold wind of change was not uninfluenced by the coming of Darwinism and Marxism. But Wellhausen's book marked a decisive turning point. From that point, the advent of anti-revelational liberalism, Christianity ceased to be a religion based on *divine revelation* but rather became a set of composite religious views anchored in *human reason*. Revelation was doubted and then denied, and rationalism took its place. So fundamental was the change, and so long-standing and deadly were the results, that Wellhausen can be regarded as one of the seminal thinkers who rule the world from their graves.

Julius Wellhausen was born May 17, 1844, in Hamlen, Westphalia, Germany. Following his undergraduate studies, he gave himself to the study of theology at the University of Göttingen. His diligence as a student and his brilliance in comprehending the nature of things brought about his appointment as professor of theology at Greifswald University. His tenure at Greifswald lasted for ten years. During those years, he departed step by step and year by year from the view that the Old Testament and New Testament

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Scriptures came to us by divine inspiration. As a result, he was dismissed from his professorship at Greifswald. He was able, however, to continue his career in teaching theology as an extraordinary professor of Oriental languages at Halley. He later taught at Marberg until 1892, at which time he became professor in a similar post at Göttingen.

During his career as a theological professor, Wellhausen published many books in the German language on the subject of biblical criticism. Over the years, his reputation grew as the leader of a school of thought concerning a method of interpreting the Old Testament Scriptures. This school of thought came to be called *Higher Criticism*. Paul Heinisch, whose *Theology of the Old Testament* was translated into English by William G. Height, gives us insight into the thinking behind the new form of biblical interpretation of which Wellhausen was at the center: "Scholars who will not admit divine revelation seek to explain Old Testament belief in God in terms of evolution. They would have Old Testament monotheism be the resultant from lower stages, or from polytheism, or regard it as a peculiar instinct of the Semites, or as borrowed from neighboring nations."¹

The perceptive reader will note the introduction of the ideas of Darwin on evolution into Old Testament biblical scholarship. There can be no doubt that the biological assumptions Darwin pressed upon our world were soon transposed out into the wider world of thinking on many subjects, including theology.

We can learn more of Wellhausen from Heinisch.

The Wellhausen School maintains that pre-Mosaic religion in Israel had been polydemonism in the form of totemism, animism, ancestor worship, fetishism. Recent investigations in the countries of the ancient Orient, however, have demonstrated that the religions of the Near East as far as can now be ascertained, did not sink to such levels; they were polytheistic in character (star worship, personification of natural forces), and tapered off in a monarchical system. Rather than evolution, there was retrogression, because the number of gods gradually increased. Furthermore, prehistory testifies that primitive man was in no way intellectually inferior to his descendants, and that at least in the realm of art he was quite superior. Ethnology also refutes the theory of religious evolution, for the concepts of the so-called primitive peoples are purer than those of their neighbors already engaged in agriculture and cattle raising. Therefore, we need but give scant attention to those passages which have been cited as containing traces of the above-mentioned "isms."²

¹ Paul Heinisch, *Theology of the Old Testament* (St. Paul, Minn.: Liturgical, 1955), p.34.

² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

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We notice, then, that to enhance his view that the Bible is a collection of interesting documents rather than the Word of God, Wellhausen invented an account of prehistory that has been decisively refuted by later scholarship.

One other passage can be cited from Heinisch's *Theology of the Old Testament* to support this point. Under the heading of "The Notion of God's Justice Before the Period of the Literary Prophets" Heinisch said: "Belief in God's justice, i.e., that He rewards the good and punishes the wicked, dates to the most ancient ages of mankind. It was not, as claimed by the Wellhausen school, first proclaimed by the literary prophets. Our first parents were driven from paradise because they had disobeyed God's command."³

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To understand Wellhausen's impact upon textual criticism, we need to know something of the work of his predecessors and their theories in this area, a view that came to be known as the Documentary Hypothesis of the Pentateuch. This fine-sounding phrase simply means this: at least four authors made a contribution to the first five books of Moses—that is, Moses may have been a contributor, but he did not write the entire Pentateuch.

In 1678, Richard Simon, an oratorian Catholic priest, put forth the hypothesis that the Pentateuch had at least two authors: a Yahwist and an Elohist. That was so. Simon said, because the two writers used the names Jehovah and Elohim for God in the respective portions of Scripture they wrote.

Wellhausen took this idea several steps further. His contribution was to clarify respective authorships by establishing definitive criteria and by chronicling the biblical books, dating them by a central postulate of the science of comparative religion. That postulate was the assertion that cults indigenous to one another evolve in the same manner: from a plurality of gods to a unified deity. This evolution occurs roughly at the same rate, since the cults' geographic proximity provides a social, economic, political, and religious catalyst toward mutual change. From this postulate, Wellhausen concluded that those portions of Scripture that deal with sophisticated doctrine (the one God, the decalogues, the Tabernacle, and so on) may have been inserted at later dates than those passages that were simple narratives. According to Wellhausen, then, some passages, including all of Deuteronomy, were written as a result of an evolutionary process and not by divine revelation.

Wellhausen regarded Israel's history prior to the beginning of the monarchy of Israel as uncertain. Exodus, he thought, was completely historical; prior to that, all was myth.

³ Ibid., p. 86.

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Wellhausen's scholarship became an important contribution to liberalism as it sought to demythologize the Bible by taking God and spiritual things out of it. Through this means, Wellhausen opened the door for subsequent scholars to expand the base of liberalism and add to it their own interpretations of biblical truth. Some found the Bible to be an endless round of allegories rather than necessary historical truth.

The logical consequence of all of this speculation was a defection from sound doctrine by the church and its leadership, as well as a fundamental shift in religious allegiance from Christianity to an empty humanist religion. Although the Bible still remained, because of Wellhausen it was dry pages of variable human theory, rather than the living, breathing revelation of the eternal God.

Instead of the mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, he presented the authors E, J, P, and D—and others. The expression "EJPD" may be familiar to the reader who remembers it as the core of the Documentary Hypothesis. The suggestion of the Wellhausen school was that the first chapter of Genesis used the name of God "Elohim." Subsequent to this, another writer used the name "Jehovah" for God. The book of Leviticus was quite obviously written by a priestly mind, and so this was known as "the Priestly document." Deuteronomy became "the D document," and so the authors of the Pentateuch were summed up under the expression "EJPD." Again, the insistent message was that anybody by the name of Moses was irrelevant, and that in these documents we have a representation of myths that teach us something about God, rather than anything that should be called divine revelation. Revelation disappeared, and reason took its place.

As a consequence, the Christian religion became a complex set of human rationalizations, rather than the revealed truth of God. This defection from the orthodox view of Scripture was the evisceration of Christianity, leaving it a mere religion, without life, without hope, without authority. The initial effect of German rationalization upon a Christian culture was on the schools, churches, and scholarship of Europe. Profoundly affected by the influence of intellectual pride, the Christian leadership of Europe in the colleges, universities, and then in the churches cooperated with the rationalist theologians and themselves became liberal. Quickly, the state churches embraced the rationalistic point of view and lost the concept of divine revelation. Along with this, they lost faith in the Bible.

Even so, religion still continued in Europe. There were still large churches, burning candles, beautiful choirs, lovely stained glass windows, congregations, and sacerdotalism—all of that was still there. What was gone was spiritual life. The Bible was only empty pages written by men who were now dead, rather than the revelation of the living God. European Christianity was destroyed from within while still possessing the external form by which it had been known for centuries. Like a formerly intelligent man

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who has taken leave of his senses and become jibbering and irrational, so was European Christianity. The leaders quoted everything but the Bible and preached everything but the gospel, and reality was gone.

Moreover, it was because of religious liberalism that Europe lost its soul. To this very hour, it is still in search of that soul. It can accurately be said that if Europe does not discover spiritual reality once again, if it does not turn to Christ, the Prince of Life, it may produce the prince that shall come (Daniel 9:26).

An interesting saga followed the spiritual surrender of Europe to religious liberalism. It concerns the United States and the nations of the western hemisphere.

Soon after it came into being, liberalism leaped the ocean and began to be preached in the old-line denominational churches, colleges, and seminaries of the eastern seaboard of the United States. The writings of the intellectuals of Europe argued that the new understanding of the Bible would bring a marvelous, liberating rise of humanism and deliver America from the shackles of the divine laws that were ours by revelation.

The great scholar J. Grescham Machen discussed those days and the coming of liberalism to the Methodists, the Anglicans, and especially the Presbyterians. Machen reminded us in his important work *Christianity and Liberalism* what liberalism truly is. He valiantly held to the truth of the Word of God, announcing to the churches of America that liberalism was a sham. It traveled under the guise of true Christianity but was in fact an entirely different religion. It used the familiar words *God*, *Christ*, *Bible*, and *inspiration* to mean something different from what had been the traditional use of those expressions.

A word from Machen who, more than most, was conscious of the issues of those days, may be appreciated:

In the sphere of religion, in particular, the present time is a time of conflict; the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religion is called "modernism" or "liberalism." Both names are unsatisfactory; the latter, in particular, is question-begging. The movement designated as "liberalism" is regarded as "liberal" only by its friends; to its opponents it seems to involve a narrow ignoring of many relevant facts. And indeed the movement is so various in its manifestations that one may almost despair of finding any common name which will apply to all its forms. But manifold as are the forms in which the movement appears, the root of the movement is one; the many varieties of modern liberal religion are rooted in

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naturalism—that is, in the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection with the origin of Christianity. The word “naturalism” is here used in a sense somewhat different from its philosophical meaning. In this non-philosophical sense it describes with fair accuracy the real root of what is called, by what may turn out to be a degradation of an originally noble word, “liberal” religion.⁴

A further word from Machen:

The rise of this modern naturalistic liberalism has not come by chance, but has been occasioned by important changes which have recently taken place in the conditions of life. The past one hundred years have witnessed the beginning of a new era in human history, which may conceivably be regretted, but certainly cannot be ignored, by the most obstinate conservatism. The change is not something that lies beneath the surface and might be visible only to the discerning eye; on the contrary it forces itself upon the attention of the plain man at a hundred points.⁵

One must pray that the plain man of our time will not see himself forced upon by an alien religion that is really “neo-Christianity.” Each of us, whether scholar or not, must not stand idly by and watch the destruction of our Christian faith.

Machen wrote *Christianity and Liberalism* in 1924, but for many institutions, the old-line denominations, it was too late. The arguments of liberalism had already subverted many educational establishments.

The liberal argument was relatively simple and went generally as follows:

1. We know that we are here because of an evolutionary process. The great scholar Darwin taught us this, and evolution has now become a fact of life for us all.
2. Because we know that the body of man has evolved, must we not also be aware that the brain, the mind of man, has evolved as well, moving from the simple to the complex?

⁴ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), p. 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

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3. Given that the mind of man has evolved, have not his ideas, his concepts, his understanding of things also evolved, that is, matured? (The answer for many a gullible audience, was, of course, in the affirmative.)
4. If the ideas of man have evolved, has not also our idea of God properly evolved? We used to think of God as a vindictive, judgmental, frowning ruler of the universe. Now we know Him as a God of love.
5. Because God is a God of love, we must do away with the archaic concept of original sin. Sin is not a violation of the law of an offended God. God cannot be offended. Therefore, we must see sin as lack of maturity, lack of enlightenment, lack of proper evolution on our part.
6. As a solution to the problems of mankind, then, must we not hold to salvation by education? Man does not need forgiveness and redemption; he needs enlightenment. He has a spark of divinity within him that only needs to be fanned into a new flame.
7. In the pursuit of this program of the enlightenment of man as a way of salvation, we will do away with the old, ugly activities of war, hatred, famine, and the like.

Argument along this line was convincing to many. People gathered in churches and recited, "Every day and in every way, I am getting better and better." All that was needed to transform humanity was encouragement, optimism, and thinking positively about oneself.

What mankind really needed, according to the liberals, was not the "butchershop religion" of salvation by the blood of Christ. Rather, man needed to expand his ideas and concepts about himself and his human possibilities.

Karl Marx was not without his influence in these concepts. He had preached a doctrine that was really only a form of Social Darwinism, promising the improvement of humanity if people would unselfishly sacrifice themselves for the good of the commune. Religious liberalism, therefore, developed an early alliance with the political left. Indeed, conservative Christians who had seen these tides wash upon them in Europe and in England and who now saw the same ideas taking hold in the United States described some of the great denominations of that time as nothing but Communist front organizations.

Happily, we can now look at the record and rejoice in the fact that liberalism did not win the day in the United States, carrying everything before it as it had done in Europe and

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to a significant extent in England. No, indeed, America had a form of frontier Christianity generally characterized by sound doctrine and an allegiance to the infallibility of Scripture. Toward the end of the last century, the preaching of Dwight L. Moody had a profound effect upon the masses of America. Before that, from colonial America forward, one and another earnest expositor of the Word of God had instructed the masses of Americans as to the essential nature of true Christianity and the inspiration of the Bible.

The result was interesting to behold. In the face of the obvious poison of oncoming liberalism, there grew up in America one of the most significant movements in the life of our nation, a movement that came to be called the fundamentalist movement. Across the East, the Midwest, and on to the Pacific, literally thousands of preachers, many of them young, began to take notice of the danger of succumbing to evolutionary, Marxist, Bible-denying liberalism. In tens, then hundreds, then thousands of churches in cities, towns, and villages across America, these earnest preachers of the Word thundered a warning against the Satanic subversion of Christianity. New churches by the thousands were built, new denominations formed, and great tabernacles were attended by sometimes tens of thousands of people in the major cities of the East and the Midwest. Some of these tabernacles still stand today, their dimensions reminiscent of the concern, indeed the faith, of their builders two and three generations ago.

The tenets of faith of the fundamentalist movement were all-important to them. They preached with conviction messages centered around five points of doctrine. These were:

1. *The inerrancy of Scripture.* They believed and preached that “verbal plenary inspiration” is the way God made the Bible. A person could trust each and every word, for the Scripture cannot be broken.
2. *The deity of Christ.* In the mind of the fundamentalists, the liberals had already made blasphemous statements about the Lord Jesus, one statement even calling Him “the illegitimate son of a Jewish girl and a blonde German Roman soldier.” Such egregious liberal statements turned the fundamentalists livid with indignation, which found its way into their powerful preaching.
3. *The finished work of the cross.* Salvation for the fundamentalist depended upon the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and the cross was central to everything. It was their preaching that doubtless made “The Old Rugged Cross” the greatest hymn of that day and perhaps of all time.
4. *Salvation by grace alone.* The fundamentalists detected in liberalism the doctrine of salvation by works, if the liberals preached any doctrine of salvation at all.

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This was anathema to the fundamentalists, who rang the words from their pulpit “by grace are ye saved.”

5. *The premillennial return of Christ.* The doctrine of the special mission of the church as the Body of Christ and its deliverance from the world before the days of the Great Tribulation that was to come upon earth—this was the fundamentalist hope. They looked forward to “that blessed hope and glorious appearing” of Jesus Christ, and preached this message with fervor. Indeed, the preaching of the prophetic Word was one of the great strengths of fundamentalism and was almost never heard from a liberal pulpit.

What were the results of this powerful anti-liberal tide that moved across America? The results, of course, were that liberalism became firmly rooted in America. Its impact was largely in the East. It was less strong in the Midwest and even less than that in the far West. By contrast, the fundamentalist movement grew, producing a powerful program of evangelism, a global thrust of world missions, and a call to holy living that was of signal influence in the United States.

It is now the case that fundamentalism has, to a great extent, been succeeded by evangelicalism. An evangelical is, as they say, the son of a fundamentalist.

Evangelicalism unites around a strongly conservative doctrinal platform. It is, however, generally less willing than the fundamentalists to take to the barricades in defense of its convictions. Within evangelicalism are elements of compromise, some people even expressing a certain willingness to renegotiate with the liberals in order to come to a happier, more mutual understanding. Elements of evangelicalism appear also to retain sympathies with the left of the religious and political spectrums, putting what it calls “social action” virtually on a par with evangelism. Still, evangelicalism remains as a significant counterforce to liberalism.

So it can certainly be said that the rise of liberalism, its thorough conquest of Europe, and its difficulties in the United States constitute one of the most interesting religious sagas of all time. Parts of that story are yet to be told. As we near the end of the twentieth century, Europe has been racked by convulsions that are widespread in Eastern Europe, moving across the Soviet Union, and disturbing the culture more than any suspected was possible. As an onlooking world contemplates the future of Europe, it rejoices but is also somewhat disquieted. It remembers that Europe gave us the bloodiest century in the history of the world. The hills and valleys of this troubled continent are still stained with crimson from more than 50 million lives lost in two world wars and a set of related conflicts.

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Why did these awful calamities come upon Europe? Could it be that, by destroying the core of its own Christianity, it committed a form of social suicide? It is obvious that Europe, despite its vaunted intellectualism, was unable to defend itself against the arguments and subversions of Nazism, Communism, fascism, the world of the occult, and other diseased ideas. External results in the life of any nation are ultimately caused by the presence or absence of a spiritual core made of divine life and spiritual blessing.

Wellhausen and his liberalism destroyed that spiritual life in Europe and nearly succeeded in the spiritual destruction of the United States. To this very day, less than 1 percent of the population of Europe is evangelical Christian. Should America descend to that point, what resources will remain to us by which we can defend ourselves against the deadly tide of our time?

No one can travel through the echoing, empty churches of Europe, and from thence to its large cemeteries without suggesting that there might be a connection between spiritual depression and the life or death of a nation. That kind of spiritual depression, coming from a Christianity that has lost the core of its spiritual reality, could yet impact with its awful consequences upon other lands that still constitute Christian civilization.

The assertion of Scripture that “blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord” is not merely a sweet, devotional remark. It is a political statement and a truth to live by. Wellhausen, having stolen from Christianity its reason for being, continues to rule from his grave. Any thinking person who looks at the origins of religious liberalism, the causes of its wide acceptance, and the fearful results that it has wrought, should certainly join the movement back to the Bible as the inspired Word of God and the Lord of history who stands behind it all, without whose blessing we cannot live.

Machen, and many hundreds of competent scholars from his day until now, have shown us that Christian liberalism is in a sense “a religion within a religion.” It lives within the outer form of true Christianity, plaguing the church like an incubus. It has existed side by side with true Christianity from the time of the rationalistic subversions of the last century until now.

There is another aspect of liberalism that should continue to interest: its insistence in calling itself *Christian*. While denying the inspiration of the Bible, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the true nature of faith, and most of the other cardinal Christian doctrines, the liberals still want conservative Christians to think of them as “one of us.” As a consequence, it is almost a rule of life that the liberals do not leave the visible church.

True even in our time, in the remaining contests (most of the early ones have been lost) between liberals and conservatives, the liberals threaten to depart and go it alone. They

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tell of plans to open new churches, start new seminaries, and the like. But alas, that does not happen. There is a severe strain of dishonesty about this reluctance to leave, this maintaining a pretense of Christianity by those who deny the faith. Great clarity could be wrought by the liberals if they called their religion by another name than Christianity and set up shop on their own. However, in that clarity is divine and confusion is satanic, we cannot expect this course of action by the liberals. Rather, liberalism will only exist by living like a parasite off the healthy body of the Christian church. It will draw its strength from the concessions yet to be made by conservatives. It will labor subversively until it gains a majority in an organization. Then, possessing that majority, it will move to more overt control—and another church, another college, another denomination will be lost forever to the enemies of the cross of Christ.

When the early church Fathers saw the advent of heresy, they were bewildered by the behavior of those who once affirmed but then denied the truth. Being unable to explain this defection on rational grounds, they ascribed heresy to a demonic origin. For them, Satan had subverted those who once stood for the Lord.

Their assessment of the origin of heresy is not wide of the mark when it is applied to liberalism. The Scripture says, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Timothy 4:1).

Defection from the faith has been a perverse tendency at all times. The apostle Paul felt constrained to write to his beloved brethren at Galatia, saying, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel, which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:6–8).

The idea that rationalism is superior to revelation is still with us today. The contest between these polarities grows hotter, suggesting that this contest may be the final battle of human history.⁶

⁶ Breese, D. (1990). *Seven men who rule the world from the grave* (pp. 89–104). Moody Publishers.