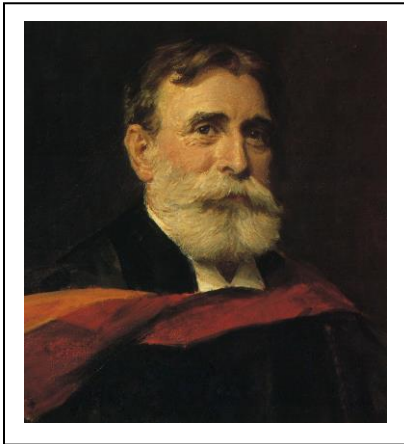


# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## The Essence of Christianity and the Cross of Christ<sup>1</sup>

BENJAMIN BRECKINRIDGE WARFIELD

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In a recent number of *The Harvard Theological Review*,<sup>2</sup> Professor Douglas Clyde Macintosh of the Yale Divinity School outlines in a very interesting manner the religious system to which he gives his adherence. For “substance of doctrine” (to use a form of speech formerly quite familiar at New Haven) this religious system does not differ markedly from what is usually taught in the circles of the so-called “Liberal Theology.” Professor Macintosh has, however, his own way of construing and phrasing the common “Liberal” teaching; and his own way of construing and phrasing it presents a number of features

which invite comment. It is tempting to turn aside to enumerate some of these, and perhaps to offer some remarks upon them. As we must make a selection, however, it seems best to confine ourselves to what appears on the face of it to be the most remarkable thing in Professor Macintosh’s representations. This is his disposition to retain for his religious system the historical name of Christianity, although it utterly repudiates the cross of Christ, and in fact feels itself (in case of need) quite able to get along without even the person of Christ. A “new Christianity,” he is willing, to be sure, to allow that it is—a “new Christianity for which the world is waiting”; and as such he is perhaps something more than willing to separate it from what he varyingly speaks of as “the older Christianity,” “actual Christianity,” “historic Christianity,” “actual, historical Christianity.” He strenuously claims for it, nevertheless, the right to call itself by the name of “Christianity.”

It is, no doubt, a kind of tribute to Christianity—this clinging to its name to designate a religious system which retains so little of what that name has heretofore been used to express. Clearly, the name “Christianity” has become an honorable one under its old connotation, and has acquired secondary implications which do it credit. Mr. G. K.

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<sup>1</sup> From *The Harvard Theological Review*, vii. 1914, pp. 538–594.

<sup>2</sup> vii. 1, January, 1914, pp. 16–46.

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Chesterton has lately called our attention in his serio-comic way to the extent to which such secondary implications have attached themselves to it in the speech of the common people. The apple-women and charwomen, the draymen and dustmen, it seems, are accustomed to employ it in a sense of which we can only say that it lies somewhere between "sane" and "civilized"; which "signifies that which is human, normal, social, and self-respecting." "Where can I get Christian food?" "Where can I find a Christian bed?" These are natural forms of popular speech with which we are all familiar. And, adds Mr. Chesterton, when the modern idealist puts away wine and war and dons peasants' clothes in imitation of Tolstoy, and parts his hair in the middle as he has seen it parted in paintings of Christ, the democracy will most likely pass its scornful judgment on him by simply demanding, "Why can't he dress like a Christian?" By some such immanent logic "Christianity" has apparently come to mean to Professor Macintosh, "rational," "ethical"; and we can observe him, when wishing to express his vigorous rejection of "a particular theory of redemption" — this "particular theory of redemption" being the Christian doctrine of the Atoning Sacrifice of Christ — merely declaring of it roundly that it is "not only not essential to Christianity, because contrary to reason, but moreover essentially unchristian because opposed to the principles of sound morality."<sup>3</sup>

We certainly feel no impulse to deny that whatever is Christian is rational and moral. And we are profoundly interested in such indications as are supplied by the form of Professor Macintosh's declaration, that the general mind has been so thoroughly imbued with this fact that men instinctively reason on the subaudition that when we say, "Christian," we say "rational," "moral." But surely it cannot be necessary to point out that we may not determine the contents of a historical system after this fashion. Shall we deal so with Buddhism or Mohammedanism or Mormonism, with Romanism or Calvinism or the new "Liberalism"? If we find doctrines taught by these systems repugnant to reason and morality, we (so far) reject these systems. We do not forthwith declare that these (alleged) irrational and immoral doctrines can therefore have no place in these systems. We can deal differently with Christianity only on the assumption that Christianity is through and through and in all its parts in complete accordance with right reason and sound morality. The assumption is, no doubt, accordant with fact. But we are not entitled to make it prior to examination. And the first step in this examination cannot be taken until the contents of Christianity have been ascertained.

To argue that a doctrine is not Christian because it is not reasonable or moral, in a word, is to argue in a manifestly vicious circle. It is to confuse the historical question, What is Christianity? with the rational question, What is true? And it can result in nothing other

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<sup>3</sup> P. 18. Cf. p. 35, where this judgment is repeated: "being irrational, it cannot be of the essence of Christianity"; not being "rigidly moral," "it must be pronounced essentially unchristian."

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than replacing historical Christianity by a “rational” system of our own, or, to phrase it in Mr. Chesterton’s language, in “turning the Christians into a new sect, with new doctrines hitherto unknown to Christendom.” Nietzsche, Mr. Chesterton reminds us, insisted that there never was but one Christian, and He was crucified; the improvement now offered, Mr. Chesterton hints, may consist in suggesting that perhaps even that single Christian was not a “Christian.” Certainly, the “Christianity” which is constructed on the principle, not that it consists in the religion founded by Jesus Christ and practised ever since by His followers, taught of Him, but that it shall contain only what commends itself to our ideas of “reason” and accords with our ideas of “morality” runs a considerable risk of becoming a Christianity which stands out of all relation to Christ and to whatever has heretofore passed for Christianity. It offers us, in point of fact, merely a Rationalistic system—taking the term in its broader historical and not in its narrow philosophical significance.

Clearly, Christianity being a historical religion, its content can be determined only on historical grounds. The matter scarcely requires arguing; and we may be permitted, perhaps, at this point to content ourselves with simply referring to the very lucid statement of its elements made by H. H. Wendt in the opening pages of his “System of Christian Doctrine,” as also in an earlier pamphlet devoted to the subject. “The Christian religion,” remarks Wendt with admirable point<sup>4</sup>—

“is a historically given religion. We cannot by an ideal construction or by deduction from a general notion of religion, determine what constitutes its genuine essence. We must rather seek to determine this essence by such an objective historical examination as we should give it were we dealing with the determination of the essence of some other historical religion.”

Again<sup>5</sup>:

“In a scientific presentation of Christian doctrine, as we have already seen, one side of its criticism and positive justification must be directed to the proof that the doctrine presented is also genuinely Christian doctrine. How is this proof to be made? The recognition of the fact that Christianity is an entity which is historically given, and is not to be ideally constructed, is of fundamental importance for answering this question.... The question of the genuine Christianity of the Christian doctrine to be presented is, as a matter of principle, not to be confused with the question of the truth and the value of this doctrine. From our incidental conviction of the truth and indispensableness of Christianity there easily arises the

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<sup>4</sup> “Die Norm des echten Christentums,” 1893, p. 3; cf. p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> “System der christlichen Lehre,” i. 1906, pp. 23–24; cf. pp. 3ff., 42 ff.

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assumption that a religious conception, if it is true and valuable, must also be genuinely Christian. But from the scientific standpoint it is self-evident that it must first be proved what conceptions are genuinely Christian, and only then the truth of these Christian conceptions be tested. Even when a capacity for ever-advancing development is recognized for Christianity and for Christian doctrine, the question of the authentic Christianity of any conception presented as Christian remains at bottom a historical one. For the question of what constitutes the ground-type of Christianity and of Christian doctrine, by which it is to be determined whether anything can still pass as Christian or not, is just as certainly to be answered historically as, for example, the question of what belongs to the ground-type of the Buddhist religion and doctrine."

There is really no mystery about the matter. The process by which it is determined what is a truly Christian doctrine (something very different from what is a true Christian doctrine), or what the Christian religion really is, differs in principle in no respect from the process by which we determine what is an old Hellenic doctrine or what Ritschlism really teaches, what is the nature of Islam or what is the essence of the Pragmatic philosophy. In the very nature of the case such questions are purely historical and purely objective in their character, and the answers to them are not in the least advanced by any judgments we may pass upon the rationality or morality of the several doctrines or systems which come under our survey.

The justification which Professor Macintosh offers for permitting his subjective judgments of rationality and ethical value to intrude into the determination of the purely objective question of "What is Christianity?" he draws from a theory, which he very earnestly advocates, of the proper method of procedure in determining "the essence" of "any historical *quantum*." This theory might well have been derived, by the simple process of transferring it to historical quantities, from the metaphysical doctrine of "essence" propounded of late by our Pragmatic philosophers. Out of the general Pragmatic doctrine that "reality must be defined in terms of experience"<sup>6</sup>—or, as even more sharply expressed, that "reality is experience"<sup>7</sup>—these thinkers have evolved the notion that the "essence" of anything is not what it is, but what it is, not merely to but for me; not that which makes the thing precisely the thing it is, but that in the thing, whatever it may be, which I find needful for the realization of a purpose of my own. "The essence of a thing," says William James,<sup>8</sup> "is that one of its properties which is so *important for my interests* that, in comparison with it, I may neglect the rest." Applying this astonishing doctrine to historical entities, and especially to Christianity, which is the historical entity

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<sup>6</sup> John Dewey, "Studies in Logical Theory," p. x.

<sup>7</sup> F. C. S. Schiller, "Studies in Humanism," p. 463.

<sup>8</sup> "Text-Book of Psychology," 1892, p. 357; cf. "The Principles of Psychology, 1908," ii. p. 333.

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in which at the moment he is interested, Professor Macintosh feels able to argue that the essence of Christianity is not that in Christianity which makes it the particular thing which we call Christianity, but that in Christianity which he finds it desirable to preserve in constructing what he considers the ideal religion. Since the essence, as he tells us with the emphasis of italics, “is necessarily *what is essential for a purpose,*” and the right purpose is, of course, the realization of the true ideal, the essence of the Christian religion is necessarily “that in the totality of the religious phenomena of Christianity which is a necessary factor in the realization of the true ideal for humanity, and of the true ideal for human religion in particular”; or, varying the language slightly without altering the sense, “whatever in actual phenomenal Christianity is necessary for the realization of the true ideal of human spiritual life in general and of human religion in particular.”

The odd thing is that Professor Macintosh does not betray any consciousness of the outstanding fact that, in the process of his reasoning, he has transmuted the question which he started out to discuss, namely, What is essential to the retention of Christianity? into the fundamentally different one, in which he is himself perhaps more deeply interested, of What in Christianity is it essential that we retain?—namely in order that we may build up “the ideal religion.” Unless we judge it to be still odder that he does not seem to have considered what would be the effect of the application of this method of determining the essence of a religious system to other religions besides Christianity—although he expressly presents it broadly as the proper method of determining “the essence of the Christian religion, or, for that matter, the essence of any historical *quantum.*” If the discovery “in the totality of the religious phenomena of Christianity” of something which we judge “necessary for the realization of the true ideal of human spiritual life in general and of human religion in particular” justifies our calling that particular thing the “essence of Christianity” and ourselves, on the strength of our retention of it, “Christians”; would not the discovery of such an element in “the totality of the religious phenomena” of, say, Mormonism, equally justify us in declaring that element the “essence” of Mormonism and ourselves Mormons on the strength of our retention of it in our ideal religion? And surely we cannot doubt that Mormonism does possess in its composite system, however deeply buried beneath its own *bizarrerries*, some truly religious and even some truly Christian elements—from which, indeed, we may believe, it derives whatever vitality it exhibits as a religious system; and certainly we cannot avoid retaining these elements as we build up our ideal religion. Or, if we seem to go too far afield in adducing Mormonism as an example, let us think for a moment of that active Christian sect known as the Seventh-Day Adventists. Undoubtedly, in the “totality of the religious phenomena” exhibited in the life of the members of this sect, there are many elements which must abide in any ideal system of religion. Do these elements therefore constitute the “essence” of Seventh-Day Adventism? And does our



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retention of them in our ideal construction justify our calling ourselves Seventh-Day Adventists?

It may not be an unpleasing thought to Professor Macintosh that, discerning something of value in each of the great religious movements which have stirred the waters of humanity, and preserving for the purposes of his ideal religion all that he sees in them of value, he may conceive himself to have therefore embraced “the essence” of each of them in turn, and to have thus acquired the right to claim for himself the name of every one of them. It may please him thus to think of himself as at once a Fetishist and a Shamanist, a Brahmanist and a Buddhist, a Confucian and a Mussulman, as well as a Jew and a Christian; perhaps also at once a Romanist and a Protestant, a Pelagian and an Augustinian, an Arminian and a Calvinist—for surely there is *something* of permanent value even in Calvinism, and if so, that is its “essence,” and he who holds to the “essence” of Calvinism is surely a Calvinist. We have no wish to deny that Professor Macintosh’s claim upon the one name may be as sound as upon another. But we confess to a doubt of the value of so diffused a claim upon names representing movements historically so distinct. And we confess to something more than a doubt of the validity of the method of determining “the essence” of historical entities which may lead to results so very embarrassing.

It must be admitted that the notion of “essence” has not always been dealt with lucidly by the metaphysicians. Cicero, indeed, who introduced the term into the Latin language, defined it very sensibly as “the whole of that by which a thing is, and is what it is”—a definition happily echoed in Locke’s “the very being of anything, whereby it is what it is.” And that essentially this remains the meaning of the term until today in general philosophical usage, we may be assured by Rudolf Eisler’s definition of it. “Essence (οὐσία, *essentia*),” says he,<sup>9</sup> “is, ontologically speaking, that which constitutes the reality (Selbst-Sein) of a thing, its most proper, abiding nature, in distinction from its time-and-space-conditioned, changeable existence.” Even an activist like the late Borden P. Bowne<sup>10</sup> without hesitation speaks in the same sense of “essence” as just “the nature of a thing”: “We believe that everything is what it is because of its nature, and that things differ because they have different natures.... The nature of a thing expresses the thing’s real essence; and we hold that we have no true knowledge of the thing until we grasp its nature.” To him, of course, as Being is just action, and a thing as conceived just a “conceived formula of action,” the essence of a thing consists in a law “which gives both its coexistent and its sequent manifestations.” But this concerns only his ontology. Under its guidance he writes:

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<sup>9</sup> “Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe,”<sup>3</sup> 1910, iii. p. 1774.

<sup>10</sup> “Metaphysics,” 1882, pp. 59–60.

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“Now this rule or law which determines the form and sequence of a thing’s activities, represents to our thought the nature of a thing, or expresses its true essence. It is in this law that the definiteness of a thing is to be found; and it is under this general form of a law determining the form and sequence of activity that we must think of the nature of the thing.” “In the metaphysical sense, the nature of a thing is that law of activity whereby it is not merely a member of a class, but also, and primarily, itself in distinction from all other things.” “When then we speak of the nature of a thing under the form of a law, we regard this law as entirely specific and individual and not as universal. The nature has the form of a law but applies only to the single case.”

In one word, to Bowne too, the “essence” means just the specific quality of a thing.

Nevertheless already a half-century ago James McCosh could write of “essence”: “It is a very mystical word, and a whole aggregate of foolish speculation has clustered round it.”<sup>11</sup> He had perhaps been reading the section on “essence” in Hegel’s “Phaenomenologie,” without the assistance of William Wallace. “Still,” he adds hopefully, “it may have a meaning.” Whether he could have spoken so hopefully, had he had the discussions of our Twentieth-century Pragmatists before him, we can only conjecture. Certainly they have done what they could to confuse the matter, and it may be a fair question whether under their definitions the term “essence” retains any meaning at all. What is called its “essence” certainly ceases to have any significance for the object whose “essence” it is said to be; and, being transmuted into merely whatever the changing observer in his changing moods may find from time to time in an object utilizable for his varying purposes, has whatever significance it may retain rather for him than for it. We observe in the mean time that the Pragmatists have great difficulty in carrying their discussions of “essence” through consistently on these lines. The real meaning of the term is continually making itself felt, and advertising to the reader the artificiality of the construction which is being commended to him.

William James’s discussion is particularly instructive in this respect.<sup>12</sup> Every object, he explains, has an indefinite number of attributes. But we, being finite, cannot attend to all these attributes at once. We must, by the necessity of the case, make a selection. And we shall inevitably make our selection according to our interests. The attribute to which we attend under the influence of an interest at the moment governing our attention, is not more “essential” to the object than any other attribute to which another observer, led by another interest, or ourselves at another time, governed by another interest, may attend. The object “is really *all* that it is” — a statement which seems to assure us that the essence

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<sup>11</sup> “The Intuitions of the Mind,”<sup>2</sup> 1869, p. 152.

<sup>12</sup> “The Principles of Psychology,” 1908, ii. pp. 332 ff.

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of an object is “really” all that by virtue of which it is what it is, and that is very much the old definition of “essence.” But *we* must “attack it piecemeal, ignoring the solid fulness in which the elements of Nature exist, and stringing one after another of them together in a serial way, to suit our little interests as they change from hour to hour.” Thus the “essence” of the object may seem to us to be a different attribute at each successive moment. And that leads James to declare with the emphasis of underscoring: “*There is no property absolutely essential to any one thing. The same property which figures as the essence of a thing on one occasion becomes a very unessential feature upon another.*” This, however, can only mean that there is no single property among the many which belong to the object “really” which is “absolutely,” that is to say, always and in every contingency, essential—to us, for our interests and purposes. Our interests change, and with the change of interest the quality of the object to which we attend also changes. This is not to say, of course, that there are no properties of an object which are absolutely, that is indispensably, essential—to it, that is to say to the preservation of its integrity as the very thing that it is. That this cannot be said is already made plain when it is declared that the object “is really all that it is.” That little word “really” has confounded all of James’s reasoning. And so he proceeds to tell us that “the elements of Nature exist” “in solid fulness”; and that it is only our partial, piecemeal dealing with them that hides this fact from us from time to time. Things, then, have “really” a “solid fulness” of properties by virtue of which they are objectively what they are; and this fact cannot be altered, though it may be obscured, by our habit—it may be a necessary habit—of attending to this “solid fulness” of elements one by one, and emphasizing each as it may meet a transient (or permanent) interest of our own. What things “really” are—that is what is essential *to them*; what in them meets an interest of ours (transient or permanent)—that is what we find essential *for our* (transient or permanent) purposes.

It is quite proper for James to say, therefore, that those properties which we are accustomed to select out of an object in accordance with “our usual purpose,” “characterize us more than they characterize the thing.” They are, no doubt, properties of the thing, and so far characterize it. But they need not be the particular properties of the thing which are most characteristic of it and form its specific quality. They are only the particular qualities of the thing by virtue of which it is most usually serviceable for us, and which therefore most constantly attract our attention. It is not implied, therefore, that there are no qualities which particularly characterize the thing, make it the thing it is, and so constitute its “essence.” It is only recognized that we do not always, or commonly, select these properties for contemplation. When we are making selections of properties in accordance with our interests, we rather commonly, or always, select elements in the object which, because they are essential to *our* purposes, characterize *us* rather than the object. It is passing strange, therefore, that James should now go on to define the “essence of a thing,” as “that one of its properties which is so *important for my*



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*interests* that in comparison with it I may neglect the rest." This, he has told us, is not "really" "the *essence* of the thing"; *that* lies elsewhere, and *this* is only the element in the thing which is essential to *my purpose*—which surely is a very different matter; unless, indeed, our particular purpose at the moment happens to be to determine what the "essence of the thing" is, in which case we may perhaps select out the particular properties which, constituting the essence of the thing, meet also our present purpose.

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It is, of course, the Pragmatic point of view which, intruding here so many years before its formal announcement, forces this logical saltation upon James. From this point of view, he despises all questions of "inner essence"<sup>13</sup> as mere hairsplitting abstractions, and insists that "we carve out everything" "to suit our human purposes."<sup>14</sup> Accordingly he suddenly asserts here, without any justification in the preceding discussion, that "the only meaning of essence is teleological." A thing *is* just what it is good for, and, let us add, just what it is good for to me—and now. He has given us no reason, however, to believe that this is the case. He has only given us reason to believe that our interest in things is apt to be focussed on whatever we find serviceable to us, for the moment or permanently. That this is not all that the things are, however, he tells us himself, when he tells us not only that "the properties which are important vary from man to man and from hour to hour" in accordance with the purposes which dominate observation, but in express words that "the reality overflows these purposes at every pore." Surely it cannot be pretended that the properties which constitute the "concrete fact" "vary from man to man and from hour to hour," and are never more than what meets our purposes, which the reality that they constitute "overflows at every pore." And surely it is legitimate to inquire what then these properties are which enter into and constitute this "concrete fact," from the richness of which men may select what suits their purposes from time to time, but which in its richness "overflows" these purposes "at every pore." On the face of it this is the problem of "the essence" of the "concrete fact" in question.

Except that it seems to show a somewhat more formal respect for objectivity, F. C. S. Schiller's definition of "essence"<sup>15</sup> does not differ essentially from James's. He speaks, of course, from his activist standpoint, to which "the activity is the substance; a thing *is* only in so far as it is active." "So it is the activity," he explains, "which *makes* both the 'essence' and the 'accidents,' both of which are as it were 'precipitated' from the same process of active functioning." "The 'essence,' " therefore, he proceeds, "is merely such aspects of the whole behavior as are selected from among the rest by reason either of their relative permanence or of their importance for our purposes." He is recognizing nothing but activities. Some of these "activities" are "relatively" more permanent than others.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. "Pragmatism," 1907, p. 107.

<sup>14</sup> "Pragmatism," pp. 251 ff.

<sup>15</sup> "Humanism" (1903),<sup>2</sup> 1912, p. 225.

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Some of them are more important for us than others. We are to call either the one or the other of these sets of “activities” the “essence” of the object under consideration. Which? The former give us an objective criterion; the latter, a subjective one. Both are activities; but the latter only are conceived Pragmatically. If the latter be employed as our criterion, we are fully on William James’s ground. If the former, we seem to be as fully off of it; we seem to be allowing that the “essence” of a thing is what makes it persistently (at least “relatively”) the thing that it is, not what we discover in it serviceable to us—which is what we shall have if the latter criterion be employed.

How the two criteria—objective and subjective—can be conciliated, does not appear. Schiller does indeed tell us that they “are, of course, convergent.” And he explains this by remarking that “a permanent aspect is naturally one which it is important for us to take into account, while an important aspect is naturally one which we try to render permanent.” We shall have to take his word for both declaration and explanation. An aspect taken into account because it is permanent is surely one selected on grounds relative to the object; it tells us what the object itself is, or, if we prefer that mode of statement, how the object itself behaves. And an aspect taken into account because it is important for us (we assume that it is not significant that the “for us” has dropped out of the second clause) is one selected on grounds relative to us, to “our purposes”; it tells us what we find in the object (or its behavior) which is serviceable to us. How these two criteria can be said to “converge” passes our comprehension—unless indeed we are to think circularly as well as activistically, and conceive that motions in diametrically opposite directions will meet—on the other side of the circle. It must be admitted that Schiller’s statement is not free from suggestions of such a circular movement. If an aspect of the behavior of an object under our contemplation is to be held “important for us” because it is permanent, one would think that its observed permanence would precede our interest and determine it; and that, in such a case, we could scarcely say that the “essence” of the object, identified with this permanent aspect of its behavior, is determined by our interest. And yet we are immediately told that we can render permanent an aspect of the behavior of such an object in which we chance to be interested; or at least that we may try to do so, presumably hopefully. One would like to know how he is to go about trying to make permanent an aspect of the behavior of an object under his observation; and if we can render an aspect of it permanent because it is important for us that it should be so, why cannot we create this aspect for ourselves in the first instance, that it may serve our purposes?

We may take it that Schiller’s disjunctive is merely another illustration of the difficulty of carrying out the programme of the subjectivation of the “essence,” and that it therefore bears witness only to the fact that the “essence” of an object cannot really be conceived merely as that in it which is essential for me— which is of importance for my purposes—

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but will continue to present itself as that in the object which is essential for it—which is necessary to its integrity, to its remaining the precise thing it is. That is to say, those aspects of the whole behavior of an object which are permanent constitute its “essence,” and that quite independently of their “importance for us.” It is important, of course, that we should take cognizance of them and adjust our behavior to them, for they constitute reality, that actual environment upon which we react. Hardness, for example, does not enter into the essence of a stone-wall because it serves an interest of ours and can be made serviceable to us. It enters into its essence because it is “there,” quite independently of its serving an interest of ours; and it is important for us to recognize that it is “there” because the recognition of realities serves interests of ours, and realities have a very unpleasant fashion of revenging themselves on those who do not recognize them. It is the hardness of the stone-wall which determines our interests, not our interests which determine its hardness: and it would be very difficult to understand how we should go about rendering its hardness permanent, because we found it important for us. We may discover many good reasons, on the other hand, why it would be well for us to render permanent our recognition that a stone-wall is hard. The assumption of an “external world” which ordinary experience makes, as Schiller himself allows, “works splendidly.”<sup>16</sup>

It is upon some such flimsy philosophical basis that Professor Macintosh, transferring the matter to the sphere of historical entities, develops his method of determining the “essence” of historical movements. It must be allowed that, in applying to this new class of objects the principles laid down by the metaphysicians, he proceeds with a consistency which fairly puts the metaphysicians to the blush. He is seeking what he indifferently speaks of as a valid “definition,” “the real nature,” the “essence” of the Christian religion. In order to obtain this, he lays down with great firmness and with the emphasis of italics the general proposition that “the essence,” that is, the essence of any “historical *quantum*,” “is necessarily *what is essential for a purpose*.” The “unrelieved subjectivity” of this proposition is obvious, and he seeks to mitigate it, but only by insisting that “the controlling purpose” which is to determine the essence of an object “must be the right purpose in the given situation.” He explains this to mean that it must be “the purpose to realize what under the circumstances is the true ideal.” Thus we obtain what he regards as two “normative principles” which it is necessary to observe in extracting “the essence” from any historical entity. They are: “in the first place, the essence must be in the total actuality”; “and in the second place, the controlling purpose must be the right purpose.” “In short,” we read (again in the emphasis of italics), “*the essence is whatever is both present in the actual and demanded by the ideal.*”

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<sup>16</sup> “Studies in Humanism,” p. 459.

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Why the essence of any historical entity must be something found not only in it but also in our ideal, is not made clear to us, and we profess ourselves unable to divine. We appear only to be given a formula by means of which we may get rid of the historical entity and substitute for it our own ideal; we are to recognize as the essence of the historical entity nothing that we do not find in our ideal. Shall Protestant investigators then declare that the essence of Romanism must be identified with what is common to Romanism and their ideals? Or Rationalistic investigators declare that the essence of Protestantism is what is common to Protestantism and their ideals? In that case Romanism is merely defined as really Protestantism, and Protestantism as really Rationalism. The matter is not relieved by the expedient taken to guard against error. "To guarantee that what is taken as essential is the real essence," we read, "what is taken as the ideal must be the true ideal." What is to guarantee that what is taken as the ideal is the true ideal, we are not told here, but afterwards it is intimated that "what this true ideal is, must be determined by a critical philosophy of values," which leaves us in great concern to know whose "critical philosophy of values" is to have this decisive function committed to it.

A third normative principle is now, however, invoked. What is under these rules extracted as the essence of any historical entity must, we are told, "be able to maintain itself after it has been selected and separated from all that is unessential"—that is, we infer, from all that to the investigator seeking the "true ideal" seems harmful to that ideal. Accordingly, "in addition to being the highest common factor of the actual and the ideal, *the essence must be vital enough to persist in separation from all that must be eliminated.*" "The essence of the actual, then"—we reach now the final summing up—"is that element in the actual whose continued existence is demanded by the true ideal, and which can retain its actuality and vitality after the elimination of all objectionable elements from the actual at the demand of that same ideal."

The process of extracting the essence of any historical entity which is commended to us by Professor Macintosh is now before us. It is in brief the following. First, by "a critical philosophy of values," determine independently for yourself what is the true ideal. Next, go to the historical entity in question with this "true ideal" in your hand, and select from this historical entity whatever seems to you fitted to promote the "true ideal." This is "the essence" of that historical entity—provided only that when you discard all in it which is not in your judgment fitted to promote your "true ideal," enough is left to call the essence of anything. If not enough is left, then say that that entity has no "good essence" and discard it *in toto*. Clearly, in this process, the historical entity is nothing; our ideal is everything. We have simply sunk the historical entity in our ideal; and it almost has the look of a concession that it is still allowed that what is called its essence shall actually be found in the historical entity.

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Applying this method of extracting the essence of historical entities to the Christian religion, Professor Macintosh has naturally no difficulty in moulding Christianity to his own taste. He tells us that the result reached is that “the Christian religion” must be in essence whatever in actual phenomenal Christianity is necessary for the realization of the true ideal of human spiritual life in general and of human religion in particular.” Obviously, then, the contents of “the Christian religion” are not determined by the contents of “actual phenomenal Christianity”—and by this must be understood not merely the Christianity which happens to be actual at any one moment, but any and all Christianity which has ever been actual in the course of its entire history—but by the contents of “the true ideal of human spiritual life in general and of human religion in particular.” The “true ideal” of religion—that is, of course, the investigator’s ideal of what religion ought to be, determined, no doubt, by his “critical philosophy of values”—is thus simply substituted for Christianity, and given its name. The only connection which this ideal can claim with “actual phenomenal Christianity”—that is, any Christianity which has ever actually existed—will be dependent on the presence in “actual phenomenal Christianity” of elements which are in harmony with it and may, therefore, be preserved. Whatever in “actual phenomenal Christianity” agrees with “the true ideal” of religion is preserved; the rest is discarded; and the total ideal religion,—inclusive, of course, of the elements thus “taken over” from “actual phenomenal religion” because already present in the ideal religion, and also, of course, of all else that is contained in the ideal religion which was not present in “actual phenomenal Christianity,”—receives the name of “the Christian religion.” The process is exceedingly simple. “Our religion” is certainly Christianity, because *real* Christianity is, of course, just “our religion.” Everything else in “actual phenomenal Christianity” is to be discarded because it is not included in “our religion.”

The particular religion to which, under the name of “the ideal religion,” Professor Macintosh reduces Christianity by this process, proves, as has been already intimated, to be indistinguishable from that which is generally professed in the circles of so-called “Liberal Christianity.” How he arrives at the conviction that this is “the ideal religion” and therefore essential Christianity, he does not fully explain to us. It emerges as such in his pages as the culmination of an exposition of the fundamentally moral character of Christianity as he conceives it—a moral character attributed to his “Christianity” because it is an element “common to actual Christianity and to ideal religion.” If we understand Professor Macintosh at this point, he defines Christianity on this ground as the “religion of moral redemption,” and then distinguishes it from other religions of moral redemption by the particular quality of the morality of which the redemption wrought by it consists. Christianity, he says, “is the religion whose ‘miracle’ or ‘revelation’ consists in the



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experience of *moral* 'salvation' or 'redemption.' "<sup>17</sup> To the objection that "a moral element is to be found in other historical religions also," he seems to reply that this need not invalidate the claim of Christianity to be the moral religion by way of eminence—if, that is, the quality of the morality brought by it to its votaries may be shown to be superior to that offered by other moral religions. This he affirms to be the fact, and he fixes on the term "Christlike" to express the specific quality of specifically Christian morality. Accumulating emphasis upon this quality he declares, then, that "Christianity is the religion of deliverance from unchristlikeness to a Christlike morality, through a Christlike attitude towards a Christlike superhuman reality." Repeating this with further elaboration, he declares again: "There is good ground to suppose, then, we take it, that redemption from unchristlikeness to a Christlike morality and ultimately to a Christlike fellowship with God, accomplished in the life of men by the activity of the Christlike God in response to a Christlike dependence and filial attitude on the part of the individual, is the essence of the Christian religion."

It is important to observe that these statements contain much more than was prepared for by the preceding argument. We have travelled very rapidly and very far and have arrived very unexpectedly at a very definite dogmatic result. Not only is the character of the morality involved in the Christian "redemption" defined as "Christlike" without sufficient justification or even explanation, so that we get a particular standard of morality, and one, be it observed, quite external to the subjects of religion, and wholly dependent on the truth of history for its validity and its very meaning. But we also have a particular manner—and that a very astonishing manner—in which the moral revolution asserted to take place in the subjects of the Christian religion, is wrought, made, without any, we do not say merely justification, but preparation in the preceding discussion, a part of the definition of that religion. It is wrought, we are now suddenly told, "through a Christlike attitude towards a Christlike superhuman reality"; "by the activity of the Christlike God in response to a Christlike dependence and filial attitude on the part of the individual." The essence of the Christian religion is thus made to consist not merely in the fact that it brings a moral redemption, and not merely in the specific character of the morality which it brings, but still further in the particular manner in which this moral redemption is produced. We do not stop now to press the question of what is involved with respect to the relation of Christianity to the historic Christ in the definition of this morality—and everything else significantly Christian—as "Christlike." We merely ask the warrant for the particular manner in which the moral revolution which is declared to be the essence of Christianity is asserted to be accomplished. Professor Macintosh gives us none. At a later point, it is true, we are told that this is involved in "the essence of the Christian gospel," and that this is derived from "the religious example of Jesus." "The

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<sup>17</sup> The echoes of Rudolf Eucken's language may be noted, but we do not stop to advert to the matter.

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Christian evangel," we read, "is the gospel of the power of God manifesting itself in a Christlike morality on condition of the cultivation of a life of Christlike religious devotion. It is the gospel of the universal possibility of redemption as a human religious experience, through following the religious example of Jesus, taking the attitude of sonship towards the 'God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.' " We have difficulty, however, in accepting mere repetition as justification. And we observe that Professor Macintosh can only profess in any case to be "practically certain" that the attitude here declared to be of the essence of Christianity on the ground that it was the attitude of Jesus, was really "the religious attitude of Jesus"; and indeed contends strenuously that it is not absolutely necessary for the validation of his "Christianity," thus made to hang entirely on the example of Jesus, that there ever should have been any Jesus to set this example. Nor have we discovered any reason given by him justifying the belief that if there was a Jesus and this was His attitude to God, it is capable of being imitated by us; or indeed whether, if it were imitable by us, it would have the effects asserted for it. The upshot of it all is merely that it is dogmatically declared to us, with no reasons rendered, that the ordinary "Liberal" construction of Christianity is the only true Christianity, and its fundamental postulates constitute "the essence of Christianity." On the face of it this declaration rests on nothing more solid than that the ordinary "Liberal" construction of Christianity seems to Professor Macintosh the "ideal religion," and it pleases him to call what he thinks the "ideal religion," "Christianity."

Even Adolf Harnack did better than that. It is quite true, as Alfred Loisy points out,<sup>18</sup> that Harnack does not speak really as a historian but as a dogmatician, in those brilliant lectures in which he advocates his personal religious opinions<sup>19</sup> under the name of "the essence of Christianity," and which, Ernst Troeltsch tells us,<sup>20</sup> have become "to a certain degree the Symbolical Book of all those who follow the historical tendency in theology." But he had at least the grace to profess to derive his idea of what Christianity is from historical Christianity, and his argument at least formally runs, that this and nothing else is the essence of the Christianity which was launched into the world by Jesus and has been lived by His followers. He tells us accordingly<sup>21</sup> that it is "a purely historical

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<sup>18</sup> "L'Évangile et l'Église,"<sup>3</sup> 1904, pp. ix f.: "The definition of Christianity according to Harnack—is it that of a historian or only that of a theologian who takes in history what suits his theology? The theory which is expounded in the lectures on "The Essence of Christianity" is the same as that which dominates the learned "History of Dogmas" which the same author has published. But has he really deduced it from history, or has he rather only interpreted history according to the theory?"

<sup>19</sup> Loisy, p. v, justly calls the "Wesen des Christentums," "a profession of personal faith in the form of a historical sketch."

<sup>20</sup> *Die Christliche Welt*, xvii. (1903) 19, col. 444.

<sup>21</sup> "Das Wesen des Christentums," 1900, 56–60 thousand, 1908, Lect. 1. E. T. "What is Christianity?" 1901, pp. 7, 8, 10, 11, 15.

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question" which he undertakes, and that therefore it is to be dealt with absolutely objectively; we are simply to ask what Christianity is without regard to what "position the individual who examines it may take up in regard to it, or whether in his own life he values it or not." His historical point of view is so marked, indeed, that he even declares that though we must start from "Jesus Christ and His Gospel," it is impossible to get "a complete answer to the question, What is Christianity?" "so long as we are restricted to Jesus Christ's teaching alone"; we must look upon Him merely as the root out of which the tree of Christianity has grown. "We cannot form any right estimate of the Christian religion unless we take our stand upon a comprehensive induction which shall cover all the facts of its history." "What is common to all the forms which it has taken, corrected by reference to the Gospel, and, conversely, the chief features of the Gospel, corrected by reference to history, will, we may be allowed to hope, bring us to the kernel of the matter."

We could not easily have fairer historical professions. The pity is that Harnack's actual procedure corresponds so ill with them. He certainly does not approach his task in a purely historical spirit. He brings with him to the investigation of the teaching of Jesus, for example, a whole body of presuppositions, under the influence of which he forces his material into preconceived moulds. And he certainly does not derive his conception of Christianity from an induction from its entire phenomenal manifestation; he simply makes his reconstructed version of Jesus' Christianity the sole Christianity which he will recognize. Troeltsch<sup>22</sup> accordingly is compelled to pronounce Harnack's critics right when they declare that "his *Wesen* is no purely empirical-inductive work, but includes in it strong religio-philosophical preconceptions by which it is deeply influenced"; nor can he deny that Harnack treats the gospel of Jesus alone as the essence of Christianity and "works up the details of Jesus' preaching into an idea of Christianity, which he then merely illustrates from the later history of the Church, partly by pointing to departures from it, partly by emphasizing what is consonant with it in further developments."<sup>23</sup> What Harnack invites us to do is thus in point of fact merely to recognize as "the essence of Christianity" the "religion of Jesus" as he has reconstructed it under the influence of his own naturalistic postulates. Before we can follow him we must be assured that what he presents as such was really "the religion of Jesus," and that "the religion of Jesus," in his sense of that phrase, is really Christianity. We do not need to adopt Loisy's standpoint to perceive the justice of his criticisms at these points. And surely a remark like this cuts to the bottom:

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<sup>22</sup> As cited, 21, coll. 486 f.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. W. Sanday's remarks, "An Examination of Harnack's 'What is Christianity?' " 1901, pp. 16 ff.: "And yet in spite of these explicit promises the criterion that Harnack really proposes throughout his book is his own mutilated version of the teaching of Jesus."

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“If what is desired is to determine historically the essence of the gospel, the canons of a sound criticism do not permit us to resolve in advance to consider as unessential what we are now inclined to think uncertain or unacceptable. What is essential to the gospel of Jesus is what holds the first and the most considerable place in His authentic teaching, the ideas for which He strove and for which He died, not that merely which we believe to be still vital today.... In order to determine the essence of Islam we shall not take, in the teaching of the Prophet and in the Mussulman tradition, what we may consider true and fertile, but what was actually of most importance to Mahomet and his followers, in point of belief, ethics, and worship. Otherwise with a little good will we might discover that the essence of the Koran is the same as that of the Gospels—faith in the clement and merciful God.”<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting and not uninformative to observe in passing the diametrical opposition of the methods by which Harnack and Loisy, each, seek to extract the essence of Christianity. If Harnack, having reconstructed from the evangelical narratives a Jesus to fit his naturalistic presuppositions, sees in this reconstructed Jesus at once the entirety of Christianity and will allow nothing to enter into its essence but what he finds in Him, Loisy perceives in the Jesus to which he looks back through the stretches of history only the germ out of which his Christianity has expanded. It is Harnack, it is true, who writes:<sup>25</sup>

“Just as we cannot obtain a complete knowledge of a tree without regarding not only its root and its stem but also its bark, its branches, and the way in which it blooms, so we cannot form any right estimate of the Christian religion unless we take our stand upon a comprehensive induction that shall cover all the facts of its history.”

But it is not Harnack’s but Loisy’s method which this figure suggests. “Why,” demands Loisy—<sup>26</sup>

“Why ought the essence of the tree be thought to be contained in a single particle of the germ from which it has proceeded, and why will it not be just as truly and more perfectly realized in the tree as in the seed? Is the process of assimilation by which it makes its growth to be regarded as a change in the essence, virtually contained in the germ; or is it not rather the indispensable condition of its

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<sup>24</sup> As cited, pp. xiv ff.

<sup>25</sup> As cited, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> As cited, p. xxvi.

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existence, of its preservation, of its advance in a life always the same and incessantly renewed?"

Harnack, he contends,<sup>27</sup>

“does not conceive of Christianity as a seed which has grown—first a potential plant, then an actual plant, identical with itself from the beginning of its evolution to the present moment, and from its root to the tip of its trunk; but as a ripe, or rather, a decayed, nut which must be shelled if its incorruptible kernel is to be reached. And Harnack tears off the shell with so much perseverance that the question arises whether anything will remain at the end.”

Perhaps with a little idealization, we may represent to ourselves the fundamental ideas embodied in the divergent views as involving essentially some such conceptions as the following. Harnack wishes to see the essence of Christianity in what is constant in the entire history of the Church, and just on that account seeks it in the primitive beginnings of Christianity—in those primitive beginnings, no doubt, as reconstructed by him on the basis of his postulates. He therefore makes primitive Christianity, the Christianity of Jesus Himself (as he reconstructs it), the standard of all Christianity; that alone is Christianity which is to be found in the preaching of Jesus. Loisy wishes to view Christianity as a constant development, as finding its reality not in its germ but in its full growth. The gospel of Jesus is merely to him the root of the Church; the Church is the living development of the gospel; the essence of Christianity is its historical evolution, which in every part is the necessary outcome of the complex of circumstances in which it lives.<sup>28</sup>

When he lays aside figures and speaks plainly, Loisy, it is true, finds difficulty in maintaining himself at these high levels. At one point, indeed, he seems to work rather with the ordinary logical conception of “essence” in his mind, according to which “it denotes the common quality or qualities which are found in all the members of the class.”<sup>29</sup> He makes in effect a genus of Christianity by cutting it up into periods; and, extracting the characteristic quality of each period in turn, he compares these together and concludes that what is common to all is the essence of Christianity and what is peculiar to each is the differentiation of each period.<sup>30</sup> No doubt there may be obtained

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<sup>27</sup> As cited, pp. xxix, xxx.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Troeltsch, as cited, col. 445.

<sup>29</sup> McCosh, as cited, p. 152.

<sup>30</sup> As cited, p. xv: “If common traits have been conserved and developed from the origin until our day in the Church, these are the traits which constitute the essence of Christianity. At least the historian cannot recognize any others; he has no right to apply any other method than that which he applies to any other religion.”



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thus a conception of what has persisted through all ages of Christian history; and this may, in a sense, be called “common Christianity.” But what will be the result, if perchance Christianity has become apostate in any one age and has recovered itself (“come to itself” like the Prodigal Son) only after a period of general corruption? Obviously, at the best, such a method must confound “the essence of Christianity” with the minimum of Christianity, and presents no great advantage in this respect over that thoroughly misleading method of determining what is essential to Christianity, dear to the hearts of all “indifferentists,” which seeks it in what is common to all those who in any age “profess and call themselves Christians” —extension through space taking here the place of Loisy’s extension through time. What is common to all who call themselves Christians, whether as extended through time or space, is, of course, just the minimum of Christianity; otherwise those forms of professed Christianity or those periods of Christian history in which only the minimum of Christianity is or has been confessed would be excluded. The “essence of Christianity” and the minimum of Christianity are not, however, synonymous expressions. If choice were confined to these two, it would be better to follow Loisy in his ecclesiastical evolutionism and discover the essence of Christianity in the maximum of Christianity, in Christianity in its fullest growth and vigor.

The evolutionism of Loisy is reproduced in Ernst Troeltsch, though of course with all the involved temperamental and environmental differences.<sup>31</sup> Troeltsch bids us<sup>32</sup> keep in mind that the conception involved in the phrase “the essence of Christianity” is historically inseparably wrapped up with the modern critical evolutionary point of view. The Romanist, he says, does not speak of “the essence of Christianity,” but of the faith of the Church, and distinguishes only between the complete knowledge of that faith which is expected of the clergy and the less explicit knowledge of it which may be tolerated in the laity. Nor would old orthodox Protestantism have used the phrase. It would have said, “the revelation of the Bible,” and have distinguished only between fundamental and non-fundamental articles. Even for the Enlightenment, the phrase would have had no significance. It spoke with Locke of “the reasonableness of Christianity” and rationalized the Bible, making the post-Apostolic Church responsible for all untenable dogmas. It is with Chateaubriand and his *Génie du Christianisme* that the notion first emerges into sight; that is to say, it is a product of Romanticism. And it is to the German Idealists and especially to the Hegelians that we owe its development. By it is not meant Christianity as a whole—this is external appearance—but that which unfolds itself in the phenomena of Christianity, “the idea and power” which has dominated Christianity through all its

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<sup>31</sup> Six articles entitled “Was heist ‘Wesen des Christentums,’ ” published in *Die Christliche Welt*, xvii. (1903) Nos. 19, 21, 23, 25, 28, 29. These articles have been reprinted in Troeltsch’s “Gesammelte Schriften,” ii. 1913, pp. 386–451, but we cite from the articles.

<sup>32</sup> Col. 483.

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history and determined its varied phenomenal forms. It is “the internal spiritual unity” which binds all these phenomenal forms together and which can be reached only by a process of historical abstraction. Serving himself heir to the Hegelians (with the necessary corrections),<sup>33</sup> Troeltsch accordingly looks upon Christianity as, like other great coherent complexes of historical occurrences, the development of an idea which effloresces progressively, incorporating into itself and adapting to its uses all alien material which lies in its path. The isolation of this idea to thought is, in his view, the discovery of the essence of Christianity. The essence of Christianity is, therefore, an abstract notion by means of which the whole body of the phenomena which constitute Christian history is reduced to unity and explained.

It must not be imagined, however, that this wonderful informing idea which is to be distilled from phenomenal Christianity can, in the opinion of Troeltsch, “be simply abstracted from the whole course and the totality of the manifestations of Christianity in its historical development.” A distinction, it is asserted, must be drawn between the phenomena which express the essence and those in which it is suppressed.<sup>34</sup> The historical forms must be subjected to a criticism according “to the ideal which informs the chief tendency.”<sup>35</sup> This ideal may most conveniently be discovered, Troeltsch thinks, in the classical expression of Christianity in its origins.<sup>36</sup> But even there distinctions must be drawn. The primitive age must not be assumed to be a perfectly unitary complex. We must ask, What in the primitive age contains what is really classic? No doubt we shall find this in the figure and preaching of Jesus. But we must not forget that the figure and preaching of Jesus must be reconstructed. And for this reconstruction we need something more than the Synoptic Gospels. We need Paul and John, and more. “We do not find our foundation in the historical Christ, the Christ after the flesh, but in the spirit of Christ, which was disengaged by the destruction of the earthly manifestation in death.”<sup>37</sup> The “words of Christ” are not Christianity; rather faith in Christ and the spirit which proceeds from this faith and operates in the community — this is Christianity. This spirit, however, did not exhaust its efficiency in the Pauline and Johannine Gospels; the totality of the Christian development is involved. In its elements continually present themselves, which were, no doubt, present in the primitive age, and in the light of the later development may be recognized as having been present in it, but which certainly only manifest themselves later and in particular circumstances. “We must recognize them as contained in the essence of Christianity and as important for the determination of that essence; we must look upon them as effects of the spirit of Christ: but we do not find them expressed

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<sup>33</sup> Col. 484.

<sup>34</sup> Col. 534.

<sup>35</sup> Col. 534.

<sup>36</sup> Col. 578–9.

<sup>37</sup> Col. 580.

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in the primitive form in itself alone, and indeed cannot even directly attribute them to it.”<sup>38</sup> So clear is it that we cannot derive the essence of Christianity exclusively from its primitive form; this essence “cannot be an unchangeable idea which is given once for all in the teaching of Jesus.” Rather—

“the essence must be a somewhat which contains in itself energy and mobility, productive power of continuous reproduction. It can certainly not be denoted by a word or a doctrine, but only by an idea which includes in itself from the first mobility and fulness of life; *it must be a self-developing spiritual principle*, a ‘germinative principle’ or a seed-thought, as Caird has it, a historical idea in Ranke’s sense, that is, not a metaphysical or dogmatic conception, but a spiritual force which contains in itself a life-aim and a life-value, and which unfolds in its consistency and power of adaptation.”<sup>39</sup>

The continuity—the unity binding the multiplicity of forms together—is, Troeltsch admits, no doubt, difficult to trace. It cannot lie simply in the preaching of Jesus, as persisting in all forms of Christianity as their basal element; nor yet in an abstract, generic idea common to all varieties of Christianity. It does not consist in any formulated conception, but in a spiritual power embracing in itself many ideas. Nor are we done with it when we are done with historical Christianity. In determining the essence of Christianity we must take in present Christianity as well as past Christianity; yes, and future Christianity too—if we believe in any future for Christianity. Thus from an abstraction, the essence of Christianity becomes an ideal.<sup>40</sup> We cannot avoid transforming it thus if we stand in any vital relation to Christianity. We study its history that we may learn from it. What we thus learn must be applied to the present, and must be projected also into the future. Thus the “divinatorial imagination” of abstraction necessarily passes into that “prognostical imagination” which presages the further unfolding of the basal idea.

“Determination of essence is modification of essence. It is the extraction of the essential idea of Christianity from history in such a fashion that it shall illuminate the future; and at the same time a vital survey of the present and future world together in this light. The repeated determination of the essence is the repeated historical reorganization of Christianity. This can be avoided by none who seeks the essence of Christianity in a purely historical manner, and at the same time believes in the progressive power of the essence. Only those can take a different course who look upon Christianity as an outworn and transcended historical

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<sup>38</sup> Col. 581.

<sup>39</sup> Col. 581.

<sup>40</sup> Col. 651 f.

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organism or who understands Christianity from an exclusively supernatural revelation in the Bible.”<sup>41</sup>

This apparently means that Troeltsch is aware that in the process of extracting “the essence” of Christianity from its phenomenal manifestation, he is moulding it to his own ideals, and that he considers this natural to one in his position—one, that is, who looks upon Christianity as a growth and yet is concerned for its continuance in the world. We find him a little later, accordingly, speaking not merely of “the essential elements of Christianity” but rather of “the abiding and essential elements of Christianity.” The notions of “abidingness” and “essentialness” have, however, in themselves nothing in common; and we only confuse ourselves, when we are seeking to discover the essence of Christianity, if we insist that what we find “essential” must be what we consider will be “abiding.” We are here very near to employing the term “essential” again in the sense of “essential to us.”

Troeltsch does not glose the essentially subjective character of the method of determining the essence of Christianity which he proposes, nor does he fail to perceive the danger which accompanies it of passing, without observing it, beyond the limits of Christianity into a new religion only loosely connected with Christianity.<sup>42</sup> These things, he says, simply must be recognized and faced. Then he continues.<sup>43</sup>

“These remarks show our attitude towards one of the strongest assaults made of late years upon the Christianity of the essence of Christianity, as Harnack and his friends understand it. Eduard von Hartmann, who already somewhat earlier called the so-called Liberal theology the self-decomposition of Protestantism, will not permit the left-wing Ritschlians—therefore, above all, Harnack and those of like mind with him—to pass any longer as Christians. Their essence of Christianity is, he intimates, the abandonment of Christianity; and their Christianity is a self-deception due to their training and sentiment. What they maintain to be Christianity is their modern religious conviction, which has only a loose connection with the real spirit of Christianity, and which clings all the more anxiously to a few accidental historical supports. The proof which Hartmann offers of this view is as instructive for the whole question of the essence of Christianity as for the question of the maintenance of its continuity. For him, in a purely historical sense, the essence of Christianity lies in the conception of God-manhood; and he explains this conception in a Pantheistic sense of the unity of the Divine and human spirits; and declares it the great idea of Christianity, which only

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<sup>41</sup> Col. 654.

<sup>42</sup> Col. 682.

<sup>43</sup> Coll. 682–3.

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needs to be separated from the myth of the incarnation of God in Jesus, and to be freed from all theistic-personal traits in the idea of God, to be able to enrich the religion of the future. That means, however, very clearly that Hartmann too will recognize as essence only what has in his eyes a relatively abiding importance; with him too the essential is what is valuable for the future, as he understands it. But because this abiding element can obtain for him its full further significance only by elimination of essential conceptions of historical Christianity, the revelation-significance of Jesus and the personality of God, therefore Christianity, despite it, is for him in its entirety a transcended epoch, and those are already fallen out of the continuity of Christianity who do not make the conception of God-manhood central, but by giving it an externally historical connection with some words of Jesus persuade themselves that an ethical Deism, without significance either for itself or for the future, is the essence of Christianity."

The question raised here, says Troeltsch, cannot be argued; the difference lies in the point of view. But the reader will scarcely be able to agree that a mere strong counter-assertion on the part of Troeltsch and his friends that they know themselves to possess a better objective-historical conception of Christianity than Hartmann, and to preserve with it a personal religious continuity precisely in what is essential to it, is a sufficient refutation of Hartmann's strictures. Their "Christianity" is confessedly not the Christianity of the past; as Troeltsch elsewhere acknowledges,<sup>44</sup> it is not the vital Christianity of the present; and it can become the "Christianity" of the future (as he also allows)<sup>45</sup> only if Christianity may suffer a sea-change into something possibly richer, but assuredly exceedingly strange—and yet remain Christianity. Whether it can perform this feat is the real question of "the essence of Christianity" as expounded by Troeltsch.

It is, of course, precisely Troeltsch's evolutionism which commends his presentation of "the essence" of Christianity to our evolution-obsessed generation. And a purer evolutionist than he, Edward Caird,<sup>46</sup> reminds us in more direct language that "evolution in human history includes revolution." If we are to distort (as Caird does) Tertullian's *anima naturaliter Christiana* into a prophetic pronouncement that what we call Christianity is the natural production of the human soul, as man struggles slowly towards the "consciousness of himself and of his relation to God," there is no reason why we should not understand that this so-called Christianity, as it reacts on its changing environment, takes on many forms and passes through many phases, connected only as the successive,

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<sup>44</sup> "Die Bedeutung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu für den Glauben," 1911; cf. *The Harvard Theological Review*, iv. (October, 1912), p. 459.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* Troeltsch speaks of the change which Christianity has passed through in the hands of those who think with him as a "transformation."

<sup>46</sup> Article, "Christianity and the Historical Christ," in *The New World*, VI. xxi. (March, 1897) p. 10.



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though varying, expressions of the “growing idea of humanity.” And there is no reason why these phases, as they succeed one another, should not advance by a zig-zag motion, which may often seem (and indeed be) retrogression, or should not sometimes even bring contiguous phases into a relation of direct opposition to one another; Caird tells us that the condition of development “is rebellion against the immediate past.” Only, then, let it be distinctly understood, Christianity has lost all content. It is no longer a religion, but religion, finding its expression through varied forms: and the forms through which it finds its expression, whether of thought or of sentiment or of practice, are indifferent to it, so only the underlying religious impulse is there. It is only natural, therefore, that Jean Réville, for example, in endeavoring to tell us what “Liberal Protestantism” is—he might just as well have said “Liberal Christianity,” he tells us himself—takes much this line.<sup>47</sup> It is not to be denied, of course, that there is a sense in which it may very properly be said that the essence of all religious movements is just religion. It is this primal instinct of human nature which gives its vitality to every form of religion from Fetishism up to—well, just short, let us say, of the religions of revelation, if it be allowed that there is such a thing as revelation. Here we have the thing which all religions have in common, and by virtue of which they live in the world. We may abstract everything else from each of them in turn, and, leaving to each only the pure religious impulse and its products, may plausibly maintain that in this we have “the essence” of every religion which has ever existed or which can ever exist. Only, in that case, it is clear, we must allow that there never has been and never will be at bottom more than one religion. The “essence” of Christianity, so conceived, and the “essence” of Fetishism are the same; and we may, on the ground of holding to its “essence” call ourselves with equal right by either name. In holding the “essence” of one, we hold the “essence” of all. It was under the influence of some such conception that the late Auguste Sabatier lost himself in rapture over what he seemed to himself to see, in the way of real unity in the midst of apparent diversity, in any average congregation of “Christian” worshippers. There is the aged woman who has no other conception of God than the white-bearded old man with eyes like coals of fire she has seen in the pictures in the big Bible on the parlor-table. And there is the young collegian imbued with a pure Deism by his philosophical course at the university. And there is the disciple of Kant who holds that all positive ideas of God are contradictory and who can allow of God only that He is the Unknowable. And there is the proud Hegelian who knows all about God, and knows Him to be the All. Moved by a common

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<sup>47</sup> “Liberal Christianity,” E. T. 1903, p. xi.; cf. p. 200: “The profession of faith of Liberal Protestantism—or of Liberal Christianity, for these two names are interchangeable—is wholly summed up in the single precept: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul and thy neighbor as thyself.*” It does not trouble itself, however, as to who or what this God is which its ‘single precept’ requires it to love” (pp. 64, 76, 120, 194).

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piety all these bow down together and adore. I do not know, says Sabatier, if there is a spectacle on earth which is more like heaven!<sup>48</sup>

From such a standpoint, the cry Back to Christ! can have, as Caird does not fail to remind us, little meaning. The adjective "Christian" is employed to describe the movement which goes by this name only because that particular movement of religious development is supposed, in point of fact, to have taken its temporal beginning in Christ, or to have reached in the rise of Christianity a decisive—or at least an important—stage of its development, or merely perhaps to have received from Christ or from the rise of Christianity some impulse, more or less notable, the memory of which is preserved in the name by which it thus is accidentally designated. It is in any case an illusion to suppose that we can find in Christ "the true form" of the movement which is thus more or less loosely connected with His name; that would be, Caird suggests, "seeking the living among the dead."<sup>49</sup> If we speak of Him as the "seed" out of which the "plant" of Christianity has grown, we are merely using tropical language which very easily may be deceptive. We may imagine that "there is an implicit fulness in the seed which is not completely repeated in any subsequent stage in the life of the plant"; but then we must allow that this fulness in the seed is very "implicit" indeed; and we should not do amiss to bear in mind that "we can know what is in the germ only by seeing how it manifests itself in the plant." We must, in plain words, interpret Christ from Christianity, not Christianity from Christ. It strikes the reader with a sense of unreality, therefore, when writers like Troeltsch, committed to an evolutionary view of Christianity, are found laying great stress on primitive Christianity and particularly on the personality and teaching of Jesus. No sooner does Troeltsch establish the "classical" place of primitive Christianity and especially of Jesus for the interpretation of Christianity, to be sure, than he forthwith sets himself to unravelling the coil in which he has thus involved himself. We do not say he succeeds in unravelling it. But that only shows that his evolutionary conception of Christianity is not only inconsistent with the significance he has established for Jesus as not merely the germ out of which it has grown but its Founder; but, being inconsistent with it, is untenable. We can look upon the stress laid upon primitive Christianity, and on the person and teaching of Jesus, by writers of this class, in a word, only as concessions to undeniable fact; fatal concessions to a fact which, when fairly allowed for, refutes their entire point of view. Christianity, clearly, is not a natural evolution of the religious spirit of man, with a more or less accidental connection with

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<sup>48</sup> "Discours sur l'évolution des dogmes," pp. 21–22; cf. the comment on it by H. Bois, "De la Connaissance Religieuse," 1894, pp. 35 ff. Also Jean Réville, "Liberal Christianity," E. T. pp. 61 ff.: "You may hold doctrines most dissimilar and even irreconcilable concerning the essence of God and God's government of the world, and yet be equally good and faithful disciples of Christ."

<sup>49</sup> Caird employs the phrase, not directly of the cry Back to Christ! but illustratively of the parallel cry, Back to Kant!

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the man Jesus; it is a particular religion instituted by Christ and given once for all its specific content by His authority.

The manner in which Troeltsch establishes the “classical” significance of “the person and preaching of Jesus” for the determination of the “essence” of Christianity, is meanwhile worth observing somewhat more closely on its own account. His acknowledgment of the universal recognition of “primitive Christianity and behind primitive Christianity the person and preaching of Jesus” as bearing this “classical” significance is itself a concession of the highest importance. He is, no doubt, dissatisfied with the manner in which the classical significance of primitive Christianity and the person and preaching of Jesus is ordinarily established, because of the involution in it of, as he explains, “the presuppositions of the popular antique supernaturalism” and because of the position of absolute authority in which it leaves primitive Christianity and Jesus. He desiderates, therefore, a new grounding for the acknowledged fact, a grounding which will invoke and issue in nothing which is unacceptable to “the purely human-historical conception.” He explains:<sup>50</sup>

“What is in question is a purely historically grounded significance of primitive Christianity for the determination of the essence. Such an one is, of course, actually at hand in the fullest sense, and is easy to point to. The authentic meaning of a historical phenomenon is contained most strongly and purely in its origins; and if such a statement can apply only in a qualified sense to complicated culture-forms like, say, the Renaissance, it certainly applies without qualification to the prophetic-ethical religions, which receive their entire life from the personalities of their founders, require their adherents constantly to renew their vitality from the primitive sources, and therefore connect their names and essence in the closest way with their personalities; it especially applies in an unqualified sense to Christianity, which prescribes to its adherents more rigidly than any other religion the continual nourishment of their religious life from contact with the Founder, and in its Christ-mysticism<sup>51</sup> has produced a unique phenomenon which corresponds with especial clearness with this circumstance. Accordingly, it is self-evident that the determination of the essence should adhere before all to the primitive period, and look upon it as the classical age.”

We may look askance at some of the things that are said in this extract, but one thing emerges with great emphasis. Christianity certainly did not just “grow up”; it was founded. And subsequently to its founding, it has not “run wild,” gone off in this or that direction according as some contentless “informing spirit” or “germinal life” within it

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<sup>50</sup> Col. 579.

<sup>51</sup> On this Christ-mysticism, cf. also J. Réville, as cited, p. 123.

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may have chanced to lead it; it has been held strictly, more strictly than any other religious movement, to its fundamental type, by constant references back to its foundations. For whatever reason, on whatever ground, it has kept a constant check upon itself lest it should depart from type, and has shown an amazing power, after whatever aberrations, continually to return to type. Its eye has been fixed not merely in forward gaze but in backward as well. It has manifested a unique capacity of growth, justifying its Founder's comparison of it to the mustard-seed and to the leaven; but, after all is said as to the transformations it has suffered, its slacknesses, its degenerations, its failures, its growth has lain not in the gradual development of a content for itself, but in the steadily increasing assimilation of its environment to itself. In this respect too it has been like the mustard-seed and the leaven to which its Founder compared it; it has grown at the expense of its environment, not being moulded by it, but moulding it. It has accordingly remained amid its changing surroundings, and through all the forms which it has occasionally taken, essentially the same; and its "nature" is to be ascertained, therefore—like the "nature" of other stable entities—simply by looking at it. "Divinational imagination," and "prognosticational imagination" are all very well in their place, and we have no wish to deny that there is a place for them even in estimating the meaning and movements of Christianity. But observation is the proper instrument for the ascertainment of the nature of stable entities, and in spite of the "varieties of Christianity" in time and in space, it will broadly suffice for the ascertainment of what Christianity is.

It is clear then, and it may be taken as generally acknowledged, that Christianity is not merely a form which religion has spontaneously taken in the course of developing culture, but a specific religion which has been "founded," and the specific content of which has been once for all imposed upon it at its foundation. It is in the strictest sense of the terms, a "positive religion," a "historical religion"; and its content is to be ascertained not by reference to what we may think "the ideal religion," but by reference to the character given it by its Founder. This is the real meaning of a procedure like Harnack's, when, after proposing to determine the nature of Christianity from its total historical manifestation, he really seeks and finds it solely in what he has brought himself to look upon as "the religion of Jesus." His procedure here is not in itself wrong. His fault lies primarily in the critical method by which he ascertains the "religion of Jesus"; or, to speak more exactly, by which he imposes his own ideal of religion upon Jesus as "the religion of Jesus." Thus he is led to present as "the religion of Jesus" a religion which is as different as possible from the actual religion of Jesus, and the result of that is that he completely separates "the religion of Jesus" from the religion which He founded, and is compelled, therefore, to treat Christianity in its entire historical manifestation as a radical departure from "the religion of Jesus"; or, to put it brusquely, as a religion quite distinct from that which had been introduced into the world by Jesus, although it has usurped its place and name. In these circumstances, naturally, he could not fulfil his promise to

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present Christianity from “a comprehensive induction that should cover all the facts of its history.” He could only present what he had determined to be “the religion of Jesus” as genuine Christianity, and illustrate from the subsequent history the greatness of its departure from the original type, and the occasional efforts which have been made to return more or less fully to it; perhaps also the abiding presence throughout its whole history of a persistent, if vague, apprehension that some such religion lay in the background, until at last at the end of the accumulating centuries, through great throes of labor, the “Liberal” theology has thrown off the superincumbent accretions and recovered the pure gospel; or, at least, recovered it in its essence; for the acknowledgment is inevitable that “the religion of Jesus” in its completeness, just as it lay in His own mind and heart, was His own, belonged to His time and circumstances, and cannot be brought back again, in its completeness, in our day. All we can do is to recover what in it is of “permanent validity.”

In thus setting “the religion of Jesus” and historical Christianity over against one another in a relation which can be called nothing less than antipodal (whatever larger or smaller qualifications may be insisted upon) Harnack is speaking, of course, as the representative of the “Liberal” theology in general. It has become the traditional historical postulate of the “Liberal” construction of the early history of Christianity that the “religion of Jesus” was at once overlaid by the “faith of the primitive community,” and this in turn by the dogmatic constructions of Paul. Thus Paul emerges to view as “the second founder” of Christianity, and the Christianity which has propagated itself through the ages is held to derive from him rather than from Jesus.<sup>52</sup> Two deep clefts—between Paul and the primitive community and between the primitive community and Jesus—are imagined to separate historical Christianity from the teaching of Jesus; and across these, we are told, we must somehow find our way if we are to recover the teaching of Jesus, as across them the teaching of Jesus would have had to find its way if it were to determine the development of historical Christianity. It is to this conception of the course of early Christian history that William Wrede gives perhaps somewhat extreme expression when he declares—we avail ourselves of Harnack’s words here—that “the second gospel,” that is, the teaching of Paul over against “the first gospel,” that is, the teaching of Jesus, “is

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. W. Wrede, “Paulus” (1904), E. T. 1907, pp. 179 ff.: “It follows then conclusively from all this that Paul is to be regarded as *the second founder of Christianity* ... for Paul it demonstrably was who first ... introduced into Christianity the ideas whose influence on its history up to the present time has been deepest and most wide-reaching.... This second founder of Christianity has even, compared with the first, exercised beyond all doubt the stronger—not the better—influence.... Throughout long stretches of church history ... he has thrust the greater person, whom he meant only to serve, utterly into the background.” Cf. pp. 165 f.: “The name ‘disciple of Jesus’ has little applicability to Paul, if it is used to denote a historical relation.... He stands much further away from Jesus than Jesus Himself stands from the noblest figures of Jewish piety.”



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something entirely new, that it, as far as it contains what we call historical Christianity, presents a new religion, in which Jesus Christ Himself has no, or only a most remote, part, and that the Apostle Paul is the founder of this religion."<sup>53</sup> And it is from this point of sight that Wilhelm Bousset, for example, twits "the orthodox" with "basing the truth of their whole system and the form of their faith on a fantastic mythical-dogmatic interpretation of the life of Jesus by Paul."<sup>54</sup>

One great difficulty—certainly not the only one nor even the greatest one—which stands in the way of this reading of the course of primitive Christian history, arises from Paul's vigorous repudiation of the honor thrust upon him. He emphatically denies that he is the teacher of a new gospel<sup>55</sup> and explicitly represents himself as in his teaching but repeating the common gospel of Christ which had been taught from the beginning; and that especially in those very items in which he is declared to be most violently the innovator. To adduce but a single instance—that with which we are at the moment most immediately concerned—Paul, in the most natural way in the world and with a simplicity which confounds every effort to discredit it, declares that he did not invent but received from his predecessors in the teaching of Christ's gospel the great central fact—it is made the head and front of his offending—"that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures," that is to say, the Christian doctrine of atonement in the blood of Jesus.<sup>56</sup> We may believe, however, that it is rather the insuperable general difficulties which spring at once into sight when an attempt is made to construe Christianity as rather Paulinism—with its involved relegation of Jesus, as Wrede puts it, "utterly into the background" (though He is still inconsequently declared the greater person of the two)—which has caused this construction of primitive Christian history, long dallied with, to begin to crumble just so soon as it has been given clear and unvarnished statement and its logical consequences exhibited. It is not without its significance that a single recent number of a theological journal<sup>57</sup> contains side by side two articles in which the attempt is made to close up again the yawning gulf that has been opened by the speculations of the "Liberal"

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<sup>53</sup> Harnack, "Aus Wissenschaft und Leben," ii. 1911, p. 216.

<sup>54</sup> Address on "The Significance of the Personality of Jesus Christ for Belief," printed in the *Proceedings and Papers of the Fifth International Congress of Free Christianity and Religious Progress*, 1911, p. 209.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. E. von Dobschütz, *TSK*, 85 (1912), p. 364: "Paul calls his preaching gospel, the gospel; in conflict with the Judaisers, he vigorously denies that there is any other gospel (Gal. 1:6, 2 Cor. 11:4); another gospel exists just as little as there exists another Jesus." But Wrede (as cited, p. 166) does not hesitate to say there was another Christ: "The being whose disciple and apostle he wished to be was not actually the historical man, Jesus, but another." This contention indeed lies at the very root of the theory expressed by the phrase "the double gospel" in the New Testament.

<sup>56</sup> Wrede can only say in a footnote (p. 112, E. T. p. 168), that "it requires a very literal interpretation of Paul's words to make out that what was delivered to him includes 'died for our sins' "—a remark which is very naturally cited by von Dobschütz (p. 342, note) with a subaudition of derision.

<sup>57</sup> "Theologische Studien und Kritiken," 85 (1912), Heft 3.

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theology between Jesus and Paul. The circumstance that the two writers proceed to their common end by precisely opposite methods—the one by denying that Paul was a “Paulinist,”<sup>58</sup> and the other more reasonably by pointing out that Jesus was Himself very much of a “Paulinist”<sup>59</sup>—only exhibits the more clearly the precise nature of the difficulty which is created by attempting to set Paul in opposition to Jesus and emphasizes the more strongly the intolerableness of the situation induced.

We need not, however, go beyond Harnack himself to learn both the intolerableness and the untenableness of this construction of primitive Christian history. In an address delivered before the Fifth International Congress of Free Christianity and Religious Progress, held at Berlin in the early days of August 1910, under the title of “The Double Gospel in the New Testament,”<sup>60</sup> Harnack as decisively as von Dobschütz repels the notion that Paul was the author of a new gospel, and shows as clearly as von Dobschütz that the germ of Paul’s teaching is to be found also in that of Jesus, although he still rests rather more than von Dobschütz under the illusion that the gospel of Paul differs from that of Jesus in important particulars.<sup>61</sup> He therefore speaks of “a double gospel” lying side by side in the teaching of the New Testament writers, and indeed persisting side by side throughout the entire history of the Church. The problem of the origin of what he calls “the second gospel,” that is, “the preaching that the Son of God descended from heaven, was known as man, through His death and resurrection brought to believers redemption from sin, death, and devil, and thus realized God’s eternal counsel of salvation”—just “Paulinism” in the tradition of the “Liberal” theology—he carries back with complete confidence to the beginnings of the Christian community. He says:<sup>62</sup>

“The declaration that Christ ‘died for our sins according to the Scriptures’ Paul calls a traditional, therefore a universal Christian article of belief of the first rank; and he says the same of the resurrection of Christ. It is accordingly certain that the

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<sup>58</sup> G. Kittel, “Jesus bei Paulus, *TSK*, 85 (1912), pp. 366–402. By a drastic criticism of the text followed up by an artificial exegesis, Kittel manages to deprive Paul of everything which would markedly separate him from the “Liberal” Jesus.

<sup>59</sup> E. von Dobschütz, “Gibt es ein doppeltes Evangelium in Neuen Testament?” pp. 331–366. Von Dobschütz’s thesis is that “the contrast between Jesus and Paul, as it has been set forth by the newer theology, especially since the publication of the *Volksbücher* of Bousset and Wrede, is possible only when the Gospel of Jesus has been greatly reduced and, on the other side, the traits of the preaching of Paul which lead away from the Gospel of Jesus are strongly emphasized in a one-sided manner” (p. 346).

<sup>60</sup> “Aus Wissenschaft und Leben,” ii. 1911, pp. 211–224 (E. T. in the *Proceedings and Papers of the Fifth International Congress of Free Christianity and Religions Progress*, 1911, pp. 97–107).

<sup>61</sup> Therefore von Dobschütz (p. 364) notes: “I must accordingly, however, repel also Harnack’s formula of the ‘double gospel’ which is found in the New Testament, however much I approve of its purpose to bring the apostolic preaching again to its rights. I think that Paul and the others would have one and all protested against it; they were not conscious of any difference and would have acknowledged none.”

<sup>62</sup> Pp. 216 f. (E.T. p. 101).

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original apostles and the Jerusalem community shared this belief and doctrine. This is also attested by the first chapters of the Book of Acts, the trustworthiness of which in this respect is incontestable. The problem must therefore be carried back chronologically from Paul to Jesus' first disciples. They already preached the atoning death (*Sühnetod*) and resurrection of Christ. If they preached them, however, they also of course recognized them as the principle articles, therefore as 'the gospel' in the gospel, and this is evident in point of fact in the oldest written Gospel which we possess, that is, in that of Mark. The whole work of Mark is so disposed and composed that death and resurrection appear as the aim of the entire presentation. Mark may certainly have been influenced by the Pauline preaching; but the same structure has been given to the Palestinian Gospel of Matthew too; it will not have been new then to the Palestinian Christians."

If Harnack's eyes are still so far holden, that he does not yet see that what Paul found in the primitive disciples they in turn found in Jesus Himself, he is still able to go a certain distance towards the recognition of this great fact also. We find him saying:<sup>63</sup>

"Jesus' proclamation comes so far into consideration here as He preached not only the necessity and actuality of forgiveness of sins, but undoubtedly placed His Person and His Work in relation to it. He not only laid claim to the power to forgive sins, but at the celebration of the Last Supper He brought His death into connection with the deliverance of souls. This may indeed be disputed, but this much is at any rate certain, that attachment to His Person, that is, discipleship, was His own provision. He, however, who attached himself to Him must have found and known Him as somehow 'the Way' to the Father and to all the benefits of the Kingdom ('Come unto me')."

Why these utterances of Harnack's should have aroused the wide-spread interest which they have is a little difficult to understand. Not only do they seem very much a matter of course—and Harnack himself reminds us that they have always been common property (not even Strauss, says he, disputed them, and Baur fully acknowledged them)<sup>64</sup>—but he had himself years ago set them in a clear light and partly in even more suggestive form, in his lectures on *What is Christianity*. "If we also consider," says he there,<sup>65</sup> "that Jesus Himself described his death as a service which he was rendering to many, and that by a solemn act he instituted a lasting memorial of it—I see no reason to doubt the fact—we can understand how this death and the shame of the cross were bound to take the central place." He even calls attention there to that very significant fact, that the death of Christ, being looked upon as a sacrifice—as it confessedly was by His very earliest disciples—

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<sup>63</sup> P. 218 (E. T. p. 103).

<sup>64</sup> "What is Christianity?" p. 156.

<sup>65</sup> P. 160.

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“put an end to all blood-sacrifices”<sup>66</sup>; surely not (as Harnack inconsequently suggests)<sup>67</sup> because it showed that blood-sacrifices were in themselves meaningless (it was itself looked upon as a blood-sacrifice), but because (as is implied in Harnack’s own words) this was to Jesus’ followers the only true blood-sacrifice and left no room for any other. “This death,” he is impelled himself to write,<sup>68</sup> “had the value of a sacrificial death; for otherwise it would not have possessed the power to penetrate into that inner world out of which blood-sacrifices have issued”—which surely is as much as to say, with the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that it actually cleansed the consciences of men while other sacrifices did not avail to cleanse them, that it satisfied the demands of the uneasy consciences of those who were suffering under a sense of their guilt.

That there is something still lacking in these acknowledgments is of course true. Something of what is lacking is supplied by von Dobschütz’s somewhat more hearty recognition of the saving value which Jesus Himself attached to His death.<sup>69</sup> That He looked upon His death, not as an untoward accident befalling Him or as a hard necessity breaking off His work but as an instrument for the accomplishment of His mission, von Dobschütz shows with sufficient solidity. And

“We have still three declarations in which Jesus expresses Himself to His disciples—certainly only to them—with respect to the redemptive significance of His death, suggestively, figuratively, yet sufficiently distinctly; I mean the declaration about ministering and giving His life *λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν* (Mk. 10:45), the declaration about the Body and Blood as symbols of the New Covenant (Mk. 14:24), and the declaration, transmitted to be sure only in the Fourth Gospel but certainly original, about the hazarding of His life in conflict with the adversary who menaces His people (Jno. 10:11); three varying figures, all of which come at last to the recognition by Jesus of His death as necessary for the completion of His work, viz., for uniting men again with God, by an expiation removing the guilt which separated them, overcoming the Evil One, establishing the indissoluble covenant relation predicted by the prophets. I can find no decisive reason for excising these three declarations from the genuine tradition of Jesus. What has been adduced against them proceeds from *a priori* presuppositions which seem to me unjustified, such as that Jesus could not foresee His death, to say nothing of predicting it. Neither His own dismay at Gethsemane, nor the conduct of the

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<sup>66</sup> Pp. 156 ff.

<sup>67</sup> P. 158.

<sup>68</sup> P. 99 (German ed.; E. T. pp. 157 f.).

<sup>69</sup> Pp. 352 ff. Harnack is inclined to deny to Jesus the saying recorded in Mk. 10:45. Mt. 20:28 especially its last clause (“*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*,” 1912, xxii, p. 9); of von Dobschütz’s three passages, he would allow therefore only one (Mk. 14:24) to be direct evidence of Jesus’ teaching.

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disciples, their flight and their despair, gives any justification to such a contention. They remain psychologically thoroughly intelligible, even with respect to the perception and salutariness of His death. And then these declarations are, so to say, necessary for explaining the fact that the Apostolical preaching from the beginning deals with the redemptive significance of Jesus' death as with a settled fact, while yet remaining entirely without clarity as to the 'how' and seeking after varying explanations, all of which, however, ultimately move in directions more intimated than inculcated by these declarations of the Lord."

In order to reach the truth we need only take one step more and frankly recognize that these declarations are central to Jesus' conception of His mission.<sup>70</sup> And this step we must take not less on account of the declarations themselves (Jesus says expressly that He "came" for the distinct purpose of "giving His life as a ransom for many" and with great explicitness declares the sacrificial character of His death) than on account of numerous other less direct but no less real references to the significance of His mission as redemptive, and in order that the whole subsequent historical development may not be rendered unintelligible (the very disposition of the matter of the Gospels is determined by this presupposition, and the whole preaching of the disciples turns on it as its hinge). No doubt Jesus is thus implicated in the presentation of Christianity as specifically a redemptive religion; "an appearance is created," to use Paul Wernle's phrase in an analogous connection, "that Jesus Himself is responsible for the momentous dogmatic development, and encumbered the simple, eternal will of God with a minimum of dogma and ecclesiasticism"<sup>71</sup>; an appearance, we may add, which is not deceptive, as Wernle would have us believe, and with an amount of "dogma" which cannot justly be called a "minimum." This is, however, only to permit Jesus to come to His rights in the matter of His teaching; and to allow Him to found the religion which He tells us He came to found, and not to insist on thrusting an essentially different one upon Him because we happen ourselves to like it better.<sup>72</sup> These declarations of Jesus as to the redemptive significance of His death cannot be denied to Him; their meaning cannot be eviscerated by studiously minimizing expositions,<sup>73</sup> and they cannot be deprived of their cardinal position in the religion which He founded.<sup>74</sup> In point of fact, Jesus announced His mission as not to the righteous but sinners; and what He offered to sinners was not mere exemption—or if

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<sup>70</sup> Compare the discussion of the matter in *The Princeton Theological Review*, xi. 2 (April, 1913), pp. 259 ff.

<sup>71</sup> "Die Anfänge unserer Religion,"<sup>2</sup> 1904, p. 58.

<sup>72</sup> A very pleasantly written exposition of Jesus' relation to "the double gospel" may be found in Lic. theol. Martin Schulze's brochure, "Das Wesen des Christentums," 1897.

<sup>73</sup> We permit ourselves merely to refer here to the treatment of these by James Denney, "The Death of Christ," 1902, pp. 11–60. E. D. Burton's attempt to make "to give His life a ransom for many" mean to give His life, not His death ("Biblical Ideas of Atonement," 1909, pp. 113 ff.) surely requires no refutation.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. what Paul Feine says, "Theologie des Neuen Testaments," 1910, pp. 120 ff.



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even that word retains too much reminiscence of a price paid, say immunity—but specifically redemption.

In the mind of Jesus as truly as in the minds of His followers, the religion which He founded was by way of eminence the religion of redemption. Perhaps we could have no better evidence of this than the tenacity with which those who would fain retain the name of Christianity while yet repudiating its specific character, cling to the term “redemptive” also as descriptive of the nature of their new Christianity, identified by them with the religion of Jesus. Professor Macintosh, for example, wishes still to describe his new religion as “the religion of moral redemption”; though he discriminates the notion which the term connotes with him as its broad sense, as over against “the narrow sense” which it bears in its customary application to Christianity. By “redemption” he means, however, merely “reformation”; and these are not only the narrow and the broad of it; they are specifically different conceptions, and the employment of the two terms as synonyms cannot fail to mislead. For our part, we prefer the perhaps brutal but certainly more unambiguous frankness of William Wrede.<sup>75</sup> He conceives “the religion of Jesus” on the same lines as Professor Macintosh’s “Christianity,” and roundly denies on that very account that it can strictly be called a religion of redemption, contrasting it with Paul’s precisely on this score. He does not deny that “redemption” may have a wider meaning also, according to which we “may say of all real religion that it is and intends to be redemptive.” But he knows very well that “it is not of this general truth that we are thinking when we characterize particular religions as religions of redemption.” And since in his view the emphasis in the religion of Jesus “falls on individual piety and its connection with future salvation,” he remarks simply, that “no one who set out to describe the religion which lives in the sayings and similitudes of Jesus could hit by any chance on the phrase ‘religion of redemption,’ ” while on the other hand, with respect to Paul, “everything ... is said when we say that he made Christianity the religion of redemption.” It tends to obscure the fact that a religion is being ascribed to Jesus which is not in the accepted (“narrow”) sense of the word “redemptive,” to characterize the religion which is ascribed to Him so emphatically as “redemptive” (in the “wider” sense of the word), especially when it lies on the face of the record that the religion which Jesus founded is a redemptive religion in the narrow sense, that is to say, has the Cross set in its centre.

Its redemptive character has not, then, been imported into Christianity from without, in the course of its development in the world—whether through the instrumentality of Paul or of some other one. It has constituted its essence as a specific religion from the beginning; without which it would cease to be the religion that Jesus founded, and that,

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<sup>75</sup> Paulus, pp. 177 f.

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retaining the specific character impressed on it by Him, has borne His name through the centuries known from it as Christian. Precisely what Christianity was in the beginning, has ever been through all its history, and must continue to be so long as it keeps its specific character by virtue of which it is what it is, is a redemptive religion; or rather that particular redemptive religion which brings to man salvation from, his sin, conceived as guilt as well as pollution, through the expiatory death of Jesus Christ.

So clear is this that even an observer who approaches the matter from a very general point of view, and seeks only, as a student of philosophy, to determine from the outstanding facts what the real nature of Christianity is, cannot miss it. Josiah Royce<sup>76</sup> asks himself “what is vital in Christianity?” using the term “vital” much in the sense which is ordinarily attached to the term “essential.” “That is vital for an organic type,” he explains, illustratively, “which is so characteristic of that type that, were such vital features changed, the type in question, if not altogether destroyed, would be changed into what is essentially another type.” In seeking an answer, he naturally brings the “Liberal” and what he calls the “Traditional” answers into comparison. “Is Christianity essentially a religion of redemption,” he inquires, “in the sense in which tradition defines redemption? Or is Christianity simply that religion of the love of God and the love of man which the sayings and the parables so richly illustrate?” For the former view, he notes, is pleaded “the whole authority, such as it is, of the needs and religious experience of the church of Christian history; the church early found, or at least felt, that it could not live at all without thus interpreting the person and work of Christ.” For the latter is pleaded that “the doctrine in view seems to be, at least in the main, unknown to the historic Christ, in so far as we can learn what he taught.” Nevertheless he has no hesitation in rejecting the latter view, or in ascribing the former to Jesus. “As a student of philosophy, coming in no partisan spirit,” he declares, “I must insist that this reduction of what is vital in Christianity to the so-called pure gospel of Christ, as he preached it and as it is recorded in the body of the presumably authentic sayings and parables, is profoundly unsatisfactory.” The historic church was led to support the opposite view, he asserts, by “a sense of religious values which was a true sense.” And despite what he (erroneously) believes to be the testimony of the records, he refuses to believe that the “Liberal” view can fully represent our Lord’s own conception of His religion. He argues:

“For one thing, Christ can hardly be supposed to have regarded his most authentically reported religious sayings as containing the whole of his message, or as embodying the whole of his mission. For, if he had so viewed the matter, the Messianic tragedy in which his life work culminated would have been needless and unintelligible. For the rest, the doctrine that he taught is, as it stands,

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<sup>76</sup> Essay III. in the volume, “William James and Other Essays on the Philosophy of Life,” 1911.

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essentially incomplete. It is not a rounded whole. It looks beyond itself for a completion, which the master himself unquestionably conceived in terms of the approaching end of the world, and which the church later conceived in terms of what has become indeed vital for Christianity.”<sup>77</sup>

That one who does not profess to approach the question with which he deals “as an authority in matters which are technically theological,” and who has accordingly been led astray by those upon whom he was compelled to depend for the statement of the facts—and whose own interpretation, we must add, of the significance of the conclusion that he reaches leaves so much to be desired—should yet have seen thus clearly, and been led to assert thus strongly, that Christianity is, in its essence, “a redemptive religion” and that “what is most vital in Christianity is contained in whatever is essential and permanent about the doctrines of the incarnation and the atonement,” seems a notable testimony to the obviousness of the main facts. Had Royce understood that these elements in the Christian religion which he finds vital to it were not introduced into it by the followers of Christ in their interpretation of His religion, but were inserted into it as its very heart by the Master Himself, we may fancy with what increased emphasis he would have insisted upon them as the very essence of this religion.

Professor Macintosh tells us, to be sure, that if this is Christianity, “he would have to confess not only that he is not a Christian, but that he does not see how he ever could be a Christian.” It is a sad confession, but by no means an unexampled one. Every Inquiry Room supplies its contingent of like instances, and Christianity had not grown very old before it discovered that the preaching of Christ crucified was unto the Jews a stumbling-block and unto the Greeks foolishness. The only novel feature in the present situation lies in the proposal that if one cannot or will not accept the Christianity of the crucified Son of God, we shall just call what he can or will accept “Christianity” and let it go at that. This may seem an easy adjustment; but it is attended with the inconvenience of transferring our interest from things to mere names. The thing which has hitherto been known as Christianity appears to remain the same, however we deal with the name by which it has hitherto been known. And that thing enshrines the Cross in its heart. Paul Feine does not in the least exaggerate when, in the opening words of the section in his “Theologie des Neuen Testaments”<sup>78</sup> which speaks of Jesus’ own teaching as to His death, he writes:

“It has been the belief and the teaching of the Christian Church of all ages and of all Confessions, that Jesus, the Son of God, in His sacrificial death on the cross wrought the reconciliation of men with God, and by His resurrection begot anew

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<sup>77</sup> P. 141.

<sup>78</sup> P. 120.

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those who believe in Him unto a living hope of eternal life. This belief forms the content of the hymns and prayers of Christian devotion through all the centuries. It filled with new life the dying civilization of Greece and Rome and conquered to Christianity the youthful forces of the Germanic stock. In the proclamation of Jesus the Divine Saviour who died for us on the Cross, still lies even today the secret of the successes of Christian missions among the heathen. The symbol of this belief greets us in the form of the Cross from the tower of every church, from every Christian grave-stone and in the thousands of forms in which the Cross finds employment in daily life; this belief meets us in the gospel of the great Christian festivals and in the two sacraments of the church."

Enough; there can be no doubt what Christianity has been up to today; and there can be no doubt that what it is now proposed to transfer the name to is an essentially different religion. Have we not had it for a generation past dinned into our ears that it is an essentially different religion? that precisely what Paul did, when he substituted "the religion about Jesus," that is, the religion of the Cross, for "the religion of Jesus," that is, the "Liberal" reconstruction of what Jesus Himself taught, was to introduce a new religion, a religion, to recall Wrede's characterization, more unlike the religion of Jesus than the religion of Jesus was unlike Judaism?<sup>79</sup>

It seems merely frivolous to declare in one and the same breath that Paul introduced an essentially new religion when he supplanted "the simple gospel of Jesus" with the religion of the Cross, and that this new religion of the Cross is not essentially deserted when a return is made from it to "the simple religion of Jesus." The two religions are, in point of fact, essentially different, and no attempt to confuse them under a common designation can permanently conceal this fact. He who looks to be perfected through his own assumption of what he calls a Christlike attitude towards what he calls a Christlike superhuman reality—though he considers that the term "Christlike" may without fatal loss be a merely conventional designation—is of a totally different religion from him who feels himself a sinner redeemed by the blood of a divine Saviour dying for him on the Cross. It may be, as Troeltsch seems to suggest, that "Liberal Christianity" lacks the power to originate a church and can live only as a kind of parasitical growth upon some sturdier stock.<sup>80</sup> It may be that it is not driven by internal necessity to separate itself off from other faiths, on which it rather depends for support. It is otherwise with those who share the great experience of reconciliation with God in the blood of His dear Son. They know themselves to be instinct with a life peculiar to themselves and cannot help forming a community, distinguished from all others by this common great experience. We have

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<sup>79</sup> If Wrede be thought a mere extremist, let the words of Paul Wernle ("Anfänge,"<sup>2</sup> 1904, p. 112; E. T. i. pp. 158 f.) be considered.

<sup>80</sup> As cited, col. 681.

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quoted the opening words of Feine's remarks on Jesus' teaching as to His sacrificial death. The closing words are worth pondering also. They run:<sup>81</sup>

"Let it be said in closing that in the two declarations of the ransom-price and the cup of the Lord's Supper there lies church-building power. Jesus did not organize His community; He founded no church in His earthly labors. But the Christian Church is an inevitable product of the declaration of the expiatory effect of His death for many. For those who have experienced redemption and reconciliation through the death of Jesus must by virtue of this gift of grace draw together and distinguish themselves over against other communities."

There is indeed no alternative. The redeemed in the blood of Christ, after all is said, are a people apart. Call them "Christians," or call them what you please, they are of a specifically different religion from those who know no such experience. It may be within the rights of those who feel no need of such a redemption and have never experienced its transforming power to contend that their religion is a better religion than the Christianity of the Cross. It is distinctly not within their rights to maintain that it is the same religion as the Christianity of the Cross. On their own showing it is not that.<sup>82</sup>

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**Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield** (November 5, 1851—February 16, 1921) was professor of theology at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1887 to 1921. He served as the last principal of the Princeton Theological Seminary from 1886 to 1902. After the death of Warfield in office, Francis Landey Patton took over the functions of the office as the first president of seminary. Some conservative Presbyterians consider him to be the last of the great Princeton theologians before the split in 1929 that formed Westminster Theological Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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<sup>81</sup> As cited, p. 148.

<sup>82</sup> Warfield, B. B. (2008). *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Christology and Criticism* (Vol. 3, pp. 393–444). Logos Bible Software.