

Lion and Lamb Apologetics' The Gospel Confronts "Christian Deviations"

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"Christian deviations" was used as the title of a book by Dr. Horton Davies, published in 1954 (SCM Press), in which he surveyed a number of religious movements more or less remote from the main stream of Christian tradition. In this chapter we are to look at four first-century movements which could also be classed as Christian deviations—but deviations so radical that, in the eyes of New Testament writers, they robbed the gospel of its essential character and therefore required to be exposed in their true nature. These four are legalism, ascetic gnosticism, antinomian gnosticism and docetism.

1. Legalism

By legalism in this context is meant the attempt to combine the gospel of salvation by faith with the doctrine of salvation by keeping the Jewish law. Such attempts were made more than once in the history of the apostolic churches, but we shall pay particular attention to that which called forth from Paul his Letter to the Galatians.

In AD 47 and 48 Paul and Barnabas engaged in a campaign of evangelism, based on Syrian Antioch, which included Cyprus and central Asia Minor in its scope. In the latter territory they met with special success in some of the cities in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia, and churches were planted. But not long after the two missionaries returned to Syrian Antioch, trouble broke out in that church and spread to the recently planted churches of South Galatia.

The mother church of Jerusalem included in its membership many Jewish believers who could be described as "zealots for the law." Some of them had affinities with the party of the Pharisees. To these men the church was little more than a group within the Jewish commonwealth—a group which cherished Jesus' fulfilment of the messianic hope, which their fellow Jews had failed to recognize. They might agree that, since so many Jews had failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, a number of Gentiles had to be incorporated into the messianic community in order that the full quota of the elect of the last days might be

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made up. But these Gentiles had to be incorporated as proselytes,⁴ and they were therefore under an obligation not only to believe in Jesus as the Messiah but also to observe the Mosaic law. The Jerusalem apostles apparently did not accept this view, and no more did Paul and Barnabas. But these “zealots for the law” looked for leadership not to the apostles but to James the Just, the brother of Jesus, although it must be said that James was a much wiser and more moderate man than many of his more extreme followers.

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A delegation of these men visited Antioch and tried to impose their views on the church there. For a time the situation was very delicate because some Christian leaders at Antioch thought that temporary concessions should be made to these visitors’ strong convictions. But Paul refused to concede an inch, because he believed that basic principles of the gospel were at stake, and his firm stand helped to rally the waverers.

The situation was more precarious in the churches of Galatia. These churches were visited by Judaizing Christians from Jerusalem, who insisted that the young Galatian Christians must submit to circumcision and undertake to keep the Jewish law if they were to win acceptance by God or recognition as fellow believers by the Jerusalem church. In their inexperience the Galatian Christians were disposed to pay heed to the earnest representations of these visitors. Perhaps Paul was not as well informed as they had imagined. According to these visitors, he was a latecomer to Christianity and had not been directly commissioned by Jesus as the Jerusalem apostles were. If Paul had any authority at all, he received it from the leaders of the Jerusalem church, but these Judaizers could claim to represent the true faith as practised at Jerusalem.

The addition, however, of circumcision and other requirements of the Jewish law as necessary for salvation was, in Paul’s eyes, not so much an addition to the gospel as a perversion of it. It nullified the principle that salvation is bestowed by grace and received by faith, and gave man a share in the glory of salvation which, according to the gospel, belongs to God alone. The whole scheme as proposed by these Judaizers was a different gospel from that which Paul and his fellow apostles preached. It was, in fact, no gospel at all.

When news of what was happening in the Galatian churches came to Paul, he wrote an urgent letter to them, warning them, as they valued their salvation, not to give up the liberating message which they had heard from him and accept in its place a system which

⁴ Proselytes were Gentiles by birth who became full converts to Judaism (as distinct from “God-fearers,” who remained content with a looser attachment to the Jewish worship and way of life).

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could bring them only into spiritual bondage. His defence of the gospel against the legalists makes the following eight points.

- a. The gospel which Paul preached was one which he received by a direct commission from Christ. This involves him in a defence of his apostleship and a review of his movements from the time of his conversion (with special reference to his relations with the Jerusalem church), that it might be seen from the facts how baseless was the charge that he was indebted to the Jerusalem leaders for such authority as he possessed. Incidentally, Paul's defence of his apostleship, to which he repeatedly found himself driven in the course of his career, forms an interesting phase of Christian apologetic in the first century, although it is not one to which we shall pay detailed attention here. But for Paul it frequently played a necessary part in his defence of the gospel.
- b. If acceptance with God could have been attained by observing the Jewish law, what (asks Paul) was the point of the death of Christ? He died for his people's salvation, but there was no need for him to die if salvation could have been procured in the way indicated by the Judaizers.
- c. Christian life (as the Galatian Christians knew from their own experience) is a gift of the Spirit of God, and when they received it, they received at the same time unmistakable proofs of the Spirit's presence and activity in their midst. But if they began their Christian career on that high plane, was it not preposterous to imagine that they could continue it on the lower plane of legal works?
- d. The Judaizers justified their insistence on the necessity of circumcision by appealing to the example of Abraham. Circumcision was the seal of the covenant which God made with him, and no uncircumcised person could hope to have a share in that covenant with all its attendant blessings. To this Paul replied that the true children of Abraham are those who are justified by believing in God, as Abraham was. Those who believe God, as Abraham did, enjoy the blessings promised by God to Abraham. God's promise to Abraham found its fulfilment in Christ, not in the giving of the law. The blessings which are embraced in that promise, then, are not obtained through the Mosaic law (which was introduced long after the promise and could not modify its terms), but through faith in Christ.
- e. The law pronounces a curse on those who fail to keep it in its entirety. Those who trust in the law for their salvation, then, are exposing themselves to the risk of this curse. But Christ, by his death on the cross, has absorbed in himself

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the curse which the law pronounces, and set his people free from it. Why then should they go back and put themselves under it anew?

- f. The principle of righteousness by law-keeping belongs to the age of spiritual immaturity, the apron-string stage. But now that Christ has come, those who place their faith in him attain their spiritual majority as responsible sons of God. To listen to the arguments of the Judaizers means putting the clock back and reverting to infancy.
- g. The law imposed a yoke of bondage; faith in Christ brings freedom. Why should sensible men who have been emancipated by Christ give up their freedom and submit afresh to servitude under the elemental powers through which the law was mediated? “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1).
- h. Let it not be supposed that this freedom which the gospel of grace proclaims has any affinity with anarchic licence. The faith of which the gospel speaks is a faith which manifests itself outwardly in acts of love, and thus fulfils “the law of Christ” (Galatians 5:6; Galatians 6:2).

2. Ascetic Gnosticism

Gnosticism is a mode of thought which we meet in a developed form in the second century. It reinterpreted Christianity for an intellectual elite by representing it as a form of higher “knowledge” (*gnosis*) by means of which the soul might be liberated from the shackles of the material order and mount to the upper realm of truth and light. In many gnostic systems the disparagement of the material order manifested itself in severity to the human body. Bodily asceticism and spiritual enrichment went together.

An incipient form of this gnosticism is refuted by Paul in the Epistle to the Colossians. Colossae, a city in the Lycus valley in the province of Asia, had been evangelized by one of Paul’s colleagues during Paul’s three years of apostolic ministry in Ephesus (AD 52–55). A few years later, when Paul was in custody in Rome, waiting for his appeal to Caesar to be heard, news came to him of a disquieting development in the churches of the Lycus valley, and especially in the church of Colossae. There was a strong inclination on the part of that church to accept an attractive line of teaching which (although they did not suspect it) was calculated to subvert the pure gospel which they had believed and bring them into spiritual bondage.

Basically this teaching was Jewish. This seems clear from the place which it gave to legal ordinances: circumcision, food regulations, the sabbath, new moon and other

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prescriptions of the Jewish calendar. To this extent it was very similar to the legalism which Paul had previously had to deal with in the churches of Galatia. But on that Jewish foundation there had been raised a philosophical superstructure which was non-Jewish in origin. In this part of Asia Minor the barriers between the Jews and their pagan neighbours had ceased to be very effective. Social intermingling led to religious fusion, and the "Colossian heresy" (as this teaching is commonly called) may be described as a refashioning of the gospel so as to fit it into the framework of a Jewish-Hellenistic syncretism.⁵

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In this system the angelic or elemental powers through which the Jewish law was given (*cf.* Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 2:2) were identified with the lords of the seven planetary spheres, "principalities and powers" who had some share in the fullness of the divine nature and controlled the lines of communication between God and men. Since they were in a position to cut men off from access to God, tribute had to be paid to them in the form of law-keeping. To break the law meant incurring their resentment, and then they had to be appeased by severe self-denial and penance. In so far as this system paid any attention to the work of Christ, it probably suggested that his descent to earth and return to heaven could have taken place only by the permission of those powers. Indeed, the fact of his suffering and death was probably regarded as evidence of his inferiority to them. Accordingly, allegiance to Christ was not a sufficient protection in a universe controlled by these mighty beings. That was clearly to be seen in the case of a man like Paul, one of the servants of Christ. The afflictions into which Paul was brought by his service to Christ showed that he had not attained that degree of control over the cosmic forces which would have enabled him to avoid them.

This line of teaching appealed to a certain religious temperament, the more so as it claimed to be a form of advanced teaching for spiritually superior persons. Christians were invited to go in for this higher wisdom, to explore the hidden mysteries by a series of initiations until they reached perfection. Baptism was only a preliminary initiation, and those who would pursue the path of truth further must put off all material elements by means of a rigorous asceticism, until they were transported from this world of darkness to the domain of light, and so experienced full redemption.

But, however attractive this cult might be to many, Paul condemned it as specious make-believe. Far from representing a more advanced grade of knowledge than that provided by the apostolic gospel, it was completely inconsistent with that gospel and sought to undermine the foundations of Christianity. A system which exalted the planetary powers

⁵ Syncretism "selects elements from a variety of religious beliefs and customs and absorbs and adapts them" (B. J. Nicholls in *The World's Religions*. 4th ed. N. Anderson. InterVarsity Press, 1975, 137).

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enthroned fate in place of the will of God, and a system which brought men into bondage to those powers denied the grace of God.

To this “tradition of men,” as he called it, Paul opposed the true tradition of Christ. The planetary powers have no part at all in the divine fullness; that fullness is perfectly embodied in Christ. In Christ all wisdom and knowledge are concentrated, and in Christ all wisdom and knowledge are accessible to believers—not to a spiritual elite only, but to all. The planetary powers are not the mediators between God and men. That role is filled by Christ, who unites Godhead and manhood in his one person. Was Christ inferior to the planetary powers? On the contrary, his supremacy over them is established by a twofold right. First, it was by him and for him that these powers were created, together with everything else that exists. Secondly, he vanquished them when they assaulted him upon the cross, and by his victory over them he liberated from their now impotent grasp his people whom they had formerly held in bondage. Why should those who were united with Christ think it necessary to appease powers which owed their very existence to him? And why should those who, by faith, had died and risen with Christ, thus sharing in his victory, pay any further tribute to powers which he had so signally defeated? Far from being an advanced form of wisdom, this angel cult bore all the marks of immaturity. It called on those who had come of age in Christ to go back to the conditions of childhood.

In his defence of the gospel against this plausible system, Paul gives a good example of his readiness to be “all things to all men” for the gospel’s sake (1 Corinthians 9:22 f.). He confronts the false *gnosis* and bodily asceticism which was being urged upon the Colossian Christians with the true *gnosis* and spiritual asceticism of Christ. While he writes as an uncompromising opponent of the false teaching, he takes up its characteristic terms and shows how the truth which they attempt, unsuccessfully, to convey is embodied in Christ, the true “mystery” (or revelation) of God.

In this Epistle, it has been argued, Paul is undertaking two tasks at once—the defence of Christianity over against the intellectual world of paganism and the defence of gospel truth within the church. As an apologist to the Gentiles, he was perhaps the first to meet his pagan opponents on their own ground, and use their language in a Christian sense to make it clear that the problems to which they vainly sought an answer elsewhere found their satisfying solution in Christ.

His employment of the technical terms of the Colossian heresy in what has been called a “disinfected” sense helps to explain the differences in vocabulary between Colossians and its sister Epistle to the Ephesians on the one hand and the rest of Paul’s Epistles on the other. It may also have been in reaction to the Colossian heresy that Paul developed his earlier picture of the Christian fellowship as a body to the point reached in Colossians and Ephesians, where the church is viewed as the body of which Christ is the head. In

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this way he brings out not only the interdependence of the members of the believing community, but also the dependence of each and all of those members upon Christ for life and power. And he vindicates the supremacy of Christ against a system which would have cast him down from his excellence.

In his reply to the Colossian heresy, Paul unfolds the cosmic significance of Christ more fully than he had done in his earlier writings. This theme is not absent from the earlier Epistles, but in Colossians and Ephesians it is expounded at length. While the teaching of justification by faith is the foundation of Paul's gospel, it does not exhaust his gospel. But in some quarters Paulinism has come to be identified so exclusively with this teaching, especially as expounded in Galatians and Romans, that the cosmic and corporate aspects of the gospel, as set forth in Colossians and Ephesians, have been felt to be un-Pauline. In fact, there is room in true Paulinism for both, and any presentation of the gospel today must also make room for both if it is not to be lopsided and defective.

For the truth of Christ's supremacy over all the powers in the universe is one which modern man sorely needs to learn. He is oppressed by a sense of impotence against merciless forces which he can neither overcome nor escape. These forces may be Frankenstein's monsters of man's own creation, or they may be horrors outside his conscious control, but either way he is intimidated by the vastness of those fateful currents which threaten to sweep him on to destruction whether he will or no. And to modern man in his frustration and despair the full-orbed gospel of Christ, as Paul presents it to the Colossians, is the one message of hope. Christ crucified and risen is Lord of all; all the forces in the universe, well-disposed and ill-disposed, are subject to him. To be united to Christ by faith is to throw off the thralldom of hostile powers, to enjoy perfect freedom, to gain the mastery over the dominion of evil because Christ's victory is ours.

3. Antinomian Gnosticism

While the view that matter was inherently evil led most gnostics to treat the body with severity as a condition of saving the spirit of man, there were some gnostic groups which argued differently. The body, they said, being part of the material order, is irrelevant to religion; whether it is treated roughly or indulgently makes no difference to one's spiritual well-being. This attitude could lead to a throwing off of restraint so far as the deeds of the body were concerned. For practical purposes the same end was served by those who argued that the body ought to be humiliated by being plunged in all sorts of vice and impurity.

By contrast with all these wrong attitudes to the body, the apostolic teaching lays it down that the body belongs to God as much as the spirit does, and should be dedicated to his service. But the one document in the New Testament which appears to deal most directly

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with the antinomian variety of gnosticism, which refused restraint on the life of the body, is the tiny Epistle of Jude.

Jude, writing probably in the later part of the first century, tells his readers that when he was minded to write to them about “our common salvation,” he was constrained instead to use his pen in defence of the gospel against an insidious error which threatened to subvert it. But Jude by no means confined himself to passive defence. There are times when it is not enough to hold and expound the truth; the war must be carried into the enemy’s lines so that the error may be attacked, exposed and refuted.

The faith for which Jude contends is “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” “Faith” here is not belief, but the sum total of that which is believed. It is based on the teaching delivered by the Lord to his apostles, and by them to his people. For Christ is God’s complete Word to men; God has nothing more to say than has been said in Christ. Therefore all claims to convey an *additional* revelation to that which has been given in Christ (as distinct from bringing out the fuller implications of the revelation in Christ) are unfounded. That is so whether they are embodied in books which aim at superseding or supplementing the Bible, or take the form of extra-biblical traditions which are promulgated as dogmas by ecclesiastical authority. It is true, as John Robinson of Leiden said, that “the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of his holy Word,” but that truth will break forth from the Word already spoken, the Word which became incarnate in Jesus Christ and has been recorded for us in the Bible. The Spirit of God, who spoke by the prophets and apostles, still speaks to us through their words and thus bears witness to Christ, the perfect revelation of God.

The false teachers against whom Jude defends the faith had not launched their attack upon it as open enemies, but had infiltrated into the Christian position. They had professed faith in Christ, received baptism in his name, entered into church fellowship, but were revealed by their conduct to be wolves in sheep’s clothing. They took advantage of the pardoning message of the gospel as though the efficacy of Christ’s redemptive work gave them licence to sin as they pleased, without fear of consequences. Like some people whom Paul knew—and like Rasputin in our own century—they considered that they ought to continue in sin, that grace might abound. By so doing, says Jude, they “pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness.” Their lives showed them to be utter strangers to the meaning and power of the gospel, and constituted an open denial of Christ. When Jude says that they “deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ,” he may have their moral teachings and practices in mind. But these teachings and practices were probably attended by a false conception of the person and work of Christ, such as appears one way or another in all the gnostic systems.

How does Jude defend the faith against the dangers which these people presented to it?

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First, he reminds his readers of Old Testament characters in whose succession these false teachers run. Just as divine judgment fell on the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness, on the disobedient angels, on the inhabitants of the cities of the plain, just as it fell on individuals like Cain, Balaam and Korah, so it would fall on these. Those Old Testament characters revolted against God and his representatives and suffered for it. So these false teachers disregarded the custodians of godly order in the churches and fed themselves instead of their misguided followers:

Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A sheep-hook, or have learn'd aught else the least
That to the faithful herdman's art belongs!

(John Milton, *Lycidas*)

Secondly, Jude points out that these false teachers were foreseen by the Old Testament prophets from Enoch onwards, and by the apostles of Christ, who issued warnings in advance against their plausible devices. Indeed, he finds in them a fulfilment of the predictions about Antichrist. When he describes them as “loud-mouthed boasters” (Jude 16), he uses language borrowed from Daniel’s description of the wilful king, who would “speak astonishing things against the God of gods” (Daniel 11:36). Nor was Jude the only Christian writer around that time to recognize in heretics preliminary manifestations of the spirit of Antichrist which was to be unleashed at the time of the end; John, as we shall see, does the same.

Thirdly, Jude exhorts his readers to make the faith once delivered the foundation of their lives, to persevere in prayer, to abide in the fellowship of God’s love and to look forward to that outpouring of mercy which would mark the second advent of Christ. Thus their feet would be kept in the way leading to eternal life. Let them at the same time rescue those who were in danger of being misled by the false teachers, while abhorring the false teaching itself.

And fourthly, he commends them to God, who is able to guard his people from stumbling until at last he brings them into his own glorious presence and satisfies them with his joy. For all the vigour of his polemic, he does not content himself with the denunciation of error, but finds the best defence against its insidious approaches in a closer adherence to the love of God and faith in Christ.

4. Docetism

The gnostic view of the material world as unreal or as essentially evil ran counter to several of the basic tenets of the New Testament faith. It undermined the doctrine of creation, for something which was unreal or essentially evil could not have been made

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by God. It undermined the doctrine of the incarnation, for obviously the divine being could not inhabit a material body if the substance of that body was unreal or evil. One attempt to reconcile the gnostic doctrine of matter with the apostolic teaching about Christ was the theory that his body was not a real body but a phantom one. He only *seemed* to inhabit a material body, and from the Greek word *dokein*, which means “to seem,” people who held this theory were known as docetists.

But if Christ’s incarnation was unreal, his death and resurrection were also unreal, and the whole gospel message was thus emptied of its truth and power. One unhappy legacy of this short-lived phase of Christian heresy (short-lived as far as its career within the history of Christianity is concerned) remains to bedevil Christian witness to Muslims up to the present day. For when the Koran says of Jesus that “they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; it was made a semblance to them,” we may infer that Muhammad was indebted for this idea to a Christian source tainted with docetism.

Towards the end of the first century, then, we find Christian communities receiving repeated warnings against those who denied the reality of Christ’s incarnation—who denied his coming in the flesh. These people might occupy a vantage point as prophets, whose unpremeditated words were commonly believed to be words prompted by the Spirit of God. Christians had to be warned that only by the content of the words spoken by these prophets could it be decided whether they were prompted by the Spirit of God or by a spirit of a very different sort.

At the beginning of the second century Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, in spite of the fact that he possessed the gift of prophecy himself, found it necessary to curb its exercise in the churches, because it was being misused to gain a hearing for false teaching. And earlier still, John “the disciple of the Lord” (as he was called in the province of Asia) finds it necessary to write to Christians in that province, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which disunites Jesus (*i.e.* disunites the historical Jesus of Nazareth from the eternal Son of God) is not of God” (1 John 4:1 ff.). And again, “Many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 John 7). The activity of these “many antichrists” was a feature of the “last hour” in which the great and final Antichrist would have his day and cease to be (1 John 2:18).

One form of docetic teaching is associated with the name of Cerinthus, who according to tradition was the “deceiver” whom John had especially in mind. Cerinthus, we are told, held that “the Christ” (a divine power) descended on the man Jesus when he was

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baptized and enabled him to perform the mighty works which characterized his ministry, but left him before his death. This last point is well illustrated by the so-called *Gospel of Peter*, a docetic document of the late second century, which represents Jesus as crying out on the cross, “My power, my power, why hast thou left me?”

John refutes this teaching explicitly both in his Gospel and in his Epistles. When in 1 John 5:6 he says, “This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood,” he is thinking of those who held that the Christ came with water (*i.e.* at the time of Jesus’ baptism) but not with the blood (because the divine power abandoned him before his death). Some commentators see in these words of John a reference to the two Christian sacraments, and they may not be wrong in this. But John is primarily concerned with historical realities which lie behind the sacraments. He who was baptized was Christ, the Son of God; he who died was Christ, the Son of God. John replies to the docetic distortion of the faith with a positive affirmation of the true doctrine of Christ.

Similarly, in his Gospel he speaks of our Lord’s incarnation in language too direct and unambiguous to be misunderstood or misinterpreted in a docetic sense: “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). Had he said that “the Word assumed manhood” or “took to himself a human body” he would have spoken the truth, but with the blunt assertion that the Word *became* flesh he insisted on the reality of the incarnation in terms which could not be used as a convenient theological formula covering a wide variety of interpretations.

And as he emphasizes the reality of the incarnation at the beginning of his Gospel, so towards the end of his Gospel John asserts the reality of the death of Christ against those who held that he only seemed to die, or that it was not the Christ who died. In his narrative of the crucifixion he describes how, after Jesus had died, his side was pierced by a spear, “and at once there came out blood and water” (John 19:34). Then he adds, “He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth, that you also may believe.” This solemn attestation is evidently intended to confirm (a) that Christ really died, (b) that by his death the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah were fulfilled, and (c) that the blood and water from his side were a parabolic token of the truth that he came “not with water only but with the water and the blood.”

The historical facts about Christ are our court of appeal both for the rebuttal of error and for the establishment of truth. No pronouncement by ecclesiastical authority can carry

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such weight as these. "Councils, we admit, and Creeds, cannot go behind, but must wholly rest upon the history of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁶

The presentation of the gospel in all its fullness and depth is the best defence against pseudo-Christianity. So evidently the apostles and other first-century Christians believed. The refutation of error, they knew, was necessary, but only so that the ground might be cleared for the proclamation of the truth.

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Some of the deviations with which they had to deal are still with us. The most perennially popular is that which imagines that we can win acceptance with God by our own works, or simply by our ordinary decent nature. What more could God want? I suppose several of us have had the experience of explaining justification by faith to someone in words of one syllable, so as to make it (as we think) crystal clear—only to be told at the end, "Yes, that's what I always say: we must just do the best we can." Man's bankruptcy before God, his utter indebtedness to God's free grace, the all-sufficiency of Christ, these foundations of the gospel need to be insisted upon today as much as they did when Paul wrote his Epistle to the Galatians.

But if any should mistakenly conclude that the Christian liberty into which the grace of God brings us means freedom from ethical obligations, then there is great need to insist that, on the contrary, the grace of God trains us "to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives" (Titus 2:12). And when an attempt is made to "restate" Christianity in terms of some current philosophical or cosmological fashion, in such a way that it ceases to be genuine Christianity, let us remember that the first Christian century was acquainted with such attempts and learn how to deal with them.

Philosophical and cosmological fashions tend to be ephemeral. If Christianity had in fact become completely identified with one or another of the first-century fashions of this kind, it would speedily have become obsolete. The everlasting gospel is not tied to out-of-date world views; it is relevant to every age, to the twentieth century as much as to the first, because it meets the total need of man through Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday and today and for ever.⁷

Frederick Fyvie Bruce, FBA [Fellowship of the British Academy is an award granted by the British Academy to leading academics for their distinction in the humanities and social sciences] was Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester from 1959 until 1978 and one of the most influential evangelical scholars of the second half of the twentieth century. His importance

⁶ R. C. Moberly, *Lux Mundi: Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*, ed. Charles Gore (Murray, 1889), 243.

⁷ Bruce, F. F. (2017). *Defending First-Century Faith: Christian Witness in the New Testament*. Kingsley Books.

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comes from the fact that when the academic community looked down upon Evangelicals, Bruce demonstrated that a scholar holding evangelical views could do worthwhile academic work. At the same time, he persuaded Evangelicals that they should not turn their backs on academic methods of Bible study, even if the results might differ from traditional evangelical views. As a result, he has been called the "Dean of Evangelical Scholarship."

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