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The Finality of Christianity [String-Bound Sermons]

Earl Clement Davis

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the Finality of Christainty. When Straus published his favores Life of fewer in 1835, the whole body of Christin Sheologius was stricel to its very defths. In think that a more should place to Think, much less to give utterance to the idea that Christanity is bosed upon mythology, and that the heir destoment stories are nothing wors or less them a collection of mythe and legends, - this brought forth sel the feen sel the indiquation, all the wroth, all the mindistive withfuration of which the Christin Church has bru cofable. June that hime and ever before the church has heen conducting a sullen defiant and befoles retreat before the

surrement of worlen life. with fear and trembling the adherents of to a religion of theology authority have wothled the fearless critic and scientific histories, desict and analyze, and sift the motivides history of the church, the Bitte allel Lestonent, the creeks, the doctrines one often another. But they keld fort to the conniction that we won within the the church, and in the interest of Christianity and religion itself would slave to offert the sitialed of the new Pertament, and subject the leozals and of to the some keen warching analysis! that had been affherl to the books, get for a hunched years this has been going on

This touch of Prof. Forter, The Finaily of Christianity" is one of the institut servets of this hundred years of work. ats significance restruct alone in the fait that it stands fairly and squarely upon the religious flot from of the world, and world Thought, but also that Prof. Factor repercute the spirit of teaching and training of the large and Minerity of thicogo, and is identified with the one of the lengest and work consensative of otherly furtisting bodies of Christians. Realizing full well the womentons: ven of the situation, and the real irrue which is at atobe in the freeent day continuous in theology. he subjects the fin wifler of the conflicting tendevires to

scholarly, and keen anolysis, and then submit his own fusition for con: side other stating as punkly as for the that his their is Peligin without sufernaturahim, and science without notwohim! He examines the system of chiertainty which bases its claims to obsolute . vers, and findly upon the offert external objects of faith, such as unocles, the Deity of Christ, the insfination of the Rible, the authority of the creeds the doctive of the Livily, the doction of the stenement, and smeluster this examination by declaring that all there things have forest former from the religious conseptions of the world world. The Rible the cuels the doctries of the

Eccleriation me the firshest of religion faith, and as such con not be the annu freligions in canal raine que von of the uligion life. If chiertrainly is just this suferrativel religion, and withing work, then chirtianly is faring from our life, weren to return. and all claims to belong to chanch Christin body are mercheled from the life of the worlen won. In this new world there is no worm for the theory of Christianitys exclusives sufernaturalner, over againt which is vot fells work but woris; for in this new world the officition of human and cliving is oversome, and all is human and sel is clivine sat one and the some twine " all this system is based

on the frimacy of intellect in won. It is the structfort of view of solvetion by Rumledge, comment to orthodoxy. and rationaline, to ver Platonism and Buddhim, to Lowar againer and Hegel," but in the new world there is nothing good save the good wiel." Orinary of the intellect in won; the ascitic- contemplative life the highest life; Pormer elge The cheif good; dogue, or served clothing, the essence of chiestianity and the centent of revelation, such con: test grandetech by infallibily of fufe or book, whose creclestions are necessily minaculous; paving faith, first of all tolshing things to be two because fore or book sugs so, the finality of the christian religion consisting in the minacus lously authenticated direcity of its clocking - of this is a fine of this is all of a fiece, and it all fili into the old gracer, Kowan world and Mediaene world with its static corwology, and its static enfire, and hierarchy ones the spirit. The frimacy of the well in won: the fractical word life the highest life; character the shift good: ideals the evene of the Christin religion, and the centent of revelation, which latter is the kisting of great souls. and the sort of history; ideals volved teleologically, and not causally; faith not assent. but werd arting the finality of christianity in its ideals, - This two, is all of a frice and filt with the worlen dynamic and hislogical world

differentialism in religion, and Chietianity if it is in evene bond on sufernotimolism is gone, But in the great humistic werement of which this over throw of authorly religion is one result, and the se establishment of war in the world is another, the frime question before the world to-day is whether This was se established was shall he much a won of seine, or choll he he a won of spiriture from Here he me come to face the quet problem of motorialistic naturalin, wherein the high spiriture for developments of were are reclured to the level of natural course aline. Hohe disintegrating, devolating effect of oth system of thought which

declares that we are what we are or a revet of the sole action of weeknicol love which have fortured us, without giving flow for the sportmen action of a fre furnality, is as work to fear he fewed , on the egroly dewralizing sufernaturalism. The conflict between softwaters! sim religion and science, has met heen most wither a conflict tehnen superaturolin au science and science how hear the nichown faity. But owing to the first that that the defender of religion have touch their who stoked Their whole claim of chints ianty ofen the sufernatural authority of chirtianty, the notwork revet is following, viz. that with

the over those of Sufernoturaling the overthim of chickbuilty for hear to hear for granted. Lowest the the chiefing from the decoying stand structure of sufernaturalism, on the and maintain its integrity and volicity against the dogunatic assertion of of moterolistic dogwotion is our perent poblem in the interest of a richer free dufer life for worr. This toher us bock to the sources of of christianity, sur as formel in the new testiment. The question immedially arises as to what the essence of church owily is, Is il-that which is corrown to all the vorins selyins christin groups, che et the teaching of any one of these georgs; de it the relig teaching of the new testoment? In it the teaching of anyone, of the großel. or any fortin of the Googles.? the induct is their any errore tout

at all. Difficulties arise as som as this question frements itself. In when we come to the new Lestament, we find there a variety of oficious, a conglumentin of tractition, myth. Legeral, and ships: imposed statements week \$ in the interests of profogonda by wer who unote from 40 to 10 years often the alleged events are said to have accured. There is not one word in the four boyels that we can say with certainty was ever uttied by Jerna, There herr Lestament nanatives which are the some of all our historical Rounledge about Jesus, one records of ofinines about events, at hest they uperent the second hand translated seconds of the imperiors that the life of a un worde upon the the feefle, who and the successors of the profle who gothered about him.

when we come to find one way though this war of material which is clearly often the accumulations of followers and out the defacil of ferus him seef me find it very difficult to find a common todis general ufor which to struct with Jesus, If we seek to officiente himself ourselves to him on the basis of the acceptance of his teaching, we shell find that we have to fact confory with him at once. He tet behind in angels and demons. which we do not. He believed in a fersure duit which we chront. He behind in winacles which me dr vot: He believed in the feerlier doetime of the obligation of Heaven, such as the achievities of to-sloge think in me de vot. He in the clottime of the merriohely which we do not. In shot be

wor the shild of his own time shaving with them the conceptions of the world, and the relations of won to the world which we have outgern. Here we con find over comme grown to with Jerus. If his top continuance of religious supernary slepended reforme such truths and teachings. tekind. Shuld me seek a comme word gived with him jet word would be difficult. The word footlens of to: dry receive wo treatment at his hourses. He has withing to any upon the subjects which are awang the wort fenning in worlen life

Indudall there alterifts to seek on 13 intellectual confinionalis, breed ufor likeles of idear, from all the worlden attempts to find sheller in a Wille chistianity, are but survivals of the old suffernativolian. The things that he said the thoughts that he expensed the doctions that he freached, there are not the obiching but the traveient in his life. not in spite of the fort that we do not believe as he dich, or do vot accept. his afterfice leachings as the, but because of this diversity of ofin in we came meaner to the won who lined 1900 years ago, and lift-such a hewereless inflerin you the forfle. The foundation of chirting is ferm, but the esseure of the life of Jerus is vot in words or declaras such vot in alleged

miracless, or claims to werich ship but in the ferromality of the won who said the things, and chiel the deich, and obout whom the wythis and legend, collected. the he finds, and we find the basis of our faith. not in faith not in deed, vot in doctrine, vot in any object to fought of faith but in the welling of within us of the sportameous former of fewer ality. on This that former which is the columna: Tim of our life, that expense itself in the ceaselour activities of wan. Jesus significance as a religious beacle is formed in this that those formers of love, those chef human sympothies, those stewol hopes, the quest expunding former of love and human fellemshif. there

were things of the spiritool purrolly he worde the offer bases of his regulat: ing frincifle of life, when he forced the mystery of the world, the mystery of life, of geowth of self course owner of live, of lofe, of africation, when he fored the reterrol negeting which we coll God, he felt his relations = shif to this rugstay, felt its oll fevetrating former, felt is defindance ofore it. and said fother. Out of this heat of Jenes, this heart some furefiel by living in the very ference of the unseens, absorbing its former shooting its right wichurs and elymerice, formacl furth words of love and deeds of truckerners, just as the former of life in notice is busting into leaf and florer. But the leaf and follower facle, but the spirit of slife is obiching.

The word and dead of Jener way far away, as the changing seasons of wor succeed each other, but the shill of his life, the fewer of his ferrorabity, the soul chicking and observing the spill of God the Fother, and transforming it into human kircher, and human love, this is sterral, and obiding. In this certs the finality of the religion of ferus. Test the grantity of his speculative truth, not indeed the infollibility of his utleance, but strong woble free former of his fersenalty, willing to do the will of God, the Fother, the Thus me arrive of the essential former of the son of foreth and wring who has left such an imfruit ofon the history of the world.

Chiestianely the religion of which he is the formales, becomes not a religion of a book, vol a religein of a weed, vot a religion of duchine, not a religion of texts, and veryings of Jesus. but a religion of fersonaly, the tigich external object of faith chowat exist, the religious faith is inwood. and expense it-invocal former by stamfing the world with its inspirit. So chartainty is a religion in which me aunt insp are religions, vot tecause me read a hible, but me write a hible, because of the wines former of our fersimolity, he are not the does of good deeds, and the liver of the voble life, not Lecause some book a clericus or what not tells us to; but because me are chrimated by the former of some releal.

This religion of feromality, this religion of Jens, this two chirtianity is reflacing the the stormbling structure of suferunturalism, and sufflementing, and giving life to mechanical inferral system of moteriolisti efemalin notwolin in our modern life. as we face the feblus before us, the firstlem of god, and wil, the firsterns of life, and death, the ferblew of word and social life, our great full things with whether were took is won, he the won form or another, is like God, but whether hard I much rother that God is like won. Could we know that the great infinite former of the world in which we to live, the source of all our former our strength on

love, our arfination, he like the tender loving forgining Jesus of nagneth ou life would be freed form all il-doobting uncertainties. This wer the religious faith of Jones the well spring of his life. This is and must be one uligins faith, the well string of our life. The fellowship with Jenes, on fellowshif in christianity is in wo work determined by our assent ordinert of the dogwood of seclesiasticism. nor by our assent to a direct from the teachings of Joseps, Chin fellowship with Jens, ou fellow: shif in Chustianity is determined by the extent to which the spirit, the stonel fourt of our life is like the spirit the standforit of his life. The disforition which Jerus hack in his world we shold have in ous, my the will to follow as

of the rightern and workle life in 19 which the rule of lors show he sufreme. This at least is thouligin of Jerus, and of Churchamity is the religion of Jerus, and not a uligion about form then chirtianly must be a religion of ferenality. It finality is not exclusive, indud it is not all quantitative, but it is qualitative, It is the way by which were way enter with the richert and deefert exferiences of life, and face the hardest furthern, the defect souries, the wort and disoffint wents with the color and resolution that Characterized forms the life whit we hove of the life, and the death of Jenn of hozauth. In flow of the combling meeton ism of Rybanatural

The Finality of Christianity [Version 2]¹ Earl C. Davis Pittsfield, MA 1906

When Strauss published his famous Life of Jesus in 1835, the whole body of Christian Theologians was stirred to its very depths. 2 To think that a man should dare to think, much less to give utterance to the idea that Christianity is based upon mythology, and that the New Testament stories are nothing more-or-less than a collection of myths and legends, this brought forth all the fear, all the indignation, all the wrath, all the vindictive vituperation of which the Christian Church has been capable. Since that time, and even before, the church has been conducting a sullen, defiant and hopeless retreat before the movement of modern life. With fear and trembling the adherents to a religion of authority have watched the fearless critic and scientific historian dissect and analyze, and sift the history of the church, the Old Testament, the creeds, the doctrines, one after another. But they held fast to the conviction that no man within the church, and in the interests of Christianity and religion itself, would dare to approach the citadel of the New Testament, and subject the Gospels to the same keen searching analysis that had been applied to the books. Yet for a hundred years this has been going on.

Among the manuscripts left by Earl Clement Davis there were two very similar texts, "The Finality of the Christian Religion" and "The Finality of the Christianity." Both were connected toperhaps prompted by—the book by Professor George Burman Foster, The Finality of the Christian Religion. The transcribed text that follows I have somewhat arbitrarily labeled "version 2." As opposed to "version 1," which reads more like a book report or review, this text, "version 2," reads as a more digested set of remarks that are prompted by Foster's book.

² David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) published *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet* in 1835-6, initially translated by George Eliot in 1846 as *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, 3 volumes.

This book of Prof. Foster's, The Finality of Christianity, is one of the important results of this hundred years of work. Its significance rests not alone in the fact that it stands fairly and squarely upon the religious platform of the modern world, and modern thought, but also that Prof. Foster represents the spirit of teaching and training of the large University of Chicago, and is identified with one of the largest and most conservative of orthodox protestant bodies of Christians.

Realizing full well the momentousness of this situation, and the real issue which is at stake in the present day controversy in theology, he subjects the principles of the conflicting tendencies to scholarly, and keen analysis, and then submits his own position for consideration, starting as frankly as possible that his thesis is "Religion without supernaturalism, and science without naturalism."4 He examines the system of Christianity which bases its claims to absoluteness and finality upon the external objects of faith, such as miracles, the Deity of Christ, the inspiration of the Bible, the authority of the creeds, the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of the atonement, and concludes this examination by declaring that all these things have passed forever from the religious conceptions of the modern world. The Bible, the creeds, the doctrines of the Ecclesiasticism are the products of religious faith, and as such cannot be the causal sine qua non of the religious life. If Christianity is just this supernatural religion, and nothing more, then Christianity is passing from our life, never to return, and all claims to belong to the Christian body are excluded from the life of the modern man.

In this new world there is no room for the theory of Christianity's exclusive supernaturalness, over against which is ... not God's work but man's; for in this new world the opposition of human and

³ George Burman Foster, The Finality of the Christian Religion, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906.

⁴ George Burman Foster, *The Finality of the Christian Religion*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906, p. 199.

divine is overcome, and all is human and all is divine at one and the same time. 5

All this system is based on the primacy of intellect in man. "It is the standpoint of view of salvation by knowledge, common to orthodoxy and rationalism, to neo-Platonism and Buddhism, to Thomas Aquinas and Hegel." ... But in the new world "there is nothing good save the good will."

Primacy of the intellect in man; the asceticcontemplative life the highest life; knowledge the chief good; dogma, or "sound doctrine," the essence of Christianity and the content of revelation, such content quaranteed by infallibility of Pope or Book, whose credentials are necessarily miraculous; saving faith, first of all holding things to be true because Pope or Book says so, the finality of the Christian Religion consisting in the miraculously authenticated divinity of its doctrines-this is all this is of a piece, and it all fits into the old Graeco-Roman and medieval world, with its static cosmology, and its static Empire and hierarchy over the spirit. The primacy of the will in man; the practical-moral life the highest life; character, the chief good; ideals the essence of the Christian religion and the content of revelation, which latter in the history of great souls and the soul of history; ideals valued teleologically and not causally; faith, not assent, but moral action; the finality of the Christian religion in its ideals-this, too, is all of a piece and fits into the modern dynamic and biological world.⁷

Supernaturalism in religion and Christianity, if it is in essence based on supernaturalism, is gone. But in the great humanistic movement of which this overthrow of authority-

⁵ George Burman Foster, *The Finality of the Christian Religion*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906, p. 147.

⁶ George Burman Foster, *The Finality of the Christian Religion*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906, p. 187.

⁷ George Burman Foster, *The Finality of the Christian Religion*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906, p. 189.

religion is one result, and the re-establishment of man in the world is another, the prime question before the world today is whether this re-established man shall be merely a man of sense or shall he be a man of spiritual power. Here we come to face the great problem of materialistic naturalism, wherein the high spiritual developments of man are reduced to the level of natural causes alone. The disintegrating, demoralizing effect of the system of thought which declares that we are what we are as a result of the sole action of mechanical laws which have produced us, without giving place for the spontaneous action of a free personality, is as much to be feared as the equally demoralizing supernaturalism. The conflict between religion and science has been rather a conflict between supernaturalism and science, and science has been the victorious party. But owing to the fact that the defenders of religion have staked their whole claim of Christianity upon the supernatural authority of Christianity, the natural result is following, viz., that with the overthrow of supernaturalism, the overthrow of Christianity has been taken for granted. To unrest the Christian from the decaying structure of supernaturalism, and maintain its integrity and validity against the dogmatic assertions of materialistic dogmatism is our present problem in the interest of a richer, deeper life for man. This takes us back to the historical sources of Christianity, as found in the New Testament.

The question immediately arises as to what the essence of Christianity is. Is it that which is common to all the various Christian groups? Is it the teaching of any one of these groups? Is it the teaching of the New Testament? Is it the teaching of anyone of the Gospels, or any portion of the Gospels? Or indeed is there any essence to it at all?

Difficulties arise as soon as this question presents itself, for when we come to the New Testament, we find there a variety of opinions, a conglomeration of tradition, myth, legend and superimposed statements, made in the interests of propaganda, by men who wrote from 40 or 70 years after the alleged events are said to have occurred. There is not one word in the four Gospels that we can say with certainty was ever uttered by Jesus. These New Testament narratives which are the sources of all our

historical knowledge about Jesus, are records of opinions about events. At best they represent the second-hand translated records of the impressions that the life of a man made upon the people, and the successors of the people who gathered about him. When we come to find our way through this mass of material, which is clearly the accumulations of followers and not the deposit of Jesus himself, we find it very difficult to find a common ground upon which to stand with Jesus.

If we seek to affiliate ourselves to him on the basis of the acceptance of his teaching, we shall find that we have to part company with him at once. He believed in angels and demons, which we do not. He believed in a personal Divine which we do not. He believed in miracles which we do not. He believed in the peculiar doctrine of the Kingdom of Heaven such as the Adventists of today believe in, we do not. He [believed in] the doctrine of the messiahship which we do not. In short, he was the child of his own time, sharing with them the conceptions of the world, and the relations of man to the world which we have outgrown. Here we can find no common ground with Jesus. If his contrivance of religious supremacy depended upon such truths and teachings we should have to leave him behind.

Should we seek a common moral ground with him, it would be difficult. Many of the moral problems of today receive no treatment at his hands. He has nothing to say upon the subjects which are among the most pressing in modern life. Indeed all these attempts to seek an intellectual companionship, based upon likeness of ideas, all the modern attempts to find shelter in a Bible Christianity, are but survivals of the old supernaturalism. The things that he said, the thoughts that he expressed, the doctrines that he preached, these are not the abiding, but the transient, in his life. Not in spite of the fact that we do not believe as he did, or do not accept his specific teachings as true, but because of this diversity of opinion we come nearer to the man who lived 1900 years ago, and left such a tremendous impression upon the people. The foundation of Christianity is Jesus, but the essence of the life of Jesus is not in words or deeds, as such, not in alleged miracles, or claims to messiahship, but in the personality of the man who said the things and did the deeds, and about whom the myths and legends collected.

Here he finds, and we find, the basis of our faith. Not in word, not in deed, not in doctrine, not in any external objective of faith, but in the welling up within us of the spontaneous power of personality, that power which is the culmination of our life, that expresses itself in the ceaseless activities of man. Jesus' significance as a religious leader is found in this that those powers of love, those deep human sympathies, those eternal hopes, the great expounding power of love and human fellowship, these inner things of the spiritual personality he made the basis of his regulating principle of life. When he faced the mystery of the world, the mystery of life, of growth, of self-consciousness, of love, of hope, of aspiration, when he faced the eternal mystery which we call God, he felt his relationship to this mystery, felt its all-penetrating power, felt his dependence upon it, and said, "Father." Out of this soul of Jesus, this soul purified by living in the very presence of the unseen, absorbing its power, absorbing its richness and dynamic, poured forth words of love and deeds of tenderness, just as the power of life in nature is bursting into leaf and flower. The leaf and flower fade, but the spirit of life is abiding.

The word and deed of Jesus may pass away, as the changing seasons of man succeed each other, but the spirit of his life, the power of his personality, the soul drinking and absorbing the spirit of God the Father, and transforming it into human kindness, and human love, this is eternal, and abiding. In this rests the finality of the religion of Jesus. Not the quantity of his speculative truth, not indeed the infallibility of his utterance, but strong noble free power of his personality, willing to do the will of God, the Father.

Thus we arrive at the essential power of the son of Joseph and Mary who has left such an imprint upon the history of the world. Christianity, the religion of which he is the founder, becomes not a religion of a book, not a religion of a creed, not a religion of doctrine, not a religion of texts, and sayings of Jesus, but a religion of personality. The external objects of faith do not exist.

The religious faith is inward, and expresses its inward power by stamping the world with its imprint. So Christianity is a religion in which we are religious, not because we read a bible, but we write a bible because of the inner power of our personality. We are not the doers of good deeds, and the livers of the noble life, not because some book or clericus or whatnot tell us to, but because we are dominated by the power of some ideal.

This religion of personality, this religion of Jesus, this true Christianity, is replacing the crumbling structure of supernaturalism, and supplementing and giving life to [the] mechanical impersonal system of materialistic naturalism in our modern life.

As we face the problems before us, the problems of good and evil, the problems of life and death, the problems of moral and social life, our great hope is not that man, be that man Jesus or another, is like God, but much rather that God is like man. Could we know that the great infinite power of the world in which we live, the source of all our power, our strength, our love, our aspiration, be like the tender loving forgiving Jesus of Nazareth, our life would be freed from all its doubting uncertainties. This was the religious faith of Jesus. The well-spring of his life. This is and must be our religious faith, the well-spring of our life. Through fellowship with Jesus, our fellowship in Christianity is in no way determined by our assent or dissent of the dogmas of ecclesiasticism, nor by our assent to or dissent from the teachings of Jesus. Our fellowship with Jesus, our fellowship in Christianity is determined by the extent to which the spirit, the standpoint of our life is like the spirit the standpoint of his life. The disposition which Jesus had in his world we should have in ours, viz., the will to follow as of the righteous and noble life in which the rule of love shall be supreme. This at least is the religion of Jesus, and if Christianity is the religion of Jesus, and not a religion about Jesus, then Christianity must be a religion of personality. Its finality is not exclusive, indeed it is not at all quantitative, but it is qualitative. It is the way by which men may enter into the richest and deepest experiences of life, and face the hardest problems, the deepest sorrows, the most cruel disappointments with the calm and resolution that characterized what we know of the life, and the death of Jesus of Nazareth.