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What Is Christianity? The Letter Killeth but the Spirit Giveth Power

Earl Clement Davis

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"What is Christianity."
The letter killeth but the spirit
giveth forme.

What is christianity? is a question that seems to be forcing its way to the front again, as it has done time and time again during the centuries since the disciples and apostles followers of Jesus took up the work after Jesus death. James and the group at Jerusalem gave one interpretation of it, still clinging to the old Jewish forms and insisting upon the necessity of circumcision, Paul on the other hand held that it made no difference whether one were circumcised or not. To follow in spirit, to be justified by faith that was christianity. Each succeeding generation made its interpretation, as Christianity grew in numbers and power. Finally there came a time

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when the letter, the adherence to
our essential needs, to forms, rituals,
and the sacraments had taken the
Christian Church so far away from the
spirit of Christianity, that it became
necessary to go back to the source and
make a fresh investigation into
the nature and form of the great
movement.

Myself, Luther, Huss, Colman, and
the reformers to of the task of peering
the spirit from the form. But it was
not long before the spirit had become
imprisoned in the form of Protestantism.
The Pilgrims and Puritans to of the
work of the reformers, and brought the
spirit of Christianity to this country.
It has been subjected to several
very severe cross examinations. In
each one of those struggles the spirit
has conquered over the letter. For
the letter is already dead, and

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it is the attempt of the spirit - to
escape from ^{the} dead body of form that
causes the struggles and cluttered voices
of which from time to time disturb
the quiet of the religious world.

What is Christianity? is now
coming to be a common question.

The reason why this question is
being asked with such seriousness
to-day is perhaps war for reaching
there at any time since the early
days of its new born freshness.

That conception of Christianity which
looked upon it as a peculiar and special
mechanism by which the few were
to be saved from the general rack and
ruin of the world, is no longer
one to which men can or do adhere.
It makes little or no difference
whether it is the Catholic Church
the Protestant Bible, or the

crucified Christ, or any other ⁴
agency that is to be the controlling
power and expositor of that
great mechanical device by which
a few are to be saved, or all are
to be saved. The distinction which
formerly was current, the dis-
tinction between natural and
supernatural, between natural
and revealed religion can no longer
be held to. If man is natural
and Christianity is supernatural
why of course the natural man
cannot follow its mysteries, and
so far as this life is concerned
he has nothing to do with it,
for the natural man cannot
penetrate that which is above and
beyond the power of his natural
faculties. Edwards and his
followers saw that clearly and

carried the doctrine to its logical⁵
conclusions, in making the very
fine distinction between the regene-
rate, and the unregenerate.

The doctrine of the election of the
few to be saved by the free grace
of God, and the absolute inability
of man ^{to do any thing towards} to save _{himself} is the
only consistent and rational position
which a man can take if he makes
any distinction between natural
and supernatural religion. For if
religion is supernatural, man in his
natural state can have nothing to
do with it. ~~For~~ His natural powers
do not permit him to enter into the
realm of the supernatural, He must
await the action of God's free grace
for his regeneration, and the touch
of the spirit that shall enter into
him, and wake him supernatural

and reveal to him the secrets of the ⁽⁶⁾
supernatural. It is this idea that is
behind the doctrines of the Berkshire
Divinity, with their ideas of man's
absolute dependence upon God, and
salvation by election, and ~~the~~ man's inability
to save himself.

But history has assumed that
doctrine of the distinction between
natural, and supernatural in
religion. Whether it is true or not
we cannot say, but the fact remains
that man no longer believes it
to be true. If man is natural religion
is natural, if religion is supernatural
man is supernatural, you may
take whichever you choose. They mean
the same, and the thing that they
mean is this. that man has the
religious impulse within him, and
to some extent feels himself to
be spiritually related to the

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museum would about him. One hundred and fifty years ago seen a wide departure from the rigid theology of Calvinism, and its followers. The gradual weathering away of the old hard and fast lines has almost resulted in a complete demolition of the whole structure. We are now in the midst of a new problem. We are asking, not "Is Christianity supernatural?" but "Is it natural?" "Is it true to life?" "Is it capable of meeting the highest needs of our life, and responding to the inward demands of man's nature for truth, goodness and beauty." In the long and at times heated discussions between science and religion, even the

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conservative ofologists of a religion
have hardly attempted to reconcile
natural science to religion, but
they have been concerned with
the task of reconciling the old
interpretations of religion to what
are the plain facts of science.
In other words they have been
trying to show that Christianity
is natural, and conforms, in so
to the laws of nature and the soul
in so far as we can discover them.
To-day the methods of science
the principles which govern
and control the scientist, and
guide him in his investigations
are accepted as final. I do not
mean to say that certain theories
are dogmatically held to be
true, but the scientific

habit of mind, the free and 19
unprejudiced investigation and
search after truth, and the use
of that truth in arts and indus-
tries is no longer a source pleading
for recognition, but it is an
established principle. Experiment
and testing by actual facts, and
accepting that which the experiments
and tests point to as being true, that
is the accepted standard of the
world to day. "Demonstrate the
truth of your theory by an actual
working test," says the world to
the man who proposes a new
theory. If you can demonstrate
we will accept. If you can-
not demonstrate, we will reject.
It is just this test that the
world to day is exacting of

Christianity. We care not for 10
your theories, your plans for
salvation, your varied notions
about this that and the other thing?
demonstrate to us the truth of
your theories, give your power
to some, by some; ~~some~~ ~~some~~
~~the~~ test your doctrines, and
historic claims by rigid and
strict examination, Prove that
the Bible is inspired by its power
of inspiring the world? Prove
all things told forth to that which
is true, said the apostle Paul, and
the world is turning upon the
church, and christianity, with
the same command. ^P What
is christianity? says the world.
An answer is given by its de-
pendence. "What will it do?"

says the world, an answer is given ^{III}
by its defenders. They, well, says
the world, demonstrate your
claims.

Some very interesting and some
very illuminating suggestions have
been made of late as a result
of well known events. I venture
to present one or two of these as
representative of various answers
which are being given in answer
to the world's question, "What is
Christianity?" This was ^{apparently} written and
^{apparently} recently, and was published
in a recent number of "The Living Church".

Christianity, says the Living Church, must necessarily hinge about the person of Jesus Christ. If it had to deal only with natural morality, it would be absurd to apply to it the epithet Christian. Morality did not enter the world with Christ. The Hebrew prophets cried out for it. The Psalmist extolled it. The synagog worship inculcated it. The Ten Commandments enforced it. Greek philosophy dwelt upon its loveliness. Poets sang for it. . . . A Christianity, therefore, based upon pure morality alone, is untenable. Morality is older than Christianity. A Christianity based upon the moral teaching of Jesus Christ alone is equally untenable. It cannot be demonstrated that that teaching introduced new elements into the moral law. Christianity is absolutely bound up with the successive dogmas which assert the unique position of Jesus Christ as God and man. We know that Jesus Christ is alone good, because he is Son of God; we never could know that he is Son of God because he was always good on earth, because the immaculate goodness cannot be proved apart from the sonship. Christianity therefore hinges neither upon the Sermon on the Mount, nor upon the Lord's prayer, nor upon the parable of the Prodigal Son. Each of these does, indeed, illuminate the Christian life; but no one of them is sufficient to stand as the cornerstone of Christianity. That cornerstone can be nothing less than the personality of Jesus Christ. Now the personality of Jesus Christ is only sufficient to bear up the structure if it be unique wholly beyond comparison with the x of human kind. Mere goodness is not sufficient; natural morality will not do it; beautiful principles of ethics are wholly insufficient. Christianity rests on Jesus Christ; but it rests upon him as Son of God; co-equal with the Father; God of God. Light of Light; of one substance with the Father;

conceived by the Holy Ghost; born of the Virgin Mary; living, dying, rising in the fulness both of his godhead and of his manhood from the dead; ascended into heaven; reigning eternally at the right hand of God. Nothing less than this is a sufficient foundation for Christianity. Follow the agnostic argument to-day, and see how easily overthrown is a Christianity based on morality alone. Christianity is a life, based upon a life. Nothing less is Christianity. And so the creeds are no mere summaries of human deductions from natural hypotheses. As such they could have no value. They would be unworthy the subscription of an intelligent man. The mere fact that the church pledges her children to belief in the creeds shows that she has no such conception of their function. It would be an insult to 20th-century intelligence to bind it to fourth-century speculations. If there were a single speculative hypothesis in the creeds, it would be intellectual tyranny to demand subscription to them. But the creeds state the essence of Christianity. Each fact, thus stated in irreducible language, transcends human knowledge. The wisest man does not comprehend all that it involves. But all that it involves is forever bound up with Christianity. Christianity defined can be no less than the sum total of the creeds."

Sunday-School Methods as Discussed
in Manhattan.

I do not presume to pass judgment for you, but as for myself I cannot believe that "Christianity defined can be or less than the sum total of the creeds". It is for you to say whether or not it is true to your experience. But it is interesting to point out the historical fact, that there are no creeds in the New Testament, ^{certainly} and, not until the ^{third and fourth} century, ^{they not until} do they appear when the life, and spiritual vigor of the Christian church had given away to form. If it is true that Jesus, the founder of Christendom, intended to leave such a statement as we find in the creeds as the ^{test of being a Christian} why do they not appear somewhere in the New Testament.

That is a sample of one ^{group} ~~kind~~ of 115
answers that ~~are~~ being given to day
in answer to the question "What is
Christianity?"

But of course there are not the
ideas of the modern ^{even} ~~man~~ in a
conservative church. They represent
the ideas of the reactionists who recoil
from the pressing questions that are
being put to them. They are like
the woman who stood braced against
the side of the station, while the
train which she wished to take
wound off and left her standing
there. "I thought the whole concern
was going," said the amazed old
lady. These creeds, these systems
of theology are the stations at
which the great on-moving train
of Christian spirituality has stopped

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for a woman to take on passengers.
They are stationary, and one who
stands upon the platform of these
stations, may expect as the simple
old lady did, to have the whole
thing move on. But as a matter
of fact the stations remain behind
while the train moves on.

But there is an other type of
answer that is being given to day
to the question "What is Christianity?"
Those who have a deep reverence for
the old forms and old statements
because of their associations, because
of their close relations to the events
of the Christian Church, are averse
to dropping the old forms, and
substituting ^{new} interpretations in
their places. Such ones realize
that we do not and cannot
take these statements literally

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They do not accept them intellectually, but rather use them sentimentally for old associations sake. Into these old bottles they put new wine, and delight in the long train of associations which keeps inviolate the historic continuity of the forms as well as the spirit of the Church. They welcome new truth, new ideas, new forms, and in every way take delight in filling the old bottles with the new wine. Inwardly they are the very spirit of the free truth-seeking atmosphere of the life of Jesus, a power for truth and righteousness in the world. As an illustration of this type of answer let me quote some passages from an address of

one of the foreword of them. 18

There are two essentials of Christianity. The first is the unswerving recognition of the Great Good Will, which has its way for every word we speak and every deed we do. This will takes many forms to meet the varying circumstances of life. - kindness, patience, modesty, charity, honesty, truth, fidelity, cheerfulness, temperance, courage and the like. The man who tries to observe them all as different phases and expressions of the One Good Will has the first of the two essentials of Christianity. The second essential of Christianity is the democratic attitude toward other people. To fall short of the democratic attitude

toward the humblest and worst (19)
of our fellow men, is to fall
short of the reverent attitude
toward the Great Good Will,
which includes the welfare of
the lowest equally with the
highest, of the worst no less
than the best. "

Here, you see, is the utmost
frankness in expressing the
essentials of Christianity. There
is nothing dogmatic, nothing
rigid or narrow, ~~is~~ nothing
which swacks of ancient conceptions,
nothing which denies the freedom
of the individual to thought,
think, and investigate for
himself.

But this same writer passes
from this exposition of the

essentials of Christianity to put ²⁰
some of his new wine into the
old bottles. For example he says.

"Is Jesus Christ the divine Son of
God, and the Saviour of the world?"

Yes. Because in precept and
example, in life and death, he was
implicitly obedient to the Great
Good Will, and included the
lowliest and worst in his sym-
fathy and service. Measured
by these ~~essential standards~~
tests. Jesus stands forth as su-
premely divine.

"Are we saved by the sacrifice
of Christ?" yes. For no man, from
Christ to his humblest disciple, can
do the good will, and try nobly
to serve others without suffering
the enmity and hate of the

selfish and sinful, with whose ²¹
schemes the just and generous
christian man is bound to interfere."
It would be delightful to think that
such clean sparkling wine always
filled those old bottles. But every
one knows that such is not the
truth. One is really reminded of
that figure which Jesus used
about new fitches on old clothes,
Much rather it is a new lining
to the old outside.

Of course one does not wish to say
that such clinging to old forms
is bad. But there is an element
of danger in such a use of
language. It not only destroys
the original meaning of the
terms, but in fact it involves
and distorts the real truth of
the life and way of living

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that one is trying to prevent. It is
very much as if we should
still continue to call the head of
our democratic nation a King,
or to permit or to compel our President
to wear a crown, as a symbol
of the ancient ancient conceptions
of the Divine right to rule. It would
be a misuse of words and symbols,
and lead to a misunderstanding on
the part of those who did not fully
understand.

On the other hand there are those
who look upon the old forms and
symbols as of great interest and
significance historically. They
have a deep reverence for them
as symbols which interpreted
~~these~~ great truths to an age
that is now fast. In fact they

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have to much reverence for them
to subject them to daily use and
commit them to the repair shop
of modern theology.

Take the spirit of Christianity
leave the old forms that we cannot
use without mutilating them
as monuments of those who also
tried to enter into the spirit of
Christianity. And in this spirit
meet the needs and demands
of our time with all the
wisdom and all the power
and devotion that we have.
Whatever form Christianity
may take upon itself, as
colorings of the particular age
in which one suffers to
examine it, Its spirit
its essential and funda:

mental ideas are the same. The fusion of the Greek genius for thinking and philosophical investigation, and scientific spirit of study, with the Jewish genius for religious worship, in the midst of the great world of Rome, makes the origin of Christianity. The spirit of truth from Greece, the spirit of worship from Israel, the spirit of activity and service from Rome, are melted together into one great movement of Christendom. The first prophet and teacher was Jesus of Nazareth. In him we find the great fountain head of the new movement. In his spirit of common sense observations, in his habit

of testing his truth by actual life ⁽²⁵⁾
~~not~~ regardless of the tradition or teaching
of his people, he is the incarnation
of the Greek genius, As the writer
of John puts in presenting to us
the incarnation of the Greek logos
in Jesus. The word became flesh.

In his implicit trust in God the
Father whom he saw not only in
light, but in the beauties of nature
and ⁱⁿ the secrets of his inner life
and in the very nature of the Hebrew
soul, he was the evocation of
the Jewish genius of worshipping.
In his noble and simple ministrations
to the poor and needy whenever
he found them he translated into
its present form the genius to
activity which the Roman world
gave to modern civilization.
The subtle influences of the

(26)

one nation of the other was bound
to produce a new and undefined
and essentially ~~radical~~ different
group with their might which
should embody the the genius of
each. The first great prophet and
teacher was Jesus of Nazareth, to
his spiritual power, to his inquiring
spirit, to active ministrations many
responded, just as we speak of
Lincoln as the first of Americans, the
first great citizen, to embody in
his life the national characteristics
of North, South, East and West.
so Jesus was the first great teacher
~~at~~ who was the incarnation of the
the great amalgamation of
forces which ~~took place~~ ^{was} ~~were~~
~~being~~ ~~taking place~~ in those days, were
being fused into one power in
those days.

To worship God the father, to seek
 zealously after his truth, and
 to translate that truth into the
 beauty of a noble life, this is
 the great spiritual power of
 christianity. Those who live
 in this spirit are christians, and
 follow the spirit of the
 life of Jesus who declared in
 so uncertain terms that
 on the two commandments, "Thou
 shalt love the Lord, thy God with
 all thy heart, and with all thy
 soul, and with all mind," and "Thou
 shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,"
 hangeth the whole law and the
 prophets.

To follow, to defend, to glorify
 for the letter of christianity, is
 the worst deadly work that
 one can do. But to live in the

the spirit forever leads us nearer²⁸
to truth, to God, and to the
heart of war. Thus did Paul
seek to follow in Jesus' footsteps
for he knew as he too told us
that "the letter killeth, but
the spirit giveth life."

What is Christianity?
The Letter Killeth but the Spirit Giveth Power

Earl Clement Davis

No Date¹

What is Christianity? is a question that seems to be forcing its way to the front again, as it has done time and time again during the centuries since the disciples and followers of Jesus took of the work after Jesus' death. James and the group at Jerusalem gave one interpretation of it, still clinging to the old Jewish forms and insisting upon the ceremony of circumcision. Paul, on the other hand, held that it made no difference whether one was circumcised or not. To follow in spirit, to be justified by faith that was Christianity. Each succeeding generation made its interpretation as Christianity grew in numbers and power. Finally there came a time when the letter, the adherence to vow essential creeds, to forms, rituals and the sacraments had taken the Christian Church far away from the spirit of Christianity, that it became necessary to go back to the source and make a fresh investigation into the nature and power [of] that the [sic] great movement.

Wycliffe, Luther, Huss, Calvin and the reformers took up the task of freeing the spirit from the form. But it was not long before the spirit had become imprisoned in the forms of Protestantism. The Pilgrims and Puritans took up the work of the reformers, and brought the spirit of Christianity to this country. Here it has been subjected to several very severe cross examinations. In each one of these struggles the spirit has conquered over the letter, for the letter is already dead, and it is the attempt of the spirit to escape from the dead body of form that causes the struggles and disturbances which from time to time disturb the quiet of the religious world.

What is Christianity? is now coming to be a common question. The reason why this question is being asked with such seriousness today is perhaps more far-reaching than at

¹ While this sermon is not dated, almost certainly it is from the period 1905-06 when Earl Davis hand-wrote his sermons. In addition to the hand-writing, the paper is consistent with other datable sermons from that time.

any time since the early days of its new born freshness. That conception of Christianity, which looked upon it as a peculiar and special mechanism by which the few were to be saved from the general rack and ruin of the world, is no longer one to which men can or do adhere. It makes little or no difference whether it is the Catholic Church, the Protestant Bible, or the crucified Christ, or any other agency that is to be the centralizing power and expositor of that great mechanical device by which a few are to be saved, or all are to be saved. The distinction which formerly was current, the distinction between natural and supernatural, between natural and revealed religion can no longer be held to. If man is natural and Christianity is supernatural, why, of course the natural man cannot fathom its mysteries, and so far as this life is concerned he has nothing to do with it, for the natural man cannot penetrate that which is above and beyond the power of his natural capacities. Edwards and his followers saw that clearly and carried the doctrine to its logical conclusions, in asking the very fine distinction between the regenerate and the unregenerate. The doctrine of the election of the few to be saved by the free grace of God, and the absolute inability of man to do anything towards saving himself is the only consistent and rational position which a man can take if he makes any distinction between natural and supernatural religion. For if religion is supernatural, man in his natural state can have nothing to do with it. His natural powers do not permit him to enter into the realm of the supernatural. He must await the action of God's free grace for his regeneration, and the touch of the spirit that shall enter into him, and make him supernatural and reveal to him the secrets of the supernatural. It is this idea that is behind the doctrines of the Berkshire Divinity, with their ideas of man's absolute dependence upon God, and salvation by election, and man's inability to save himself.

But history has answered that doctrine of the distinction between natural and supernatural in religion. Whether it is true or not we cannot say. But the fact remains that men no longer believe it to be true. If man is natural, religion is natural. If religion is supernatural, man is supernatural. You may take whichever you choose. They mean the same, and the thing that they mean is this, that man has the religious impulse within him, and to some extent feels himself to be spiritually related to the unseen world about him.

One hundred and fifty years has seen a wide departure from the required theology of Calvinism, and its followers. The gradual weathering away of the old hard and fast lines has almost resulted in a complete demolition of the whole structure. We are now in the midst of a new problem. We are asking not "Is Christianity supernatural?" but "Is it natural?" Is it true to life? Is it capable of meeting the highest needs of man's life, and responding to the individual demands of man's nature for truth, goodness and beauty. In the long and at times heated discussions between science and religion, even the conservative apologists for religion have hardly attempted to reconcile natural science to religion. But they have been concerned with the task of reconciling the old interpretations of religion to what are the plain facts of science. In other words, they have been trying to show that Christianity is natural, and conforms to the laws of nature and the {??} in so far as we can discuss them. Today the methods of science, the principles which govern and control the scientist, and guide him in his investigations are accepted as final. I do not mean to say that certain theories are dogmatically held to be true, but the scientific habit of mind, the free and unprejudiced investigation and search after truth, and the use of that truth in arts and industry is no longer a cause pleading for recognition, but it is an established principle. Experiment and testing by actual fact, and accepting that which the experiments and tests point to as being true, that is the accepted standard of the world today. "Demonstrate the truth of your theory by an actual working test," says the world to the man who proposes a new theory. "If you can demonstrate, we will accept. If you cannot demonstrate, we will reject." It is just this test that the world today is exacting of Christianity. "We care not for your theories, your plans for salvation, your varied notions about this that and the other thing. Demonstrate to us the truth of your theories, prove your power to save, by saving; test your doctrines and historic claims by rigorous and strict examination. Prove that the Bible is inspired by its power of inspiring the world? "Prove all things hold fast to that which is true" said the apostle Paul, and the world is turning upon the Church and Christianity with some command.

What is Christianity? says the world. An answer is given by its defenders. "What will it do?" says the world. An answer is given by its defenders. "Very well," says the world, "demonstrate your claims."

Some very interesting and some very illuminating suggestions have been made of late as a result of well-known events. I venture to present one or two of these as representative of various answers which are being given in answer to the world's question, "What is Christianity?" This was apparently written recently, and was published in a recent number of "The Living Church."

Here a transcription of a column from "The Living Church:"

"A Christianity, says the Living Church, must, necessarily, hinge about the person of Jesus Christ. If it had to deal only with natural morality, it would be absurd to apply to it the epithet Christian. Morality did not enter the world with Christ. The Hebrew prophets cried out for it. The Psalmist extolled it. The synagogue worship inculcated it. The Ten Commandments enforced it. Greek philosophy dwelt upon its loveliness. Poets sang for it. A Christianity, therefore, based upon pure morality alone, is untenable. Morality is older than Christianity. A Christianity based upon the moral teaching of Jesus Christ alone is equally untenable. It cannot be demonstrated that that teaching introduced new elements into the moral law. Christianity is absolutely bound up with the successive dogmas which assert the unique position of Jesus Christ as God and man. We know that Jesus Christ is alone good, because he is Son of God; we never could know that he is Son of God because he was always good on earth, because the immaculate goodness cannot be proved apart from the sonship. Christianity therefore hinges neither upon the Sermon on the Mount, nor upon the Lord's prayer, nor upon the parable of the Prodigal Son. Each of these does indeed illuminate the Christian life; but no one of them is sufficient to stand as the cornerstone of Christianity. That corner-stone can be nothing less than the personality of Jesus Christ. Now the personality of Jesus Christ is only

sufficient to bear up the structure if it be unique wholly beyond comparison with the x [sic] of human kind. Mere goodness is not sufficient; natural morality will not do it; beautiful principles of ethics are wholly insufficient. Christianity rests on Jesus Christ: but it rest upon him as Son of God. Light of Light: of one substance with the Father; conceived by the Holy Ghost; born of the Virgin Mary; living, dying, rising in the fulness both of his godhead and of his manhood from the dead; ascended into heaven; reigning eternally at the right hand of God. Nothing less than this is a sufficient foundation for Christianity. Follow the agnostic argument today and see how easily overthrown is a Christianity based on morality alone. Christianity is a life, based upon a life. Nothing less is Christianity. And so the creeds are no mere summaries of human deductions from natural hypotheses. As such they could have no value. They would be unworthy [of] the subscription of an intelligent man. The mere fact that the church pledges her children to belief in the creeds shows that she has no such conception of their function. It would be an insult to 20th century intelligence to bind it to fourth-century speculations. If there were a single speculative hypothesis in the creeds, it would be intellectual tyranny to demand subscription to them. But the creeds state the essence of Christianity. Each fact, thus stated in irreducible language, transcends human knowledge. The wisest man does not comprehend all that it involves. But all that it involves is forever bound up with Christianity. Christianity defined can be no less than the sum total of the creeds."

I do not presume to pass judgement for you, but as for myself, I cannot believe that "Christianity defined can be no less than the sum total of the creeds." It is for you to say whether or not it is true to your experience. But it is interesting to point out the historical fact, that there

are no creeds in the New Testament, and certainly not until the third and possibly not until the fourth century do they appear when the life, and spiritual vigor of the Christian Church had given away to form. If it is true that Jesus, the founder of Christendom, intended to have such a statement as we find in the creeds as the test of being a Christian, why do they not appear somewhere in the New Testament?

That is a sample of one group of answers that are being given today in answer to the question, "What is Christianity?"

But of course these are not the ideas of the modern man even in a conservative church. They represent the ideas of the reactionists who recoil from the pressing questions that are being put to them. They are like the woman who stood braced against the side of the station, while the train which she wished to take moved off and left her standing there. "I thought the whole concern was going." said the amazed old lady. These creeds, these systems of theology are the stations at which the great on-moving train of Christian spirituality has stopped for a moment to take on passengers. They are stationary, and one who stands upon the platform of these stations, may expect as the simple old lady did, to have the whole thing move on. But as a matter of fact the stations remain behind while the train moves on.

But there is another type of answer that is being given today to the question, "What is Christianity?" Those who have a deep reverence for the old forms and old statements because of their associations, because of their close relations to the events of the Christian Church, are averse to dropping the old forms, and substituting new interpretations in their places. Such ones realize that we do not and cannot take these statements literally. They do not accept them intellectually. But rather use them sentimentally for old association's sake. Into these old bottles they put new wine, and delight in the long train of associations which keep inviolate the historic continuity of the forms as well as the spirit of the Church. They welcome new truth, new ideas, new forms and in every way take delight in filling the old bottles with the new wine. Inwardly they are the very spirit of the free truth-seeking atmosphere of the life of Jesus, a power for truth and righteousness in the world. As an illustration of this type

of answer let me quote some passages from an address of one of the foremost of these.

There are two essentials of Christianity. The first is the reverent recognition of the Great Good Will, which has its way for every word we speak and every deed we do. This will takes many forms to meet the varying circumstances of life, kindness, patience, modesty, charity, honest, truth, pity, cheerfulness, temperance, courage and the like. The man who tries to observe them all as different phases and expressions of the One Good Will has the first of the two essentials of Christianity. The second essential of Christianity is the democratic attitude toward other people. To fall short of the democratic attitude toward the humblest and worst of our fellow men, is to fall short of the reverent attitude toward the Great Good Will, which includes the welfare of lowest equally with the highest, or the worst no less than the best.

Here, you see, is the utmost frankness in expressing the essentials of Christianity. There is nothing dogmatic, nothing bigoted or narrow, nothing which smacks of ancient conceptions, nothing which denies the freedom of the individual to think, and investigate for himself.

But this same writer passes from this exposition of the essentials of Christianity to put some of his new wine into the old bottles. For example, he says,

Is Jesus Christ the divine Son of God, and the Savior of the World? Yes. Because in precept and example, in life and death, he was implicitly obedient to the Great Good Will, and included the lowest and worst in his sympathy and service. Measured by these essential tests, Jesus stands forth as supremely divine.

Are we saved by the sacrifice of Christ? Yes. For no man, from Christ to his humblest disciple can do the good will, and try really to serve others without suffering the enmity and hate of the selfish and sinful, with whose schemes the just and generous Christian man is bound to interfere.

It would be delightful to think that such clean sparkling wine always filled those old bottles. But everyone knows

that such is not the truth. One is really reminded of that figure which Jesus used about new patches on old clothes, much rather it is a new lining to the old outside.

Of course one does not wish to say that such clinging to old forms is bad. But there is an element of danger in such a use of language. It not only destroys the original meaning of the terms, but in fact it involves and distorts the real truth of the life and way of living that one is trying to present. It is very much as if we should still continue to call the head of the democratic nation a King or to permit or to compel our President to wear a crown, as a symbol of the ancient conception of the Divine right to rule. It would be a misuse of words and symbols, and lead to a misunderstanding on the part of those who did not fully understand.

On the other hand, there are those who look upon the old forms and symbols as of great interest and significance historically. They have a deep reverence for them as symbols which interpreted great truths to an age that is now past. In fact they have too much reverence for them to subject them to daily use and commit them to the repair shop of modern theology.

Take the spirit of Christianity leave the old forms that we cannot use without mutilating them as monuments of those who also tried to enter into the spirit of Christianity. and in this spirit meet the needs and demands of our time with all the wisdom and all the power and devotion that we have. Whatever form Christianity may take upon itself, as colorings of the particular age in which one happens to examine it, its spirit, its essential and fundamental ideas are the same. The fusion of the Greek genius for thinking and philosophical investigation, and scientific sprit of study, with the Jewish genius for religious worship, in the midst of the great world of Rome, makes the origin of Christianity. The spirit of truth from Greece. The spirit of worship from Israel. The spirit of activity and service from Rome. All melted together into one great movement of Christendom. The first prophet and teacher was Jesus of Nazareth. In him we find the great fountainhead of the new movement. In his spirit of common-sense observations, in his habit of testing his truth by actual life, regardless of the traditional teachings of his people, he is the incarnation of the Greek genius. As the writer of John puts in presenting to us the incarnation of the Greek Logos in

Jesus, "The word became flesh." In his implicit trust in God, the Father whom he saw not only on high, but in the beauties of nature and in the secrets of his inner life and in the very nature of the human soul, he was the embodiment of the Jewish genius of worshipping. In his noble and simple ministrations to the poor and needy wherever he found them he translated into its finest form the genius to activity which the Roman world gave to modern civilization. The subtle influences of the one nation upon the other was bound to produce a new and modified and essentially different group within their midst which should embody the genius of each. The first great prophet and teacher was Jesus of Nazareth. To his spiritual power, to his inquiring spirit, to active ministrations, many responded. Just as we speak of Lincoln as the first American, the first great citizen, to embody in his life the national characteristics of North, South, East and West, so Jesus was the first great teacher who was the incarnation of the great amalgamation of forces which were being fused into one power in those days.

To worship God the father, to seek zealously after his truth, and to translate that truth into the beauty of a noble life, this is the great spiritual power of Christianity. Those who live in this spirit of the life of Jesus who declared in no uncertain terms that on the two commandments, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all [thy] mind," and "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," hangeth the whole law and the prophets.

So follow: to defend, to apologize for the letter of Christianity, is the most deadly work that one can do. But to live in its spirit forever leads us nearer to truth, to God, and to the heart of man. Thus did Paul seek to follow in Jesus's spirit, for he knew as he has told us that "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."