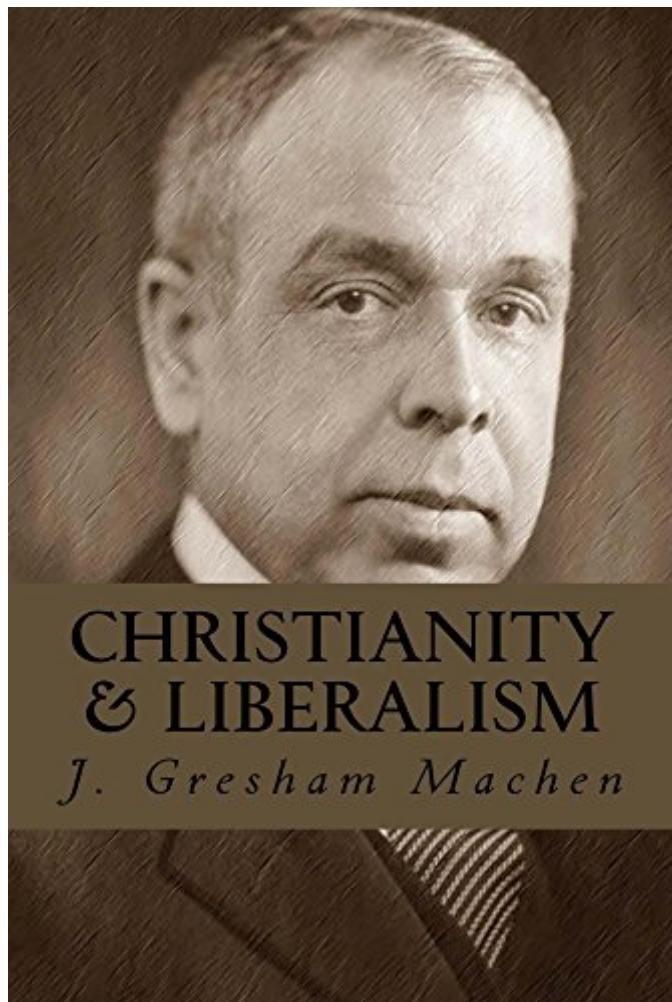


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Christianity & Liberalism (Illustrated)



Synopsis

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The purpose of this book is not to decide the religious issue of the present day, but merely to present the issue as sharply and clearly as possible, in order that the reader may be aided in deciding it for himself. Presenting an issue sharply is indeed by no means a popular business at the present time; there are many who prefer to fight their intellectual battles in what Dr. Francis L. Patton has aptly called a "condition of low visibility." Clear-cut definition of terms in religious matters, bold facing of the logical implications of religious views, is by many persons regarded as an impious proceeding. May it not discourage contribution to mission boards? May it not hinder the progress of consolidation, and produce a poor showing in columns of Church statistics? But with such persons we cannot possibly bring ourselves to agree. Light may seem at times to be an impudent intruder, but it is always beneficial in the end. The type of religion which rejoices in the pious sound of traditional phrases, regardless of their meanings, or shrinks from "controversial" matters, will never stand amid the shocks of life. In the sphere of religion, as in other spheres, the things about which men are agreed are apt to be the things that are least worth holding; the really important things are the things about which men will fight. In the sphere of religion, in particular, the present time is a time of conflict; the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religion is called "modernism" or "liberalism." Both names are unsatisfactory; the latter, in particular, is question-begging. The movement designated as "liberalism" is regarded as "liberal" only by its friends; to its opponents it seems to involve a narrow ignoring of many relevant facts. And indeed the movement is so various in its manifestations that one may almost despair of finding any common name which will apply to all its forms. But manifold as are the forms in which the movement appears, the root of the movement is one; the many varieties of

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

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Customer Reviews

I would heartily recommend everyone read Christianity and Liberalism, written in 1923, but as applicable today as it was then. Machen was a faithful defender of the faith, who stood his ground in defense of the Word of God and the gospel at a time when unbelievers and church people alike, including pastors and professors, were trying to make the Bible sensible to modern thought. Such things as the atonement of Christ through his sacrifice, the virgin birth, and the miracles of Christ, and the inerrant inspiration of the Bible all stood (and still stand) in opposition to modern thinking

based on naturalism and only what the senses can perceive. These doctrines, and others, are just too old, and we need to make the Bible and its message more palatable to modern thinking. Sound familiar? This was a huge problem in the early 20th century and Machen stood firm for the truth of the gospel against such assaults. Unfortunately, as today, the onslaught is strong, and the once conservative Presbyterian Church and the stalwart Princeton Seminary both succumbed to the liberal and modern notions of a Jesus that is mere example and a religion that is not Christian at all. Machen's Christianity and Liberalism should be read by all concerned Christians today because the same problems that Machen faced in 1923 are still with us today. The term "liberalism" should not be taken in a present day political sense, but rather in a theological sense. Machen's book was essentially a response to a sermon by Harry Emerson Fosdick, entitled "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" in which he labeled fundamentalism divisive and intolerant. Fosdick viewed them as backwards thinkers, quite out of step with modern thinking, so he proposed a more tolerant and more modern approach to the Bible. He argued centered on three topics primarily, Christ's virgin birth, the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, and Christ's second coming. In his sermon, he argues that the church is big enough for both conservative and liberal views. However, the liberal views are confusing at best, and heretical at worst. For instance, he states that the virgin birth was not a historical event, and that it was merely a way to show that Christ was unique. He states that the biblical writers phrased it in terms of a biological miracle that our modern minds cannot use. He applies the same line of arguments to the inerrancy of the Bible and the atonement. He ends his sermon with two points: one, Fosdick calls for a spirit of tolerance and Christian liberty, and second, he rebukes the church for quarreling over such petty matters when "the world is dying of great needs." Over doctrinal verity and precision, Fosdick preferred personal piety and devotion and tolerance. Machen did not deny that Fosdick could hold these views, but he insisted that they were not Christian, and should not be called such. Christianity was not first and foremost a life, but a doctrine, and from that doctrine followed life. To Machen, these were not little matters to be pushed to the background, but fundamental to the Christian faith. Machen did not disagree with the need for piety and devotion, but if doctrine did not matter, then to what end and to whom were we supposed to be devoted? If doctrine did not matter, and Christ's death and sacrifice did not remove sin, then what was He doing on the cross? Machen held that when Fosdick brushed aside doctrine, he was destroying the very center of Christianity. Christianity that was not built on doctrine was living on

borrowed time, and would soon degenerate into mere moralism. In the first chapter of his book, Machen stressed that there were two separate systems vying for the church: "the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity" on the one hand, and on the other hand "a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology." Essentially, Christianity is basically supernatural, from God, while liberalism elevates man and lowers Christ, and is basically a natural religion. He makes his argument in the next six chapters of the book examining six major doctrines of the church: doctrine, God and humanity, the Bible, Christ, salvation, and the church. Christianity and Liberalism is a must-read classic, not simply for historical purposes, but because it addresses issues that are prevalent today. Fosdick was the grandfather of the seeker sensitive movement of Schuller and Warren. The view that doctrine doesn't matter and that all we need is Jesus pervades the modern evangelical church. Many pastors, churches, and Christians use Christian terminology that is devoid of Biblical and orthodox meaning. Seeker-sensitive liberalism appeals to man, whether modern or not, because it addresses our fundamental sin, pride. Liberalism allows man to save himself using the example of Christ, rather than depending on him for our very lives. The issue may even be more pressing today, because at least in Machen's time people still had some knowledge of Biblical doctrines and of the Bible itself. Today, however, after nearly 100 years of fluffy preaching and anti-intellectual and anti-doctrinal mamby-pamby, most people in our churches don't even know what to believe and why. Read this book and it will change your world. Preach this and people will call you intolerant, narrow, and divisive. Great. Christianity is what it is. Being steadfast and faithful to the Word of God and to the doctrines it contains is not popular, but it is the difference between life and death. Jesus, Peter, and Paul were not tolerant or broad-minded when it came to what Christianity was (and is) and why it was necessary to believe certain things. Too many people today who call themselves Christians believe that they are believers and love Jesus. The problem is that they don't hold to what the Bible states, and they believe in a Jesus that is not Biblical. Machen makes this clear.

Even skeptic H.L. Mencken respected Machen as the foremost public exponent for orthodox Christianity in the early decades of the 20th Century. This deep yet accessible exposition of Christianity against its alternative is perhaps the most famous and perennially republished contribution by the Presbyterian leader and Princeton theologian, J. Gresham Machen. By "Liberalism" he means the modernist product of academicism, sentimental pop philosophy, and

pernicious unbelief that became the impotent churchianity of mainline protestantism; it was enshrined doctrinally in the 1924 "Auburn Affirmation" signed by a thousand modernist ministers, such as Harry Emerson Fosdick. Against that sort of nominal Christianity, Machen was willing to align himself with "the Fundamentalists." Scion of an eminent Baltimore family, Machen (he pronounced it like the German word "Maedchen", and jokingly called himself "Das", the neuter article matched to that in German) became a bright light in the Princeton classics department; his grammar for New Testament Greek is still used widely. "Christianity and Liberalism" is presented in philosophical and theological terms, but Machen clearly points to political and broader cultural consequences of lukewarmness among professing liberal Christians. Understanding Machen's analysis is essential for anyone wanting to understand Progressive political theory and why today's western culture has fallen apart totally.

Text arrived overseas in Korea in just 2 weeks--New book--very good service--The text gives an excellent definition of liberalism vs. Fundamentalism--Machen calls for the liberals to leave the conservative churches and start their own denominations and churches--that did not happen and most conservatives were timid enough to co-exist with the liberals--Machen separated himself from Princeton Seminary and started his own school: Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, PA--he then left the Presbyterian denomination and started a Conservative Presbyterian denomination--J. Gresham Machen was a great man of God who stood for the truth of the Bible and separated himself from people who would not do the same--must reading for everyone interested in the difference between Conservative Fundamentalism and Liberalism--

This was a great read - "liberalism" is a term so misunderstood anyways. Machen explains the situation of the encroachment of liberalism so very well. It is so applicable to today's church and so well written that it is easy to forget that it was written almost 100 years ago! I recommend this book to anyone wanting to understand the dangers of sloppy theology in the church. It is not for the faint of heart, but it is well worth it.

Machen's message is still as relevant to the Church today as it was in his day. And the dreaded influence of liberalism which he defines and describes shows its teeth even more so in our culture. A worthy read for those who desired to be prepared for spiritual battle.

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