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## THE CRISES OF CHRISTIANITY AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

*As oppositions of contraries lend beauty to language,  
so the beauty of the course of the world is achieved  
by the opposition of contraries, arranged as it were by an*

Christianity is at a crisis. This does not mean that she is decreasing numerically. Over 570,000,000<sup>2</sup> persons avow themselves Christians. Neither does it mean that she is calling in her outposts. Every considerable country is being occupied by the missionaries of the cross. Nor yet does it mean that at home she is losing interest in social progress. As never before sociology is her study and philanthropy her passion.

What is meant is that while developing her philanthropy, she is detaching it from the church and even from Christ. A constantly growing number of Christians are advocating and are themselves supporting "welfare work" which is intentionally and often ostentatiously non-religious. What could be more suggestive, more alarming? The bouquet of roses is both beautiful and fragrant. In a day or two, however, its perfume will have gone and its beauty will have departed. It must be so with flowers that have been picked from the living bush. Can it be otherwise with social or charitable movements which have separated themselves from Christ, even if they have not in terms repudiated him? At best they are but flowers that have been picked.

Again, the crisis of Christianity appears in this, that while her missionaries are multiplying, their gospel, it would seem, here and there, little by little, is being depleted and emasculated. Such is the warning that has been coming to us

<sup>1</sup> *City of God*, I. xi. c. 18.

from Japan. Such is the warning that is now coming to us from China. Such is the warning that is beginning to come to us from other fields. Could anything be so appalling? We have been wont to look on our Foreign Missions as the demonstration that the church is obeying her Lord's last and great commission to 'go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.' But what if the gospel which *some* missionaries preach is 'another gospel which is not a gospel'? This would prove treason both in the council tent and on the firing line.

In short, the crisis of Christianity is seen in this, that while gaining in quantity, she is losing in quality. Five facts, among many, demonstrate this.

One is the neglect of the Sabbath. What is known as the Continental Sabbath has come to be, with some exceptions, the universal Sabbath. The day is still kept, but it is kept as a holiday rather than as a holy day. Physical and mental recreation and social enjoyment are coming to be recognized as its chief purpose. In few places is it yet regarded as a day to be wholly set apart from secular to sacred uses, from the service of God in the affairs of this world to his service in worship and in "the things of the Spirit". The effect of this change of view is as radical as the change itself is general. Religion languishes in proportion as church-rolls lengthen. It must be so. Deny a community time to eat, and they lose their vigor. Take from the church the day given to her for feeding on the milk and the meat of the Word of God, and may she hope to develop or even to retain her strength?

Another fact indicative of the waning influence of Christianity is the passing of family worship. This symptom is more alarming than the related one just noticed. The family is the unit of society. Biologically speaking, it is the cell through the multiplication and development of which society lives and grows. Scarcely anything, therefore, could be more serious than any deterioration of the family in purity and influence. But how can the family escape

deterioration, if it neglects God in whom it "lives and moves and has its being"? And what neglect of him on the part of the family as such could be so decisive and, consequently, so fatal as the disuse of the altar of the home?

A third symptom and proof of the crisis to which our religion has come is the general disbelief in, and, indeed, the common inability even to conceive of, "the divine order of human society". That God has constituted and is developing and perfecting such an order is to most but an idle tale and to some an absurdity. The state has no deeper foundation than the "Social Compact". The church was never more than a voluntary association. The family is merely a temporary arrangement, once, perhaps, convenient, but now often decidedly inconvenient. And as to a "kingdom of God", in which these, as all else, should find their goal, their reason, and their norm—this is a pitifully transcendental imagination. What hope can there be for society from the Christian standpoint when its very bases are thus overthrown and trampled under foot?

A further fact, more significant and more serious, is that, in increasing numbers, Christians are beginning to adopt the world's view of the Bible. From the first this view has denied the supernatural origin and the infallible authority of our Scriptures. Instead of holding them to be a direct communication from God himself, it insists that they are only a natural evolution of man's religious nature. Now the church is adopting this view. It has not yet modified the historic creeds of Christendom; but it is the view of not a few private Christians in almost every communion. It is taught from the pulpit by ministers whose ordination vows bind them to defend and to teach the contrary. It is diligently and insidiously propagated by theological seminaries which were founded and endowed to maintain and to disseminate the opposite. What does this mean?—that the Church is throwing away her God-appointed and God-given food and that she is doing this as she goes into her great conflict. Must it not be so when she puts the "Word

of God", which is her "Word of Life", in the same class with the Koran of Islam and the Vedas of Hinduism?

The final fact demonstrative of the crisis of Christianity is the spread of a world-view which must make belief in God and in Christ as God irrational and his service absurd. The gist of this way of regarding the universe is that it substitutes the world for God. Whether, as monism, be it materialistic or idealistic, it identifies the two, or as pluralism, it makes God a part, though it be the best part, of the world—the result is the same. God is taken from his throne and is stripped of his prerogatives. No longer does he "do according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth." If he exists at all, it is by sufferance; and the next step, it would seem, must be to declare man's religious nature, which cries out for "the living God", a lie. Such is the crisis to which Christianity has come.

The reality of this crisis has just been emphasized by the war and is being yet appallingly emphasized by its consequences. This is the great, if not the all-absorbing, fact at the present moment. War, we are told, is the contradiction of Christianity. It is the triumph of hate. War and our religion, consequently, cannot coexist. Did not our Lord himself say, "By this shall men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another"?<sup>2</sup> According to Christ's own words, therefore, nations that are at war cannot be his disciples; and as the powers just emerging from war—and that the most awful war of all history—include much the larger part of Christendom, what must be the inference?

Nor is this a novel situation. Most of the wars as well as the greatest war of modern times, have been between Christian nations. It is not necessary to substantiate this statement. No truth of history is more conspicuous. The conclusion which many are drawing from it would seem to be as obvious. Modern wars, and preeminently the war

<sup>2</sup> Pres. Board of Foreign Missions.

<sup>3</sup> St. John xiii. 35.

just over, mark the collapse of Christianity. They are the demonstration of her inability to prevent what must be the destruction of her true spirit and life. This is the deepest significance of what, not inaccurately, we call "The War."

Could anything indicate more strikingly and terribly the crisis to which Christianity has come? Her doctrinal foundation would seem to have crumbled; her ethics would appear to have collapsed. Her end must be at hand. What is worst is that Christians themselves are too dazed to resist, even if, indeed, they can realize the seriousness of the situation.

That we may regain our poise as well as come to feel that our Lord Christ is still on the throne, it will be well to remind ourselves that it is no new thing for Christianity to reach a crisis.

She was born of a crisis, even of the apparent defeat and actual death of her Founder and Head. The crucifixion was followed by the resurrection and was in order to it; and both were followed by the descent of the Holy Spirit and the constitution of the Christian Church on the day of Pentecost and were in order to these. Now this, the most tremendous of all crises, was not only the beginning of the history of Christianity; it was also and specially the type of it. Christianity has again and again met crises, and the result of each crisis has been advancement proportioned to the seriousness of the crisis.

Such, for example, was the issue of the martyrdom of Stephen. For upwards of six years Christianity had been, on the whole, in favor. She had grown steadily. "About three thousand" were added to the Church on the day of Pentecost. Not long afterward the number of men who believed was found to be "about five thousand". Soon we are told, that "believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women"; again, "that in those days the number of disciples was multiplied"; and once more, that "The Word of God increased, and the number of the

disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient unto the faith".<sup>4</sup>

The whole situation, however, was suddenly changed. Hitherto such persecution as there had been had proceeded from the Sadducees. Now an event occurred which aroused the anger of the Pharisees, and thus stirred up against the infant church the hostility of the whole Sanhedrin. The occasion of this crisis was the advocacy by Stephen of the freedom of the Gospel. This brought against him and against his sect the new charge of disloyalty to Judaism. False witnesses were produced who accused him of blasphemy against Moses and even against God. He was arraigned before the Council; his defence was unconciliatory and unsatisfactory; he was immediately stoned to death: and the result was that "a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles".<sup>5</sup> That is, only a few years after the birth of the church of a crisis which must have appeared to make that birth impossible, she came to another crisis which threatened her destruction through her dispersion.

What was the issue?—"They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word."<sup>6</sup> As Dr. Purves wrote, "Christianity discovered its intended destiny and attained its universal and complete message to mankind."<sup>7</sup> The martyrdom of Stephen and the apparent collapse of the Church which it at once produced became the necessary steps to Paul's world-wide work and the world-wide conception of the Gospel. Thus the significance of this second great, and, as it must have seemed, fatal crisis in the Church's history was that, in the words of Neander, it was "the boundary line of a new era, both of the outward and inward development of Christianity."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Acts ii. 41; Acts iv. 4; Acts vi. 1, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Acts viii. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Acts viii. 4.

<sup>7</sup> *The Apostolic Age*, p. 55.

With the beginning of the fifth century our religion came to another crisis. On the one hand, luxury, corruption, vice, were rampant. The wealth of the Roman nobles was exceeded only by their selfishness. The poverty of the poor was surpassed solely by their indifference to it. In both classes ambition seemed to be dead. The rulers sought merely to relieve the want and to arouse the idleness of an innumerable people who, as Gibbon remarks, "considered the circus as their home, their temple, and the seat of their republic." On the other hand, the northern barbarians were thundering at the gates of the Imperial City. For the first time in 619 years the seat of empire was violated by the presence of a foreign enemy. Alaric and his conquering Goths were at hand. The most splendid civilization that the world had known was in collapse.

Christianity was held responsible for all this. Why had she not availed to arrest the corruption of the populace, even if she could not herself purify it? Nay, why had she suffered her own garb to be thrown over this corruption and then permitted it thus veiled to attach itself to her? Why was it that the enemy had devastated Italy and was even forcing the gates of the capital itself? Had not these great and manifest evils befallen the nation and the Church under Christian princes and under Christian princes who were, for the most part, diligent observers of the Christian religion? In a word, was not the appalling situation then existing—the conquering Goth without and corruption within—was not this situation the demonstration of the failure of Christianity? Such was the crisis that she faced after 400 years of triumphant progress. It seemed as if she must be crushed under the ruins of that magnificent empire which she had conquered, but which she could not save.

Note the issue. No more than at either of the crises already observed had God forsaken his own. At the turning point itself stood the divinely sent deliverer. The taunts and gibes of the unbelievers Augustine answered, and the despair of the Christians themselves he overcame. He

pointed out that there had been a misconception of their standpoint. What though the Roman civilization should pass away? The grace of God was the great blessing, and it was not confined to any one civilization. The ancient notion of the state as the highest good must yield to the idea of the kingdom of God. To advance this, and not Roman aggrandizement, had been the divine purpose in the development of Rome itself. St. Augustine, in his 138th Letter to Marcellin, when comparing the effect of Christianity with the civic virtues of the ancient Roman republic, finely remarks: "Thus God showed, in the example of that flourishing empire of the Romans, how much the civic virtues could effect even without the true religion, that it might appear evident that men when this is added, became the citizens of another state, whose king is the truth, whose laws are love, and whose duration is eternity." This spiritual standpoint the great North African theologian set forth in his magnum opus, *The City of God*, not only the ablest of the patristic apologies, but one which has never been surpassed. Its effect was seen in the centuries of faith which followed, and in a spiritual conception of the Church's nature and mission which even the darkness of the Middle Ages could not wholly obscure. Such was the result of the third great crisis in the history of Christianity. Not only did she meet it successfully. It was through it that she attained to a true vision of the real "City of God".

Coming now to the tenth century, we find ourselves in the darkest age of the church's history. As another has said, "it was a period of such frightful chaos in church and state as has never since been equalled or approached".<sup>9</sup> "The "Holy Roman Empire" had fallen; and with its fall, Christianity, if she gained freedom from entangling because worldly alliances, lost security, energy, and imperial eminence. That is to say, with the ceasing of the world-empire she ceased to be the world-religion. She was thrown on

<sup>8</sup> *The Planting and Training of the Christian Church*, p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> R. S. Storrs, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 32.

her own resources; and these were, or appeared to be, utterly inadequate. Thus she could not stem the inrolling tide of barbarism. Learning was despised. Art was neglected. Armed enemies also burst with unrestrained fury on the enfeebled Church as on the struggling but dismembered State. The African Saracens pillaged the coast of the Mediterranean. The Northmen pierced into France. The ravages of the Hungarians were yet more widespread and dreadful. The Slavonic Wends and Czechs had denounced dependence on the Empire and now threatened its frontiers. Fear was so general as to tend to social and governmental atrophy. Sismondi writes that "in reading the scanty records one is struck by a prevailing feeling of solitude".<sup>10</sup> "Harvests were unreaped. Forests widened. Wolves ravaged Aquitaine. Herds of deer seemed to have taken possession of France".<sup>11</sup> General anarchy prevailed. As Bryce has remarked, "The grand vision of a universal Christian empire was utterly lost in the isolation, the antagonisms, the increasing localization of all powers; it might seem to have been but a passing gleam from an older and a better world".<sup>12</sup>

All this could not have been without its effect on Christianity itself, and especially on the Church. The fact was that the civil disturbances just referred to were followed by religious dissension, decline and degradation still more appalling. At Rome herself, the centre of Christendom, the vilest vices of Tiberius and Caligula reappeared. As Dr. Storrs has remarked, "The annalists of the Roman Church stand aghast before it".<sup>13</sup> "The Pornocracy", or reign of harlots, is the terrible name by which a part of it is more accurately described. We pass over the record as unfit for decent, not to say, Christian ears. Suffice it to add that despair settled upon all Europe. A belief in the immediate return of Christ for judgment took possession of men. In harmony with this the gloomiest portents seemed to appear

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<sup>10</sup> *Hist. de Francaise*, tom. III. p. 279.

<sup>11</sup> Michelet's *Hist. de France*, tom. I, p. 397.

<sup>12</sup> *Holy Roman Empire*, p. 79.

<sup>13</sup> *Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 47.

in heaven and earth. The lands were deluged with the perpetual rain. A famine followed more awful than had been known. So many died that they could not be buried, and so great was the scarcity of food that cannibalism prevailed and human flesh was sold almost openly in the markets.<sup>14</sup>

But why prolong the agony of recital. The recuperative power of Christianity again reasserted itself in a way to evince yet more clearly its supernaturalness. In the very desperateness of her situation she saw and grasped her opportunity. The world-empire, as we have seen, had vanished; but the world religion had not died. Thrown on her own resources, it seemed as if she must die; but this became the occasion of her supremacy. What the Church and the Empire had combined to accomplish, the Church would now attempt by herself and in so doing would subordinate to herself even the Empire.

Nor was the man wanting who should thus exalt the spiritual or what passed as the spiritual. The crisis found him waiting. Indeed, what led up to the crisis had prepared him as well as it had prepared for him. In a word, Hildebrand was the man for the time because he was the man of the time. He had grown up in its corruption. He had breathed its despair. He had become so convinced of the failure of the Empire that he realized that the unity of Europe could be restored only by aggrandizing the Pope. And this he did. This was his work; this was his life: by this work and this life, at least for the time being, he saved Christianity, and through Christianity civilization. Thus out of the Church's despair was born and reared he who should exalt her, not to the side of the Empire, but to the place of the Empire. Was not this a complete recovery? nay, much more?

Yet it led to another and—could that be—more dangerous crisis. Exalted as God's viceregent, the Papacy usurped his sovereignty. Though "no one can forgive sins but God only", the Popes, because they were vicars of Christ, as-

<sup>14</sup>R. Glaber: *Hist. sui temporis*, lib. IV. cap. 4.

sumed to do so. Boniface VIII, however, originated the idea of jubilees. In order to celebrate the close of the thirteenth century fittingly at Rome he promised absolution from all their sins to all who should in penitence visit the Church of the Apostles. This brought a concourse of two hundred thousand people to Rome and proved a large source of revenue to the Holy See. His example was followed by his successor. At first every fifteenth, and later every twenty-fifth was proclaimed jubilee year. Moreover, instead of actual attendance at Rome for the sake of obtaining absolution, the payment into the Church's treasury of the cost of the journey was permitted as sufficient.

At first indulgences, as they were called, were granted in remission of only part of the penance imposed by the Church for sin; afterwards they were issued as plenary remission for the whole of it; and finally it became the custom to give them in anticipation of the sin and the imposition of the penance. This awful usurpation and abuse of the divine prerogative was brought to a climax by Leo X. In his zeal to adorn Rome with good art and particularly to complete the Church of St. Peter he undertook to raise the necessary funds by the sale of indulgences. What God would do freely for all who were penitent and what only he could do for any, a mere man, a sinful man, in some cases a notoriously wicked man, claimed to be ready and able to do for all who would pay for it, and claimed, also and worse, that no one but himself and his delegates had authority and power to do so. Was there ever tyranny equal to this? Not only was it assumed that the grace of God could be purchased for money, but also that only the Pope kept it on sale.

Yet again, the deliverer had been prepared and was at hand. By a long course of training the providential nature of which we now see clearly, Luther had come to believe that by faith alone and not by works of righteousness, still less by gifts of money, shall "the just live". For the proclamation of this revolutionary doctrine, which is the very heart of the Gospel, the formal and general teaching of in-

dulgence became the occasion. Nor was this all. The result of the controversy was that Luther planted himself firmly on the Bible as the Word of God and demanded for all the right to search and to interpret it for themselves. Could emancipation have been more thorough? Thus it was the crisis of the Reformation that established "the glorious liberty of the children of God."

Passing over many decades (because of the limitation of time) we come to a yet more serious crisis in Christianity's history. In the year 1736 the Rev. Dr. Joseph Butler, than whom a calmer, more judicial, more discerning philosopher never lived, complained, in the Advertisement of his great work, *The Analogy of Religion Natural and Revealed to the Constitution and Course of Nature*, as follows: "It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons, that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry; but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all people of discernment; and nothing remained, but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals, for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world." This complaint, after fifteen years of further observation and reflection, in 1751, Dr., now Bishop Butler, virtually repeated in his charge to the Clergy of Durham, his diocese, which charge he opened by lamenting "the general decay of religion in the nation, which is now observed by everyone." "Besides the decline of religious influences, the number of those who profess themselves unbelievers," he says, "increases, and with their numbers their zeal."

The crisis thus described was more serious than any one of those just depicted for this reason. The crisis which arose on the death of Stephen was rooted, as we have seen, in bigotry; and the question was whether the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free could be maintained in the face of Pharisaic legalism and narrowness. The crisis which called forth Augustine was, as we have observed, created

and sustained by the corruption of the age and even of the Church. But for this, the northern barbarians could not have devastated Italy, and still less could they have sacked Rome. And the issue at stake was whether, amid the awful sensuality of that period, the spiritual conception of Christianity could be restored, whether the Roman city and civilization could be replaced by the City of God and the Kingdom of Christ. The crisis which evoked Hildebrand and made him Gregory VII was, as we have noted, the product of the despair consequent on the overthrow of the Holy Roman Empire that paralyzed the Church no less than the State; and the point in doubt was whether either had any future, whether "the end of all things was not at hand." The crisis that produced Luther was the result of the usurpation and tyranny of the Pope, and the issue was whether the sinner should have free access to God or whether he could come to him only through the successor of St. Peter.

The crisis however that we are now considering originated neither in bigotry nor in corruption nor in despair, nor in spiritual tyranny, but in reason. This was the significance of it and the seriousness of it. The narrowness of the Pharisees, the foes of Christianity had repudiated; the corruption of the Romans, they abhorred or professed to abhor; the despair of the tenth century they passed over as unworthy of the attention of thinking men; the spiritual tyranny of the Papacy they could not condemn too vigorously: but the Rationalism of the 17th and 18th centuries at least claimed to proceed on the principle on which Christianity herself was founded; for Christianity is the religion of the *Λόγος* and the *Λόγος* is divine reason. The question at issue, therefore, was radically different from what it had been. Then Christianity was contending with error. Now she was assailed in the name of the truth. Besides this, the opposition, if not persecution, was thoroughly organized, was long sustained, and came from several quarters and in various forms. Beginning in the 17th century, its full line and its real purpose were not unmasked until the 18th. Dif-

fering within itself as widely as English deism and German pantheism and French atheism differ among themselves, it was, nevertheless, one movement in its exaltation of reason above Scripture, and in its open and violent and often coarse antisupernaturalism. If it did not always or usually deny God, it did invariably dethrone him. It subjected him to the world that he had made. That he could interpose in it to save or even to help it—this it pronounced as unnecessary or as impossible as to enlightened reason it was inconceivable.

Yet Christianity, as she has done before, survived this crisis and took a long step in advance because of it. Assailed on grounds of reason, she triumphed by means of the same. This was notably so in England. John Howe met the pantheism of Spinoza with his *Living Temple*. Ralph Cudworth replied to sensationalism with his *Intellectual System of the Universe*. Robert Boyle established his famous lectureship to prove the truth of the Christian religion against infidels. Bishop Butler wrote his great *Analogy* to show that no objection could be brought on grounds of reason against Christianity as the supernatural religion which did not bear just as much against the deism of the day.

Nor was this all. Another and independent, but as really rational movement was in progress. While Butler was writing his *Analogy*, a little company of the ablest as well as the most godly scholars at Oxford were organizing the "Holy Club". They chose John Wesley the Creator or "Father" of it. Their aim at first would seem to have been the sanctification of learning. In it, as in all else, they would do the will of God. But this aim was soon broadened. God, they saw, would have them live, not for their own perfection alone; he would have them seek that in the service of others. Hence, they devoted themselves to works of charity. Nor did they stop with this. What work of charity could be so pleasing to God or so helpful to men as the free proclamation of the free grace of God. And so the Methodist revival began. It was, in the last analysis, the result of the consecration of the culture, the scholar-

ship, the genius for organization, the most uncommon common sense, and the unique initiative of John Wesley to the cause of Christ. What was the issue of this two-fold movement led by Butler on the one hand and by Wesley on the other, this combined defense and propagation of Christianity on grounds of reason? Nothing less than modern missions. By proving that our religion, because the supernatural one, was fitted to be and ought to become the universal religion, and by showing, through the preaching of it to all, that it could "save unto the uttermost", it impressed on the Church, as it had not been impressed on her since the Apostolic age, the Saviour's last and great commission, "Go ye unto all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation." Such was the issue of what we may, perhaps, call the fifth great crisis in Christianity's history. Instead of exposing the gospel as either a forgery or an idle tale, it secured its proclamation unto the ends of the earth.

And now we have come to yet another crisis. It is like that just noticed in two respects. The opposition to our religion is both antisupernaturalistic and rationalistic. As has been remarked, whether monistic or pluralistic, it insists that nature is all, and it maintains that to hold that there is a being who is above nature and who, though also in nature, is independent of it, is unreasonable.

But this crisis differs from all proceeding it also in two respects. The opposition to Christianity now is usually courteous. Persecution, at least of a physical sort, is unheard of. Denunciation is uncommon. We are told that it is not Christianity herself but certain adventitious and non-essential elements that are objected to. All honor is shown to Christ, if only his deity be not insisted on. The Gospels are given the first place among the Sacred Books of the world, if only their teaching of a gracious and supernatural salvation be expurgated. Indeed, the present attack on our religion is largely by those who claim to be the only true Christians and to make their attack just because they would save Christianity. Hence, the unique

seriousness of the crisis. As never before the Church is in danger of being deceived as to the issue.

The other difference between the present crisis and those before it is that now the assault is much more extended and general. In the eloquent words of Professor Henry B. Smith, words even more appropriate than when he uttered them, "The main characteristic of the present attack upon, and defence of Christianity is that it is all along the line. Forces that have been gathering for centuries are concentrating simultaneously. Systems of science and philosophy hitherto at war have made peace with each other that they may attack the common foe, Christianity. History in its process of recovering all the records is in many quarters trying to undermine our historic basis and many of the so-called philosophies of history and civilization attempt to explain the whole course of human history without God and without Christ. Almost all of the sciences, in some of their representations, are constructing a theory of the earth and of the heavens, of the origin and growth of all life, at war not only with the Scriptures, but also with the first principles of natural theology, of ethics and of all rational psychology—scouting not only the dogmas of faith, but the dictates of reason; rejecting not theology alone, but all metaphysics; denying all final causes, all consciousness, all intelligence in the first cause of finite being, and leaving only a blind unconscious force as the source of an unconscious development, whereby everything is educed out of an inscrutable void in which all is to end."<sup>15</sup>

Have we not in this situation what is most serious? The Church is in danger not only of being deceived by the smooth words of her adversaries; she is bewildered because their deceptive advances are from every side. Nor is this all or the worst. While thus deceived and bewildered, the war-cloud has burst upon her and she is stunned. Again we ask, What of the issue?

This review shows, that it is no new thing for our

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<sup>15</sup> *Apol.*, p. 11.

religion to meet a crisis; that these successive crisis have been increasingly serious; and yet that Christianity has survived them, and in every case has, in consequence of them, advanced proportionately to their seriousness. The question, therefore, at once arises, Will she not do so again? Observation and experience have taught us that, other things being equal, what has occurred is what is likely to occur. It is on this basis that we make our plans and regulate our lives. Why should it not in the present instance continue to be the ground of our expectation; and we look with a higher degree of confidence, for such a revival of evangelical and of evangelistic religion and for such a manifestation of its power in the regeneration of society, as the result of the present well-nigh universal war, as never yet has blessed the church and the world? Surely, in view of history, such an attitude is more reasonable than the unbelief and the pessimism which are now so prevalent.

There is a further and not unimportant consideration which should be mentioned. The present crisis might have been and should have been anticipated by Christianity. On the ground of her own teaching it should have been expected. She affirms the existence of a great spirit of evil, "the devil, the prince of darkness, the God of this world, the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience."<sup>16</sup> She represents him, not as omnipotent, but as inconceivably powerful; not as omniscient, but as cunning beyond our comprehension; not as omnipresent, but as ubiquitous. She teaches that the devil is not alone; but that he is the head of a kingdom of darkness, of demons of varying and vast resources, of "principalities, powers, world-rulers of this darkness, the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."<sup>17</sup> She holds, further and chiefly, that between him and God there can be only unceasing opposition; that this opposition has been concen-

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<sup>16</sup> Eph. ii. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Eph vi. 12.

trated by the devil on Christ, 'the only-begotten and well beloved Son of God', "in whom dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily", and who was manifested to "destroy the works of the devil." Finally, she describes him as the great, the implacable foe, the adversary of the Church, which is "the body of Christ, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

What, then, could be so likely as that the recent missionary activity of the Church, both at home and abroad, should call forth fresh opposition on the part of the devil, just as the earthly mission of our Lord became the occasion for an unprecedented manifestation of Satanic energy and hate? If the war be regarded as such a manifestation—and doubtless, most Christians are ready so to regard it—should it not have for us a message even of encouragement? If Christianity were not making headway, one special reason for activity on the part of "the prince of the powers of darkness" would be lacking. The very fact, therefore, that the hosts of evil are arrayed against our religion as never before might well be in her favor. It might indicate that, as never hitherto, she has become formidable. It might warrant the conclusion that she is beginning to occupy the earth. At all events, what is happening, and especially the present awful war, is just what might have been expected to happen at such a juncture in view of her own teaching as to a great and cunning spirit of evil whom Christ came to destroy. This consistency between Christianity's teachings, and particularly her predictions, and her development, is worthy of the most serious consideration. It would seem to stamp her with "The broad seal of truth".

Nor should the increasing power any more than the renewed activity of the enemies of Christianity dismay us. They might be expected to grow in ability as she grew in influence. If she is "the wisdom of God", she must strengthen men intellectually more than any earthly philosophy or science; and this, whether she makes them good or

not. She will train, as she has trained, the thinkers of the world; and so, as her influence becomes wide and powerful, will men be qualified for the wrong as well as for the right. Nay, further, as an efficient nurse may have many battles with the child who could never have continued to contend with her but for her faithfulness and skill in resisting him; so, that it has been reserved for nations developed by Christianity to manifest a unique genius for war, is again merely what was to have been anticipated. Indeed, the devil himself is one of the great proofs of Christianity. None but a supernatural religion could have called forth and then trained opposition so skilful, so determined, so horrible as his. Thus, even the life-destroying machines of modern battlefields, so far from disheartening us, should even encourage us. They are just what was to be looked for. Only supernatural resistance could have developed such skill in destruction even in the devil. But it would certainly have developed this, there being a devil. Precisely, therefore, because of what most appalls us in the war, may we not, must we not, look for the abolition of war through the triumph of the Prince of peace? In a true sense the wails still going up from the battlefields of a continent herald his victory. As the great adversary could never have been driven to such lengths, so he could never have acquired such ability, had he not been hard-pressed by him who, because he is all-powerful and all-wise and all-righteous, must reign until he shall have put all his enemies under his feet.

“Finally”, then, ‘let the Church be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Let her put on the whole armor of God, that she may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.’ “For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Wherefore take up the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all, to

stand. Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; withal taking up the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Such is the significance of the crises, and specially of the present crisis, of our religion.

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