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## THE PERSON OF CHRIST IN RECENT RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

The high claims of Jesus in our historical sources and the claim of Christianity to finality or to be the absolute religion have proved a difficulty to all modern types of religious philosophy which reject the claim of the New Testament to be a supernatural revelation and which cannot accept the New Testament doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son of God.

In point of fact all attempts to give a philosophical basis for Christianity which could do justice to its historical element, to the central place of the Person of Jesus, and to the finality of Christianity, apart from Christian supernaturalism, have failed.

We agree with Karl Heim<sup>1</sup> when he says that the attempts to bridge the gulf between the eternal and the historical, and to see in Jesus the central object of religion and in Christianity the final religion, have been along two lines. One is the Hegelian which by a process of logic attempts to see the fulness of the Divine Idea in the form of a popular representation (*Vorstellung*) in historical Christianity. But in the last analysis we have only the *Idea* of Divine Sonship and Saviourhood. Its full and final realization in Jesus is not done justice to, and can never be reached along this high *a priori* road. Just why these ideas could not be realized in many mediators, the Hegelian philosophy of religion can never show. And Heim is right in saying that Hegel was the last great religious philosopher who attempted to deduce from a philosophical system the New Testament idea that there is

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<sup>1</sup> "Zu meinem Versuch einer neuen religionsphilosophischen Grundlegung der Dogmatik" (*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, N. F. Jahrgang 4. Heft 6. 1924).

## THE GOD OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS\*

A marked characteristic of the present time is the intellectual decadence which has affected most departments of human endeavor except those that are concerned with purely material things. This decadence has been felt in no department more clearly than in the sphere of the Christian religion. And the reason is not far to seek—it is found in the pragmatist philosophy of the day, which divorces right living from right thinking and supposes that religion may be the same no matter what may be the intellectual conceptions with which it is connected. Such exclusion of the intellect from the highest sphere of human life has very naturally degraded the intellect, and the result is a lamentable intellectual decline. No doubt the men who laid the foundations of the modern anti-intellectualistic philosophy and anti-intellectualistic religion were men of great intellectual power, and for a time the logical results of their endeavors were obscured. But to-day the inevitable result is becoming more and more clear. The intellect has been browbeaten so long in the field of theory that one cannot be surprised if it is now ceasing to function in the field of practice. Schleiermacher and Ritschl, with all their intellectual gifts, have, it may fairly be maintained, contributed largely to produce that indolent impressionism which, at least in the New Testament field, has now largely taken the place of the patient researches that were being carried on a generation or two ago.

But in this development from anti-intellectual theory to anti-intellectual practice, the distinguished president of Union Theological Seminary is to be connected clearly, not with the latter, but with the former phase. In the sphere of theory, Dr. McGiffert is clearly to be included among the enemies of the intellect; few men have separated more sharply than he between theology and religion, and few have more ruthlessly drawn the skeptical conclusions from that separa-

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\* *The God of the Early Christians*. By Arthur Cushman McGiffert. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924.

tion. But even in dethroning the intellect, Dr. McGiffert, like the older Ritschlians, has displayed marked intellectual power; unlike most contemporary writers on Biblical themes he belongs spiritually to a better day when scholarship was at least thought to involve painstaking intellectual work.

And so in this volume of Nathaniel William Taylor Lectures, delivered before the Divinity School of Yale University in 1922, the author has produced a learned and brilliant, though at the same time provocative and (we are constrained to think) erroneous, book. Underlying the book, it is true, and more fundamentally, we suppose, than the author himself realizes, is the anti-intellectualistic philosophy of our day, with its separation into water-tight compartments of theology and philosophy on the one hand and religion and ethics on the other. But this philosophy, though it does, we think, influence and even determine the conclusions, does not lead to the shallow sentimentality and meaningless repetition of cant phrases which characterize the great mass of religious books at the present time. On the contrary Dr. McGiffert has examined the problem of Christian origins for himself, with ruthless disregard of what is usual in the ecclesiastical circles to which he belongs; and far from falling into sentimentality he has, we are almost tempted to say, erred on the other side—he has, despite his own exaltation of experience at the expense of theology, displayed, not too great, but too little, sympathy with religious feeling, at least where religious feeling is connected with convictions which he does not himself share. Such a book, with its learning and its originality, whatever may be its faults, repays careful examination far more than many a five-foot shelf of the ostensibly startling and progressive but really thoroughly conventional religious books which are so popular just now.

Jesus, according to Dr. McGiffert, did not teach a new view of God, but simply continued the teaching which was common among His people and in His day. In particular it is a great mistake, according to Dr. McGiffert, to suppose that Jesus emphasized in any revolutionary manner the love

or the Fatherhood of God—indeed, he says, in the Synoptic Gospels (which are here treated as the sole authentic sources of information), the love and the forgiveness of God are very seldom directly in view, and the Fatherhood of God was perhaps even more prominent in the teaching of Jesus' contemporaries than in His own. Indeed, our author insists, if any element in Jesus' teaching about God is distinctive, it is the awful severity of God rather than the love of God; Jesus had much to say about punishment as well as bliss in the future world, and differed from his contemporaries in breaking down their easy complacency and bringing them face to face with the dread decision between death and life. "Strait is the gate," according to Jesus, "and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." But even in this element in His teaching, Dr. McGiffert maintains, Jesus clearly was following in the line of an Old Testament prophet such as Amos; and in general, in the whole outline of His teaching about God—His thoroughgoing theism, with its insistence upon the sovereignty of God with which none can argue or bargain, and His doctrine of creation—He was simply a child of His people and was not the originator of distinctively Christian ideas.

It will not be possible here to examine these contentions in detail: they are based, we think, upon a false limitation of the sources; and even within those sources that are used they are at a number of points clearly one-sided. But if they are one-sided, they constitute at least a salutary protest against a modern presentation that is more one-sided still. In a few ruthless strokes Dr. McGiffert has here demolished the entire sentimental picture of the "liberal Jesus." It is only necessary to compare, for example, Professor Ellwood's absurd but exceedingly popular and altogether typical assertion that "Jesus concerned Himself but little with the question of existence after death"<sup>1</sup> with our author's insistence upon Jesus' utterances about heaven and hell and upon the central place which they had in His teaching, in order to detect the

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<sup>1</sup> Ellwood, *The Reconstruction of Religion*, 1922, p. 141.

difference between popular Modernism,<sup>2</sup> with its thoughtless repetition of current phrases and its complete refusal to separate the question what we should have said from the question what Jesus actually said, on the one hand, and real scholarship, no matter how radical, on the other. The truth is that our author has indicated with admirable clearness, despite the one-sidedness of his presentation in detail, how false is the appeal of the dominant optimistic and positivist Modernism to the real Jesus of Nazareth. To put the matter briefly, Modernism (including Dr. McGiffert himself) thinks of religion exclusively "in terms of salvation," whereas the real Jesus of Nazareth thought of it also in terms of judgment; Modernism relegates the doctrines of creation and the divine sovereignty to the realm of metaphysics, whereas the teaching of the real Jesus was theistic through and through.

Thus according to our author Jesus was, and always remained, a Jew; and his doctrine of God was Jewish and not Christian. In what sense, then, was He the Founder of the Christian religion? The obvious answer might seem to be, from the point of view of our author, that He was not the Founder of the Christian religion at all, and that Christianity originated after His time and had little to do with Him. But we desire earnestly to be fair; indeed at this point we want, if possible, to be fairer to Dr. McGiffert than he is to himself. He does not himself make the matter very clear, certainly he does not lay very much stress upon it; but still he does find something in Jesus that was distinctive as over against His contemporaries. That something was not His teaching, but it was His life; in Jesus the gospel of the kingdom was "irradiated by the intimacy and beauty of Jesus' own relation to God and by the quality of his life of service and sacrifice" (p. 193). No doubt, Dr. McGiffert holds that without that *life* of Jesus, the whole subsequent development, the whole formation and development of Christianity, would

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<sup>2</sup> We are using this word in a broad sense, in which it would include Harnack, for example, as well as Loisy.

have been impossible.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly our author is not so very far away from the current Modernism after all—he probably agrees with the Modernist preachers in holding that Jesus was the Founder of Christianity because He was the first to live the Christian life. But at any rate he does emphasize with a salutary clearness the falsity of the customary Modernist appeal to the *teaching* of Jesus. The impression is constantly being produced by the popular exponents of Modernism that although they have given up the authority of the Bible they do hold to the “authority of Christ.” That impression would be removed by a perusal of Dr. McGiffert’s book. Our author has shown, with all requisite clearness that the God of Modernism is quite different from the God of Jesus of Nazareth. The admission, we think, ought to be taken with very great seriousness. It will not indeed bring the Modernists back into conformity with the Word of God; for when, learning from Dr. McGiffert, they have to choose between their own view of God and the view which Jesus held, they will no doubt hold to their own view and let the teaching of Jesus go. But at least the alternative will have been placed clearly before the rank and file of the Church, and that will be immense gain. Dr. McGiffert has shown very boldly and very clearly, in the brief but weighty first section of his book, that the God of Jesus of Nazareth was quite different from the God proclaimed by the antitheistic Modernism of the twentieth century, including Dr. McGiffert himself.

So much for Jesus’ view of God; it was, according to our author, simply the view commonly held by the Jewish teachers of Jesus’ day. But an important step in advance, it is held, was taken by the apostle Paul. Paul did indeed retain his allegiance to the God of the Jews and of Jesus; but he added to that God a second object of worship—namely Jesus Himself. At this point it is interesting to observe the insistence of Dr. McGiffert upon the Pauline doctrine of the deity of Christ; indeed the reference of the word “God” (Θεός) to Jesus in Rom. ix. 5, which was singled out by

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, p. 21.

Jülicher for special criticism in his review of a book by the writer of the present article,<sup>4</sup> here receives the weighty support of one who certainly cannot be accused of orthodox prejudices. But at any rate whether or no Paul applies the word "God" to Jesus he constantly applies to Him the word "Lord" (Κύριος), and refers to Him Old Testament passages where in the Septuagint that word is used to translate the "Jahwe" of the Hebrew text. What is more important still, Paul recognizes Christ throughout as an object of worship and even addresses prayers to Him. With this second object of worship whom Paul added to God the Father, and with the closely related idea of the Holy Spirit, the distinctive mystical piety of the apostle, according to our author, was connected. At this point, Dr. McGiffert believes, is to be found the influence, important though indirect, of the non-Jewish and non-Christian religion of Paul's day; Paul "illustrates in his own thinking the twofold strain which has run through nearly all Christian thought since his day, for Christianity was the child both of Judaism and of the orientalized Hellenism of the Roman world" (p. 34). "The God of Paul was the God of the Jews, expanded to include the divine Saviour Jesus Christ the Lord, by mystical union with whom believers are transformed from flesh into spirit and are thus saved" (pp. 193 f.).

This exposition of Paul is correct, of course, in emphasizing Paul's full belief in the deity of Christ, and also in representing Paulinism as in the fullest sense a religion of redemption. But it is wrong, we believe, in several respects: it is wrong positively, in finding the origin of Paul's redemptive religion in the orientalized Hellenism or the Hellenized oriental mysticism of Paul's day; and it is wrong negatively because of its ignoring of important elements in Pauline thought and Pauline experience. It ignores in the first place the entire forensic aspect of Paul's doctrine of salvation—the aspect which is concerned with justification or with the

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<sup>4</sup> See *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, 1921, p. 198, and Jülicher in *Christliche Welt*, 36, 1922, col. 625.

question how a sinful man becomes "right with God"—and it ignores in the second place the factual or historical basis which the apostle himself clearly attributed to his religious life. Paul's religion was not founded, as the reader of Dr. McGiffert's book might suppose, merely upon what Christ was, but it was founded also, and primarily, upon what Christ had done; Paulinism is based not merely upon things that always were true but upon something that happened—namely the redemptive work of Christ in His death and resurrection.

We understand of course that Dr. McGiffert is discussing, not soteriology, but theology in the narrower sense; he is discussing not Paul's doctrine of the way of salvation, but Paul's doctrine of God. Yet even in such a discussion the strictly factual basis of Paul's religion should not have been ignored: attention to it might have led to a clearer recognition of the identity between the God of the old dispensation, with His promises of redemption to come, and the God of the new dispensation holding closer fellowship with His people because of the redemption already accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ; and it might have led also to a recognition of the difference between the mystery religions, with their dimly conceived saviour gods, whose experiences, even if they were really regarded as taking place at all otherwise than in the constantly repeated cult, lay at best in the remote past, and the religion of Paul, with its clear account of a redeeming act that had taken place before the gaze of the multitude outside the walls of Jerusalem only a few years before. Paulinism was founded upon a plain account of something that had happened, upon a piece of good news, a "gospel." Ignore that fact and you are without the key which unlocks the meaning of all the rest.

But it is time to return to the exposition of Dr. McGiffert's book. Two steps in the reconstruction have so far been noticed. There was according to our author first the thoroughly Jewish monotheism of Jesus; and there was in the second place, added to this Jewish monotheism, the Pauline notion of Jesus as a Saviour God. These two elements in

Paul's thought were, according to Dr. McGiffert, brought together in a sort of rough, provisional way by the Pauline designation of Jesus as "Son of God." This designation, or rather the Pauline use of it, shows, Dr. McGiffert thinks, that Paul had come to conceive of God in quite an un-Jewish way as a sort of substance in which two persons (God the Father and Jesus the Son) could share, and that this conception involves the conception of the divine immanence and the momentous notion, common to Paul and to the mystery religions, that salvation consists in a sharing, on the part of men, of the nature of God. All of this, our author thinks, is non-Jewish, and the union of it with Paul's Jewish monotheism, which conceives of God in a strictly personal way, means merely that two elements, really disparate, were allowed to rest side by side in the mind of Paul. Paul began, it is supposed, with Jewish monotheism, like that of Jesus; but added to it, as an entirely new and disparate element in his thinking, the Christ-mysticism which made of Jesus a Saviour God.

Yet, according to Dr. McGiffert, disparate as the two elements really were, they were both present in Paulinism and in the thought of some men, like the author of the Fourth Gospel, who were his followers. But—and here we come to the boldest and most distinctive contention in this remarkable book—there were many persons who accepted one of the two elements in Paulinism and did not accept the other, who accepted Jesus as a saviour-god, but did not accept the monotheism which Jesus and Paul derived from their Jewish inheritance. These persons, it is supposed, were not at all exceptional, and did not creep into the Church at any late date, but on the contrary formed the rank and file of primitive Gentile Christianity. There were no doubt, it is admitted, some Gentile Christians who, coming into the Church through the gateway of the synagogue, believed in the one God, Maker and Ruler of the world, before they came to believe in Jesus. But the great majority, it is thought, were of the way of thinking which has just been indicated; the great

majority accepted Jesus as *their* saviour god, but were not at all concerned to deny the existence of other gods, and in particular were not at all interested in the connection of Jesus with the Maker and Ruler of the universe or indeed with the question whether there is any Maker and Ruler of the universe at all. At an early date, Dr. McGiffert says, "there came into the Christian church from the Gentile world many who found in Jesus Christ their saviour, and to whom the God of the Jews—the God worshipped by both Jesus and Paul—meant nothing" (pp. 193 f.). A somewhat extended quotation may be necessary to set forth this central thesis of the book (pp. 46 ff.) :

"The saviour gods of the current mystery religions were not supreme gods—creators and rulers of the world—nor were they thought of by their votaries as the only gods. Initiation into this or that cult did not mean the denial of other deities, but only the special consecration of oneself to the service of a particular deity. This may well have been the situation of many early Christians. Their personal piety centred in the Lord Jesus Christ. In communion with him and in devotion to him they found their religious life. But they may not have felt it necessary to deny the existence of other deities or to accept the one God of Israel as their God.

"There was no antecedent reason, indeed, why the Gentile Christians should accept the God of the Jews whom Jesus worshipped, any more than the Jewish ceremonial law which he observed and the Jewish practices in which he was brought up. The fact that Jesus himself and his personal disciples were Jews no more required the Gentile Christians to be Jews in their customs and beliefs than the fact that Adonis was a Syrian deity, Attis a Phrygian, and Isis and Serapis Egyptian deities required their adherents to become Syrians or Phrygians or Egyptians, and to accept the religious tents of those peoples. Whether Judaism or any part of it was to be regarded as permanently essential to Christianity was a matter to be determined, and by no means went without saying. The early Jewish disciples thought the whole of it essential and regarded the new faith as only a form of Judaism. Paul broke with Judaism and made of Christianity a new religion, but he did not break with the Jewish God. On the contrary, he recognized him as the God of Christians as well as Jews.

"But by what right did he reject a part of the old system and retain another part? Evidently there was room for a difference of opinion. Paul's authority was not great enough to compel the general adoption of his doctrine of redemption, nor were other Christians under the necessity of accepting the Jewish God simply because he did. We can hardly avoid the conclusion that if belief in the God of the Jews was finally universal among Christians it was because it commended itself as sound rather than because it was from the beginning an essential part of the new faith. As already said, most of the early Gentile converts were not seeking monotheism, but salvation through Christ. This being so, it is gratuitous to assume that they must have accepted monotheism when they accepted Christianity. On the contrary, they may well have taken Christ as their Lord and Saviour, without taking His God and Father as their God."

Thus, according to Dr. McGiffert, primitive Gentile Christianity thought of religion "in terms of salvation" but not in terms of metaphysics; it was Christian without being theistic; it accepted Jesus but did not accept Jesus' God.

It would be difficult to imagine a more revolutionary thesis; and if such a thesis were proposed by one of the merely impressionistic historians of the day, who either dispense themselves from any examination of the sources, or else, completely abandoning scientific historical method, make the sources subservient to the practical needs of the modern Church, then the thesis could perhaps safely be passed by. But when it is proposed by one of the most distinguished American scholars, who in his *Apostolic Age* has produced perhaps the ablest American exposition of the older "Liberal" view of primitive Christianity—a view widely different from the one which the author now sets forth—and who by the solid learning of his commentary on Eusebius has placed all students of Christian literature very deeply in his debt—when so revolutionary a thesis is proposed by such a scholar it certainly ought to be examined with some care.

But before the examination, it is important to fix in our minds, just as clearly as possible, exactly what it is that Dr. McGiffert is undertaking to prove. If he were maintaining

merely that individual Gentiles, not understanding the apostolic proclamation of the one God, found their way into the Church without having really freed themselves of their polytheistic point of view, then we should not perhaps venture upon a summary denial. Certain Athenians supposed that when Paul spoke of "Jesus and the resurrection" he was a setter forth of "strange gods;" they did not understand or perhaps mockingly pretended to misunderstand the monotheism which underlay everything that the apostle said. These Athenians were indeed certainly not received into the primitive Christian community; they are spoken of, rather, as typical representatives of those who scornfully rejected the new faith. But it is conceivable, though perhaps improbable, that individual Gentiles made their way into the apostolic churches without inwardly relinquishing their polytheistic point of view and without becoming deeply interested in the apostolic teaching about the one living and true God. In the subapostolic age, moreover, there were those who perhaps called themselves Christian and who accepted some at least of the Christian claims for Christ and yet were very far from accepting the central elements in New Testament Christianity. It is conceivable, though by no means certain, that such heresies as those of Cerinthus and Carpocrates, for example, had their precursors even in the earlier part of the apostolic age. And it is conceivable, though again by no means probable, that among such isolated phenomena is to be put a non-theistic<sup>5</sup> Gentile Christianity such as that which Dr. McGiffert describes.

But even if such an admission should be made it would not at all touch the matter now under discussion. What Dr. McGiffert is undertaking to establish is not merely the existence, in individual converts in the apostolic and subapostolic age, of a non-theistic Christianity, but the existence of such a

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<sup>5</sup> It is hoped that the reader will pardon the use of this hybrid word. "Atheistic" would obviously not do at all. And even "antitheistic" would perhaps be too strong; since Dr. McGiffert does not maintain that these Christians expressly denied theism but only that they were not interested in it.

Christianity as embracing the great mass of early Gentile Christians, as having a recognized place in the Church instead of being rigidly excluded as were the adherents of Carpocrates and Cerinthus and the later Gnostics, and indeed as forming the basis for the whole subsequent development of the Christian religion. That, and nothing less than that, is the astonishing thesis which our author endeavors to establish. Indeed so fundamental does he regard this non-theistic Christianity in the subsequent history of the Church that at times he seems almost to ignore the possibility of any other influence, and in particular the possibility of any considerable direct influence of the New Testament. Were the primitive Gentile Christians so predominantly worshippers of Jesus without being worshippers of the God of Israel, were they so predominantly Christians without being monotheists, that this non-theistic Gentile Christianity could form the basis of the whole subsequent development of the Church? That is the question which is raised by Dr. McGiffert's book.

In proposing so provocative a thesis it is unfortunate that the author has not allowed himself more space than is afforded by a short volume of lectures. Dr. McGiffert is proposing nothing less than a rather radical reconstruction of early Christian history; yet he has flung his suggestion out into the world with only very sketchy argumentative support. One could wish that like Baur or Bousset he had made public at once the materials upon which his reconstruction is based. Nevertheless he has at least clearly indicated the main arguments by which his thesis is to be supported, and we do not think that the addition of details could essentially change our estimate. We shall therefore endeavor briefly to set forth and criticize the arguments by which the existence of a non-theistic Gentile Christianity as a dominant factor in the life of the primitive Church is here thought to be established.

In the first place, the author deals with the antecedent probabilities of the case. Before adducing positive evidence as to the existence of a non-theistic Gentile Christianity he seeks to show that the existence of such a Christianity is

only what might have been expected, especially on the basis of the Epistles of Paul. The early converts from the Gentile world, except those who had already been attracted by the synagogue, were, Dr. McGiffert insists, in a very different situation from that which prevailed among the Jewish Christians; the "Christians of Jewish birth or training worshipped the God of the Jews from the beginning, and only afterward worshipped Christ and recognized him as divine, as many of them never did."<sup>6</sup> But converts drawn directly from the Gentile world were in a different situation. They did not begin with the God of the Jews, but with the Lord Jesus Christ. Not the former, but the latter, brought them into the Christian circle" (p. 44).

It cannot be said, however, that this consideration supports Dr. McGiffert's thesis. Indeed it is not even clear that the situation of the Gentile Christians is here correctly stated; it is by no means clear that the Gentile Christians "began" with the Lord Jesus Christ and not with the God of the Jews. In the precious summary of missionary preaching to Gentiles which Paul gives in 1 Thess. i. 9, 10, the apostle indicates the contrary; in that summary the proclamation of "the living and true God" comes before the proclamation of Jesus. "For they themselves," Paul says, "show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivereth us from the wrath to come." But even if it should be granted that the primitive Gentile Christians began with Jesus rather than with God, it would still not follow that acceptance of Jesus was ever possible without acceptance of God. For in all our sources of primitive information the Lordship of Jesus and His Saviourhood are represented as being indissolubly connected with the relation that He sus-

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<sup>6</sup> There is really not the slightest evidence that the words "as many of them never did" are correct for the early period. Even in arguing with his bitterest Jewish Christian opponents Paul gives no evidence of any difference of opinion between himself and them with regard to the person of Christ.

tained to God the Father. There is not the slightest evidence for the opinion that the title "Son of God" was a mere invention of Paul to show a relation between Jesus the Saviour God and the God of the Jews whom Paul continued to worship. On the contrary Jesus is presented in every aspect, including His aspect as Saviour, which Dr. McGiffert makes the sole aspect in which he appeared to the Gentile Christians, as standing in relation to God. Indeed the very idea of salvation involves the idea of the one God. What did the primitive Gentile Christians understand by "salvation"? Did they not understand by it—whatever else it might mean—did they not understand by it salvation from the final condemnation *of God*? Will Dr. McGiffert venture to remove—and just in the case of the simple-minded rank and file—this eschatological reference? He insists indeed that the primitive Gentile Christians thought of religion in terms of salvation, not of judgment. But does not the very idea of salvation involve, as its correlative, the idea of judgment; and does not the idea of judgment involve the idea of God as judge?

Moreover, if the result of salvation or the very nature of it thus involves the idea of God, so does also the act by which salvation was consummated; in speaking of the resurrection of Christ, Paul speaks, in the Thessalonian passage just quoted and elsewhere in the Epistles, of the One who raised Him from the dead. So it is also with regard to all other aspects of salvation. In attributing to those supposedly simple-minded Gentile Christians of the first century the sublimated mysticism of the twentieth century, which is not interested in the thought of a life after death or in the relation of man to the inscrutable and terrible power that the ancients called fate, Dr. McGiffert is, we are constrained to believe, guilty of a very serious anachronism. Indeed even in connection with the Holy Spirit, where the affinity with a mere mysticism might naturally be expected to appear, if it appears anywhere, Paul speaks of the sending of the Spirit or the supplying of the Spirit *by God*. So monotheism is connected even with what might be regarded as the most mystical

aspect of salvation. The truth is that so far as the primitive sources permit us to judge, Christ was valued as Saviour just because of His relation to the one supreme God; it is, so far as we can see, quite typical of primitive Christianity when Paul couples "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" together regularly at the beginnings of his epistles. There is not the slightest evidence that in the apostolic age Jesus was ever preached in such a way that the acceptance of Him as Saviour and Lord was possible without the acceptance of God His Father.

Against this conclusion Dr. McGiffert employs one of the most extraordinary arguments in the whole book. In certain passages, he says, Paul speaks of the gospel as having "to do only with Christ, not God." So for example in I Corinthians xv.1 ff. But could there be any greater conceivable misuse of the passage? Paul was led to give this excerpt from his fundamental missionary teaching because of an error that was concerned specifically with the resurrection and with nothing else; it is absurd to expect him, in such a connection, to reproduce other elements in his teaching, which no matter how fundamental would here have been entirely irrelevant. Again Dr. McGiffert refers to Phil. i. 15-21, where the rival teachers are tolerantly spoken of because they are preaching Christ, and where nothing is said about God. But would Paul ever have spoken with tolerance of a preaching which ignored God the Father? The question needs only to be put in order to be answered. The truth is that preaching "Christ" for Paul necessarily involved preaching the one God the Father; the idea of "Christ" had as its absolutely necessary correlative the idea of God; the former could never be thought of without the latter. Finally Dr. McGiffert asks that with the tolerance of Phil. i. 15-21 there should be contrasted the stern words of Gal. i. 7,8: "There are some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we or an angel from heaven preach another gospel than that we have preached unto you, let him be anathema." The point seems to be that Paul was intolerant where as in

Galatia "Christ" or the way of salvation was not correctly set forth, but could be very tolerant about errors concerning other things, including the doctrine of God. But could there be any more complete abandonment of grammatico-historical interpretation? The reason why Paul does not in Galatians pronounce an anathema upon those who fail to proclaim God the Father is simply because he is there arguing against Jews, whose doctrine of God the Father was presumably all that could be desired; very naturally he refers to the matter that was in dispute and not to other matters, important though they might be, which were utterly irrelevant at that particular time. If the opponents in Galatia had failed to proclaim the one true God set forth in the Old Testament and in the teaching of Jesus, then we can be sure that Paul's anathema would have lacked nothing in sternness. But as a matter of fact a proclamation of Christ which was not also a proclamation of God the Father was so absolutely inconceivable in the early Church that anathemas against it were never needed. Where Paul does refer, as in the case of the Thessalonians, to his missionary preaching among Gentiles, he places the proclamation of "the living and true God" at the very beginning.

But Dr. McGiffert has not quite finished with Gal. i.7,8. "Of this gospel preached to the Galatians," he continues, "Paul says: 'Neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but by revelation of Jesus Christ,' showing that it was something different from Judaism and Jewish monotheism." Here appears, in a peculiarly poignant way, the failure of our author to recognize the dispensational, or factual and historical character of Paul's teaching. It is perfectly true that the doctrine of God did not, strictly speaking, form a part of Paul's "gospel"; for gospel meant to Paul, as the very word implies, a piece of good news, an account of something that had happened. The doctrine of God sets forth what God was and always had been; and in itself, far from being a gospel or a piece of good news, can lead us sinners only to despair: whereas the "gospel" sets forth something that God did at

a definite point of time near Jerusalem when He saved sinful mankind through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. But although the gospel itself does not contain the doctrine of God, it presupposes it and is absolutely meaningless without it. In isolating the gospel from its presuppositions, Dr. McGiffert, in accordance with the dominant tendency of today, has made of the gospel something totally different from that which Paul understood it to be. If the gospel of Paul is said to be "something different from Judaism and Jewish monotheism" that is perhaps true, provided that "Jewish monotheism" (in what is really a thoroughly unhistorical way) be abstracted from the element of promise with which it was always connected. But if the assertion is true, it is also valueless. "Jewish monotheism" sets forth what God is; the gospel of Paul sets forth something that He has done: but what He has done is entirely unintelligible without a knowledge of what He is.

The same consideration—namely, insistence upon the factual or historical nature of Paul's gospel—serves to refute the next argument which Dr. McGiffert brings forth. "Paul's teaching about the law in his Epistle to the Galatians—that they were not justified by works of law but by faith in Jesus Christ, and that they who were justified by law were severed from Christ—and his declaration that circumcision is nothing nor uncircumcision, but a new creation, might easily lead his converts to think the whole Jewish system including Jewish monotheism itself of small importance" (p. 50). "There was no antecedent reason . . . . why the Gentile Christians should accept the God of the Jews whom Jesus worshiped, any more than the Jewish ceremonial law which he observed and the Jewish practices in which he was brought up" (p. 47). This argument ignores the difference between a command, which deals with what *ought to be*; and a doctrine of God which deals with what *is*. A command may be absolutely authoritative and yet temporary, whereas a doctrine of God, if it be abandoned, can be abandoned only because it never was true at all. If a boy's father, to use a homely

example, tells him to chop up the wood on the woodpile, that does not mean that he is to continue chopping wood to the end of time; he is not at all disobeying or setting aside his father's command if he quits chopping wood when the job is done. So it is exactly with the ceremonial requirements of the Old Testament law; they were, according to Paul, commands of God, but they were commands which God intended from the beginning to be in force only until the coming of Christ. When their purpose was fulfilled, it was not obedience but disobedience to insist upon the observance of them. But to reject the "Jewish" doctrine of the one living and holy God would not be to declare a command to be temporary, but it would be to declare an assertion of fact to be false. The two things are entirely incommensurate. If God commanded Jewish fasts and feasts and the separation of Israel from other nations, it was quite conceivable that He should declare that the purpose of those commands was fulfilled with the completion of Christ's redeeming work. And if He did so, that did not involve at all any confession that those previous commands had been, under the old dispensation, anything but holy and just and good. But to say that the God of Israel was not really the Maker and Ruler of the world—indeed to say that there was no supreme Maker and Ruler of the world at all—that would be an entirely different matter. Dr. McGiffert says: "Paul broke with Judaism and made of Christianity a new religion, but he did not break with the Jewish God . . . . But by what right [the Gentile disciples are represented as possibly saying to themselves] did he reject a part of the old system and retain another part?" The answer to this question of Dr. McGiffert's is that Paul did not reject any part of the old system at all. He did not reject the ceremonial law, but believed that it was authoritative throughout. But he believed that though absolutely authoritative it was intended by God to be temporary.

So the whole notion that Paul was picking and choosing in Judaism, and that in retaining the Old Testament idea of God while rejecting the ceremonial law he was stopping

arbitrarily in a half-way emancipation, is based upon an ignoring of the dispensational or historical basis of Paulinism. Paul preached his gospel of Gentile freedom not because he took the Old Testament law with a grain of salt, but on the contrary because he took it strictly—so strictly that he could not be satisfied with half-way measures, but was led on to a clear recognition of the epoch-making significance of the Cross of Christ. He emancipated his converts from the ceremonial law, not because he accepted part of what the Old Testament teaches and rejected the rest, but on the contrary just because he accepted all of it; his doctrine of redemption is based not upon a lax or eclectic, but upon a strict and comprehensive, view of the law of God.

No doubt it may be said in reply that, although Paul himself was not really rejecting the authority of any part of the Old Testament, yet simple-minded Gentile converts might have thought that he was doing so, and so might have thought that they were only going a little farther in the path in which Paul had led, if, in addition to the rejection of the ceremonial law, they rejected or at least ignored the Old Testament teaching about God. But the reply is hardly satisfactory. Despite the Epistle of Barnabas, with its different teaching (which was due to the anti-Jewish polemic of the second century), the Pauline doctrine of the temporary character of the ceremonial law may probably have made its way generally in the early Church. The point was so very simple that even simple-minded, untheological Gentile Christians could understand it. And were any human beings ever quite so simple-minded and quite so untheological as Dr. McGiffert's Gentile Christians are thought to have been?

But even if the Pauline teaching about the one God, Maker and Ruler of the world, was perfectly clear, would the authority of Paul and of the other Jewish Christian apostles and teachers be sufficient to compel the Gentile converts to accept this "Jewish God"? Dr. McGiffert thinks that it would not. "Paul's authority," he says (p. 48), "was not great enough to compel the general adoption of his doctrine of redemption,

nor were other Christians under the necessity of accepting the Jewish God simply because he did." This reference to the Pauline doctrine of redemption is ingenious but hardly convincing. The point here made seems to be that many post-Pauline writers—for example the Apostolic Fathers and the later writers of the Old Catholic Church—display a woeful lack of understanding for the Pauline doctrine of redemption. Might not others in the Church, then, have displayed a similar lack of acceptance of the Pauline doctrine of God? In answer, it must be admitted that there is in early Christian literature outside of the New Testament evidence of a failure to understand or at least to state at all fully or clearly the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith. That is why the achievement of Augustine and of the Reformation, in bringing to light things that are indeed at the very centre of the Bible but that the Church had failed fully to understand and use, must be rated very high; and that is also why the true "progressives" are not those who now busy themselves with the "simplification" of creeds but those who value the rich theological heritage which on the basis of Scripture the Holy Spirit has given to the Church. Nevertheless the failure of the sub-apostolic Church to make full use of the Pauline doctrine of redemption is not at all comparable to that ignoring of Pauline monotheism which Dr. McGiffert attributes to the primitive Gentile disciples. The Pauline doctrine of redemption was not denied, nor even altogether ignored, but was merely not made use of in its full richness and depth; whereas this supposed ignoring of Pauline monotheism would mean the missing of that feature of Paul's preaching which according to I Thessalonians came at the very beginning, which was perhaps most strikingly distinctive as over against the beliefs from which the Gentiles were won, and which appeared in the simplest possible way in everything that Paul said. What did those Gentile Christians, according to Dr. McGiffert, make of the terms "God" and "the Father" which appear every few lines in the Pauline Epistles and which were undoubtedly equally frequent, if not more frequent, in his

oral missionary teaching? Did they suppose that those terms meant nothing at all, so that they could be safely passed by? The supposition, we think, is nothing short of absurd.

But Dr. McGiffert has raised the question of authority; and it is an important question which cannot be ignored. What, according to our author, were the authorities or the influences which led the early Gentile converts to ignore monotheism, and what were the authorities or influences on the other side which, in order that they might thus ignore monotheism, they were obliged to overcome?

On the former side, as an influence hostile to monotheism, Dr. McGiffert places the religions from which the converts had come. "While monotheism and polytheism," he says, "were both represented in the religious world of the period, the former was usually the affair of the philosopher, and it is improbable that the mass of the early Gentile converts, who were certainly not drawn from the philosophic schools, had any initial interest in monotheism or any understanding of it" (p. 41). "Had the Gentile Christians lived in a monotheistic world, they might have been expected to subordinate Christ to God as Christians of Jewish antecedents did. As it was, they needed no supreme God above and beyond Christ, and to suppose such a God central in their thought is to misinterpret their interest and attitude. Jewish Christianity was monotheistic and Gentile Christianity became monotheistic under influences to be referred to later, but there is no reason to suppose that the latter was monotheistic from the start. The Jews had won their monotheism only gradually and by many struggles;<sup>7</sup> to imagine that Jewish Christians could impose it without more ado upon converts to the new faith from the polytheistic civilization of the day is to overestimate their influence" (pp. 45 f.). "The saviour gods of the current mystery religions were not supreme gods—creators and rulers of the world—nor were they thought of by their votaries as the only gods. Initiation into this or that cult did not mean the

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<sup>7</sup> This is obviously not the place to discuss the view of the Old Testament which Dr. McGiffert here assumes.

denial of other deities; but only the special consecration of oneself to the service of a particular deity. This may well have been the situation of many early Christians. Their personal piety centred in the Lord Jesus Christ. In communion with him and in devotion to him they found their religious life. But they may not have felt it necessary to deny the existence of other deities or to accept the one God of Israel as their God" (pp. 46 f.).

It will not here be possible to examine in detail the questions of fact involved in this argument—particularly the question whether the Gentile converts in any considerable numbers had been adherents of the mystery religions. That question, we think, must be answered, for the early period, with an emphatic negative.<sup>8</sup> But the fundamental weakness of the argument is independent of all such questions, no matter how important the questions may be in themselves. The clearest defect of the argument is that it ignores one of the most outstanding features of early Christianity—namely its uncompromising exclusiveness. That was the characteristic which impressed itself most plainly even upon outsiders; that was the characteristic which gave the new religion all its offensiveness, but also all its power. If the early Christians had been what Dr. McGiffert represents them as being, if they had simply accepted Christ as *their* saviour without being concerned to deny the existence of other saviours, then there would have been no persecutions, but also there would have been no conquest of the world. The most obvious single feature of this religion was just the thing that Dr. McGiffert denies; the strange thing about these hated Christians, the thing which aroused the opposition of the world, was not that they accepted a new Saviour, but that they held Him to be the *only* Saviour and the *only* Lord. But to what was this exclusiveness of the early Church due? The answer is perfectly plain—it was due to the lofty, universalistic, uncompromising monotheism which runs all through the Old Testament and

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<sup>8</sup> See *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, 1921, p. 273, and the passage there cited from Oepke, *Die Missionspredigt des Apostels Paulus*, 1920, p. 26.

which appears in supreme glory in the teaching of Jesus Himself. Is Dr. McGiffert correct in representing the universalistic and exclusive monotheism of the Christian Church as being the cold invention of theological schemers who saw that without it the Church could not extend its dominion over the whole world? Surely not. Rather was it the thing for which plain men and women were willing, with a glad smile on their faces, to suffer and die.

Our author is making a great mistake in assuming that because monotheism has no place in *his* religious life, it had no place in the religious life of the early Church. And just the prevalent polytheism of that age, upon which this argument lays stress, placed in the very forefront of the disciples' mind and heart their belief in the one God the Father Almighty and the one Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus the previous polytheism of the Gentile disciples, far from making them indifferent to the apostolic teaching about God, had if anything exactly the opposite effect. Adherence to an exclusive monotheism was one of the things that acceptance of the new faith, in a polytheistic environment, most clearly meant. Nothing is to be said, therefore, in favor of the antitheistic influence which Dr. McGiffert finds in the previous beliefs of the early Gentile converts.

But what were the authorities on the other side?

In the first place there was the authority of the Apostle Paul. Dr. McGiffert tries to minimize its importance, but surely without success. It is true, the authority of Paul was called in question in the early days, in accordance with the information contained in the Epistles. But by whom was it called in question? It was called in question not by Gentiles who refused to accept the Jewish Christian teaching about God, but, quite the contrary, by Jews who appealed to the Jerusalem apostles and to the Old Testament. In their case Paul's authority was undermined not by a rejection of apostolic authority but by an appeal to one apostle against another. As a matter of fact the appeal was unsuccessful; Paul was in agreement even about the way of salvation with the original

apostles; and the Old Catholic Church was quite correct in appealing not to Peter alone or to Paul alone but to Peter and Paul together. But whatever may have been the differences of opinion in the early days about the way of salvation and the place of the Jewish law, there was at any rate full agreement among all the apostles about the God of Israel. Where Paul's authority was undermined, it was undermined not because of an objection to Judaism on the part of Gentile converts, but on the contrary because of an excessive readiness of Gentile converts to accept even the most burdensome parts of the Jewish ceremonial law. The receptiveness of the Galatian converts to the Judaizers would be very strange if Dr. McGiffert's picture of the polytheistic and anti-Jewish tendencies of the Gentile Christians were at all correct. At any rate, in the matter of monotheism all the early teachers of the Church, to say nothing of all the apostles, were fully agreed. If the Gentile disciples had not accepted this element of the apostolic preaching it is difficult to see how they could have accepted anything at all.

In the second place, there was on the same side the authority and influence of the Old Testament. This influence, again, Dr. McGiffert underestimates in a very extraordinary way. He does not of course deny altogether the use of the Old Testament. "I do not," he says, "mean, of course, to suggest that all the primitive Gentile Christians took Christ as their Lord and Saviour without taking his God and Father as their God. On the contrary, I have no doubt that many of them accepted the Jewish God and the Jewish Bible when they accepted Jesus Christ" (p. 49). But surely this admission, in its inadequacy, only sets in sharper light the gross underestimate of the influence of the Old Testament in the early Church which runs all through the book. To say that "many" of the Gentile converts accepted the "Jewish Bible" completely fails to do justice to the place which the "Jewish Bible" holds in all our accounts of the primitive Gentile mission. Is it not clear that one of the chief instruments in the missionary work of the church was just the appeal to this ancient

and authoritative book? The world of that day was seeking for ancient authority; no religion which represented itself as really new could have any chance of success. Even those Gnostics of the second century who rejected the Old Testament could not do without a Bible, but appealed to New Testament books or to sacred books of their own. Dr. McGiffert has therefore clearly failed to give due attention to the attitude of the converts, just as he has also failed to appreciate the attitude of the missionaries, when he represents the Old Testament as a piece of baggage which might easily be dropped by the way. There is evidence, moreover, that just that feature of Old Testament teaching which our author supposes to have been ignored was the feature which appealed especially to the Gentile world of that day; for the progress of the pre-Christian Jewish mission shows clearly that the pagan world was susceptible to monotheistic influences. It is true, that mission would never in itself have succeeded in conquering the world; but the reason for its failure was not unattractiveness in monotheism but the national exclusiveness of the Mosaic Law. Judaism could only have removed this limitation by rejecting the Old Testament, or at least by taking it "with a grain of salt." But to have done so would have destroyed all the power which the Jewish mission possessed. The Christian mission on the other hand because of its presentation of the epoch-making, dispensational significance of the coming of Christ offered all that Judaism had offered and yet offered it with a good conscience and with full retention of the authoritative Book which had been the chief strength of the previous missionary effort. Without the Old Testament Gentile Christianity would have been at best only one religion among many; an absolutely essential element in its world-conquering power was just the thing that Dr. McGiffert rejects.

A third authority in favor of monotheism in the early Gentile Church was the authority of Jesus. This authority Dr. McGiffert not merely minimizes, but almost ignores. The only reference to it seems to be as follows:

“There was no antecedent reason, indeed, why the Gentile Christians should accept the God of the Jews whom Jesus worshipped, any more than the Jewish ceremonial law which he observed and the Jewish practices in which he was brought up. The fact that Jesus himself and his personal disciples were Jews no more required the Gentile Christians to be Jews in their customs and beliefs than the fact that Adonis was a Syrian deity, Attis a Phrygian, and Isis and Serapis Egyptian deities required their adherents to become Syrians or Phrygians or Egyptians, and to accept the religious tenets of those peoples” (p. 47).

But surely this reference to the gods of various pagan cults only places in the sharper light the weakness of Dr. McGiffert's contention. Where is anything said in antiquity about the *teaching* of Adonis or Attis or Isis? Where is there any even pretended record of their words? It is no wonder that the worshippers of Adonis did not have to be Syrians and the worshippers of Attis did not have to be Phrygians; for nothing whatever about the personality of those deities was recorded. They were pale mythical figures, whose experiences, even if they were conceived as taking place at any definite time at all—rather than being merely repeated again and again in the cult—lay in the dim and distant past. But Jesus, the “Saviour God” of the Christians, was an historical personage who had lived and died but a short time before. And He was an historical personage whose words were recorded and treasured. Even Dr. McGiffert will not deny that fact; for he himself makes use of the tradition contained in the Synoptic Gospels as providing precious information about the real Jesus. But here, in defending his main thesis, he treats the tradition of the words of Jesus as though it did not exist; and his parallel between Jesus and the pagan cult-gods shows as clearly as anything possibly could do how far he is from doing justice to the real facts of primitive Christianity. The worshippers of Adonis were not bound by the teaching of their god; for no teaching of Adonis was handed down. But the worshippers of Jesus were worshippers of an historical character, whose words, as we know and as even Dr.

McGiffert admits, were carefully treasured among his followers. At this point our author has almost outdone the radicalism of Wrede. Wrede supposed (quite erroneously) that the Apostle Paul cared little about the words which Jesus uttered when He was on earth; but even Wrede would hardly have denied that the tradition of Jesus' words was carefully preserved in the primitive Gentile Church taken as a whole. But if the tradition of Jesus' words was treasured at all, then His teaching about God the Father could certainly not be ignored. It was quite impossible for disciples of Jesus to accept anything that Jesus said, and not accept this. But to suppose that the mass of Gentile Christians in the early period accepted nothing that Jesus said, not even this central part of His teaching, and treated Him merely as the worshippers of Adonis treated the mythical figure that was supposed to be connected with their cult—this is to exceed by far all bounds of historical possibility. If the mass of early Gentile Christianity had been what Dr. McGiffert supposes it to have been, then the memory of Jesus' words and deeds would probably have been lost and Christianity would probably long ago have taken its place among the half-forgotten cults of a decadent age. A primitive Gentile Christianity that cared nothing for Jesus' teaching about God is an historical monstrosity, which Dr. McGiffert's whole reconstruction indeed demands, but which a little reflection shows to be nothing short of absurd.

Historic Christianity as a whole has certainly retained the influence of Jesus' life; and Dr. McGiffert would probably maintain, with the current Modernism, that Jesus was the Founder of Christianity just because of the ethical and religious life that He lived. But does he not see that, in supposing the primitive Gentile Church, which as we shall observe, he makes the basis of the whole subsequent development of Christianity, to have been ignorant of the teaching of Jesus about God, which lay at the centre of Jesus' own religious life, he has placed an insurmountable barrier between the life of Jesus and the Christianity of which Jesus is thought to have been the Founder? Dr. McGiffert's primitive

Gentile Christians could have had no contact with Jesus' religious life; for if they had had contact with Jesus' religious life they could not possibly have ignored the thing that lay at the very heart of it. But if they had no contact with Jesus' religious life, then, since they formed the basis of the whole subsequent development, the religious life of Jesus could have exerted no central influence upon the historic Christian Church. That is absurd; but it is an absurdity which follows with relentless certainty from Dr. McGiffert's thesis. Shall the thesis be abandoned, or shall the Christian Church be regarded as having only a nominal and no essential connection with the real Jesus of Nazareth? The answer, we think, can hardly be uncertain.

Thus our author has failed to render his extraordinary thesis antecedently probable; he has entirely failed to put out of the world the overpowering weight of *prima facie* evidence that is against it. His non-theistic Gentile Christianity did not exist, for the simple reason that, in view of the whole character of the primitive Christian mission and in view of the authorities upon which that mission was based, it never *could* have existed. It is with much more brevity, therefore, that we can deal now with the positive arguments for the actuality, as distinguished from the antecedent possibility, of this reconstructed Gentile Christianity.

These arguments may apparently be placed under six heads (pp. 52-87).

(1) In the first place (pp. 52-64), Dr. McGiffert says, it is "beyond dispute that Christ was widely recognized as divine among the early Christians." That fact may certainly be admitted—indeed we do not understand why Dr. McGiffert does not say that Christ was *always* instead of only *widely* recognized as divine. But how does the recognition of the divinity of Christ prove that there ever was a time when God the Father was not also recognized? Paul, for example, as Dr. McGiffert himself insists, recognized Christ as divine; yet he also recognized the God of Jesus and of the Old Testament. The only answer which our author can give is that in

certain writers it cannot always be determined whether Christ or God the Father is being spoken of, whereas in Paul there is no such confusion. But surely this answer is quite inadequate. In Paul the same terms are sometimes used in referring to God the Father as those which are used in referring to Christ; and if confusion is avoided usually in his Epistles, surely that may be merely a matter of linguistic clearness as over against other writers, or at most a mere difference of the degree to which a certain phenomenon appears. Dr. McGiffert, under the same head, points to the frequency with which in certain quarters prayers were offered to Christ; but as he himself admits Paul also offers prayers to Christ, and the difference is again a difference not of principle, but of degree. The entire argument, therefore, clearly breaks down. Recognition of the divinity of Christ certainly does not indicate any denial or ignoring of God the Father; for Paul recognizes the divinity of Christ, yet his theism cannot be called in question.

Of course that simply raises the central question how it was that a strict monotheist like Paul could place the worship of a Jew, one of his contemporaries, alongside of the worship of Jehovah. With that question, in the present book, Dr. McGiffert does not attempt to deal. It is answered, of course, if the New Testament account of Jesus be true. But it has never been satisfactorily answered by any naturalistic reconstruction. Certainly no progress toward the answering of it has been made by Dr. McGiffert's addition to it of the other question how a primitive non-theistic belief in the divinity of Christ came to have added to it in the later history of the Church the belief in the one God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth. If our author could only maintain that there was (1) a Jewish Christian monotheism without the divinity of Christ and (2) a Gentile Christian belief in the divinity of Christ without monotheism, then he might explain the later belief of the Church by the conjunction of these two elements. But unfortunately this way is closed to him by the testimony of Paul. The whole problem therefore

remains in all its troublesomeness; belief in the divinity of Christ and worship of Him arose, unfortunately for all naturalistic reconstructions, not on Gentile Christian ground but among the monotheistic Jews.

(2) In the second place (pp. 64-67), Dr. McGiffert points to Marcion, the heresiarch of the second century, who "read Christianity solely in terms of salvation, and rejected the creating God, the God of the Jews." "The presence in the church of the second century of Marcion and his followers, as well as of their fellow heretics, the Gnostics, who also rejected the God of the Jews on grounds to be referred to later, goes to show that conversion to Christianity did not necessarily carry with it the acceptance of the God of the Jews. Had it done so, their attitude would have been difficult, not to say impossible. At any rate, if Jewish monotheism was an essential element in Christianity, and to be a Christian meant to believe in the Jewish God, they could not have regarded themselves in good faith as Christians."

This argument involves the customary use of the second-century heresies as witnesses to a primitive Christianity which is supposed to have been left behind, and so have come to be despised, by the main body of the Church. But the argument is extremely precarious. A living religion, such as the Christian religion was in the second century, is constantly assailed from within and from without by totally alien types of faith and life. So it was in the ancient period, and so it is also today. That Marcion and the Gnostics called themselves Christians is no more a proof that they really were Christians, than the fact that the disciples of Mrs. Eddy call themselves "Christian" Scientists is a proof that their acutely pagan teaching has any real affinity for the religion whose name they choose to bear. It is certainly very precarious, to say the least, to find any foothold for the dualism of Marcion or of the Gnostics in the piety of the apostolic age. Moreover, in the specific case of Marcion, it must be remembered that he did not venture to identify Jesus with the supreme "good God," as over against the "just God" of the Jews, but regarded

Jesus as having been sent by that good God. Thus he does not even plausibly attest the type of belief which our author attributes to primitive Gentile Christianity; but rather is a witness (if such witnesses were really needed) to the necessary connection in Christian thinking between Jesus and a Father who sent Him into the world.

(3) In the third place (pp. 67-75), Dr. McGiffert finds a polemic against, and so a testimony to the existence of, his primitive non-theistic Gentile Christianity in Polycarp, Ignatius, the First Epistle of John, and even in the Epistles of Paul—particularly in the Epistle to the Ephesians. The First Epistle of John, for example, is regarded by our author as being directed not, as has always been supposed, against those who made too little of Christ but against those who made too little of God. But this polemic—certainly the reference of it to non-theistic Gentile converts within the church—is found only by the most unnatural reading of the Epistle, and particularly by reading into the text what is not there. For example Dr. McGiffert quotes in support of his thesis 1 John iv. 2, 3: "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (and so was connected historically with the Jewish people) is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God." Here the only words which support Dr. McGiffert's thesis instead of actually telling against it are the words in parenthesis which Dr. McGiffert himself supplies. And so it is throughout the whole argument. Particularly unwarranted is the use of the Epistle to the Ephesians as a polemic against those in the Church who did not accept the God of the Jews. And any references of Paul to the evils of idolatry are surely explained quite adequately by the fact that Christianity was engaged in an active propaganda against the polytheism outside of the Church. In general the Pauline Epistles and all the other books to which Dr. McGiffert refers create the clear impression that monotheism did not need to be defended among Christians, but could always be assumed. This impression is dealt with by our author in a very extraordinary way. "It may be objected," he says, "that if

there were Gentile Christians who did not accept the God of the Jews, Paul would not have contented himself with references of so casual a sort, but would have denounced and condemned them in unsparing terms, as he did the Judaizers. It should be noticed, however, that such Christians as I have been speaking of accepted Jesus Christ as their saviour and were thus one with Paul in the chief matter." Here the last words simply beg the question. Were Christians who accepted Jesus Christ and ignored God the Father one with Paul [in Paul's view] "in the chief matter"? Indeed would Christians who "accepted Jesus Christ" in this manner have been regarded by the apostle as having accepted the real Jesus Christ at all?

(4) In the fourth place (pp. 76-78), "in support of the assumption that there were Christians in the primitive church whose God was Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone, attention may be called," Dr. McGiffert says, "to the continued use of the original formula of baptism in his name" [that is, baptism in the name of Christ alone instead of in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost]. "Of course," Dr. McGiffert continues, "the use of the simple formula among the early Jewish disciples meant that they and their fellow countrymen already believed in God, and hence did not need to be baptized into his name. But in the Gentile world the situation was altogether different." Here our author weakens his own case by supposing that the formula which mentioned Christ alone was earlier than the triune formula of Matt. xxviii. 19. For if that simple formula was earlier, then the continuance of it even in the Gentile world could be easily explained by faithfulness to tradition. But in any case, the whole argument altogether fails to bear the weight that Dr. McGiffert rests upon it. No matter how firm and vital was the belief of the Gentile Church in God the Father, the brief designation of baptism simply as baptism in the name of Christ would be thoroughly natural. And Marcion's rejection of the triune formula must probably be regarded as simply connected with his system and (for the reasons mentioned above) as being

quite without significance for the facts of primitive Gentile Christianity.

(5) In the fifth place (pp. 78-80), Dr. McGiffert points to the wide prevalence in the second century of "Modalism, the belief, namely, that Christ is himself the supreme God, the Father of the world and of men." But surely this denial of the personal distinction between Father and Son is adequately to be explained simply as one of the unsuccessful attempts to set forth the mysterious teaching of the New Testament. The Modalist solution of the problem presented by the relation of God the Father and God the Son is rightly designated by Tertullian (quoted on p. 78) as belonging to "the simple"; but this (false) simplicity is to be explained—quite naturally, in view of human weakness—as an attempt of second-century Christians to interpret the New Testament, rather than as any survival of a primitive non-theistic Christianity.

(6) The last argument (pp. 80-87) is drawn from the "extraordinary lack of vivid and fervent piety" and indeed of devotional writings of any kind in "most of our early Christian literature, aside from the New Testament." But what is the bearing of that interesting fact—interesting if true—upon Dr. McGiffert's thesis? The bearing of it is certainly not obvious. "If such piety toward Christ" [as that which is discovered in Ignatius], Dr. McGiffert says, "found frequent expression in the literature of the early church, it would be easy to explain the situation on the ground that Christ was the real God of the early Christians and the Father God only a theological abstraction. But except in the writings of Ignatius piety toward Christ finds no larger and more vivid expression than piety toward God." The admission is certainly significant, and would seem to deprive the observation of all possible significance for the main thesis of the book. But Dr. McGiffert is not ready to surrender so easily. "In these circumstances," he says, "I can only suggest that the lack may have been due to the divided object of worship. The singleness of devotion felt by the Jews toward

Jehovah may have been difficult for a Christian whose real God was Jesus Christ, but who was compelled to subordinate him to another God, a theological or philosophical figure—as will appear in the next lecture—not at all calculated to arouse deep personal devotion.” Could there possibly be a weaker argument? If the real God of the Gentile Christians was Jesus and only Jesus, why did the fact that they were compelled to connect Him with God the Father prevent them from giving joyous expression to their devotion to Him any more than the voluntary connection of Jesus with God the Father on the part of Paul and the other New Testament writers prevented them from giving joyous expression to *their* devotion to both of these divine persons?

Thus the positive arguments for Dr. McGiffert's thesis break down as completely as do his attempts to establish an antecedent probability in its favor. Enough has been said, we are bold enough to think, not merely to show that the thesis is not proven, but to show positively that it is proven to be false. There never was a prevalent Gentile Christianity in the early Church that read Christianity only in terms of salvation and was not interested in the God whom Jesus taught His disciples to worship and love.

But if so, then the rest of the book can be treated very briefly. It is indeed full of interesting observations, but, despite the hope expressed at the conclusion of the lecture which has just been reviewed, the attentive reader can hardly say that it provides any “added reason” for positing the existence of “a Christianity whose God was Jesus Christ alone.”

“In the previous lecture” [that is, the one which has just been discussed], Dr. McGiffert says in summing up the subject of the latter part of his book, “I showed that the God of the primitive Gentile Christians, or, at any rate, of many of them [but he has really claimed far more than that], was Jesus Christ; that they began with him and only afterward associated him with the God of the Jews and worshipped two divine beings, Son and Father. In the present lecture I wish to trace this development and explain the addition of God the

Father to the original object of worship, the Lord Jesus Christ. Many writers have described the process by which Christ came to be associated with the God of the Jews, and to be thought of as the second person of the Trinity, subordinate only to God the Father, and I shall not repeat the story here. I am interested, rather, in the other problem and shall confine myself to that. So far as I am aware, it has hitherto escaped notice. How, then, did it come about that Christians who originally worshipped Jesus Christ alone were led to worship also the God of the Jews and even to subordinate Christ to him, as a son to a father?"

It is no wonder that this second problem has "hitherto escaped notice." It has escaped notice for the simple reason that its existence depends upon the existence of the primitive non-theistic Gentile Christianity which until the appearance of the present book was unknown. And since that condition has just been shown not to be satisfied, it is only with a qualified, though (because of Dr. McGiffert's mastery of details) still with a keen, interest that we turn to the solution of the problem which his hypothesis has raised.

How did Dr. McGiffert's Gentile Christianity whose only God was Jesus come to give place to the monotheism of the historic Christian Church? The answer which our author gives may be put almost in a word. The transition was due, not to religion, but to theology; it was due to the necessity of exhibiting a world-wide scope for the Christian religion. The simple Gentile Christians, it is supposed, were perfectly willing to accept Jesus as their Saviour without asking whether He stood in any relation to the whole world. In this respect, as in many other respects, they were the precursors of those who in the modern Church accept certain beliefs for themselves without being interested in the question whether those beliefs are accepted by others, and are perfectly willing to make common cause with men whose beliefs are diametrically opposite to their own. But this simple, non-theological, non-theistic, non-universalistic religion, it is supposed, would have been only one religion among many, and

the theologians and apologists were unwilling to be satisfied with any such position as that. They therefore had to show the connection of Jesus the God of the early Christians with a God who would require the devotion of all the dwellers on earth; in short they had to show the connection of Jesus with the one supreme God, Maker and Ruler of the world. There were unsuccessful attempts, it is supposed further, at attaining this result, notably Gnosticism; but after such errors had been overcome the result was the addition of the Jewish God to the Saviour-God Jesus and the connection between the two as Father and Son. "The Christianity that emerged from the [Gnostic] conflict was not a mere gospel of salvation, but a theology and a cosmology, a doctrine of God and a philosophy of the universe" (p. 107). But this connection of Jesus with God the Father "did not mean the displacement of the Saviour Jesus Christ . . . but the extension of his functions to include creation, providence, and judgment" (p. 194). "The association of the two was as close and the identification of the two as complete as philosophy would allow" (p. 195).

One thing that strikes the careful reader forcibly as he examines this hypothesis is the evident disregard by the author of the law of scientific parsimony: ingenious and far-fetched explanations are here sought for things of which a simple explanation lies ready to hand. Why is there all this labor to explain how God the Father came to be added to Jesus Christ as an object of worship in the Christian Church? Does He not appear as an object of worship, side by side with Christ, at the very beginning of the development, in all the New Testament and particularly in the Epistles of Paul? Does not Christ also appear in the New Testament as associated with the Father in creation and in judgment? Why then may not the appearance of exactly these same views in the later Church be due to the simple influence of the New Testament (to say nothing of the teaching of Jesus Himself) instead of to this elaborate theological and apologetic scheming of men who wanted by such means to extend the power of the

Church over the whole world? The question is unanswerable to the man who stations himself on the basis of the plain historical facts. But it is easily answerable on the basis of Dr. McGiffert's theory. The reason why if Dr. McGiffert's theory is correct the simple influence of the apostolic teaching and of the teaching of Jesus cannot at this point be made determinative is that if it is made determinative the entire hypothesis of a primitive non-theistic Gentile Christianity falls to the ground. Such a Christianity could have come to exist in the first place only if there was in the early days the most abysmal neglect of the teaching of Jesus and of the Jewish Christian apostles. But if there was such a neglect of the New Testament and of the teaching underlying it, then and then only does the final victory of the New Testament idea of God become a problem—a problem which must be solved in the extraordinarily ingenious and intricate way which Dr. McGiffert proposes.

The truth is that the primitive non-theistic Gentile Christianity of Dr. McGiffert is without beginning of days or end of life. It had no root in what preceded, and it left no real trace in what followed. All the labor of the latter part of the book—instructive and interesting though it is in detail—could have been spared if the problem had not been artificially created by the insertion into history of a phenomenon which is not attested in the sources, and which throws the whole development of the Church into a confusion from which even Dr. McGiffert's learning and skill have not succeeded in extricating it.

But another observation is more important still. The really important thing about this elaborate reconstruction of the history of the Church is not the historical improbability of it in detail, but the presupposition upon which it is based. We do not indeed demand that an historian should be without presuppositions. But the important question is whether the presuppositions are true or false. And in the case of Dr. McGiffert we think that they are false. The entire book is really based upon the pragmatist assumption that religion can be

separated from theology and that a man can obtain the values of the religious life apart from the particular intellectual conception which he forms of his God. This assumption leads in the first place to an artificial treatment of history, which altogether fails to do justice to the real complexity of human life; and it leads, in the second place, and in particular, to the reconstruction, contrary to all the evidence, of a primitive Gentile Christianity which shall exhibit just the type of non-theological religion which the modern pragmatist desires.

Dr. McGiffert is not able, it is true, to carry out his separation between theology and religion in a thoroughly consistent way. At one moment, for example, he tells us that "the Gnostic controversy . . . was a theological controversy pure and simple," and that "the Gnostics, as well as their opponents, believed in Christ and in salvation through him" (p. 107), and at another moment he implies that Gnosticism outraged traditional Christian piety (p. 108). And even Dr. McGiffert's non-theological Gentile Christians have at times attributed to them interests which never ought to have been theirs. Thus it is said that to have made Christ less and lower than God would have doomed the doctrine "with the great mass of pious Christians" (p. 99), and that the Gnostic degradation of Jesus to a mere place in a series of emanations "seemed particularly offensive to common Christian sentiment, as tending to degrade the Lord Jesus Christ and remove him from his place of pre-eminence" (p. 103). No doubt these observations are in themselves perfectly true. But the trouble is that they do not at all agree with the main thesis of the book. What did those simple-minded Gentile converts care about the pre-eminence of Christ, just so He was allowed to be still their Saviour? Our author has here attributed to the supposedly non-theological converts just that "theological" interest which it is the chief point of his book to keep separate from them.

Nevertheless, despite such inconsistencies, the anti-intellectualistic philosophy of our author does color and determine his conclusions throughout. Philosophy and theology

and religion are in this book kept rigidly separate; and where they are supposed to have combined in the production of any historical phenomenon, the proportion contributed by each of the ingredients is determined almost with the accuracy of a chemical analysis. Thus the book ends with this characteristic utterance: "Religion speaks in the historic doctrine of the deity of Christ; philosophy speaks in the Logos Christology which means the distinction of the Son from the Father, and that, too, even though both are declared to be equally divine" (p. 195). In Dr. McGiffert's treatment of history the pragmatist philosophy of the present day is fully as determinative as was the Hegelian philosophy in the Tübingen reconstruction of Baur and Zeller. And even far more plainly than in that former case the result is failure. The sources fail utterly to lend themselves to the attempted reconstruction; history refuses to be forced into the pragmatist mould; and all religious life—certainly all Christian life—is found to be based upon a doctrine of God.

The incorrectness of Dr. McGiffert's assumptions appear at many points. Particularly faulty is the separation of "salvation" from theism—a separation which appears again and again in the book. "That there were philosophical thinkers" he says, "who were attracted by the monotheism of the Jews and became Christians because of it is undoubtedly true, but they were vastly in the minority, and the Roman world was not won to Christianity by any such theological interest. On the contrary, faith in Christ and in his salvation converted the masses then, as it has converted multitudes in every age since" (pp. 44, 45). "Christianity ceased," he says again with evident disapprobation, "to be a mere religion of salvation—a mere saving cult—and Christ ceased to be a mere saviour. He was the creator, ruler, and judge of all the earth. This is really a very remarkable fact, not adequately accounted for in my opinion by the influence of Jewish tradition. I see no satisfactory explanation of it except the one I have suggested, the [theological and apologetic] desire to associate Christ with God in all the divine activities, and thus to make the

connection between the two as close as possible" (p. 191).

This distinction ignores the simple fact that there can be no salvation without something from which a man is saved. If Christ saves the Christians, *from what* does he save them? Dr. McGiffert never seems to raise that question. But the answer to it is abundantly plain, and it destroys the entire reconstruction which this book so brilliantly attempts. Is it not abundantly plain that Christ saves Christians from sin, and from the consequences which it brings at the judgment-seat of God? And is it not plain also that this was just the thing that appealed most strongly to simple people of the first century, as it appeals most strongly to many persons today? The truth is, it is quite impossible to think of Christ as Saviour without thinking of the thing from which he saves; the justice of God is everywhere the presupposition of the Saviourhood of Christ. No doubt modern men, especially in the circles where Dr. McGiffert moves, have lost the sense of sin and guilt and the fear of God's awful judgment-seat. But with this loss there goes the general abandonment even of the word "salvation," to say nothing of the idea. Without the sense of sin and the fear of hell, there may be the desire for improvement, "uplift," betterment. But desire for "salvation," properly speaking, there cannot be. Modernism does not really "read Christianity in terms of salvation," but reads salvation out of Christianity. It gives even the word "salvation" up. For salvation involves the awful wrath of a righteous God; in other words it involves just the thing which the antitheistic Modernism of Dr. McGiffert and others is most eager to reject. Very different was the situation in the early days of the Christian Church. Modern men have lost the sense of guilt and the fear of hell, but the early Gentile Christians had not. They accepted Christ as Saviour only because He could rescue them from the abyss and bring them into right relation to the Ruler and Judge of all the earth. The Saviourhood of Christ involved, then as always, the majesty and justice of God.

Even more radically at fault is another distinction which

is at the very root of Dr. McGiffert's thinking throughout—the distinction “between a god of moral and a god of physical power” (p. 154). This distinction underlies the “ethical theism” presented in *The Rise of Modern Religious Ideas*—an “ethical theism” which is really the most radical possible denial of everything that the word “theism” can properly be held to mean. In accordance with the distinction, Dr. McGiffert holds that it is or should be matter of indifference to Christians how the world came into being; the doctrine of creation belongs, he thinks, to a region of metaphysics with which religion need have nothing to do. Similar is really the case with respect to the doctrine of providence; the whole thought of the power as distinguished from goodness of God is, our author evidently thinks, quite separable from religion; we can, he thinks, revere God's goodness without fearing His power or relying upon His protection from physical ills. And that really means that we can cease thinking of God as personal at all.

Such skepticism may be true or may be false—with that great question we shall not now undertake to deal—but indifferent to religion it certainly is not. Give up the thought of a Maker and Ruler of the world; say, as Dr. McGiffert really means, that “the Great Companion is dead,” and you may still maintain something like religious fervor among a few philosophic souls. But the suffering mass of humanity, at any rate, will be left lost and hopeless in a strange and hostile world. And to represent these things as matters of religious indifference is to close one's eyes to the deepest things of the human heart. Is the doctrine of creation really a matter of no religious moment; may the religious man really revere God without asking the question how the world came into being and who it is that upholds it on its way? Is the modern scientist wrong, who, pursuing his researches into nature's laws, comes at length to a curtain that is never lifted and stands in humble awe before a mystery that rebukes all pride? Was Isaiah wrong when he turned his eyes to the starry heavens and said: “Lift up your eyes on high, and behold

who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number : he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power ; not one faileth"? Was Jesus wrong when He bade His disciples trust in Him who clothed the lilies of the field and said : "Fear not, little flock ; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

To these questions, philosophy may return this answer or that, but the answer of the Christian heart at any rate is clear. "Away with all pale abstractions," it cries, "away with all dualism, away with Marcion and his modern followers, away with those who speak of the goodness of God but deprive Him of His power. As for us Christians, we say still, as we contemplate that field gleaming in the sun and those dark forests touched with autumn brilliance and that blue vault of heaven above—we say still, despite all, that it is God's world, which He created by the fiat of His will, and that through Christ's grace we are safe forever in the arms of our heavenly Father."

But what have we left when according to Dr. McGiffert our heavenly Father is gone? The answer that he gives is plain : "We have goodness left," we are told in effect, "we do not know what brings out the stars in their courses, we do not know how the world came to exist, we do not know what will be our fate when we pass through the dark portals of death. But we can find a higher, disinterested worship—far higher, it would seem, than that of Jesus—in the reverence for goodness divested of the vulgar trappings of power."

It sounds noble at first. But consider it for a moment and its glory turns into ashes and leaves us in despair. What is meant by a goodness that has no physical power? Is not "goodness" in itself the merest abstraction? Is it not altogether without meaning except as belonging to a person? And does not the very notion of a person involve the power to act? Goodness altogether divorced from power is therefore no goodness at all. And if it were goodness, it would still mean nothing to us—included as we are in this physical uni-

verse which is capable apparently of destroying us in its relentless march. The truth is that overmuch abstraction has here destroyed even that which is intended to be conserved. Make God good only and not powerful, and both God and goodness have really been destroyed. The moral law will soon succumb unless it is grounded in the nature of a personal God.

Feeling, even if not fully understanding, this objection, feeling that goodness is a mere empty abstraction unless it inheres in good persons, many modern men have tried to give their reverence for goodness some sort of subsistence by symbolizing this "ethical" (and most clearly antitheistic) "theism" in the person of the man Jesus of Nazareth. They read Christianity only in terms of salvation and take the man Jesus as their only God. But who is this Jesus whom they make the embodiment of the goodness that they revere? He is certainly not the Jesus of the New Testament, for that Jesus insisted upon everything that these modern men reject. But He is not even the Jesus of modern reconstruction; for even that Jesus, as Dr. McGiffert has shown with devastating clearness, maintained the theism which these modern men are rejecting with such contempt. The truth is that it is impossible for such men to hold to Jesus even as the supreme man, even as the supreme embodiment of that abstract goodness which Modernism is endeavoring to revere. For the real Jesus placed at the very centre, not merely of His thinking but of His life, the heavenly Father, Maker and Ruler of the world.

Is then the antitheistic Modernism of our day, reading Christianity solely in terms of salvation and taking the man Jesus as its only God, to relinquish all thought of continuity with the early glories of the Christian Church? Dr. McGiffert here comes with a suggestion of hope. He abandons indeed the former answers to the question; he destroys without pity the complacency of those who have supposed that the early history of Christianity on naturalistic principles is all perfectly settled and plain; he throws the historical problem

again into a state of flux. Hence we welcome his brilliant and thought-provoking book. Such books, we believe, by their very radicalism, by their endeavor after ever new hypotheses, by the exhibition which they afford of the failure of all naturalistic reconstructions—especially their own—may ultimately lead to an abandonment of the whole weary effort, and a return to the simple grounding of Christian history upon a supernatural act of God.

But meanwhile Dr. McGiffert comes to the Modernist Church with a word of cheer. The continuity with primitive Christianity, he says in effect, does not need to be given up even by an antitheistic, non-theological Christianity which at first sight seems very non-primitive indeed.

It would be a great mistake, we think, to ignore this practical reference of the book. It is no doubt largely unconscious; Dr. McGiffert writes no doubt with the most earnest effort after scientific objectivity. But as we have said, no historian can be altogether without presuppositions, and the presupposition of the present author is that an antitheistic Christianity is the most natural thing in the world. And so, as many notable historians have done, he finds what he expects to find. Baur, on the basis of his Hegelian philosophy, with its "thesis, antithesis and synthesis," expected to find a conflict in the apostolic age with a gradual compromise and settlement. And so he found that phenomenon surely enough—in defiance of the sources, but in agreement with his philosophy. Similarly Dr. McGiffert, on the basis of his pragmatist skepticism, expects to find somewhere in the early Church a type of religious life similar to his own.

Why is it that despite our author's own admission of the precariousness of many of his arguments he yet "cannot resist the conclusion that there was such a primitive Christianity" as that which he has just described (p. 87)? The answer is plain. It is because Dr. McGiffert is seeking a precursor in early Christianity for the non-theistic Modernism which he himself holds. Others have found precursors for it in the New Testament—even in Paul. But Dr. McGiffert is far too good

a scholar to be satisfied with any such solution as that. Still others have found it in Jesus, and so have raised the cry "Back to Christ." But Dr. McGiffert has read the Gospels for himself, and knows full well how false is that appeal of the popular Modernist preachers to the words of the one whom they call "Master." Rejecting these obviously false appeals, our author is obliged to find what he seeks in the non-literary, inarticulate, and indeed unattested, piety of the early Gentile Christians. "There," he says in effect to his fellow-Modernists, "is *our* religion at last; there is to be found the spiritual ancestry of a religion that reads Christianity exclusively in terms of salvation and will have nothing to do with 'fiat creation' or the divine justice or heaven or hell or the living and holy God." And so for the cry, "Back to Christ"—upon which Dr. McGiffert has put, we trust, a final quietus—there is now apparently to be substituted the cry, "Back to the non-theistic Gentile Christians who read Christianity only in terms of salvation and were not interested in theology or in God." But if that really is to be the cry, the outlook is very sad. It is a sad thing if the continuity of Christianity can be saved only by an appeal to the non-theistic Gentile Christians. For those non-theistic Gentile Christians never really existed at all.

The truth is that the antitheistic religion of the present day—popularized by preachers like Dr. Fosdick and undergirded by scholars such as the author of the brilliant book which we have just attempted to review—the truth is that this anti-theistic Modernism, which, at least in one of its characteristic forms, takes the man Jesus of naturalistic reconstruction as its only God, will have to stand at last upon its own feet. With the historic Christian Church, at any rate, it plainly has little to do. For the Christian Church can never relinquish the heavenly Father whom Jesus taught His disciples to love.

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