

HARVARD THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

VOLUME V.

OCTOBER, 1912

NUMBER 4

EMPIRICISM AND PLATONISM IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

TO THE MEMORY OF WILLIAM JAMES

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During the lifetime of William James, his philosophical work, closely connected as it is with many traditions of British philosophy, made a marked impression—one might almost say, a stir—on the Continent of Europe. Since his death, obituary notices and comprehensive reviews of his philosophy have made the intellectual legacy of the departed thinker the object of still greater attention, the more because, outside of the pragmatic school itself, the interest in the writings of so fine and penetrating a mind as Bergson naturally extends itself to cognate movements of thought.

In this legacy, James's philosophy of religion stands out with special prominence, partly by reason of its contrast to the type of philosophy of religion which is traditional on the Continent of Europe, partly because of the wealth of his own new and valuable suggestions, which have been added to by a number of zealous followers. It may not be uninteresting, therefore, to the readers of this *Review*, if I try to characterize what is peculiar and new in this, the first thorough-going contribution from America to the philosophy of religion. In doing so, I shall discuss two points: *first*, the contrast between James's ideas and the European philosophy of religion; and, *second*, the positive value that the new ideas which thus emerge seem to me to have.

Before I undertake to define the difference, I must, however, point out what is common to the two systems. This common

CHRISTLESS CHRISTIANITY

BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD

PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

The Christ Myth by Arthur Drews was published early in 1909,¹ and before the year was out its author was being requisitioned by dissidents from Christianity of the most incongruous types as a promising instrument for the general anti-christian propaganda. Few more remarkable spectacles have ever been witnessed than the exploitation throughout Germany in the opening months of 1910 of this hyper-idealistic metaphysician, disciple of von Hartmann and convinced adherent of the "Philosophy of the Unconscious," by an Alliance the declared basis of whose organization is a determinate materialism. As, under the auspices of the *Monistenbund*, he made his progress from city to city, lecturing and debating, he drew a tidal-wave of sensation along with him. A violent literary war was inaugurated. It seemed as if all theological Germany were aroused.

In one quarter there was an ominous silence. The "Conservative" theologians looked on at the whole performance with bitter contempt. When twitted² with leaving to the "Liberals" the whole task of defending the historicity of Jesus against Drews, they replied with much justice that it was none of their fight. The Liberals had for two generations been proclaiming the only Jesus that ever existed a myth: why should it cause surprise if some at length were taking the proclamation seriously and drawing the inference—if such a simple recasting of the identical proposition can be called an inference—that therefore no Jesus ever existed? If the Christianity which flowed out from Palestine and overspread the world was not the creation of Jesus, but the spontaneous precipitation of old-world myths from a solution just

¹ Arthur Drews, *Die Christusmythe*, Jena, 1909, and many subsequent editions. English translation: *The Christ Myth*, by Arthur Drews, Ph.D., Professor of Philosophy in the Techn. Hochschule, Karlsruhe. Translated from the third edition (revised and enlarged) by C. Delisle Burns, M.A. London, [1910].

² As by the *Christliche Freiheit*, February 13, 1910.

now, as it happened, evaporated past the saturation point, why postulate behind it a shadowy figure, standing in no causal relation to it, without any effective historical connection with it, for whose existence there is therefore neither historical nor logical need? We may not think the language elegant, but we can scarcely pronounce the jibe unprovoked, when Herr Superintendent Doctor Matthes of Kolberg bursts forth in Hengstenberg's old *Evangelical Church-Journal*:³ "That the wasted, colorless phantom which alone the Liberal theology leaves over of Jesus could not have transformed a world,—that is clear to all the world except the Liberal theologians themselves, who are still always hoping to see their homunculus come forth from the Gilgameshmishmash-mush-brine which alone is left in the pantry of the comparative-religionists and which Arthur Drews has served out afresh to the Berliners." That the Liberal theology has travailed and brought forth a monstrous birth is not surprising; nor is it surprising that the fruit of its womb should turn and rend it. Let them fight it out; that is their concern; and if the issue is, as seems likely, the end of both, the world will be well rid of them. Why should sane people take part in such a "theological mill" in which "as-yet Christians" and "no-longer Christians" struggle together in the arena with nothing at stake,—for certainly the difference between the reduced Jesus of the one and the no Jesus of the other is not worth contending about? To deny the existence of Jesus is, of course, as Ernst Troeltsch puts it, "silly";⁴ to be asked to defend the actual existence of Jesus is, as Adolf Harnack phrases it, "humiliating."⁵ But the artillery which the Liberal theologians have hurriedly trained upon the denial shows how little they can really let it go at that. It is only the Conservative, secure in the possession of the real Jesus, who can look serenely upon this shameful folly and with undisturbed detachment watch the wretched comedy play itself out.

Only the Conservative,—and, we may add, the extreme Radical. For there is a Radicalism, still calling itself Christian, so

³ *Die evangelische Kirchenzeitung*, March 6, 1910.

⁴ "Die törichte Frage" (*Die Bedeutung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu für den Glauben*, 1911, p. 2).

⁵ "Beschämend" (*Neue Freie Presse*, May 15, 1910, reprinted in *Aus Wissenschaft und Leben*, 1911, vol. ii, p. 167).

thoroughgoing as to fall as much below concernment with the question whether Jesus ever lived as Conservatism rises above it. The Conservative looks with unconcern upon all the pother stirred up by the debate on the historicity of Jesus, because he clearly perceives that it is all (if we may combine Harnack's and Troeltsch's phraseology) scandalous nonsense, unworthy of the notice of anyone with an atom of historical understanding. The Radical looks upon it with unconcern because in his self-centred life Jesus has no essential place and no necessary part to play: the question whether Jesus ever lived is to him a merely academic one. An interesting episode in Drews's lecture-tour through the Germanic cities brings this point of view before us with strong emphasis. A discussion was contemplated at Bremen also, and the *Monistenbund* there extended an invitation to the local *Protestantenverein* to take part in it. This invitation was decisively declined, and the *Protestantenverein* took a good deal of pains to make it perfectly plain why it was declined. The *Protestantenverein* was not quite clear in its own mind that the whole business was not merely an advertising scheme for the benefit of the *Monistenbund*; though, to be sure, it could not see what Monists as Monists have to do with the question whether Jesus ever lived, more than "whether Socrates ever lived, or Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays." The *Protestantenverein*, moreover, for itself felt entirely assured on good historical grounds of the historicity of Jesus, and had no interest in threshing out old straw. But it was on neither of these grounds that it declined to take part in the debate, but precisely because it was a matter of no importance to it whether Jesus ever lived or not. "All the theologians of the Bremen *Protestantenverein*," they formally explain, "are agreed that the question whether Jesus lived is, as such, not a religious but a historico-scientific question. It would be sad for Christianity as a religion if its right of existence hung on the question whether anybody whatever ever lived, or anything whatever ever occurred, even though it be the greatest personalities and the most important events which are in question. Every true religion lives not because of 'accidental truths of history,' but because of 'eternal truths of reason.' It lives not because of its past, more or less verifiable and always subject to the critical

scrutiny of historical science; but because of the vital forces which it every day disengages afresh into the soul from the depths of the unconditioned." All the great religious forces of Christianity—trust in the Living God, elevated moral self-respect, sincere love of men—are quite independent today of all question of the historicity of Jesus, and therefore this question can without fear be left in the hands in which it belongs,—in the hands of untrammelled historical criticism. "Whether Jesus existed or not, is for our religious and Christian life, in the last analysis, a matter of indifference, if only this life be really religious and Christian, and preserve its vital power in our souls and in our conduct." ⁶

There is asserted here something more than that religion is independent of Jesus. That was being vigorously asserted by the adherents of the *Monistenbund*; and as for Drews, his *Christ Myth*—like the *Christianity of the New Testament* of his master, von Hartmann, before it—was written, he tells us, precisely in the interests of religion, and seeks to sweep Jesus out of the way that men may be truly religious. With the extremities of this view the members of the Bremen *Protestantenverein* express no sympathy: they are of the number of those who profess and call themselves Christians. What they assert, therefore, is not that religion merely, but distinctively that Christianity is independent of Jesus. They do not declare, indeed, that Christianity, as it has actually existed in the world, has had, in point of fact, nothing to do with Jesus; or that Christians of today—they themselves as Christians—have had or have no relations with Jesus. They are convinced on sound historical grounds of the historicity of Jesus; they recognize that he has played a part in setting the movement called Christianity going; they draw, no doubt, inspiration from his memory. What they cannot allow is that he is essential to Christianity. They are conscious of standing in some such relation to him as that in which an idealistic philosopher stands, say, to a Plato. In point of fact such a philosopher reverences Plato, and derives from him inspiration and impulse, perhaps even instruction. But had there been no Plato, he would be able to do very well without a Plato. So Christians may in

⁶ See the whole document in the *Christliche Welt*, April 23, 1910, pp. 402 ff.

point of fact owe not a little to Jesus, and they may be very willing to acknowledge their indebtedness. But Christianity cannot be dependent on Jesus. Though there had been no Jesus, Christianity would be; and were his figure eradicated from history—or even from the mind of man—tomorrow, Christianity would suffer no loss. The sources of its life, the springs of its vitality, lie in itself: it may owe much to a great personality, teaching it, embodying it; it cannot owe to him its being.

The *Protestantenverein* of the good city of Bremen is, of course, not the inventor of this christless Christianity. It is as old as Christianity itself; and has come to explicit assertion whenever and wherever men have thought of Christianity rather as universal human religion in more or less purity of expression—perhaps in the purest expression yet given to it, or even in its purest possible expression—than as a specific positive religion instituted among men in particular historical circumstances.⁷ The classical period of this point of view is, of course, the Enlightenment; and its classical expounder in that period, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing; and the classical treatise in which Lessing propounds it, the tract written in response to Johann Daniel Schumann under the title, *Concerning the Proof of Spirit and Power* (1777); in which occurs accordingly its classical crystallization in a crisp proposition, the famous declaration (very naturally quoted by the theologians of the Bremen *Protestantenverein*) that “accidental truths of history can never be the proof of necessary truths of reason.”

In Lessing's conception, as in that of some before him and of many after him,⁸ Christianity is in its essence simply what we have learned to know as altruism. He sums it up in what he calls “the Testament of John,”—“Little children, love one

⁷ Hermann Reuter, *Geschichte der religiösen Aufklärung im Mittelalter*, 1875, 1877, gives mediæval instances.

⁸ Perhaps the most thoroughgoing expression of it is given by Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, Eng. trans.², 1881, p. 209: “He therefore who loves man for the sake of man, who rises to the love of the species, to universal love, adequate to the nature of the species, he is a Christian, is Christ himself.” Auguste Sabatier, however, in his ultimate statement, scarcely falls short of this. Christianity, he tells us, is the religion “of universal redemption by love,” that is everybody's love for everybody. (*The Doctrine of the Atonement in its Historical Evolution*, Eng. trans., 1904, p. 134.)

another"; and he refuses to believe that "dogmas," whatever may be said of their probability, or even of their truth, can enter into its essence. The proximate purpose of the tract, *Concerning the Proof of Spirit and Power*,⁹ is to show that the "dogmas" of the "Christian religion" cannot be put forward as essential truths, and so far as they are not intrinsically self-evidencing rest on evidence which is at best but probable. But the argument itself takes rather the form of an assault on the trustworthiness of historical testimony in general. Lessing does not deny, in this tract, that truths might conceivably be commended by authority. If a man actually witnessed miracles or fulfilments of prophecy, he might no doubt be brought to subject his understanding to that of him in whom the prophecies were visibly fulfilled and by whom the miracles were wrought. But this is not our case. We have no miracles or fulfilments to rest on; we have only accounts of miracles and fulfilments. And "accounts of the fulfilment of prophecies are not fulfilments of prophecies; accounts of miracles are not miracles." "Prophecies fulfilled before my eyes, miracles worked before my eyes," he explains, "work immediately. Accounts of fulfilments of prophecies and of miracles have to work through a medium which deprives them of all force." "How," he exclaims, "can it be asked of me to believe with the same energy, on infinitely less inducement, the very same incomprehensible truths which people from sixteen to eighteen hundred years ago believed on the strongest possible inducement?" "Or," he demands, with a show of outrage, "is everything that I read in trustworthy history, without exception, just as certain for me as what I myself experience?"

The argumentative force of the representation resides, of course, largely in its exaggerations,—“deprived of *all* force,” “without exception.” But Lessing skilfully proceeds to cover these exaggerations up by assuming at once an air of the sweetest reasonableness. “I do not know,” he remarks, “that anyone ever maintained just that; what is maintained is only that the accounts which we have of these prophecies and miracles are just as trustworthy as any historical truths can be. And then it is

⁹ Ueber den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft, in Lachmann's edition of Lessing's sämtliche Schriften, vol. xiii, pp. 1-8.

added that no doubt historical truths cannot be demonstrated,—yet, nevertheless, we must believe them just as firmly as demonstrated truths.” Surely, however, exclaims Lessing, “if no historical truth can be demonstrated, then nothing can be demonstrated *by means* of historical truths, that is, accidental truths of history can never be the proof of necessary truths of reason.” “I do not deny at all,” he protests, “that prophecies were fulfilled in Christ; I do not deny at all that Christ wrought miracles: but I do deny that these miracles, since their truth has altogether ceased to be evinced by miracles which are still accessible today, since there exist nothing but accounts of miracles (no matter how undenied, how undeniable, they may be supposed to be), can or ought to bind me to the least faith in any other teachings of Christ.”

The whole procedure involves at any rate a *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος*. To know that Christ raised a man from the dead,—how does that prove that God has a Son? Suppose I could prove that Christ rose from the dead? How does that prove that he is God’s Son? “In what connection does my inability to advance anything decisive against the testimony to that fact stand with my duty to believe something which outrages my reason?” You tell me that the very Christ who rose from the dead declared that he was the Son of God, of the same nature with God. Of that declaration, too, we have nothing but historical evidence. If you say, No, we have inspired evidence, for the Bible is inspired,—of that, too, we have nothing but historical evidence! “This, this, is the nasty wide ditch, across which I cannot get, no matter how often and earnestly I have tried to leap it. If anybody can help me over it, let him do it, I beg him, I implore him. He will do me a great charity.” Thus Lessing ends his sinuous argument with a round denial that “historical evidence” can ever place a fact beyond question. It is a case of general historical skepticism. The only evidence which can really establish a truth is the truth’s own self-evidence. He breaks off suddenly, therefore, with a recommendation to his readers, divided by disputes over the Gospel of John, to come together on the Testament of John. “It is, no doubt, apocryphal, this Testament: but it is not the less divine for that.” Truth is truth

wherever we find it. And truth is truth to us for no other reason than that it finds us.¹⁰

It was not to be expected that a point of view so natural to the Age of Reason should continue in the same measure to hold the minds of men in the Age of History. But neither was it to be expected that a point of view so deeply rooted in the popular philosophy of the eighteenth century should fail to project itself into the nineteenth, and color the thought of all who in any large degree draw their mental inheritance from the Enlightenment. We are not surprised to find Kant standing in his judgment of history wholly on the ground of Rationalism, or the lately resurrected Fries following closely in Kant's steps. Nor are we really surprised to observe Fichte still determined by the old point of view, and not even Hegel yet emancipated from it.¹¹ What does surprise us is that at the end of the days a Rudolf Eucken, true child of the Age of History, and, if one could be permitted to judge only from his profound sense of sin and of the need of divine grace for its overcoming, almost persuaded to be a Christian, can still speak through much the same mask. There is

¹⁰ Otto Kirn, *Glaube und Geschichte*, 1900, pp. 9-10, remarks on Lessing's double point of view and the consequent confusion in his argument: "The position of the critic appears upon more exact consideration as little sure. He attacks his adversary at once from two standpoints which are not in harmony. He asserts with the Wolfian Dogmatism that reason can never receive its convictions through history. To this standpoint, however, self-experienced and past facts are alike unimportant and inconclusive, when the question concerns religious or ethical propositions. Then he comes forward in the armor of the historical critic, who is ready to let himself be convinced by facts if only they be certainly established, and authenticated by self-experienced analogies: the training of his critical judgment forbade him, however, to draw far-reaching conclusions from facts which 'act through a medium,' and remain controversial. As a Wolfian he could not openly concede what as historian of certainly authenticated facts he declared himself ready to grant. Lessing's vacillation between dogmatic rationalism and critical empiricism manifests itself in this double attitude towards history: with the one he belongs to the Enlightenment, with the other he is preparing the way for a time which would be able to see in history something better than a source of 'obscure and confused ideas' (cf. *Windelband, A History of Philosophy*, § 33, 9)."

¹¹ A lucid sketch of the history of opinion on the relations of faith and history is given in pp. 1-27 of Otto Kirn's *Glaube und Geschichte*, 1900. See also Karl Dunkmann, *Das religiöse Apriori und die Geschichte*, 1910, pp. 11-51, and the admirable general account by C. W. Hodge, in the article, "Fact and Theory" in *Hastings's Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. i, 1908, pp. 562-567, esp. 564-565.

a passage in the first edition of his book on *The Truth-contents of Religion*,¹² which, though historical in form, fairly expresses his own attitude towards the relation of religious truth to historical fact. Historical criticism, he thinks, has very seriously shattered the historical foundations of Christianity; indeed, the very subjection of these foundations to criticism, he argues, disqualifies them for serving as foundations of faith, however this criticism issues. Then he proceeds:

But the shaking of the historical foundations of the religious life goes still further: it is not merely that we are compelled to doubt particular items of their contents, it is that history itself no longer seems proper to serve as the foundation of religion. For the thought to which the modern world commits the guidance of life is not disposed to recognize history as a source of eternal truths. Such a truth must be capable of immediate realization; it must be verifiable by every one and at all times; that is possible, however, only where it is grounded in the timeless nature of reason, and is continually verifiable anew thence. An occurrence of the past, on the other hand, no matter how deeply it has been imbedded in the historical connection, and no matter how energetic it may still be in its effects, does not on that account at all become a portion of our life: we cannot experience it immediately, we cannot ourselves even test its validity, we cannot transform it into a personal possession. That, however, according to our conviction, is precisely what is required for fundamental truths of religion. Thus reason and history stand over against one another in sharp opposition, and the grounding, as of all spirituality, so also of religion, on history calls out the strongest opposition. "Accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason" (Lessing). If life, however, casts off this connection with history, it becomes nonsense and an unendurable burden to bind the health of man's soul to the voluntary acceptance of historical occurrences, or even of occurrences supported by history. "That historical belief is a duty and belongs to salvation is superstition" (Kant). Can such a dissolution of the old blending of reason and history affect and shake any other religion more deeply than Christianity, which is the most historical of all religions?

Some modifications have been introduced into this passage in the second edition of *The Truth-contents of Religion*,¹³ but these

¹² *Der Wahrheitsgehalt der Religion*, 1901, pp. 34-35.

¹³ Published in 1905: Eng. trans., *The Truth of Religion*, 1911, pp. 33-34.

do not alter its general bearing. It is allowed that the Enlightenment "differentiated too sharply reason and history, the individual life and tradition, and overestimated the power of any present moment of consciousness." But the contention that history can provide no foundation for religious convictions is still pronounced true, and the quotations from Lessing and Kant are still approved, and this from Fichte is added: "Let no one assert that it does no harm to cling to such historical beliefs. It is injurious in that subsidiary facts are given equal validity with essential ones, or, indeed, are presented as the essential facts, and consequently the main facts are suppressed and the conscience tormented." With such a view of history in its relation to religion, of course Eucken cannot find the roots of his religion, which he would still call Christianity, in Christ. "We can honor him," he tells us, "as a leader, a hero, a martyr; but we cannot directly bind ourselves to him, or root ourselves in him: we cannot unconditionally submit to him. Still less can we make him the centre of a worship. To do so, from our point of view, would be nothing less than an intolerable deification of a human being."¹⁴ Eucken thus quite purely carries on the tradition of a non-historical, which is, of course, also in the nature of the case a christless Christianity.

There is much in the mental state of our times to add strength to this traditional distrust of history as a basis for religious convictions. Modern thought is not yet emancipated from that ingrained individualism which is impatient of all "external authority," and wishes each soul to be a law to itself. The very preoccupation of the age with history has moreover brought with it its nemesis. A wide-spread impression has grown up that in the crucible of historical criticism all historical magnitudes have melted; that the whole past has become uncertain and conjectural,

¹⁴ *Können wir noch Christen sein?* 1911, p. 37. Eucken, in this work, asks if we can still be Christians, and answers yes,—but only by remoulding Christianity to fit our new philosophy which will not hear of a divine Redeemer or an expiatory redemption. "We have asked," he says in his closing words (p. 236), "whether we of today can still be Christians. We reply that not only can we be, but we must be. We can be Christians, however, only if Christianity be recognized to be a world-historical movement still in flux, if it be shaken out of its ecclesiastical petrification and placed upon a broader basis. In this are found the task of our time and the hope of the future."

if not absolutely unknowable; and that nothing solid is left to offer a foundation for faith. Looking upon themselves and all that they have, instinctively, as the product of historical development, men's hold upon even their most precious spiritual possessions has relaxed; everything is in a flux, and all alike, as it is the product of change, so is held to be subject to change. Christianity itself in the universal flow comes to be thought of only as a passing phase of religious thought, as only one among many religions, rising above the rest, if at all, only in degree. Many have even become surfeited with history, and, suffocated by its load of facts, react from what Nietzsche girds at as "the hypertrophy of history"¹⁵ in the interests of "untrammelled thinking." Meanwhile the broadened historical horizon has dwarfed the significance of isolated historical events, which alone, it is said, are accessible to our observation. The imagination, fed on illimitable stretches of space and endless progressions of time, finds difficulty in attaching supreme importance to this or that historical incident, occurring at but a point of this boundless space and occupying but a moment of this measureless time. If men are disheartened by the uncertainties of history and irritated by its oppressive superfluity, they are even more dispirited by its littleness and insignificance as known to us. With what propriety, it is asked, "can a proposition about the happening of a particular incident at a certain time in a little corner of the earth" be represented as "one of the fundamental verities which every man ought to know and believe for his soul's health?"

This last sentence we have taken from an article by Arthur O. Lovejoy, which very fairly represents the manner in which this general point of view may still be advocated at the opening of the twentieth century. He calls his article, significantly, "The Entangling Alliance of Religion and History";¹⁶ and, in the course of it, he advances most of the considerations in aversion to this alliance which we have just rapidly summarized from a statement, already doubtless sufficiently summary, by Ernst Troeltsch.¹⁷

¹⁵ "Vom Nutzen und Schaden der Historie für das Leben," in *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, 1874, vol. ii², p. 210.

¹⁶ *Hibbert Journal*, January, 1907, pp. 258-276: cf. esp. p. 269.

¹⁷ Article, "Glaube und Geschichte" in Schiele and Zscharnack, *Die Religion*, vol. ii, coll. 1450-1452.

Since [he argues] religion constitutes a man's ultimate and definitive intellectual and moral reaction upon his experience, and since it presupposes the possession of truths valid and significant for all men, religious belief will naturally affirm only [why "only"?] truths of a universal and cosmic bearing. It will deal exclusively [why "exclusively"?] with the "eternal" verities and ignore contingent and temporal matters-of-fact. . . . Its content will consist of propositions equally pertinent to the interests, and equally accessible to the knowledge [is the equality absolute?] of all such beings, at any time, in any place. . . . It will not make the belief in the occurrence or non-occurrence of specific local and temporal events any part of its essence.

The very spirit of Lessing is here,—even to Lessing's characteristic assumptions of definitions and characteristic exaggerations of statement. It is treated as axiomatic on the one hand that the whole truth-content of religion must be self-evident, and on the other that history can afford us only probabilities. The Deists, it is suggested, were in the essence of the matter right, when they contended that historical propositions are unfitted to enter into the truth-content of religion because, on the one hand, they cannot be universally known, and, on the other, they "do not strictly constitute knowledge at all." No beliefs about happenings, assuredly, can stand the test of the *Quod semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*—if we take the terms strictly; nor can the actual occurrence of events be made more than probable, of remote and particularized events more than barely probable, of such events as are "contrary to the usual order" anything but improbable, so improbable that "it becomes at least debatable whether any amount of purely traditional or documentary evidence can offset" the presumption against them. It is recognized that Christianity is implicated, as is no other religion, with history; it is even allowed that its entanglement with historical facts was indispensable to its survival in the environment in which it first found itself struggling; but it is strenuously asserted that the historical elements which have thus become connected with it are not essential to it. The historical data with which it has been most intimately associated are gravely disputable; it is, indeed, "just those incidents to which theology has attached the greatest dogmatic weight" which have most

decisively "been removed from the sphere of the clearly ascertainable to that of the problematical." It is fortunate, therefore, that their reality is not of the highest importance from the religious point of view. Indeed, "religious history often becomes more available and more useful religiously when it is taken as poetry."

If we take even the life and character of Jesus, and consider them solely with respect to their inspirational and exemplary value, it is not a question of primary *religious* importance whether that life and character existed in bodily incarnation upon the solid earth of Galilee, or chiefly in the devout imagination of earlier believers. There happen, just now, to be signs of a revival of the theory of the non-historicity of Jesus of Nazareth. . . . Suppose the theory established. . . . There would be some real gain. The Gospels would become more wonderful and more encouraging than before; for the profound wisdom and lofty character found in them would prove to be the expression, not of a single and unique religious genius, but of the spiritual idealism of many humble and unknown men. That a group of men should be able to conceive the hero of the Synoptic Gospels is more inspiring than that one wholly exceptional man should have been that hero—but, for the same reason, doubtless more improbable. In so far, then, as religious history simply affords ideals for our reverence and imitation, the ideals are no worse for their lack of past reality; they were at least the products of some other men's minds, and foreshadowings of possible realities to come, in the human nature of the future. Our feeling with respect to Jesus would undoubtedly be in significant ways altered. . . . But nothing of the deepest religious concernment can be at issue here.

There is much in these remarks which invites criticism. What it concerns us especially to note, however, is that they go beyond the assertion that matters of fact do not enter into the essence of religion, and that Christianity, as it is religion, may be indifferent to them. They seem to suggest that religion may thrive better in an atmosphere of fancy than of reality. Christianity could not only do very well without Jesus; it would perhaps be better off without Jesus. Jesus as a myth might make a stronger religious appeal, might be of a higher religious value, than Jesus as a fact. It would almost seem a pity, religiously speaking, that Jesus ever lived.¹⁸

¹⁸ Lovejoy must not be thought singular in this suggestion: it is found also in the philosophers of whom he serves himself heir—for instance, in Kant and in Fichte; and it is intrinsic to the general point of view.

All cannot go quite so far as this. It does not appear that even the members of the Bremen *Protestantenverein* go so far. Most are satisfied with pronouncing Jesus unessential to Christianity, indifferent to Christianity, hardly noxious to it. The difference is rooted ultimately in a difference in point of departure. When the point of departure lies in a philosophical system, appeal to historical criticism is essentially in support of conclusions already attained. Most of those who nowadays pursue a line of reasoning substantially the same, begin nevertheless at the opposite pole. Their start is taken from historical criticism, and philosophical considerations are summoned only secondarily and subsidiarily, to give a basis to conclusions already adopted. Precisely the same philosophical assumptions are invoked, but they are not the primary presuppositions of the actual line of thought, and their logic is less prevalent. It is not so much in pride of pure reason and in contempt of history that these reasoners pronounce faith independent of Jesus, although they fall back on pure reason for a standing-ground, and express a hearty distrust in the trustworthiness of historical data. It is rather in timidity in the face of the processes of historical research, and in panic at the aspect of its results, that they seek and find a sheltered position in the independence of faith of historical entities. They are not so much tempted to despise Jesus because he is merely historical as they are tempted to despair of him for fear he is not historical enough. The christless Christianity which is springing more and more into view about us, is, in a word, the fruit less of a strong religious mysticism than of a weak historical scepticism, which has become anxious about the religious props on which it has hitherto depended.

It is the historical criticism of the Gospels "from Reimarus to Wrede" which has created the wide-reaching and deeply seated distrust in the historical tradition of Jesus that has of late become so evident. As Paul Wernle himself allows, in the very act of rebuking this distrust as excessive, "to us all it is more or less certain that the evangelists are not Jesus himself, that they are all already dependent on tradition, and that this tradition has already suffered all kinds of changes, by which the spirit of the disciples has in manifold ways been mingled with the

spirit of Jesus.”¹⁹ This being so, it is widely felt that no other attitude towards the person of Jesus remains possible except one at best of skepticism. There are in effect a whole series of Jesuses presented to our consideration. There is the dogmatic Christ which the great Christian community has worshipped through the ages with no other thought than that he was assuredly the Jesus Christ of the Biblical record. And there is this Jesus Christ of the Biblical record which the scientific study of the Bible has split up into several mutually inconsistent personalities. And there is the “historical Jesus” which Biblical criticism has hardly and with much variety of interpretation extracted from the presuppositions of the Biblical records. Where among these differing Jesuses can faith find a firm footing? The dogmatic Christ, we are told, has evaporated into a myth; the Biblical Jesus Christ has been disintegrated into the tesserae out of which its mosaic was formed; the “historical Jesus,” itself the product of doubt, remains a doubtful and fluctuating figure. If we are to continue Christians, must we not at least seek for our Christianity a less unstable basis?

The air in critical circles is fairly palpitating with questions like these. The resulting state of mind finds a clearly argued expression in such a treatise as F. Ziller's *Modern Biblical Science and the Crisis of the Evangelical Church*.²⁰ The thesis maintained is that the progress of scientific study of the Bible has hopelessly shattered the entire basis on which the faith of the Christian church has hitherto rested. The results even of textual criticism already bring certain of the most cherished church-doctrines into peril. Literary criticism renders it very difficult to repose any real confidence in the Biblical writers. And material criticism has cast into the gravest doubt the facts related by these writers which are most indispensable to the established teaching. Finally, the science of comparative religion has reduced the foundations of the central doctrines and rites of the church to the level of heathen ideas and usages. The conceptions and ideas of the Bible have become only elements in the universal history

¹⁹ *Christliche Welt*, February 17, 1910, p. 147.

²⁰ *Die moderne Bibelwissenschaft und die Krisis der evangelischen Kirche*, Tübingen, 1910, see especially pp. 99-100.

of religions, and the Biblical writings themselves only a particular section of general religious literature. The figure of Jesus has been well-nigh wiped off the page of history: the dogmatic Christ, the product of reflection, of course; and the Biblical Jesus Christ, a composition of disparate materials, equally of course; but also in large measure the "historical Jesus" himself, which it has been the object of science to disinter. "The historical Jesus, as we have seen, has been set aside by the scientific study of the Bible down to meagre remnants, and the foundation of the dogmatic Christ has been obliterated." Is there then anything left to rest upon except an "ideal Christ," a creation of fancy? Ziller, who, despite the ruin of historical Christianity which he sees about him, would fain remain a Christian, insists that there is. There is not, indeed, the "historical Jesus," doubt-born and incapable of sustaining faith, but there is the "historical Christ," which is not an ideal, but a fact. On this fact faith can stay itself.

What the altruistic postulates of an inflated egoism, and what the postulates of pure reason cannot avail for, for that neither can those of the "ideal Christ" avail. That there is such a thing as practised self-renunciation, in contrast to nature; that on the basis of such a self-renunciation there can develop a high world-overcoming life,—this conviction cannot be derived either from the pure reason or from our practical ideals with the certainty that is required by faith, face to face with the known laws of nature. Only a fact can give the certainty for it, and this fact is "Christ."

But how is this fact of Christ to be reached? The reply takes the form of an apologue.

All the day long [Ziller writes], I have had before me a wide mountain-ridge. In the morning, it stood out, deep-blue, in almost menacing nearness; towards noon, in a like-shaped whitish-grey mist on the horizon; and now, in the evening, it throws over the whole landscape the splendor of a golden reflection. Is it really the same mountain through it all? I think so. What I see is merely the effects which it works on my eye by means of the light straining through the changing atmosphere. What, then, if the mountain were no mountain; if it were only the boundless plain which seems to rise in the distance; if it were only cloud-forms deceiving my eyes? My glance sweeps over the meadows, through which my path runs.

The brooks which water it come from yonder. The mountain itself I shall, indeed, not reach; its crags I shall not explore; but I believe in the existence of the mountain.²¹

So, he would say, he believes in the existence of the Christ from whom flow the streams of blessing which gladden the plain of human life. Thus, though the "historical Jesus" has been set aside "down to meagre remnants," the "historical Christ abides unshaken for faith." We seek, and we find, Him, however, not in a book, much less in a creed, but "in the entire, constantly developing Christianity in which we believe."

Out of faith in the Christ vitally active here today, there grows up for us faith in the Christ of the past. The predicates which the past ascribed to him, we can no longer ascribe to him in the same sense, but we know how to value them from the standpoint of our faith; and though we no longer connect the same meaning with them, or though we permit them to be supplanted by others which express *for us* what is highest—we do it in the consciousness that we are only carrying forward a process in which the oldest Christianity has preceded us, and which others in their own fashion will follow us.²²

Despairing of the "historical Jesus," Ziller, in other words, substitutes for him, as he says, a "Christ who varies with the changes of human thought." Christianity, transforming itself ceaselessly from age to age, finds for itself ever a transformed Christ, suited to its changed needs. Christ, in a word, grows with his church; and it would be as impossible for the church of today to believe in the Jesus of the first Christians as it would be for us to live today the life of two thousand years ago. It is out of the whole history of Christianity that God speaks to us of today, and Christ would be dead, did he not live on in the life of human development.²³

We are not concerned for the moment with the validity of this representation. Paul Wernle is unhesitant in declaring it nonsense. It is nonsense, he asserts, to speak of modern critical research as having sapped our confidence in the "historical Jesus."

²¹ Christliche Welt, May 5, 1910, p. 413.

²² Ibid.

²³ Die moderne Bibelwissenschaft, etc., p. 101. Cf. the very similar representation of Shirley Jackson Case, *The Historicity of Jesus*, 1912, pp. 306-307.

There continue to be, no doubt, as there always have been, skeptical writers; in late years, for example, there are Wellhausen, Wrede, Schweitzer; but they must not be taken too seriously. "I do not find that, in its essential traits, the person of Jesus has even in the least become uncertain or controversial through the investigations of recent years."²⁴ And how, indeed, could historical science, let us honor it ever so highly, "avail against the voice of a history of nearly two-thousand years' duration in which Jesus and faith in Jesus—I purposely bring them together—have been the greatest of impulsive and constructive forces?" It is greater nonsense still, Wernle declares, to pretend to retain Christ when the historical Jesus has been abandoned. Once convince him that the historical Jesus has been set aside by science, and faith in Christ has no further personal interest to him: faith in God without Christ would then be his only recourse. "This whole postulation of Jesus and Christ," he adds, "abandoning the one and retaining the other, is nothing but a miserable product of opportunism. It was the weakest point in the old Liberal Christianity, and it has not been bettered by any new grounding. What we retain in our hands when the historical Jesus falls away is just myths and phantasms, which can afford no support to our faith."²⁵

Meanwhile, however, we observe Ziller abandoning the "historical Jesus" and clinging to the "historical Christ," who "still lives in the church." In this, he but follows an example set by Schleiermacher,²⁶ and from his day on imitated by a long series of writers occupying essentially the same position, but differing immensely among themselves in the completeness or incomplete-

²⁴ *Christliche Welt*, February 17, 1910, p. 749.

²⁵ *Christliche Welt*, May 12, 1910, p. 441.

²⁶ Cf. Otto Kirn, *Glaube und Geschichte*, 1900, p. 22: "According to what has been said, we may trace back to Schleiermacher the idea which recurs through the nineteenth century in manifold modifications, that the figure of the Redeemer, ever only uncertainly or indistinctly established by historical research, is lifted, by the experience of his redemptive power continuing in the community, to a certainty and clearness sufficient for faith. The effect of Christ, capable of being experienced by every man seeking redemption, permits (so it is said) the inference to a personality standing at the head of the community, and in union with God, even if we cannot otherwise come to know anything whatever about him that is historically assured."

ness, on the one hand, of their abandonment of the historical Jesus, and, on the other, of their clinging to a living Christ. At the one extreme we may discover—shall we say even a Martin Kähler? or shall we content ourselves with saying a Wilhelm Herrmann?²⁷ At the other stand the theologians of the Bremen *Protestantenverein*. Those who gather around the former node, only sit loosely to the “historical Jesus” as he is presented to us in the Gospel narrative, and can in no way do without the “historical Christ,” on whom, indeed, their whole religious system hangs. Those who gather around the latter, though they may or may not, for themselves, feel any real doubt that Jesus really lived, yet are quite able to get along wholly without him in their religious system, whether we call him Jesus or Christ. It is these latter, accordingly, who are express “christless Christians.”

Perhaps it may be well to keep near home here and select as examples of this truest christless Christianity only certain prophets of our own.

A very good example is afforded by Douglas C. Macintosh.²⁸ With the historicity of Jesus, Macintosh has for himself no difficulty; but neither does he feel any imperative need of the living Christ. He finds the historical Jesus useful; the loss of him would be a great loss,—a sentimental loss, a pedagogical loss, above all

²⁷ Cf. what is said of Kähler and Herrmann as representatives of historical skepticism with respect to the “historical Jesus” by Otto Ritschl in an article entitled, “Der geschichtliche Christus, der christliche Glaube, und die theologische Wissenschaft” in the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. iii, 1893, pp. 373 f. “There is accordingly at present no Rationalistic tendency, threatening to bring into question the value for theology of historical investigation. It is true, however, that the confidence which has been hitherto overwhelmingly felt in the result of theological historical research is made doubtful by a skeptical mood which seems to be gaining ground with many theologians. . . . To this skeptical mood . . . Kähler has hitherto given the strongest expression.” But Herrmann “shares Kähler’s historical skepticism, ascribing to historical research the ability to attain only probable judgments.” “In spite of these unfavorable judgments as to the capacity of historical science, Kähler and Herrmann are too deeply persuaded of the nature of Christianity as an historical religion not to lay stress on this—that the Christ which historical research cannot reach with its instruments, but is laid hold of now by faith, is the historical Christ. In contrast with him Kähler speaks of the ‘so-called historical Jesus’ as a creature of phantastic arbitrariness.” See also Karl Dunkmann, *Das religiöse Apriori und die Geschichte*, 1911, pp. 44–45.

²⁸ *American Journal of Theology*, July, 1911, pp. 362–372; January, 1912, pp. 106–110.

a loss to the easy attainment of Christian certitude. He would even, it appears, allow that the Christ-ideal is indispensable—that it is, indeed, precisely the differentia of Christianity; and he does not see his way to accounting for the clearness at least of this ideal without assuming the historical Jesus, and in this sense, therefore, he is prepared to admit that the historicity of Jesus is “historically indispensable.” Indispensable, that is, to the historian, not to the Christian. What the Christian must have is the Christ-ideal, not Christ. “Christian faith is trust in the Christ-like God; whether the Christ be regarded as historical fact or mere ideal, it is trust in the God of holy and unselfish love, whose purpose is the spiritual redemption of humanity and who is revealed in the Christ-like everywhere.” Was not Jesus himself—if he existed—a Christian, the first Christian? And was “the historical Jesus” needed for him as the presupposition of his faith? We cannot distinguish between the “religion of Jesus” and the “gospel of Christ”: the “gospel of Christ” is just the “religion of Jesus.” He is not the content of our faith, but only, historically, the first of the series of believers of that particular kind which we call Christian. Say that the series began in another, in a later, than he, and that he is a myth. What essential difference does that make to our faith? The “Christian God-idea” in any case remains; and the “Christian God-idea” is constitutive of Christianity.

So far as the content of Christianity is concerned, our religion would remain essentially the same, whatever judgment might be rendered upon questions of historical fact.

The disproof, or rendering seriously doubtful, of the historicity of Jesus would not mean the disappearance of any essential content from the Christian religion.

It is not incorrect to say that the essence of Christianity is Jesus Christ, if [Oh that “if”!] it be recognized that it is also possible to set forth the essence of Christianity without reference to the historic Jesus.

Granted the historicity of Jesus, was not *his* faith fully Christian? And yet *he* could not make that faith rest upon the historicity of a person of ideal character who had gone before him. If then we believe in the historicity of Jesus, we must admit that Christian faith has been possible in the case of one at least who did not believe in the historicity of any ideal Jesus before his day.

“Without the historical Jesus we may find ourselves with less verification of our faith than we thought.” That is a loss; but it is not an irreparable loss, since we may find sufficient verification elsewhere. Meanwhile,

Christianity, while enjoying the advantages of historical verification, has this qualification for being the “absolute” and universal religion, that its fate is not bound up with the actuality of any one reputed fact of history, even when that “fact” is the one which surpasses every other fact in its value to humanity.

In a single word, Christ does not form any part of the content of Christianity, and therefore his historicity cannot be indispensable to Christianity. “Spiritual religion is self-dependent,” and finds all its resources in itself; it cannot therefore be dependent “on the religious experience and inner assurance of another, even though that other be the Jesus of history.”

An almost equally good example is supplied by Frank H. Foster,²⁹ the stress of whose argument is laid on the general consideration that our religious relation cannot rest on the uncertainties of history. His particular manner of phrasing his contention is that “in some important respects it makes no difference to the modern thinker whether Jesus was a historical person or not,” because “no system of truth which shall dominate the mind and claim authority over the conduct of man can rest upon the reality of any historical person.” “Salvation” is “an inner state of the soul,” and therefore cannot be something “‘objectively’ secured by the work of a historical person.” “Truth is truth” only as it “shines to the mind by its own light,” and therefore “cannot be something which depends upon the existence of the person who first spoke it.” If “salvation,” “truth,” were thus dependent on the historicity of a person, they “would be exposed to every breath of criticism.” They must not be left in that perilous condition.

Though Jesus should be proved never to have existed, the truth which has come down to us, and which we have received because of its self-evidencing value, and which we have found to work out such great results in the liberation of our spirits from the thralldom

²⁹ American Journal of Theology, October, 1911, pp. 584-594.

of sin and the establishment of holy relations with our Heavenly Father, would still be true, and its effects would remain unaltered. In this sense, a historical Jesus is unnecessary.

For himself, Foster does not at all doubt that Jesus was an historical person. He confesses, indeed, that "of no single historical detail can we be absolutely sure, unless it be his death by crucifixion"; though, somewhat inconsistently, he at once draws up a tolerably detailed picture of the real Jesus and sets him before us as "a realized ideal,"—"a realized ideal," moreover, let us note, so lofty that none of his followers could have invented the portraiture. His historicity remains nevertheless unessential, since our real ground, for example, for acknowledging him sinless, is that this acknowledgment is useful to us—"our final reason for accepting it is its value"; and a "realized ideal" is after all fundamentally an ideal, and owes its existence as such and whatever power it may exert to its erection into an ideal, not to its historical embodiment, if it chances to be historically embodied, in a person. "No system of truth which shall dominate the mind and claim authority over the conduct of men," we will remember, "can rest upon the reality of any historical personality."

It is scarcely necessary to multiply examples further. We may pass from instance to instance; but do not escape from a common circle of ideas. R. Roberts assumes to speak for the class, and may be accepted as doing so, when he announces³⁰ that "the supreme need of the hour in these matters is the disengagement of religion from its dependence on historical personalities." "Truth is truth," he declares, "whether uttered by Sophocles or Plato in Athens, by Hillel or Jesus in Palestine, by Seneca or Aurelius at Rome." "Religion, too, rests not on inspired or divine personalities, but on the order of the world." "And if, in the inevitable evolution of the not-distant future, Jesus too should disappear from the assured certainties of the world, man would not cease to be religious." P. W. Schmiedel—if we may take advantage of the vogue of his writings in their English form to refer to him here—speaks, with the greater caution of his better scholarship, of the prospect of the elimination of the figure of Jesus from "the assured certainties of the world": "As a critical

³⁰ Hibbert Journal, October, 1909, pp. 100-101.

historian I can only say that I see no prospect of this." And it is a deeper note of personal appreciation of Jesus—and of indebtedness to him—which he sounds. But the purport of his declaration is the same.

My inmost religious convictions would suffer no harm, even if I now felt obliged to conclude that Jesus never lived. It would, of course, be a loss to me, if I could no longer look back and up to him as a historical person; but I should feel assured that the measure of piety which had long become a part of my nature could not be lost, because I could no longer derive it from him.²¹

Always there lie at the basis of the reasoning the twin assumptions of the old Rationalism: the assumption of the adequacy of pure reason to produce out of its own inalienable endowments the whole body of religious truth which it is necessary or possible for reasonable men to embrace, and the assumption of the inadequacy of history to lay a foundation of fact sufficiently assured to supply a firm basis on which the religious convictions and aspirations of reasonable men may rest. And always there is built upon these assumptions the denial that Christianity,—as it is a religion worthy of the acceptance of reasonable men, and actually exerting influence over reasonable men, and supplying the forms in which their religious life is expressed,—can possibly be dependent for its existence or power on any events or personalities in its past history, no matter how prominent a place these events or personalities may actually have occupied in its historical origination or its continued historical manifestation. The immediate motive which leads to this declaration of independence of historical events and personalities may differ from individual to individual: it is perhaps very commonly a feeling of uncertainty as to the actual historicity of the facts and personalities in question, and a desire to protect what is thought of as Christian faith from the danger incident to this uncertainty. The personal attitude of the reasoners towards Jesus may also differ greatly: most commonly, no doubt, a strong sense of indebtedness to Jesus and a deep feeling of reverence to him are preserved. But the general line of argument remains the same. History can give us only probabilities. Religion, therefore, which requires cer-

²¹ *Jesus in Modern Criticism*, Eng. trans., 1907, p. 85.

tainties, cannot be dependent on historical facts. Jesus is at best an historical fact. Christianity, therefore, as it is truly religion, cannot possibly be dependent on Jesus. So far accordingly as Christianity is truly religion, it must be independent of Jesus.³² What are we to say to these things?

It can scarcely be expected that at this time of day the ancient debate with Rationalism should be taken up afresh and threshed out over again. Butler's *Analogy* is still extant, with its initial insistence upon probability as the guide of life, and its solid proof of the reasonableness of an historical revelation. It might not even be amiss to invite those to whom matters of fact appear to be intrinsically doubtful, or at least to become at once on occurrence incapable of establishment beyond "reasonable doubt," to bring their philosophy down to earth by a course of reading in such primary text-books as Greenleaf *On Evidence* and Ram *On Facts*. Of course man is a religious being, and by the very necessity of his nature will have a religion. We have not needed to wait for W. Bousset to tell us³³ that religion has its seat in the aboriginal disposition of the reason, and we have only to look within ourselves to find it as the central fundamental law of our life. To name none other, John Calvin has told us long ago that, entering into the very constitution of man, and, above all else, distinguishing him from the brute, there is an ineradicable *sensus deitatis*, which—so far from lying inert within him—is a fertile *semen religionis*; and that accordingly all men have, and must needs have, relig-

³² Compare the description of this type of thought by Shirley Jackson Case, *The Historicity of Jesus*, 1912, pp. 319 f.

³³ In his address at the Berlin Congress of Free Christianity, 1910, under the title, *Die Bedeutung der Person Jesu für den Glauben*. History according to Bousset gives us only symbols, which cannot demonstrate, but only illustrate, the eternal ideas that reside in our bosoms. Founders of religions, Jesus among them, as historical entities, have their place among these symbols. Neither the certainty nor the contents of our faith can find its grounding in symbols. On the one hand, as regards Jesus, "What do we know that is historically certain of this Jesus of Nazareth, his life, his teaching and his person" (p. 4). Yet, on the other, "the portrait of Jesus as it is depicted in the gospels by his immediate community, as romance and truth, remains and will remain more effective than all attempts at historical reconstruction, however exact they may be" (p. 17). Effective, that is, as a symbol; for as Wobbermin (*Geschichte und Historie in der Religionswissenschaft*, 1911, pp. 47 f.) points out, Bousset leaves to Jesus no significance as source of religion.

ion. It is another question, however, whether this constitutional religion, which man cannot choose but have, is adequate to his need in the situation in which he actually finds himself, a situation which Eucken tells us has been most truly appreciated not by the optimists but the pessimists.²⁴ It is not obvious, to say the least, that a provision of nature must be competent also for unnatural conditions; that a power of living implies also a *vis naturae medicatrix* which in the presence of disease renders the exhibition of remedies impertinent. Though "pure reason" be sufficient for the religion of pure nature, what warrants the assumption that its sufficiency is unimpaired when nature is no longer pure?

It was the fault of the eighteenth century, in its pride of intellect and virtue, to neglect in its religious theorizing the evil case of man, and to proclaim under the name of "natural religion" an abstract scheme of a few meagre truths of reason as the sum of all religion, and, as such, the whole religious content of Christianity, the presently dominant religion,—which was thus represented as, so far as it was truly religious, "as old as creation." We have passed beyond the possibility of such shallow intellectualism now; we all repeat with avidity Bernhard Pünjer's caustic jibe that the difficulty with this so-called "natural religion" was that it was neither natural nor a religion. But have we bettered things in the essence of the matter? The misery of humanity may be more poignantly present to our consciousness, and even, in a sense, its sin; religion may be more prevalently thought of as "faith," rather than as opinion; the goodness of God may fill the whole horizon of our thought of him, and loving trust in his love form the entire reaction of our souls in his presence. But are we doing justice to that inexpugnable sense of guilt which constitutes the most fundamental and persistent deliverance of our moral consciousness? Shall we hope to soothe it to sleep with platitudes about the goodness of God; assurances that God is love, and that love will not reckon with sin? That deep moral self-condemnation which is present as a primary factor in all

²⁴ See the striking passage on the radical evil which afflicts the human race in *Der Wahrheitsgehalt der Religion*, 1st ed., 1901, pp. 72 f.; *The Truth of Religion*, 1911, pp. 96 f.

truly religious experience protests against all attempts merely to appease it. It cries out for satisfaction. No moral deduction can persuade it that forgiveness of sins is a necessary element in the moral order of the world. It knows on the contrary that indiscriminate forgiveness of sin would be precisely the subversion of the moral order of the world. The annulment of guilt is the annulment of the law of righteousness, out of the breach of which guilt arises; and the law of righteousness is only another name for the moral order of the world. There is a moral paradox in the forgiveness of sins which cannot be solved apart from the exhibition of an actual expiation. No appeal to general metaphysical or moral truths concerning God can serve here; or to the essential kinship of human nature to God; or, for the matter of that, to any example of an attitude of trust in the divine goodness upon the part of a religious genius, however great, or to promises of forgiveness made by such a one, or even—may we say it with reverence—made by God himself, unsupported by the exhibition of an actual expiation. The sinful soul, in throes of self-condemnation, is concerned with the law of righteousness ingrained in his very nature as a moral being, and cannot be satisfied with goodness, or love, or mercy, or pardon. He cries out for expiation. And expiation, in its very nature, is not a principle but a fact, an event which takes place, if at all, in the conditions of time and space. A valid religion for sinful man includes in it, accordingly, of necessity an historical element, an actually wrought expiation for its sin. It is the very nerve of Christianity and the essence of its appeal to men—by virtue of which it has won its way in the world—that it provides this historical element and proclaims an actual expiation of human sin. As it has been eloquently put:³⁵

Only the fact that Christ stands out in history as surety of the gracious will of God, that in God's name he punishes sin and calls the sinner to himself, that in holy suffering he endures the lot of sinners in order to convict them of their sin and free them from it, that as the Risen One he brings them the assurance of justification and of eternal life, is able to transform human seeking after salvation into finding. Severed from this fact which forms its very

³⁵ Otto Kirn, *Glaube und Geschichte*, 1900, pp. 47-48. Cf. the whole passage, pp. 47-50.

essence, faith is nothing, an empty desire, a question without an answer.

It would be sad for humanity, needing thus above all things an actual expiation that it may have warrant to trust in God's forgiving love, if no such warrant can be given it because of the inability of the human mind to attain certainty with reference to matters of fact. It is, indeed, difficult to see how man could sustain his being and prosecute his common tasks in the world, if matters of fact are intrinsically uncertain, or become immediately uncertain on their occurrence. Man is, after all said, a creature of time and space, and all that he does and all that he experiences takes place in the conditions of time and space, and becomes at once on taking place matter of history. He could acquire no knowledge whatever, the whole discipline of life would be lost to him, if uncertainty were really the mark of the historical. We deceive ourselves, for instance, if we fancy we may distinguish in principle between historical facts as uncertain and scientific facts as certain. As Lessing reminds us, we cannot base certainties on uncertainties; and the material of all the sciences is in point of fact historical. "Every science," observes Eberhard Vischer,* "builds its conclusions on the particular experiences which men have had. Every observation in the natural sciences, every experiment, gives us in the first instance not knowledge of what is, but of what at the moment of the observation, of the experiment, the observer experiences. . . . An experience had by the scientific observer, therefore an historical fact, is the foundation-stone on which is grounded, as in general the entire conduct of man, so also all scientific attainment." If, then, historical facts are by their very nature uncertain,—“if nothing that befalls man can be certainly known, then all scientific certainty whatever passes into the realm of the impossible.”

It may be suspected that the current assumption that historical facts cannot rise above probabilities, derives at least some of its force and persistency from a confusion of two senses of the word “probable.” As the opposite of “demonstrative,” “probable”

**Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1898, p. 200, article on “Die geschichtliche Gewissheit und der Glaube an Jesus Christus.” Compare also his lecture on *Jesus Christus in der Geschichte*, Tübingen, 1912, where the discussion is more popular in form.

refers to the nature of the ground on which the judgment of truth or reality rests; as the opposite of "certain" it refers to the measure of assurance which the grounds on which this judgment rests are adapted to produce. Historical facts may be "only probable" in the one usage and yet not less than "certain" in the other. This ambiguity of the term seems to be reflected in a certain embarrassment which is observable in its use in the present connection. Thus G. B. Foster talks of historical evidence as capable of producing only "probable certainty"; Otto Kirn of it as producing at best only "relative certainty"; while Heinrich von Sybel declares it able to produce "conclusive certainty,"—which he then explains by the further declaration that "historical science is capable of attaining to altogether exact knowledge."³⁷ "Conclusive certainty" is of course pleonastic, and "probable certainty," "relative certainty," are contradictions in terms, the employment of which only bears witness to the feeling of the writers using them that after all historical facts are, or may be, "certain." Let it go at that. In point of fact, there is nothing more certain than a matter of fact: what is, certainly is; and the certainty of demonstration cannot be more sure than the certainty of experience. It is no more sure that two and two make four, than that the two nuts which I have in each hand when brought together are four,—though I arrive at my certainty in the one case *a priori* by demonstrative reasoning, and in the other *a posteriori* by actual experience. The ground of certainty in both cases is my confidence in my faculties.

It may be urged, to be sure, that history, as commonly spoken of, deals only with past experiences, and it is only present experience which is "certain." But experience does not cease to be experience with the passage of time: and (as it has been well phrased) "reality that has been made" is no less reality than "reality in the making"; "reality once 'made,' is 'made' for ever."³⁸ If what is, certainly is, then what has been, just as certainly has been; and its actuality as matter of fact is not in

³⁷ Ueber die Gesetze des historischen Wissens, 2d ed., 1864, p. 17; or in Vorträge und Aufsätze, 1874, p. 11.

³⁸ F. R. Tennant, "Historical Fact in Relation to the Philosophy of Religion." Hibbert Journal, vol. viii, 1909-10, p. 173.

the least disturbed by the irrelevant circumstance that it has occurred at one point of time rather than at another. Indeed, as the writer just cited playfully points out, distance of time may be neutralized by distance in space. To an observer on the dog-star, earthly events which to an observer on earth occurred a generation ago are present-day facts; and by merely stationing ourselves at the proper distance we may recover any occurrence of the past to "immediate perception." We cannot, to be sure, take our post of observation at will in Orion or the Pleiades, but we need not on that account cast the actuality of the actual into doubt or declare ourselves incapable of assuring ourselves of it. If free transportation through the immeasurable reaches of space is denied us, there are other ways of getting at the actualities of the past which we need not on that account deny ourselves.

For one thing, we need not persist in looking at past occurrences as each an isolated event, standing absolutely out of relation with all other events, up to which therefore no lines of approach lead. Past events still live in other vibrations also, besides those which, trembling through the ether, carry notification of their occurrence to the depths of space. Everything that occurs affects everything else that occurs, and history must be conceived not merely as a series of linked chains passing side by side through time; but as one woven network covering the whole past, and running with unbroken web through the present into the illimitable future. Not by one line only but by manifold lines, therefore, we can travel from any point which for the moment may chance to be the present, over the woven pattern of the fabric to any other point, which holds changelessly its proper position in the whole, and its fixed relations to all the other parts of it. Of course, such creatures as we are cannot contemplate the whole pattern in all its details; we are like insects climbing slowly along a thread of some tapestry. There are myriads of occurrences of even the recent past which are gone beyond all hope of recovery. At best we can know a few of the events that have occurred, and them only in part. But the past is not singular in this. We do not know the present, even that present with which we are most intimately concerned, in all of its details, or in any of its details per-

fectly. We know nothing except in part. Every sparklet of human knowledge shines out from a limitless surrounding of obscurity. But we can yet know truly where we can know only in part. And because we cannot know all the past, we must not therefore fancy that we can know nothing that is past. There are occurrences which stand out so brightly against the enveloping darkness, which have wrought so powerfully on the course of events that have succeeded them, which are connected with us by so many and so deeply marked lines of effects, that we might as well pretend not to be able to see the sun in the heavens as not to be able to perceive them looming in the past, however distant. There are no doubt some who do not see the sun. They are blind.

Whether the origins of the Christian religion belong to this class of outstanding facts—the great peaks rising out of the plain with such prominence that no observer looking over the field of history can miss them—is merely a question of the evidence. This evidence is, however, of the most compelling and varied kind. It is not merely documentary, subject to those processes of testing which we lump together under the name of criticism. It is institutional as well; and it is more than institutional. The seed out of which Christianity has grown may be known, like other seed, by that which has grown out of it: “by their fruits ye shall know them.” Christianity itself is a witness to the nature of its origins; and to Christianity must be added the whole world in its development through two thousand years. It is futile to ask, as has been asked with the processes of historical criticism in mind: “Is any one entitled to believe, or to ask others to believe, in specific historical matters of fact except upon historical evidence?”³⁹ The question is already an-

³⁹ A. O. Lovejoy, *Hibbert Journal*, vol. v, January, 1907, p. 269. Cf. the much more cautious statement of O. Ritschl, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. iii, 1893, p. 376. Per contra, cf. Eberhard Vischer, *Jesus Christus in der Geschichte*, 1912, pp. 35 f.: had the historical records preserved for us no single intimation of the existence of a Dante, the existence of the *Divina Commedia* would compel his postulation, and had historical records preserved for us no single intimation of the existence of Jesus Christ,—or, what comes to the same thing, should historical criticism obliterate every existing intimation of his existence,—there are effects about us, quite as palpable as the *Divina Commedia*, which would compel his postulation.

swered by Lessing in that striking refutation of his own historical skepticism which he gives in his *Axiomata*:⁴⁰

There is still one question over which I cannot wonder enough, which the Herr Pastor puts with a confidence that seems to imply that only one answer is possible. "Had the New Testament books not been written, and had they not come down to us," he asks, "would there have remained in the world a trace of what Jesus did and taught?" God forbid that I should ever think so meanly of Christ's teaching as to dare to answer this question with a No. No, I would not repeat such a No, even had an angel from heaven dictated it to me, to say nothing of a case where it is only a Lutheran pastor who would put it into my mouth. All that occurs in the world leaves traces in the world behind it, even though men can not always point them out at once; and should Thy teaching only, divine Friend of man, which Thou didst command, not to be written but to be preached, have effected nothing, absolutely nothing, from which its origin might be recognized? Should Thy words have been words of life only when transformed into dead letters?

We are not fleeing from the results of historical criticism to take refuge in the argument from effects. We shall appeal, indeed, from a naturalistically biassed to an unbiassed historical criticism; but we shall have no difficulty in trusting the latter to give us not only an actual Jesus, but a supernatural Christ, and in Him a supernatural redemption. We are only concerned now to point out that even such a vindication of the fact-basis of Christianity on historico-critical grounds does not exhaust the evidence for it; that there is still further evidence of the richest and most varied kind for the origin of Christianity in a supernatural founder; that there is, for example, the evidence from effects, which, resting as it does on the causal judgment, has much of the quality of demonstration.⁴¹ "What then is it," asks a recent writer,⁴² "which gives us knowledge of what has been?" "Three things," he answers, "monuments, traditions,

⁴⁰ Lessings sämtliche Schriften, Lachmann's ed., 1897, vol. xiii, p. 120.

⁴¹ The value of the argument from effects in establishing historical facts is expounded at length by Eberhard Vischer as cited above, and applied in detail to the facts of the Christian origins. Cf. the review of the lecture, *Jesus Christus in der Geschichte*, in the *Princeton Theological Review* for October, 1912.

⁴² *Christliche Welt*, February 17, 1910, pp. 162-163.

effects"; and then he adds another well-known saying of Lessing's: "When the paralytic *experiences* the healing shocks of the electric spark, what does he care whether Nollet or Franklin, or neither of them, is right?"⁴³—and concludes: "So may the pious man be of good courage, while the learned are disputing over particular problems of the gospel-history. But as to the presence and as to the nature of the power which then came into the world, he too has a little word to say." He has. And though this "little word" may not be quite the same word which either this writer or Lessing might suggest, it is a word which has supreme value, and which combines with the abundant evidence from other quarters and of other orders to render the facts which belong to the origins of Christianity the most certain of all the facts which have occurred in the world.⁴⁴

We are not absurdly undertaking to prove the historicity of Jesus in ten words. Happily, our present task does not require this proof of us; and happily also, as has already been intimated, the work has been perhaps sufficiently done for us—though in many more than ten words—by a multitude of recent writers who have sprung to the defence of the historicity of Jesus against its denial by the new radicalism most prominently represented at present by Arthur Drews. One of the results of the promulgation of this denial for which we may be thankful has been that some check has been put upon the less guarded expression of historical scepticism on the part of the Liberal theologians, and there has been called out some stronger assertion and fuller exposition of the more positive side of their conception of the historical origins of Christianity than it has been usual for them to give.⁴⁵ This has been a gain. Much has, no doubt, been left

⁴³ *Axiomata*, 1778; *Lessings sämtliche Schriften*, Lachmann's ed., 1897, vol. xiii, p. 134. Lessing is in this passage defending this proposition as previously made by him, and denying that he considers this experimental evidence the only convincing evidence of the truth of Christianity.

⁴⁴ "Jesus," says Erich Foerster (*Christliche Welt*, 1909, no. 52, p. 1249), "is a fact in the history of our race, and this fact cannot be eliminated by any dilettantism, however scientifically garnished. He who does not wish to turn his back on all reality must recognize it and adjust himself to it."

⁴⁵ Heinrich Weinel, *Ist das "liberale" Jesusbild widerlegt?* 1910, has been particularly candid in chiding his colleagues for their excesses in the one direction and their shortcomings in the other.

to be desired, but it has been pleasant to see such writers as W. Bousset and Johannes Weiss take up even so far the rôle of "apologists." What we have been attempting to do is merely, by a brief statement of the actual state of the case with reference to the historicity of Jesus, to wash in a background against which the true character and significance of the christless Christianity which is being exploited about us may be thrown up into clear relief. There really is no occasion for a panic with reference to the historicity of Jesus; and there is no need of such drastic measures as those pursued by the promulgators of our christless Christianity to allay the rising panic with respect to it. It is only among the old Liberals and—on somewhat different grounds—the members of the school of Ritschl that panic here is natural. The mordant criticism of the evangelical history practised by the old Liberals has left them without defence when this criticism is pressed a step further and the historicity of Jesus is denied,—requiring, though they do, the historicity of Jesus not only to account for the origin of Christianity according to their view of its origin, but to give distinctiveness and distinction to their conception of what Christianity is. It has been the peculiarity of the school of Ritschl, in its effort to preserve Christianity from destruction by the assaults of historical criticism no less than by those of philosophy and science, to proclaim the independence of faith of all historical facts as well as of all metaphysical notions. What defence have they when the fact of Christ is included in the facts of which Christianity is independent? Yet "the fact of Christ" bears with them the whole weight of Christianity.* Our christless Christians have passed beyond all this. Indifference to Christ may have much the same practical effects as denial of the existence of Jesus; but it is a specifically different attitude and throws into the foreground specifically different questions. It has no interest in the historicity of Jesus. It has no interest in the living Christ. Its sole interest is in Christianity. It does not follow, however, that the historicity of Jesus

* On the Ritschlian attitude to historical facts and its sequences cf. E. Cremer, "Der Glaube und die Thaten," in Greifswalder Studien: theologische Abhandlungen Hermann Cremer . . . dargebracht, 1895, pp. 261–283; G. Vos, "Christian Faith and the Truthfulness of the Bible History," in Princeton Theological Review, vol. iv, 1906, pp. 289–305.

has no bearing on it; or the nature of the Jesus who is historical. Conceivably, a real Jesus may be more difficult to ignore than an imaginary one; especially if the Jesus that is real is a Jesus whom it is not easy to ignore, who has brought into the world influences and set at work forces which cannot be disregarded or escaped. In any event it is important to approach the consideration of christless Christianity with a clear understanding that the Christ it would ignore is not a doubtful Christ but a real Christ, is not an inert Christ but an active Christ.⁴⁷

The particular question raised meanwhile by christless Christianity is not that of the historicity of Jesus but that of the nature of Christianity, or, as it is fashionable nowadays to phrase it, "the essence of Christianity." It is only when "Christianity" has come to be looked upon as little more than a modern man's "religious reaction upon the whole realm of reality—past and present—available for him," "the total embodiment of the actual religious attainments of modern men in a modern environment"—whatever this "reaction," these "attainments," may chance to be—as it has been described by a not wholly unsympathetic historian,⁴⁸ that the question of the indifference of "Christianity" to Jesus can be seriously raised. Douglas C. Macintosh⁴⁹ very frankly allows that to all that has hitherto borne the name of Christianity the historicity of Jesus has been indispensable, or, to speak more adequately, the living Jesus has stood at the very centre of thought and faith. To the "early disciples of Jesus," whose faith hinged on the messiahship of Jesus; to "the Greek Christian development," whose entire teaching and trust turned on the reality of a divine incarnation in humanity; to "Christian faith in its mediaeval form, whether Romanist or Protestant," which grounded all its hope in the substitutive sacrifice of the God-man—to all these alike Jesus forms the very core of Christianity. It is only when historical—or if the word pleases better,

⁴⁷ Richard Rothe even a half-century ago sounded a warning against attempting to root faith in the *merely* historical Jesus, who lived and died two thousand years ago. "If," he declared, "this Christ is not to be altogether ignored and stricken out of history, if he is to be permitted to play any rôle and to be believed in at all, he must absolutely be conceived also as the *living* Christ."

⁴⁸ S. J. Case, as cited, p. 321.

⁴⁹ *American Journal of Theology*, vol. xv, July, 1911, pp. 304 f.

traditional—Christianity has suffered a sea-change and become “the Christianity of to-day,” that it can be contended that “the disproof or rendering seriously doubtful of the historicity of Jesus need not mean the disappearance of any essential content from the Christian religion.” The question thus concerns not Christianity in its historical sense, but “our religion,” “of to-day”; and it might perhaps be better phrased, not, Is Christ essential to the Christian faith? but, Is the so-called Christianity of today to which Christ is not essential still Christian?

Ernst Troeltsch has treated the matter more at large and with his wonted thoroughness and candor in a lecture which he has recently published under the title of *The Significance of the Historicity of Jesus for Faith*.⁵⁰ The question which he here raises is twofold: first, whether it is “still” possible to speak of an inner essential significance of Jesus for faith; and secondly, whether, that being answered in the negative, the historicity of Jesus is therefore indifferent to the “Christianity” which alone remains possible for modern culture. This latter question also Troeltsch answers with a negative, and thus comes forward as the advocate of the indispensableness of Jesus to even the most attenuated faith which still cares to call itself Christian. “So long as there exists a Christianity in any sense whatever it will be bound up with the central place of Christ in worship.”

The word “still” in the former member of Troeltsch’s question intimates that in his view a change has taken place in men’s conception of what Christianity is and imports, and that it is only because of this change that the question suggested can be raised. Troeltsch does not hesitate to speak of this change as a veritable “transformation⁵¹ of Christianity.” Formerly Christians have believed in a divine Christ “propitiating God and thus freeing men from the consequences of their infection with original sin.” To raise the question of the historicity of Jesus from this standpoint would be simply to call in question the right of Christianity to exist. It is only when we have learned, like David Friedrich Strauss (in his Christian period), to distinguish between

⁵⁰ Die Bedeutung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu für den Glauben, Tübingen, 1911. Cf. the review of it in the *Princeton Theological Review* for October, 1912.

⁵¹ “Umwandlung,” p. 8.

the principle of Christianity and the person of Christ, and have come to see that what we call Christianity is just "a particular faith in God, a peculiar knowledge of God, with its corresponding mode of life, or, as it is called, a religious idea, a religious principle,"—so that there is no historical redemptive work postulated in the background,—that we may ask ourselves with any meaning whether there exists any necessity for the assumption of an historical Jesus. Even on this ground, however, a negative answer is not to be taken for granted. There even exist some who have come so far,—to whom therefore "redemption is not something once for all completed in the work of Christ, and thereafter only to be applied to individuals, but an occurrence continually completing itself afresh in the action of God on the soul by means of the knowledge of God" wrought by faith,—to whom a negative answer is still impossible. This is because they "connect this redeeming faith-knowledge with the knowledge and recollection of the historical personality of Jesus, although this comes into consideration with them, not in its miraculous element, nor in its particular teachings, but only in the total effect of the religious personality." It is "the later, ecclesiastical Schleiermacher" that Troeltsch has in view here, and especially Ritschl and Herrmann. With them "all notion of a historical redemptive miracle, occurring once for all," indeed, is lacking; but with them also the faith-knowledge that constitutes Christianity is "bound to the historical personality of Christ, by which alone power or certitude is lent it." In this, he contends, there is betrayed lurking at the back of the brain a remnant of the old doctrine of original sin; there persists a notion "of the essential incapacity of men who do not know Christ for hearty faith in God." To such a conception, questioning of the historicity of Jesus were as fatal as to the old orthodoxy itself. Only when we occupy ground which allows no inward necessity for the assumption of an historical Jesus, can we discuss with any meaning whether the historical Jesus is indispensable to Christianity.

Troeltsch himself occupies this ground, and therefore admits that the indispensableness of Jesus to Christianity is to him a legitimate matter of debate. He holds very decided views, how-

ever, in the matter. Even on this ground he argues—and it is the chief purpose of his lecture to argue this—that Christianity cannot get along without Jesus. His argument is based on considerations derived from the history of religions and religious psychology, and amounts in general to the contention that religion is, after all said, a social affair and cannot persist without cultus and communion; while these require a rallying-centre, which must be envisaged as real; and this rallying-centre in the present stage of culture cannot be anything but Jesus Christ. The persistence of even this type of religious belief hangs thus on the historicity of Jesus, and whenever, if ever (Troeltsch thinks they will never), the results of historical research shall prove unfavorable to the historicity of Jesus, then the death-knell of even this type of religious faith is sounded. This is, he assures us, the last word of social-psychological research in the realm of religion.⁵²

The question thus defined and debated is, however, little more than an academic one. Troeltsch does not pretend that the extremely attenuated “Christianity” to which alone the question of the indispensableness of the historical Jesus has meaning, possesses vitality as a religion. Individuals may profess it and do profess it; he professes it himself; but the churches in which religious life is rich and powerful, are, he tells us, of a very different faith. We may be interested to know that even in this, its most attenuated form, “Christianity” cannot, in the opinion of one of our chief masters in the psychology and phenomenology of religion, dispense with Jesus. But the real question which presses for an answer is whether this very attenuated “Christianity,” in which alone the question of the indispensableness of Jesus to Christianity can with any meaning be raised, possesses any just claim upon the name of Christianity. Its adherents are no doubt prompt in asserting their right to the name. But the allowance of their claim depends upon the prior question of what precisely Christianity is, and what kinds of “transformation” it can suffer without ceasing to be Christianity. If Christi-

⁵² “In the central position of the personality of Jesus, Christianity does not possess a distinguishing peculiarity, separating it from all other religions, and for the first time making redemption possible, but only fulfils a general law of the spiritual life of man after a fashion peculiar to itself” (p. 42).

anity is only a particular way of conceiving God, with the emotional and volitional accompaniments and consequences of this way of conceiving God, then no doubt a particular way of conceiving God may claim to be Christianity,—that is, if it be the particular way of conceiving God which Christianity is. If Christianity, however, be anything more than just a way of conceiving God, it is hard to see what just claim a mere way of conceiving God can put in to the name.

We should not omit to note in passing that Troeltsch goes a step further than contending that Jesus is indispensable to Christianity even in that attenuated form of so-called Christianity to which he gives his adhesion. He contends that no other form of religion than this attenuated Christianity with Jesus enshrined at its centre can exist in the conditions of modern life. In a word, Jesus is to him indispensable to religion in the conditions of modern life. This is not, to be sure, quite the same as saying with Heinrich Weinel, that “after Jesus it is his religion or none.” Troeltsch is not prepared to declare Christianity “the eternal religion,” which can never be transcended. But he is prepared to insist that Christianity—of course, in the interpretation of Christianity which commends itself to him—is so bound up with, and gives such competent expression to, the religious side of the civilization of the Mediterranean basin, that so long as that civilization endures, so long must Christianity remain the only religion possible to civilized humanity. It is possible, of course, that the civilization of the Mediterranean basin may after a while be replaced by a still higher civilization; and then, no doubt, there will arise a new form of religious expression conformable to the new civilization. Christianity is thus not pronounced by Troeltsch the final, the absolute religion, but merely the only religion possible to the highest civilization as yet known to man. His defence of the indispensableness of Jesus means, then, only that we cannot in his opinion get along at present without Jesus.⁵³ After a

⁵³ Troeltsch's remarks in this connection provide a useful commentary upon the discussion in his *Die Absolutheit des Christentums und die Geschichte*, 1902. The adherents of Christianity as of all other religions, he tells us there, live in a naïve belief in the absoluteness of their religion, due to failure to compare it with others and a natural estimate of their actual knowledge of the higher life as ultimate and unique. Christianity's claim to absoluteness is, no doubt, the most

while—who can tell?—as we advance beyond our present stage of culture, we may advance also beyond Christianity as a possible religion, and beyond the need of Jesus as the religious rallying-point of men.

The question of course springs at once into the mind whether, in thus representing Christianity as merely the natural and therefore necessary religion for the civilization of the Mediterranean basin, and Jesus as indispensable only for the religion belonging to that civilization,—which is not final but may pass away,—Troeltsch has not rendered this Christianity impossible as a religion for himself at least—if not for the Mediterranean basin—and thus emancipated himself from Jesus as the indispensable rallying-point of his religion. He himself certainly thus assumes a standpoint above the Christianity which he conceives as—at least possibly—only a stage in the journey of man towards the absolute religion, and he cannot possibly belong inwardly to its life-world. Can he, then, look to Jesus, the inspiring centre of this life-world, as really indispensable to his own faith? Must he not stand as much above the need of the inspiration of Jesus as he stands above the religious life which Jesus inspires, and so by his own definition exclude himself from the Christian name?⁶⁴ In any event, by his refusal to recognize the Christianity to which, he argues, Jesus is indispensable, as “the eter-

inwardly free and universal of all; and when Christianity has attained its new form, in which alone it appeals to modern man, it comes near to justification. Troeltsch can even say: “The claim itself”—i.e. to absoluteness—“has nowhere as yet been refuted or surmounted, and no imagination is capable of excogitating such a surmounting; and so it remains that no other foundation is laid for the soul’s health of mankind except Jesus Christ” (p. 126). After a while, however, we here learn, it is possible that a new and better foundation may be laid. On the whole matter cf. C. W. Hodge, “The Finality of the Christian Religion,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies* by the Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary, 1912, especially pp. 477 f.; also F. X. Kiefl, *Der geschichtliche Christus und die moderne Philosophie*, pp. 61–74.

⁶⁴ Otto Kirn, *Glaube und Geschichte*, 1900, pp. 31–32, speaking of the demand of faith for absoluteness, remarks: “A simply provisional revelation, a merely relative religious truth, an only probable reconciliation with God, and a purely conjectural assurance of salvation,—these are, not merely for a church, but for the religious nature, intolerable ideas. A religion which would see in Christ only a transition point of the religious development of mankind would have, even in an historical judgment, no right whatever to call itself Christian.”

nal religion," Troeltsch certainly takes his place among those who deny that Jesus is indispensable to the religion, if not of today, yet of tomorrow.

Meanwhile why should the definition of the essence of Christianity be so vexed? Why should there be so much controversy over the application of the name? There surely ought to be little difficulty in determining what Christianity is. We need not disturb ourselves greatly about the debate which has been somewhat vigorously prosecuted as to whether its definition should be derived from its New Testament presentation or from its whole historical manifestation.⁶⁵ Impure as the development of Christianity has been, imperfect as has always been its manifestation, corrupt as has often been its expression, it has always presented itself to the world, as a whole, substantially under one unvarying form. Unquestionably, Christianity is a redemptive religion, having as its fundamental presupposition the fact of sin, felt both as guilt and as pollution, and offering as its central good, from which all other goods proceed, salvation from sin through an historical expiation wrought by the God-man Jesus Christ. The essence of Christianity has always been to its adherents the sinner's experience of reconciliation with God through the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ. According to the Synoptic tradition Jesus himself represented himself as having come to seek and to save that which is lost, and described his salvation as a ransoming of many by the gift of his life, embodying this conception, moreover, in the ritual act which he commanded his disciples to perform in remembrance of him. Certainly his first followers with single-hearted unanimity proclaimed the great fact of redemption in the blood of Christ as the heart of their gospel: to them Jesus is the propitiation for sin, a sacrificial lamb without blemish, and all their message is summed up in the simple formula of "Jesus Christ and him as crucified." Nor has the church he founded ever drifted away from this fundamental point of view, as witness the central place of the mass in

⁶⁵ J. Weiss, *Jesus von Nazareth*, 1910, p. 7: "That the 'essence of Christianity' is to be found not merely in the New Testament, but in the entire fulness of its historical phenomena, there should today be no longer doubt." Cf. E. Vischer, *Ist die Wahrheit des Christentums zu beweisen?* 1902, p. 16.

the worship of its elder branches, and the formative place of justification by faith in Protestant life.⁶⁶ No doubt parties have from time to time arisen who have wished to construe Christianity otherwise. But they have always occupied a place on the periphery of the Christian movement, and have never constituted its main stream.

We can well understand that one swirling aside in an eddy and yet wishing to think of himself as travelling with the current—or even perhaps as breaking for it a new and better channel—should attempt to define Christianity so widely or so vaguely as to make it embrace him also. The attempt has never been and can never be successful. He is a Christian, in the sense of the founders of the Christian religion, and in the sense of its whole historical manifestation as a world-phenomenon, who, conscious of his sin, and smitten by a sense of the wrath of God impending over him, turns in faith to Jesus Christ as the propitiation for his sins, through whose blood and righteousness he may be made acceptable to God and be received into the number of those admitted to communion with him. If we demand the right to call ourselves Christians because it is by the teaching of Jesus that we have learned to know God as he really is, or because it is by his example that we have been led into a

⁶⁶ Emil Sulze may be adduced in passing as a witness to this fact. Writing on "Die notwendige Umgestaltung der evangelischen Glaubenslehre" (Protestantische Monatshefte, vol. xi, 1907, p. 250), he declares that "the greatest danger has been brought, as to the moral life so also to faith in God, by the circumstance that the old Protestantism held fast to the foundation-stone of Catholicism, to the doctrine of the substitutive satisfaction of Christ." He is deeply grieved, therefore, that the Protestant churches of Germany still sing:

Mein Gewissen beisst mich nicht,
Moses kann mich nicht verklagen.
Der mich frei und ledig spricht,
hat die Schulden abgetragen.

To make it truly "Christian," this verse, he declares, must be transformed into this:

Klagt mich mein Gewissen an,
lässt doch Gott mich nicht verzagen,
stärkt mich auf der Leidensbahn,
hilft mir Schuld und Strafe tragen.

The antipodal attitudes to redemption of the Old Protestantism and the "transformation" which would fain present itself as a New Protestantism could not be more vividly expressed.

life of faithful trust in God, or because it is by the inspiration of his "inner life," dimly discerned through the obscuring legends which have grown up about him, that we are quickened to a like religious hope and aspiration,—we are entering claims that have never been recognized and can never be recognized as valid by the main current of Christianity. Christianity as a world-movement is the body of those who have been redeemed from their sins by the blood of Jesus Christ, dying for them on the cross. The cross is its symbol; and in its heart sounds the great jubilation of the Apocalypse: "Unto Him that loveth us and loosed us from our sins by his blood; and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

A Christianity without redemption—redemption in the blood of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for sin—is nothing less than a contradiction in terms.⁵⁷ Precisely what Christianity means is redemption in the blood of Jesus. No one need wonder therefore that, when redemption is no longer sought and found in Jesus, men should begin to ask whether there remains any real necessity for Jesus. We may fairly contend that the germ of christless Christianity is present wherever a proper doctrine of redemption has fallen away or even has only been permitted to pass out of sight. Of course in the meantime some other function than

⁵⁷It is of course generally recognized that Christianity is in its essence a religion of redemption. See for example its exposition as such by Eucken, *The Truth of Religion*, Eng. trans., 1911, pp. 10 f., where Christianity is described as specifically the religion of redemption from sin. But, as Troeltsch expresses it, the idea of redemption has been "transformed" to suit modern notions. It often happens, therefore, that definitions of Christianity recognize the specific peculiarity of Christianity in words while evaporating it in meaning. Thus Schleiermacher (*Glaubenslehre*, § 11), describes Christianity as "a monotheistic form of faith belonging to the teleological tendency of piety, distinguished from other similar forms of faith essentially by this—that in it everything is referred to redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth." Here the wide genus to which Christianity is assigned is monotheistic religion, and the proximate genus, teleological (that is, ethical monotheistic) religion, while its differentia within this proximate genus is found in the fact that "in it everything is referred to redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth." If they could be read without reference to the special use of terms by their framers, definitions such as this might be taken as loose descriptions of what Christianity really is. They bear witness to the difficulty experienced by writers of a different point of view in escaping from accustomed terminology.

proper redemption may be found for Jesus. We are not insensible, for example, of the importance of the function assigned to him in, say, the Ritschlian theology; and we quite agree when Troeltsch urges that to the proper Ritschlians, therefore, Jesus is indispensable. But we cannot close our eyes to the artificiality of the Ritschlian construction, and we cannot put away the impression that the indispensable rôle assigned to Jesus, as it rests rather on inherited reverence for his person than on the logic of the system, is, in a word, only an interim-measure. Why should an influence from Jesus be needed to awake man to faith-knowledge? And how could such a creative influence be exerted by a personality so slightly known, or an "inner life" so vaguely discerned through the mists of time? Herrmann, for example, expressly denies that there is any direct communion of the believer with the exalted Christ; everything is mediated through the "community." All this, therefore, will easily fall away and the actual influence which begets faith be assigned, as Otto Ritschl, for instance, does assign it, to the "community,"⁵⁸ while to Jesus there is left little more than the rôle of first Christian. And so soon as Jesus becomes merely the first Christian, he at once, as Macintosh justly urges,⁵⁹ ceases to be indispensable

⁵⁸ *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. iii, 1893, p. 388. In the number of the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* for July, 1912 (pp. 244-268), which has come to hand since this article was sent to the printer, Wilhelm Fresenius subjects Troeltsch's Lecture to a detailed criticism from the Ritschlian standpoint and in the name of the Ritschlians repudiates the representation that the historicity of Jesus is indispensable to faith. Ritschlians mean only, it seems, that they themselves find in Jesus what they need for faith: they do not mean that others may not attain faith by some other way (p. 250). With them "faith rests not on 'historischen' but on 'geschichtlichen' facts," that is to say, on genuine "life-experiences"; and (p. 262) "accordingly faith can look quietly on while criticism does its work, and openly accept its results: it could even endure that the unhistoricity of Jesus should be proved—a thing which, to be sure, has not been done and which sober historical criticism, moreover, will scarcely maintain is likely to be done in the future,—but in principle this case would not turn the scale for faith, that is, so long as faith remains conscious that it is of historical (geschichtlichen) nature and the historical (geschichtliche) fact on which it bases itself ultimately, can be neither established nor refuted by historical (historischen) science. According to Fresenius, therefore, it is a matter of indifference to Ritschlians whether there ever was any "historical Jesus" or not: it is only necessary that they should have had a genuine "experience." This is a full-fledged "christless Christianity."

⁵⁹ *American Journal of Theology*, vol. xvi, January, 1912, p. 110.

for subsequent Christians. Why should not they, as well as he, rise out of the void? He may be the first of the series: that is an accident. Being the first of the series he may have set an example which works powerfully through all subsequent time; he may even have left precepts and directions which smooth the path of all who would adventure the Christian walk with him; above all he may have by his "inner life" of perfect trust in his Father become an inspiration which throbs down all the years. He may, in other words, be exceedingly useful. But indispensable? To be indispensable he must be something more than a teacher, an example, an inspiration. He must be a creator. And to be a creator, he must be and do something far more than the first Christian, living in realization of the fatherhood of God. Whenever Jesus is reduced in his person or work to the level of his "followers," his indispensableness is already in principle subverted and the seeds of a christless Christianity are planted.

The application of this principle will, no doubt, carry us far. When Auguste Sabatier, for example, tells us⁶⁰ that the whole of Christianity is summed up in the parables of the prodigal son and of the publican, he is intent only on abolishing from Christianity the idea of satisfaction. But does he not by necessary consequence with it abolish also Jesus himself, so far as his indispensableness to the Christian religion is concerned? In point of fact, these parables have a Jesus in them as little as a satisfaction. Sabatier very naturally teaches us, therefore, that there is no uniqueness in Christ's work, nothing in it "isolated and incomprehensible." "The sufferings and death of the righteous and the good operate in the same way as the passion of Christ upon the conscience of the wicked"; "all God's servants" have stood by the side of Jesus as, along with him and in the same sense (though not in the same degree), our saviours. We need not, however, journey so far from home for an example. When Horace Bushnell expends the first Part of his *Vicarious Sacrifice* in proving that there is "nothing superlative in vicarious sacrifice, or above the universal principles of right and duty,"

⁶⁰ The Doctrine of the Atonement, and its Historical Evolution, Eng. trans., 1904, pp. 123, 133. Cf. also the review of the book in the Princeton Theological Review, vol. iii, 1905, pp. 508-509.

that in what Christ did, he did "neither more nor less than what the common standard of holiness and right requires," and what was "no way peculiar to him, save in degree," he has already thrown the door wide open for a christless Christianity.⁶¹ He may himself be preoccupied in vindicating to Jesus some kind of uniqueness, if not in the nature, yet in the effect of his work. But this is not intrinsic to the system, and easily falls away. The assimilation of Christ to his followers in the nature of his work and the kind of effect wrought by it is logically fatal to his indispensableness to the religion of which he is still thought of as the founder.

There are other forms of teaching, also, that have enjoyed great vogue, in which the indispensableness of Jesus is, to say the least, not explicit. One such, oddly enough, finds incidental expression in a criticism by Shailer Mathews of Macintosh's separation of Christianity from Christ.⁶² Mathews very properly questions whether the issue raised by Macintosh's reasoning "does not really involve the momentous question as to whether we are not in the process of evolving a new phase of religion from historic Christianity"; and as properly remarks that the retention of the name Christianity for "what we regard as ideal," even though it is not historically traceable to Jesus or to Paul, "would not be the first time that the effort has been made to submerge New Testament teaching in general culture, and in much the same fashion of substituting dehistoricized, speculative systems for a Christianity with historical content." He expresses hearty agreement with Macintosh, however, in one thing. It is this: that "saving faith, in the personal religious sense, does not wait upon the verdict of the higher criticism as to the historicity of Jesus." Why? Because, apart from the higher criticism, that is, apart from all scientific scrutiny of the

⁶¹ Cf. especially *Vicarious Sacrifice*, New York, 1866, p. 107, and 2d ed., vol. i, New York, 1877, p. 107.

⁶² *American Journal of Theology*, vol. xv, October, 1911, pp. 614-617. For an uncompromising assertion of the point of view here intimated by Mathews see J. Warschauer, *Jesus: Seven Questions*, 1908, pp. 206-233; "Is Belief in Him Necessary?" Warschauer has no hesitation in declaring that "there is no room in a civilized theology for a doctrine which would limit salvation to those professing any one form of religious belief" (p. 230).

gospel records, there is reason enough for trusting our all to Jesus? No. Because Jesus is not necessary to "saving faith, in the personal religious sense"! "Men are not saved by mere orthodoxy or heterodoxy," Mathews remarks,—inconsequently, since nobody ever supposed they were. But then he adds positively: "In the sense that their wills are one with God's, men who have never heard of Jesus have been and are to be saved."

The doctrine here enunciated is practically the doctrine which has played a large part in theological controversy—witness the "Andover debate" of a quarter of a century ago—under the name of the "essential Christ." According to it, men can exercise "saving faith" without any knowledge of Christ; that is to say, as Mathews suggests, their "religious faith, however imperfect," may "possess a quality" that makes them "one with those who through the clearer revelation and deeper certainty given by Jesus also trust God as fatherly and so partake of the divine spirit." In this very prevalent doctrine, there is obviously a very express preparation for a christless Christianity. In the form given it by Mathews it has indeed already fairly passed over into christless Christianity. He conceives the function of Jesus to be to induce trust in God as fatherly; and he conceives that men can exercise and do exercise a faith which has this "quality," apart from any action upon them by Jesus. This is already the announcement that Jesus may be dispensed with—all that he is and all that he does—for some. Some attain saving faith without Jesus; some—no doubt, more easily—with him.⁶³ More

⁶³ This is not nowadays a rare point of view. Emil Sulze, for example, who is very much afraid the honor due to God shall be accorded to Jesus, gives repeated expression to it. Paul Mehlhorn (*Protestantische Monatshefte*, vol. v, 1901, p. 190) describes Sulze's view, with references to his *Wie ist der Kampf um die Bedeutung der Person und des Wirkens Jesu zu beendigen?* 1901, as follows: "Although now Sulze emphasizes that faith is an immediate work of God in us, so that there are circumstances in which it can arise without the mediation of acquaintance with Christ and the church, yet it would be in his view a terrible loss for the individual if he did not permit himself to be helped forward and given assurance in this matter by history and its pioneering personalities. Just as a German statesman 'who had not formed himself on Stein and Bismarck must remain a pitiable beginner' (p. 34), so for the clarifying and establishment of our faith, 'the person of every child of God' is 'for us a means of grace in God's

commonly a higher function is attributed to Jesus. He has, it is said, made atonement for sin; on the basis of this atonement men may be saved. He has shed down his Spirit, quickening faith in men; their faith, therefore, though exercised in ignorance of him, has its warrant, and its source, and its effect from him. Their salvation is accordingly from Christ, and by Christ, and in Christ, though they are ignorant of all this. In proportion as this higher doctrine is approached, in that proportion is the preparation made for a christless Christianity less explicit. But even in it, there is an implicit preparation for it. A Christ of whom you are unconscious is at best in some sense a Christ who does not exist for you: and if everything he may be for you depends upon your consciousness of him, a Christ of whom you are unconscious does not exist at all for you. A salvation apart from knowledge of Christ is always liable to be conceived as a salvation apart from Christ. In Mathews's construction, though he is in the act of repelling a christless Christianity, it actually becomes salvation without Christ. He speaks of it only with reference to some. But if some may thus be saved without Christ, why not all? There seems no compelling reason, on Mathews's ground, why Jesus should be proclaimed, or why he should exist, at all.

We may learn from Otto Ritschl⁶⁴ that a very similar line of thought may be developed on Ritschlian premises. Ritschl is examining W. Herrmann's doctrine of faith. According to Herrmann, man finds the living God not within himself, where mysticism bids him seek him, but solely in the personal life of Jesus.

hand,' while Christ is and abides 'by his unique vocation . . . the perfectly unique means of grace for us' (p. 35)."

Sulze, however, is more hospitable to the idea of the independence of "Christian" faith of Christ than Mathews. Neither complete peace nor complete assurance can be had, he urges, without a free attitude towards Jesus himself. And quite after the manner of Macintosh, he argues: "And is the attitude to God which is here described not the same as that which, according to all that we know of him, was occupied by Christ himself? He did not win love to his Father in Heaven in dependence on an historical person. God himself gave him what he revealed by him" (*Protestantische Monatshefte*, vol. xi, 1907, p. 247). His views as to the dispensability of Jesus are more or less clearly expressed in a number of articles in the *Protestantische Monatshefte*.

⁶⁴ *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. iii, 1893, pp. 380-388.

Christian faith is thus made to carry with it "a clear consciousness of its conditioning through the personal life of Jesus." This, Ritschl thinks, is too narrow a view.

What [he asks] are we to hold respecting such Christians as lack a clear consciousness of the inner possessions for which they are indebted to Christ? Or is it also deficiency in complete faith when a Christian in prayer to his God and Father seeks and finds firm support in the cares and tasks and strifes of life, without at the same time recalling Christ as the sole revelation of this God; although he has failed in this perhaps only because he lacked the spiritual energy to grasp the religious conception of God and that of Christ in one and the same prayer-idea? Can we doubt that such Christians have faith in the full sense, because the theoretical consideration leads to conceiving Christian faith in general not apart from a clear consciousness of its conditioning through Christ's personal life?

It is plain fact, he urges, that the fruits of faith are reaped where this clear consciousness is not present; and it is equally plain fact that this clear consciousness can be present and no fruits of faith show themselves: the question obtrudes itself "whether the conscious but unfruitful or the fruitful but unconscious faith is the more valuable." Clear consciousness must obviously be looked upon as only occasional, as "a special charism"; some have it, in others it is "latent or undeveloped."

Wherever world-overcoming faith, recognizable in its fruits, is found, it must be referred back to the influence of Christ, whether the believing subject is conscious of this connection or not. On the other hand, it should be recognized, in opposition to Herrmann, that the faith which does not bring with it a clear consciousness of its conditioning through Christ, but which nevertheless is actually conditioned through Christ's operations, is only mediately grounded on the personal life of Jesus. Immediately, however, the ground of such faith is the Christian life practised in the sense of Christ in the community. And only in this also do the vital activities of Christ propagate themselves from generation to generation.

Jesus may have been needed, then, to set the course of Christian life going in the world. After that he may safely be forgotten. There is no obvious reason why he may not be forgotten by the whole Christian community,—why the memory of him may

not fade entirely out of the world,—and still faith be continued through the influence of the faith-exercising community; just as motion once induced in the first of a series of balls in contact with one another may be transmitted to the last ball, though it is touched actually only by the penultimate one. A fully developed christless Christianity may thus grow out of Christ himself; if you will only permit us to think of Christ as providing merely the initial impulse and then withdrawing out of sight.

It has been thought worth while to bring into view these remoter tendencies of thought making towards christless Christianity, that the numerous pathways may be kept in mind along which men may travel, from depreciation of the function of Christ in “redemption,” through neglect or forgetfulness of him, to actual denial of his indispensable place in the religious life of Christians. These pathways, while very direct, are also no doubt often somewhat long. That is to say, the passage from unconscious to conscious disregard of Christ is made logically much more quickly than it is practically. From the practical point of view the distance that separates the conscious from the merely virtual denial of the indispensableness of Jesus to faith is beyond doubt immense. The phenomenon which now faces us is that this immense space has been actually overstepped by many about us. There are many still calling themselves Christians who have come to the pass that, not inadvertently or by way of logical implication merely, but in the most heedful manner in the world, and by express declaration, they turn away from Jesus as no longer possessing supreme significance for their religious life. They deliberately pronounce him unnecessary for their faith, and seek its source and ground and content elsewhere. No doubt, they exhibit differences among themselves. George B. Foster, who surely ought to know, distinguishes two varieties.

To-day [he says]⁶⁵ there are two kinds of spirits which dream of a Christianity without Christ: the weak and the strong. The weak are those who have received all the priceless blessings which we possess in Christianity, only at third or fourth hand. They have been refreshed, nourished, led by these blessings—whence they came is of little concern to them. . . . The others are the strong.

⁶⁵ *The Finality of the Christian Religion*, 2d ed., 1909, p. 331.

They know very well that Christianity sprang from Christ. But one does not now need him longer. Were they to be quite frank, they would say that he, not entirely unlike miracles, had come to be something of a hindrance. But would it not poorly serve the advancement of Christianity [he adds], the pervasion of the world with Christianity, and one's own peace and joy in Christianity, to drain off the fountain? Is not their view much the same as if we were to sever the connection of our arteries with the heart whence the blood comes?

The criticism is apt, from the Christian point of view: apt, though not quite adequate. From the Christian point of view it may very properly be said (though this is far from all that needs to be said) that those who are advising us that Christianity can get along very well without Christ are very much like men sitting by a brookside and reasoning that since we have the brook we do not need the spring from which it flows, and may readily admit the doubt whether there is a spring. If even this criticism does not seem valid to our christless Christians, that can only be because they no longer occupy the Christian point of view.

The point which needs particular pressing lies, indeed, just here,—that in thus separating themselves from Jesus as the source and ground and content of their faith, they sever themselves from Christianity and proclaim themselves of another religion. By some odd tangle of thought they may still declare themselves Christians, though they no longer hold to Christ or look to him for redemption from their sins. They have learned, we are told, from David Friedrich Strauss (in his Christian period) to distinguish between the principle of Christianity and the person of Christ. The discovery of this distinction was, we know, with Strauss “the first step which counts” towards we know what end. May we not commend to those who follow him in this first step the example which he set them when he opened his eyes at last and saw whither it really had conducted him?

Therefore, my conviction is [he writes] that, if we are not dealing in evasion, if we do not wish to tack and trim, if we do not desire to say Yea, yea, and Nay, nay,—in short, if we speak like honest and candid men, we must confess that we are no longer Christians.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ *Der alte und der neue Glaube*, 1872, p. 90; cf. p. 143.

Why should there be any hesitation in the matter? A Christianity to which Christ is indifferent is, as a mere matter of fact, no Christianity at all. For Christianity, in the core of the matter, consists in just, "Jesus Christ and Him as crucified." Can he be of the body who no longer holds to the Head?

What is, after all, the fundamental difference between Christianity and other "positive" religions? Does it not turn just on this—that the founders of the other religions point out the way to God while Christ presents Himself as that Way? It is primary teaching that we receive, when we are told:

Buddha and Confucius, Zarathustra and Mohammed are no doubt the first confessors of the religions which have been founded by them, but they are not the content of these religions, and they stand in an external and to a certain extent accidental relation to them. Their religions could remain the same even though their names were forgotten, or their persons replaced by others. In Christianity, however, it is altogether different. To be sure the notion is occasionally given expression that Christ too does not desire to be the only mediator and He would be quite content that His name should be forgotten, if only His principles and spirit lived on in the community. But others who for themselves have wholly broken with Christianity have in an unpartisan fashion denied and refuted these notions. Christianity stands to the person of Christ in a wholly different relation from that of the religions of the peoples to the persons by whom they have been founded. Jesus is not the first confessor of the religion which bears His name. He was not the first and most eminent Christian, but He holds in Christianity a wholly different place. . . . Christ is Christianity itself; He stands not outside of it but in its centre; without His name, person and work, there is no Christianity left. In a word, Christ does not point out the way to salvation; He is the Way itself.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Herman Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei*, 1909, p. 312.