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THE CREEDS AND  
MODERN THOUGHT

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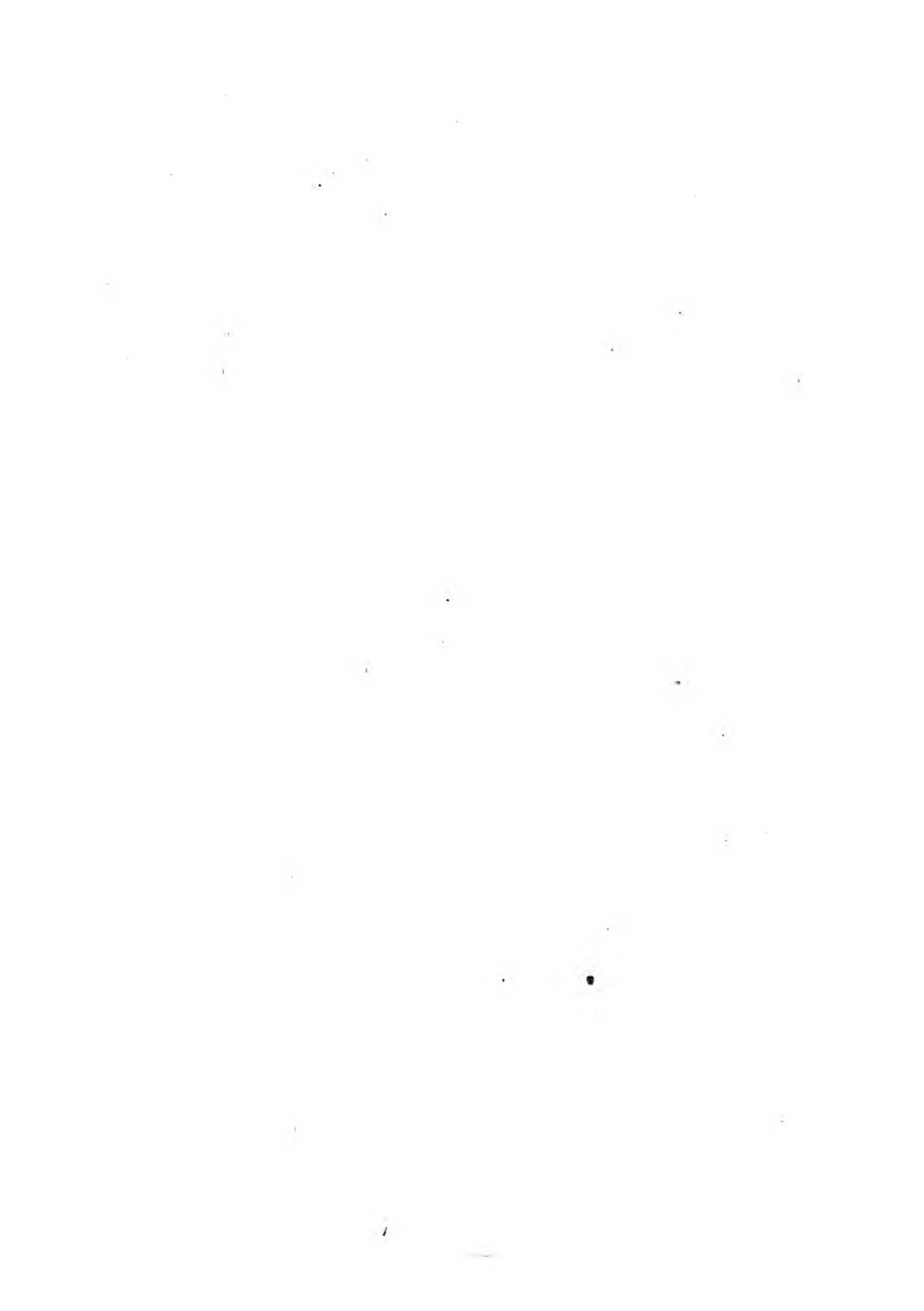
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**THE CREEDS AND MODERN THOUGHT**



**TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT  
THE NEW KNOWLEDGE AND THE ANCIENT FAITH  
CAN BE RECONCILED**

# THE CREEDS AND MODERN THOUGHT

CAN THEOLOGY BE PROGRESSIVE  
WHILE THE FAITH REMAINS UNCHANGED?

A PAPER READ AT CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD  
BEFORE THE NICENE AND ORIGEN SOCIETIES  
ON DECEMBER 5<sup>TH</sup>, 1918, TO WHICH ARE  
ADDED BRIEF NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION

BY

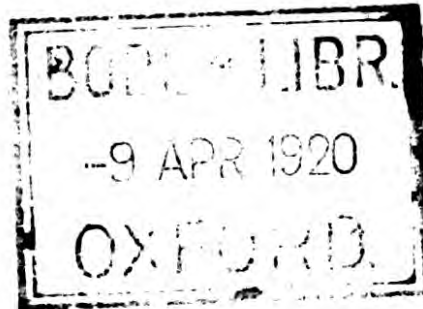
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LONDON:  
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING  
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE  
NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1919





**BY THE SAME AUTHOR**

**"PRO FIDE : A TEXT-BOOK OF MODERN  
APOLOGETICS"**

**"PRAYER-MEETINGS FOR CHURCHMEN"**

**"REUNION FROM THE NONCONFORMIST  
AND THE CHURCH POINT OF VIEW"**

**"THE POSITION OF THE LAITY IN THE  
PRIMITIVE CHURCH," ETC.**



# THE CREEDS AND MODERN THOUGHT

**MODERN THOUGHT DEFINED.** What *is* modern thought? There is such a thing, because we are all conscious, when we have read even a few pages of a book on almost any subject, whether it is written from the modern standpoint or not.

What *is* this modern standpoint? It is not, as we should at first be inclined to imagine, a body of new fundamental doctrine, philosophic, scientific, moral, and perhaps religious, upon which modern thinkers as a whole are agreed, and which therefore may be taken to distinguish modern from medieval or ancient thought. There is in fact no such agreement among modern thinkers upon any subject whatever, not even upon physics, where modern methods of experiment and observation have full scope, and where there



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seems hardly any opportunity for subjective theorizing. Over the whole field of physics a battle royal is at present raging. The very foundations of the orthodox physics, which men of the nineteenth century accepted as almost axiomatic, are now rudely questioned by the ultra-modern "School of Relativity," of which the leading representatives, such as Einstein and Planck, regard the physical universe as fundamentally discontinuous, represent energy as consisting of discrete corpuscles or "quanta," and in consequence substitute corpuscular and emissive theories of heat and light for the usual undulatory explanations. It is amusing to notice, creeping back into fashion under new names but with only very thin disguises, our old friends "caloric," the "electric fluid," and the material "corpuscles" of light and heat.\*

Even among mathematicians there are divergent schools of thought. Modern mathematicians are, it is true, fairly agreed as to

\* See Sir Oliver Lodge's Presidential Address to the British Association in 1913. My brief and necessarily bald account possibly overstates the antithesis.

practical methods. To the same problem they will, for the most part, find the same solution. But upon the whole theory of mathematics there are wide diversities of opinion. Traditional views are vigorously assaulted by the revolutionary school of Dedekind, Cantor, and Peano (represented in England by the brilliant but paradoxical writer, Bertrand Russell), who question some of the principal axioms upon which, until recently, all mathematics was supposed to be based. Not to dwell upon their astonishing views about the Infinite, and about the nature of Space (the strictly Euclidean character of which is questioned, and which is supposed by some of them to possess six dimensions), I may mention that in the sphere of geometry they abolish the figure altogether, deny several of the Euclidean axioms and postulates, and propose to treat geometry as a mere branch of formal logic.

If we were to ask a representative body of present-day mathematicians for their candid views upon such questions as these :  
 " What are the fundamental axioms of

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geometry? ” “ What is the true nature of the Mathematical Infinite? ” “ What is the nature and value of non-Euclidean geometry? ” or even “ What is the correct way of proving that two and one make three? ” we should probably receive about as many answers as there were mathematicians.\*

There are fundamental divisions of opinion among biologists. Upon the subject of heredity, for example, Mendelians and Biometricians, Weismannists and Neo-Lamarckians wage a keen and sometimes acrimonious warfare. Upon the nature of life, again, there is little agreement. There is a strong (but probably declining) materialistic school, led by Weismann, Verworn, Loeb, and Schäfer, who regard life as a purely mechanical and chemical process ; there is also an influential school of non-mechanists (of whom some are vitalists), including such well-known names as

\* A good non-technical account of the new mathematics, with a violent onslaught upon Euclid and his modern followers, will be found in B. Russell's *Mysticism and Logic*, 1918.

H. Driesch, E. B. Wilson, and J. S. Haldane, who regard life as something entirely distinct from matter and energy, recognize purpose or teleology in the organism, and whose rallying-cry is, "Back to the entelechism of Aristotle."\*

Psychologists, again, are divided not merely upon recondite matters of speculation, but also upon questions which are largely practical, as, for instance, whether there is any kind of causal interaction between soul (i.e. mind) and body. The interactionists, of whom the best known in England is William James, agree with common sense, that the body really acts upon the mind, and the mind upon the body. On the other hand, the large and influential school of non-interactionists holds, what to common sense seems the absurd view, that neither the mind acts upon the body nor the body upon the mind, but that the two chains of causation, the physical

\* A thorough treatment of the subject from the standpoint of moderate vitalism will be found in H. Driesch's important work, *The Science and Philosophy of the Organism*, 1908; a short and popular one in J. S. Haldane's *Mechanism, Life, and Personality*, 1914.

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and the psychical, are entirely separate, and run parallel to one another continuously without ever interacting.

Philosophers are as little in agreement upon first principles as scientists and mathematicians.

The wave of Hegelian orthodoxy which swept through Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century, and of which in Oxford T. H. Green was the apostle and prophet, has long spent itself. In its place we now have a profusion of discordant, and (for the most part) exceedingly one-sided systems—Pluralism ; Pragmatism and Humanism ; the Personalism of Renouvier ; the New Realism of such writers as B. Russell, G. E. Moore, and S. Alexander ; the brilliant and suggestive (but to my mind provokingly unbalanced) anti-intellectualism of Bergson ; the theistic philosophy of Varisco ; the religious idealism of Eucken ; the agnostic idealism of Croce ; the revived Aristotelianism of Cardinal Mercier ; besides the eccentric morbid and immoral philosophy of Nietzsche, which, let us hope, has received its quietus with the down-



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fall of Prussianism, of which it is the ugly offspring.

It is obvious even from this brief survey, that modern thought cannot be defined as an agreement upon fundamental doctrine in any of the chief sciences.\* We may best define it as *a new method of approaching and working out the problems of science, philosophy, and religion. It is a new spirit, rather than a new dogmatic.*

THE MAIN TENDENCIES OF MODERN THOUGHT. There seem to me to be four main tendencies in modern thought, which distinguish it from ancient, and still more from medieval thought.†

\* One speaker at the meeting disputed this estimate, and regarded modern thought as a fairly coherent body of doctrine. I myself, however, can think of no important doctrine upon which the modern world is agreed against the ancient, except perhaps disbelief in astrology, magic, and witchcraft. Some even of the rejected phenomena of magic and witchcraft are returning to favour as subjects of psychical research. Even spiritualism and necromancy have been seriously revived in some quarters, especially since the war, witness Lodge's *Raymond*.

† I fully accept Canon Streeter's statement in the discussion that followed, that modern thought is much more

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1. A tendency to reject, or at least to question authority, especially ancient authority.

2. A full and systematic use of observation and experiment as instruments of research.

3. A tendency to interpret the universe and everything it contains in terms of evolution or development.

4. A tendency to reject the supernatural, or at least to substitute natural for supernatural causation, wherever this seems to be possible.

The first of these, the tendency to reject authority, descends historically from the Renaissance and the Reformation.

The second, the habitual use of, and reliance upon, observation and experiment, owes its chief impulse to Bacon's *Novum Organum*,\* and to the natural philosophers of the seven-

sharply distinguished from medieval than from ancient thought, if by ancient thought is meant mainly its early creative period. I also agree that the later adherents of the chief ancient philosophies adopted a point of view akin to that of the medieval scholastics.

\* Published in 1620.

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teenth and eighteenth centuries who were animated by Bacon's spirit.

The dominance of the theory of evolution dates from the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859.

The tendency to reject or minimize the supernatural is inspired principally by Hume, whose argument against miracles, though vulnerable at many points, is still plausible, and will probably never be without adherents.

MODERN AND MEDIEVAL THOUGHT COMPARED. The contrast between modern and ancient, and still more between modern and medieval ways of thought, is profound. The typical medieval writer took it for granted that everything, or almost everything, worth saying upon any subject, had already been said by writers of approved authority, and that all that remained for him to do, in order to produce the best possible book, was to collect, arrange, and lucidly reproduce the wisdom of his predecessors. If he was writing upon zoology, he would copy, with little or no independent verification, the

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undigested mass of fact and fiction to be found in the works on natural history of Aristotle and Pliny the Elder ; if on medicine, he would condense Hippocrates, Galen, and Caelius Aurelianus. If his authorities differed, he would usually follow the most ancient, for how (he would argue) could a mere modern be so wise as the venerable sages of antiquity, who laid the foundations of our civilization ?

The greatest thinkers of antiquity anticipated (as I have already stated) to some extent the modern spirit. But how little even Aristotle thought it necessary to verify the statements of his predecessors, may be illustrated by his amazing assertion that bodies fall to the earth with a speed proportionate to their weights. Aristotle did not think it necessary to try the experiment, and his successors, relying upon his authority, did not think it necessary either. At last, after two thousand years, Galileo threw two weights of one pound and ten pounds respectively from the top of the leaning tower of Pisa in the presence of many learned witnesses who had pinned their faith to Aristotle. The two weights reached the

ground together, but even then some remained unconvinced, preferring the authority of Aristotle to the evidence of their own senses.

The typical modern writer has learnt from Galileo to take as little as possible of ancient wisdom for granted. He carefully tests and verifies, wherever possible, the statements of earlier writers, and, since he regards knowledge as progressive, he usually prefers modern authorities to ancient. In his eyes the latest thorough monograph is probably of greater weight than all the wisdom of the ancients.

In modern theology the same spirit prevails. The modern theologian, whether orthodox or unorthodox, applies the most rigorous and searching methods of criticism even to the sacred writings. His aim is to get at the truth, regardless of tradition and of consequences. In our day the need of independent research and unbiassed judgment is universally recognized, at least in theory; and the methods of modern theology aim at being, and in fact generally are, as free and independent as those of modern philosophy and



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science. All modern theologians regard theology as a progressive science, and are by no means satisfied with merely reproducing the opinions and learning of their predecessors. The days of obscurantism and blind traditionalism are over.

THE SUPPOSED CONTRADICTION BETWEEN A PROGRESSIVE THEOLOGY AND AN UNCHANGING FAITH. The question accordingly arises at once, Can we reconcile the modern idea of theology as a progressive science, with the old idea of the Christian Faith as a body of doctrine given *once for all*? Can we be progressive in our theology, without continually changing our faith? Are we obliged, in order to be modern, to cut ourselves loose from our ancient moorings, and to allow ourselves to drift, the sport of every wind of doctrine, over an uncharted ocean of speculation?

The question is a very serious one—perhaps the most serious question of the day, both for Oxford, and for the religious world at large. Certainly every one who intends to take Holy Orders is bound to face it. Many will declare

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off-hand that the new and the old ideas about theology are incompatible, and that any attempt to put new wine into old bottles will burst the bottles. Everything, it is said, in the whole universe, including human opinion, is in a state of continual flux. If even the everlasting hills are slowly disintegrating, so (and much more rapidly) is human belief. If historical theology, if comparative religion prove anything, they prove that the principle of evolution or development is valid universally, and that it applies quite as much to men's religious, as to their secular opinions. It is true that we repeat the same words in the Creeds as our forefathers, but we mean something quite different by them. Identity of language in this case only conceals fundamental differences of thought and belief. And even if it were possible to preserve unchanged the actual faith of the apostles, such unintelligent conservatism would not be desirable. The Holy Spirit not only guided the apostles, but also guides the Church of all ages into all truth. A faith unable to grow, and incapable of change, would be a *dead* faith

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—the mere fossil remains of a religion which was once alive, but can now never live again.

Such is the kind of language used nowadays, not only by extreme modernists, such as Loisy, but even by certain of those whose aim is to defend something like orthodox Christianity. We find it, for example, in a suggestive little book, *Belief and Practice*, by a Cambridge layman, Mr. Will Spens, whose aim is certainly to be constructive, perhaps even apologetic.

THE PRINCIPLE OF IDENTITY IN CHANGE.  
It seems to me, however, that the supposed contradiction between an unchanging faith and a progressive theology does not in fact arise. I regard it as not only possible, but even natural, for a religion which is true to start with, to grow by developing the logical consequences of its own first principles, and also by appropriating the best thought of all the ages through which it passes. It need not, in order to do this, depart in the slightest degree from the teaching of the founder. Such a development seems to me

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not only possible, but even normal. We may speak of it as *true to type*.

There is also a development which is *false to type*. If any of the original doctrines of a religion are rejected or changed, or if new ideas are freely admitted which are incompatible with the original doctrines, then the religion will gradually become something different from what it was at first, and within a few generations may be altered out of all recognition.

A good example of false development of this kind is Buddhism. It started, apparently, as a kind of philosophic atheism, but every existing form of Buddhism is decidedly polytheistic, and some forms are grossly superstitious. It is hardly possible, except by an abuse of language, to speak of the religion of Gautama and the religion of the Grand Llama of Tibet as being the same religion. In this case the original system of Gautama has been all but obliterated by inconsistent accretions.

Of true development there are many obvious instances both in philosophical and in religious

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systems. Aristotelianism, for example, is one and the same philosophy in all fundamental points, in Aristotle himself, in his successors in the Lyceum, in Thomas Aquinas, and in Cardinal Mercier's up-to-date version of it. The English "Association" School of Psychology also stands for one system, both in its earlier and its later exponents. In such cases the school of thought holds tenaciously to its own first principles. When it adopts new ideas, it takes care that they are strictly in harmony with those which it already possesses. It checks even its own spontaneous developments by continual reference to the standard of its original doctrines. In such cases there is real development, but there is no essential change. No original doctrine is altered, and no new doctrine is added which is not either a logical consequence of the original doctrines, or at least in thorough harmony with them. From first to last, through the whole process of growth, the system of thought remains identical with itself. It is one and the same system, not merely by virtue of its *continuity* (false de-



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velopments also have continuity), nor by virtue of its persistent "tendency" or "direction" (a thing may change utterly without changing its direction), but by virtue of the *absolute identity* of its original doctrines from first to last, and of the *logical coherence* of all the added doctrines with them.

Such, as it seems to me, has been in the main the development of Christian doctrine, at any rate in the principal historic churches. There have, of course, been developments which have been false to type—false because they subverted some of the original ideas of the Founder, for instance, Gnosticism, Ebionism, Arianism. But the leading churches in all ages have guarded, as something sacred and inviolable, the *deposit of faith*, and have admitted no new ideas which were fundamentally inconsistent with it. In the few cases where development started upon wrong lines (we may instance certain tentative theories of the Atonement) the process was soon checked by the obvious incompatibility of the results likely to be obtained with doctrines already accepted. Development of this

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kind is a good thing. It is the glory, not the shame of Christianity, that it assimilated in antiquity so much of the best philosophy and culture of Greece and Rome, and in our day is assimilating so many of the best results of modern thought. To aim at going back to a purely Hebraic Christianity, to attempt to revive the time when (to use the energetic but misleading language of Hatch) the purity of the Gospel had not yet been contaminated by contact with debased Greek metaphysics, would be unwise, even if it were possible. What helped to make Christianity a world-wide religion, was its power of adapting itself to new conditions, and of absorbing into itself new ideas. To take just one illustration, the identification of Jesus of Nazareth with the Divine Logos, in the real existence of which almost every philosopher and educated heathen of the second century believed, was a masterstroke of apologetic ingenuity. The Logos Christology which, originating apparently with St. John,\* reached almost

\* A speaker objected that the Logos Christology is found also in St. Paul, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

its full development as early as Justin Martyr, formed a golden bridge by which a constant stream of cultured heathens passed over into the Catholic Church. In modern times also, what gives Christianity its hold upon the modern mind, is the power which it still retains of absorbing new truth. There is hardly an important modern system of philosophy, hardly a serious movement of thought in the scientific world, which has not left its mark upon current theology. In fact modern theologians are somewhat *too* sensitive to movements of thought among philosophers and scientists, and a little too much inclined to barter away doctrines of real value because of their supposed incompatibility with the latest scientific or philosophical theory. Thus with some unstable people the doctrine of

Yes, the *doctrine*, but not the *word*. It was the use of the *word* Logos, and the appeal to accepted philosophical principles which its use indicated, that made all the difference. St. John revolutionized the prospects of Christianity by finding the right word to express its central dogma. As to Philo, whom the speaker also mentioned, he has the *word* Logos, but not St. John's doctrine. Philo's Logos does not (in fact could not) become incarnate.

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Original Sin seems incredible one year, because Weismannism is in the ascendant, and quite credible the next, because the Neo-Lamarckians seem to have proved that acquired characters can be inherited.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE DEPOSIT OF FAITH IN HOLY SCRIPTURE. Upon the whole, the tendency of theologians at the present day is to think too much of the development of Christian doctrine, and not enough of its substantial identity through all change. The principles of Modernism, carried (as they so often are) to excess, suggest that the whole body of Christian doctrine is in a constant state of flux, and that no elements in it are stable.

I dissent from this view entirely. It seems to me that a very large number of Christian doctrines, and those the most fundamental and important, are permanent. This is certainly the doctrine of the New Testament. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," are words placed in the mouth of Jesus in the oldest extant Gospel (Mark xiii. 31). St. Paul, in what I

regard as his earliest epistle,\* Galatians, says : “ Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed ” (i. 8). And in the Pastoral Epistles, which, even if not Pauline (as they well may be), belong certainly to the first century, we find the doctrine of “ the deposit of faith ” already expressed in almost technical language : “ O Timothy, guard the deposit (*τὴν παραθήκην φύλαξον*), turning away from the profane babblings and oppositions of the knowledge which is falsely so called, which some professing have erred concerning the faith ” (1 Tim. vi. 20). The similar passage in 2 Timothy (i. 12-14) is of more doubtful interpretation, but probably its meaning is substantially the same. We may perhaps translate it : “ I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard the deposit which he has committed to me

\* Galatians seems to have been written in the height of the controversy on Circumcision, which was brought to a head by St. Paul's First Missionary Journey. As it does not mention the decrees of the Council of Jerusalem, it was probably written before the Council.



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(τὴν παραθήκην μου) unto that day [viz. of the Parousia]. Hold fast the pattern of healthful words which thou hast heard from me in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit through the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us" (see also Jude 3).

THE ALEXANDRIAN FATHERS AND THE DEPOSIT OF FAITH. That the doctrine of the deposit of faith was generally held in the second century, and was the Church's main defence against the aberrations of Gnosticism, will not, I suppose, be denied by any one acquainted with the literature. What is probably not so well known is that the same belief was as firmly held by the liberal theologians of Alexandria, Clement and Origen, as by the more conservative Irenaeus and Tertullian. Both Clement of Alexandria and Origen were decided liberals, even according to modern ideas. They aimed at presenting Christianity to the heathen world, not as a mere improved Judaism, but as the perfect Gnosis or Philosophy. The Catechetical School of Alexandria, over which they each

in turn presided, was intended to be a serious rival to the heathen Museum, and a challenge to the supremacy of the School of Aristarchus (which had its headquarters there) in its chosen pursuits of textual criticism, scientific exegesis, and philosophy.

Clement and Origen boldly claimed for Christianity the possession of all truth, and formed the ambitious design of converting the entire Roman Empire by absorbing into the New Faith all that was valuable in the culture of ancient Greece and Rome. When we consider the prestige of the ancient civilization, and the mean origin of Christianity and of most of its professors, the audacity of this programme strikes us as amazing. That it should have succeeded so soon, is one of the miracles of history.

Of all Christians before or since, Clement and Origen were probably the most convinced believers in the progressive character of Christianity, and in its unlimited power of absorbing new ideas.

But with all their progressive and liberal

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tendencies, they were as convinced as Irenaeus and Tertullian, that the Faith itself cannot change. They tell us, not once or twice, but many times, that all new developments must be tested by their agreement or disagreement with the original deposit of faith. I lay particular stress upon this, because certain modern authorities (including, in some degree, even so judicious a writer as Dr. Bigg), in their anxiety to make the great Alexandrians speak the language of modern liberalism, ignore, or relegate to the background, this most important part of their teaching. The Alexandrian Fathers are at once thoroughgoing progressives and thoroughgoing traditionalists; *and they are not conscious of any inconsistency between these two standpoints.* Clement has frequent references to "the ecclesiastical canon," or "canon of the Church," by which he means the Church's authoritative tradition in such matters as the Canon of Scripture, the Creed, and Christian morality and practice. His lost work against the Judaizers was entitled *κανὼν ἐκκλησιαστικὸς ἢ πρὸς τοὺς ἰουδαϊ-*

ζοντας (The Ecclesiastical Canon, or Against the Judaizers). His *Outlines*, of which some fragments remain, was a kind of introduction to the Old and New Testaments, in which he defended the accepted Canon of Scripture on principles of ecclesiastical authority, appealing to "the traditions of the ancient presbyters," quite after the manner of Irenaeus. In the *Miscellanies* he considers the error of the heretics to lie in their violation of the ecclesiastical canon: "We must not," he says, "like those who embrace the heresies, do violence to the truth, or falsify the canon of the Church" (κλέπτειν τὸν κανόνα τῆς ἐκκλησίας) (vii. 16). And again: "They are liars . . . who, by forsaking the fundamental doctrines, reject the Lord, as far as in them lies, and corrupt the true teaching of the Lord, for *the deposit* which we have to render to God, according to the teaching of the Lord by his Apostles, is the understanding and practice of the religious tradition" (vi. 15). Here Clement uses both the technical words παραθήκη and παράδοσις. He is quite convinced that the Scriptures must be interpreted

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according to the ecclesiastical canon :  
“ ‘ Preach on the housetops,’ said the Saviour,  
that is, Explain the Scriptures according to  
the canon of the truth.” Even in matters of  
practice he regards the ecclesiastical canon as  
authoritative. Those heretics are to be  
condemned who “ take for the offering [of  
the Eucharist] bread and water, contrary to  
the canon of the Church.”

Precisely the same position is taken up by  
Origen. Although in his *De Principiis* he  
indulges in some very venturesome specula-  
tions, as even the Bowdlerized Latin version  
of Rufinus sufficiently testifies, he fully recog-  
nizes the need of testing them by their agree-  
ment or disagreement with apostolic tradi-  
tion. His preface to this great work contains  
the following passage, which might have been  
penned by Irenaeus : “ Since many of those  
who profess to believe Christ differ from one  
another, not only in small and trifling matters,  
but also on subjects of the highest moment,  
. . . it seems necessary on this account first  
of all to fix a definite limit, and to lay down  
an unmistakable rule. . . . Seeing, then, that



there are many who think that they hold the doctrines of Christ, and yet some of them think differently from their predecessors, while yet the teaching of the Church, transmitted in orderly succession from the Apostles, and remaining in the churches to the present day, is still preserved, *let that alone be accepted as truth, which differs in no respect from the ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition* (illa sola credenda est veritas, quae in nullo ab ecclesiastica et apostolica discordat traditione)."

Scattered through Origen's commentaries are such expressions as, "according to our doctrine, that is, the faith of the Church"; "this is alien from the faith of the Church"; "the faith which is encircled by the wall of ecclesiastical and apostolic dogma."

Origen's view of the relation of doctrinal development to apostolic tradition, is well expressed in the following passage: "The Holy Apostles delivered themselves with the utmost clearness on those articles which they believed necessary to every one. . . . They left, however, the deep-laid causes to be explored by those who had received from the

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Holy Ghost the excellent gifts of speech, wisdom, and knowledge. On other subjects they merely stated that things were so, keeping silence as to the cause and manner and origin of their being, in order that the more zealous lovers of study and wisdom might in times to come have a subject on which to exercise their talents with profit " (*De Principiis*, i. 3).

The position that I wish to commend to you is substantially that of Clement and Origen. I believe with them that progress in theology is possible to an unlimited extent, without any change in fundamental doctrine.

The contrary opinion, I know, is popular in certain quarters at the present time, but it rests, I venture to think, on erroneous, or at least imperfect views of development. When development occurs, it is taken for granted that every element of the subject of development changes, and that nothing whatever remains permanent. Hence, as soon as it is admitted that religious doctrines develop, the inference is immediately drawn that all religious doctrines change. From this it is

an easy step to the conclusion that there can be no identity of faith between one age and another, and that the time-honoured doctrine of the Deposit of Faith is a delusion.

THE PERMANENT FACTOR IN DEVELOPMENT. The reply to this specious argument (which is all the more plausible because it contains an element of truth) is that in the development of living organisms, which is the fundamental and characteristic type of all development, there is *a factor that does not change*, as well as a factor that changes. In the development of an acorn into an oak, for example, there is in all probability something which persists throughout the process, giving it its unity and continuous direction. The persistence of some internal principle of growth was fully recognized by Aristotle, who emphasized his opinion by assigning to even the humblest plant a super-physical formative principle which he called a plant-soul. Most modern biologists would hesitate to express themselves so definitely, but there is certainly a marked tendency in recent biology to give

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up the cell as the chief structural unit, and to insist on *the unity of the organism* as the fundamental biological fact. This tendency marks a real reaction towards the Aristotelian position. With regard to animal organisms, we are in a much stronger position. Recent research shows that *a continuous organic memory*, which implies psychic continuity, and probably psychic identity, is found in very low forms of life. Even a limpet, it is said, remembers its home, and if detached from its favourite place on a rock will return to it. In the case of human development, the proof of identity persisting through change is complete. In spite of the enormous changes, physical, psychical, and intellectual, which have taken place in each one of us since birth, and still more since conception, memory assures us that at any rate from early childhood our personal identity has persisted unchanged. It was certainly I myself and not some one else—it was I myself, and not some supposed psychic predecessor of mine whose spiritual possessions I have inherited, who played with my toys in my nursery,

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who believed in fairies, and who in the foolishness of youth was guilty of many extravagances. As Professor Knight well says in criticizing Hume ; “A succession of states of mind has *no meaning* except in relation to the substrate of self that underlies the succession, giving it coherence, identity, intelligibility.” It should be especially noticed that development in this its typical case—the only case in which we have any first-hand knowledge of it on its inner side—involves a factor not merely of *continuity*, or even of continuous *direction*, but a factor of *absolute identity*. At the core and centre of the process of growth is found a principle of *changeless self-identity*. Thus the process of development combines in a most paradoxical way change with changelessness—a factor that endures with a factor that evolves unceasingly. We ought also to notice that the factor which endures is *much more important* than the factor which changes. It is not the process of development which gives rise to the thing that develops, but the thing that develops which gives rise to the process of



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development. First in order of thought and of nature comes *the thing*, secondly its development. *The nature of the thing* explains the nature of the development, not *vice versa*.

THE PERMANENT FACTOR IN HUMAN OPINION. Thus, if we argue logically from the analogy of organic evolution or development, we shall certainly not reach the Modernist conclusion that everything in human belief changes, but rather the traditional one that only the more superficial human beliefs change, the more fundamental ones remaining constant. Of course an analogical argument like this can only yield *probability*, not certainty; but still, so far as it proves anything at all, it proves the very opposite of what the Modernists are desirous of establishing.

The truth is that the unchanging element in human belief is both extensive and fundamental. To take one simple instance, perhaps the most important human belief in the secular sphere is the belief in the existence of *other persons*. Our whole social life is based

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upon our belief in the real existence of our wife and children, our friends and neighbours, our fellow-citizens, and the citizens of other nations. This belief occupies in the secular domain much the same position that belief in God occupies in the religious domain. It is fundamental for life and morality. Yet it is not a *necessary* belief, for extreme sceptics deny it. Nor is it capable of logical proof, for metaphysicians have laboured for ages in vain to discover a conclusive demonstration of it.\* Yet mankind as a whole have always believed it, and will go on believing it to the end.

As an instance of a belief which is not only universal but also *necessary*, we may take our belief in the laws of thought. These laws absolutely *compel* our assent to them. Not even in imagination can we dispute their truth, for every attempt to argue against them assumes that they are valid.

\* The sceptic asks, How can we be sure that our waking life is not a vivid dream, and that the persons we meet in it are not as unreal as the characters of our nightly visions? We cannot refute him by logic.

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Natural science again, in spite of its continual progress and development, is based upon certain fundamental beliefs which never change. To mention only a few, modern science assumes *the trustworthiness of human reason* (i.e. its ability to lead the inquirer to true conclusions), *the trustworthiness of human testimony* and of *human memory*, *the trustworthiness of the senses*, and as a corollary, *the real existence of an external world* ; also a miscellaneous collection of unprovable first principles, generally summed up in such phrases as *the universality of causation*, *the uniformity of nature*, *the parsimony of causes*, and the *principle of sufficient reason*. None of these principles ever alter, and some of them are eternally and necessarily true.

Of all the sciences, mathematics is probably the most progressive, but even the man in the street is aware that its imposing fabric is built upon axioms and postulates that are eternal and unchangeable. It is true, of course, that certain ultra-modern theorists deny some of these axioms. But even these iconoclasts accept most of them,

and confine the more astounding of their negations to the shadowy realm of the mathematical Infinite, and the still more nebulous region of non-Euclidean space. In spite of Cantor, Dedekind, and Peano, the world will still go on believing in the immutability of the axioms of mathematics. Take, for example, the mathematical axiom *things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another*. Obviously this is true not only here in Oxford to-night, but always and everywhere—true not only in this particular universe, but in all possible universes.

There are also moral truths which have the same unchangeable character. There is, of course, a conventional element in current morality which changes from age to age, but all the more important moral truths are permanent. For instance, the truths that “justice is better than injustice,” and that “rational beings ought always to follow what is right,” are of universal and necessary validity. They can no more be altered or denied than the axioms of Euclid, or the principles of logic.

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THE PERMANENCE OF RELIGIOUS DOGMAS. We are now in a position to prove that there are also many religious beliefs which, once attained, are incapable of any change. The most fundamental of them all, belief in God, is of this nature. We may grant to the anthropologists and the advocates of the evolution of religion, that this belief has been usually reached by gradual stages. Perhaps even the chosen people had to pass through fetichism and polytheism before they finally reached it. But belief in God, once attained, is incapable of change, though (as we shall see hereafter) it is capable of development. By God is meant a Perfect Being, or rather *the* Perfect Being—the Being unique in kind, unlimited in all perfections, eternal, immutable, absolute. As soon as the idea of a Perfect Being is reached, a limit is also reached which precludes further change in the idea. Perfection does not admit of degrees, and from the very nature of things there cannot be more than one Absolute. Of course this idea of God can be *developed*—that is, worked out in detail



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by ascribing to Him new perfections which were before unsuspected, or not sufficiently appreciated. Modern theology, for example, recognizes more fully than ancient, *humility* and *passibility* as virtues of God. Till recently ideas of the Divine Majesty drawn too exclusively from the sultanic state of Eastern potentates, and of the Divine Impassibility,\* drawn rather from Plato and Aristotle than from the New Testament, have made Christians hesitate to affirm that God can be humble, or that He can suffer, though both these doctrines are implied in the Incarnation; but such changes of emphasis, or enlargements of outlook, imply no change in the fundamental doctrine of God. In recog-

\* There is a sense in which it is perfectly correct to say that God is impassible. He cannot be *made* to suffer by any being lower than Himself. When He suffers, He does so by His own free-will, and by virtue of His loving-kindness and sympathy with His creatures.

One speaker at the meeting insisted that there is a *consensus patrum* in favour of the doctrine of the Divine Impassibility. Verbally, this is the case; but the "impassibility" of God affirmed by the Fathers, who believed in the Incarnation and the Atonement, is a very different thing from the impassibility of God affirmed by Aristotle and Plato, and (I may add) Epicurus.

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nizing God as *the Perfect Being*—a recognition which is certainly as old as the Second Isaiah, and is probably as old as Abraham, religion has already assigned to Him in advance all possible perfections, all virtues imaginable and unimaginable, all powers and excellencies of every kind to an infinite degree. Hence the faith of believers in God will know no change whatever either in time or in eternity. When they see Him face to face in heaven, and share His blessedness, and drink of His essence, they will believe about Him just what they believe now, namely that He is *perfect*.

THE THEOLOGICAL DOGMAS OF THE CREED. I have shown that the first article of the Creed, which affirms belief in God, is from its very nature unchangeable, and is therefore accepted by modern Christians in the very same sense in which it was accepted by the first Christians. Something similar may be said of the second article, which affirms the creation of all things visible and invisible by God. This doctrine of creation is already im-

PLICITLY contained in our belief in God. In assigning to Him every possible perfection, we necessarily assign to Him the perfection of being the *First Cause*, that is, the *Creator* of all things. If He were not this, He would not be perfect.

The Creed asserts only the general principle of creation, without going into details. It is silent as to whether the world was created by instantaneous acts, or by a gradual process of evolution, or in some other way. It does not even exclude (at least expressly) the theory of *eternal creation*, which (although probably in the last resort illusory and self-contradictory) has approved itself at times to speculative theologians. That the idea of creation, once attained, does not admit of change, is obvious. In affirming God to be the Creator of all actual things, and also the potential Creator of all possible things, we exhaust the two universes of the actual and the possible, and reach a limit.

The Creed goes on to affirm *the Incarnation* in terms which certainly do not go beyond what was believed by the very first genera-

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tion of Christians. The unique Sonship of Jesus, which is affirmed in simple language in the Apostles' Creed, and more closely defined in the Nicene Creed as pre-existent and consubstantial, is the doctrine of the Pauline Epistles, of the Synoptic Gospels, and also of their sources. The oldest existing gospel, St. Mark's, regards the Son of God (with whom it identifies Jesus) as a celestial Being exalted in nature, knowledge, and dignity far above the hosts of heaven (xiii. 32). Recent research renders it probable, if not certain, that the apparently humble title "Son of man," which was our Lord's favourite designation of Himself, so far from denoting His lowliness or mere humanity, suggests something more exalted even than Messiahship, viz. pre-existence and divinity. At any rate in the pre-Christian book of Enoch the Son of man already appears as a pre-existent and apparently divine Being, personally distinct from God, and sharing to a large extent His attributes and powers (*Enoch*, xlvi.). The primitive Gospel Source, known as the Logia or Q, which is perhaps even older than

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St. Mark, also regards the Son of God as infinite like the Father, as in fact the Father's Second Self (Matt. xi. 27 ; Luke x. 22). The Creed does not go beyond the primitive conception of the Sonship of Jesus. It is true that it makes it clear that Jesus is the Son of God *by nature*, and not by creation or adoption or grace, but this is also the doctrine of the New Testament. For the rest, the Creed wisely refrains from going into details, leaving many important points open to speculation and reverent inquiry. There is absolutely nothing in the Creed on the subject of the Incarnation, which genuine believers in this doctrine will ever find it necessary to question, much less to disavow.

A similar wise reticence is observed in the article which speaks of the return of Christ to judgment. It asserts only the fact, and is silent as to the manner. The belief in a final and perfect judgment of some kind seems to be necessarily involved in the idea of God as the Moral Ruler of the Universe. If He is this, He must one day deal with men according to their true characters, and must inter-



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vene to secure the final triumph of good over evil.

THE HISTORICAL ARTICLES OF THE CREED. But it may be said that besides these more philosophic articles of the Creed, the immutable character of which must to some extent be admitted, there are also historical articles which stand on an entirely different footing. These depend upon *human evidence*, and therefore they must be subject to change, according to the different estimates formed of that evidence by different critics in different ages.

Now it is quite true that historic facts, unlike philosophic first principles, are *contingent*, not necessary. They can be denied without self-contradiction, and even when they are accepted, the strength of our internal conviction of their truth may vary indefinitely according to the evidence.

But it is quite untrue to say that belief in a mere historic fact is capable of change. Of course theories about the *significance* or *importance* or *causal connections* of historic facts may change, but not beliefs in the facts themselves. For instance, that Christ

was born of a Virgin Mother is either true or false. If she was really a virgin, it is true ; if she was not, it is false. There is no third alternative. Similarly, if Christ was not crucified under Pontius Pilate, but under (let us say) Felix or Festus, then the article of the Creed which affirms that He was, is false. There can be no question of change or development in connection with the mere assertion of an historic fact.

It is a circumstance which has not yet been sufficiently noticed or reflected upon by philosophers, that historical events, even when past and long forgotten, remain *as facts* absolutely immutable and eternal. The past is *what it is*. It cannot be changed. Even God cannot annihilate the past, or vary it in the slightest degree. He could, of course, annihilate the whole universe, but He could not annihilate the fact that there had been a universe. He could not even annihilate the fact that there had been *a worm*.

It is simply not true, therefore, that the historical articles of the Creed are capable of any greater variation of meaning than the

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philosophic articles. They are, in fact, even less susceptible of it. For the philosophic articles, though incapable of essential change, are capable of *development*, whereas the historical articles are not capable even of this. They are completely *static*, insusceptible of the least movement, variation, or growth. Of course doubts may be thrown upon the actual occurrence of the events asserted, and by those who reject the Christian revelation such doubts will probably continue to be expressed as freely as before, but for most of those who sincerely accept the central dogma of the Incarnation such difficulties can hardly be more than temporary. Our present perplexities about Gospel facts are due less to internal contradictions involved in the revelation itself, than to the influence of the non-Christian *Zeitgeist*.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH. With regard to the Virgin Birth, needless difficulties have been raised in our day—difficulties which are only properly in place in the works of those theologians who reject the Incarnation. The

event has been treated, even in England, as if it were a mere isolated marvel, depending for credit mainly on its own evidence. I quite admit that regarded from this standpoint it is incredible. But if we regard it, as surely we ought to do, as forming an organic part of the Christian revelation, and especially of the economy of the Incarnation, the question assumes a very different aspect. From this standpoint it is no argument whatever against it, that it is a miracle. The Incarnation, of which it forms the initial act, is itself a miracle—the greatest of all conceivable miracles. Given the miracle of the Incarnation in the spiritual order, it is quite credible, in fact almost natural, that it should be accompanied by a unique outward sign (such as the Virgin Birth) in the physical order. As I have shown elsewhere,\* the miracle of the Virgin Birth is far easier to credit, from the strictly scientific point of view, than some of the greater miracles of our Lord's public ministry. Once let the fact of the Incarnation be frankly accepted,

\* See *Pro Fide* (new edition), pp. xxxv. ff.

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and its significance weighed, and all the lesser miracles which are associated with it, and which in various ways illustrate or support it, follow almost as a matter of course.

THE CREDIBILITY OF MIRACLES. There is to-day a great need for clear thinking on the subject of miracles. There are, it seems to me, two and only two clear and consistent opinions on this subject, and for each of them there is much to be said. There is the view of the dominant continental liberalism, of which Harnack and Sabatier are perhaps the most typical representatives. Starting from the position that miracles are impossible or at least incredible, this school denies not only the Virgin Birth, but also the Gospel miracles as a whole, *including the Incarnation*. It denies the Incarnation for the very sufficient reason that it is a miracle, and because, being the greatest miracle, it is far the most difficult to credit. On the other hand, theologians of the orthodox school, starting from the assumption that miracles are possible and credible, accept the Incarnation, and along



with it those lesser miracles which are reported on trustworthy evidence to have accompanied it, and which have certainly helped to win credit for it in all ages.

Both these positions are intellectually coherent, and logically water-tight. Not so, in my opinion, is the position of those English theologians who attempt to combine both views, denying the Virgin Birth and the Corporeal Resurrection of our Lord because they are miracles, but accepting the Incarnation because it is orthodox. Even in these days of lax logic—due, I suppose, to the vogue of Pragmatism and Bergsonism—such a position is too inconsistent to stand. Such mediating theologians will be driven in the end, if only to preserve their intellectual self-respect, to make their opinions logically coherent. Either they will have to take their denial of miracles seriously, in which case they will deny the Incarnation and become Unitarians or Pantheists, or else they will have to take their belief in the Incarnation seriously, in which case they will find themselves committed to the whole principle of the miracu-

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lous, and will find no difficulty (at least in principle) in accepting either the Virgin Birth, or any other well attested gospel miracle.

With regard to this particular miracle, the Virgin Birth, it is really far better attested than we could reasonably expect a fact of such a nature to be. We may take it as proved, I suppose, after the very thorough investigations of Harnack,\* Ramsay,† and Lake,‡ that the Third Gospel was really written by Luke the companion of Paul. We know that he was in Palestine, collecting his materials at a time when authentic information was still procurable.§ We know also the source from which he obtained his knowledge of the details of the Nativity. He evidently intends us to understand—in fact he practically tells us in terms—that his informa-

\* Now translated as *Luke the Physician, and The Date of the Acts and the Synoptic Gospels*.

† See *Was Christ Born at Bethlehem? Luke the Physician, etc.*

‡ See his recent article on Acts in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Apostolic Age*.

§ See Acts xxiv. 27.

tion came directly or indirectly from Mary herself.\*

THE DESCENT INTO HELL AND THE ASCENSION. The clauses "suffered under Pontius Pilate," and "was crucified, dead, and buried" present no difficulty. It is otherwise with the articles which affirm the descent into hell, and the ascension into heaven.

Certain writers affirm that these articles, interpreted in their original and only natural sense, localize heaven in a region above the clouds, and hell in a place beneath the earth, and that those who do not thus localize heaven and hell depart from the original and genuine meaning of the Creed.

Frankly, I have been unable to find the least trace of such a view in antiquity. It is, of course, true that many (perhaps most) ancient Christians did so localize heaven and hell (though it is remarkable with what reserve many of those who seem supporters of this opinion express themselves, when they come to define their belief closely), but

\* See Luke i. 29 ; i. 40 ff ; ii. 19 ; ii. 51.

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of the view that this opinion alone is orthodox and alone authorized by the Creed, I can find no trace whatever. Ancient Christians were everywhere allowed the same liberty of speculation on such obscure matters as we enjoy now, and they made liberal use of it. Let me quote just one passage from Origen (*De Principiis*, bk. 2, chap. iii.). Commenting on our Lord's words *I am not of this world*, he observes, "Our Lord and Saviour clearly points out a certain world besides this visible one, which it is difficult to describe and make known." He then discusses and rejects the view that it is identical with the Platonic World of Ideas, and proceeds: "There is no doubt, however, that something more glorious and excellent than this present world is pointed out by the Saviour, at which He exhorts and encourages believers in Him to aim. But whether that world which He wishes to be understood is divided and far separated from this one, either by situation, or nature, or glory; or whether it is superior in glory and quality, but confined within the limits of this world (which to me also seems

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more probable), is nevertheless uncertain, and, in my opinion, is an unsuitable subject for human thought and speculation for the present.”\*

St. Augustine would probably have to be reckoned among those who take a local view of heaven, but how little importance he attached to the idea of locality in this connection, may be seen from the following extracts from his work *De Fide et Symbolo*. Commenting on the article “He ascended into Heaven,” he remarks: “But where, and in what manner the Lord’s Body is in heaven, it is utterly vain and idle to enquire, *only we must believe that it is in heaven* (tantummodo in coelo esse credendum est). For it is not for our feeble intellects to discuss the secrets of the heavens, but for our faith to entertain

\* Canon Streeter remarked that in this passage Origen is trying “to get out of” the meaning of the Creed. I recommend any one who thinks so to read it *in extenso*. When Origen brings forward (as he does at times) speculations which seem difficult to harmonize with the traditional faith, he always shows consciousness of the insecurity of his position, and speaks tentatively or apologetically. There is nothing of the kind here. He is quite unconscious of the locality of heaven being an article of the faith.



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high and honourable thoughts of the dignity of the Lord's Body." In a similar spirit, commenting on the clause, "He sitteth at the right hand of the Father," he says: "Not that we are to think of God the Father as though He were circumscribed within a human form, so as to imagine Him with right hand or left, or that when the Father is spoken of as sitting, we are to think of Him as with bended knees, and so be guilty of the impiety which the Apostle execrates in those who changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the similitude of corruptible man. . . . But by the right hand we are to understand *in supreme blessedness*, where are righteousness and peace and joy, as on the left hand the goats are stationed, that is *in misery*, by reason of their iniquities, sufferings, and torments" (cc. 13, 14). St. Augustine is thus clearly of opinion that what the Creed affirms is the *existence* of heaven, and its *superiority to earth*, not its position in space. As well might we argue, because people generally speak about going *up* to London and *down* into the country, that London is the

lowest place in England, as assume that heaven is locally above and hell below the earth, because Christ in the Creed is said to "ascend" into the one and to "descend" into the other.

The original conceptions of "heaven" and "hell" have developed greatly during Christian history, but they have not changed their fundamental meaning. Heaven has always meant the highest possible degree of blessedness attainable by creatures. This conception is clearly of an absolute character, and as such changeless. From time to time as human thought matures, new kinds of blessedness find place in the current teaching about heaven (an important development of this kind took place when Origen hazarded the speculation that the bliss of the redeemed will largely consist in the successful cultivation of philosophy and natural science), but the original idea of heaven as a state of perfect bliss provides for unlimited developments of this character. Modern Christians believe, just as ancient Christians did, that heaven

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is a state of *supreme blessedness*, and that it is constituted mainly by the *vision of God*. Similarly "hell" has always meant a final, adequate, and perfectly just retribution—a retribution worthy of God and worthy of the sinner who suffers it. Its exact nature has never been an article of faith. Nor has its meaning been altered, because, as the moral sense of Christians has developed, more refined ideas of what constitutes perfect retribution have become associated with it.

THE LORD'S RESURRECTION. With regard to the Resurrection of Jesus, about which so much controversy has raged of late, it seems to me that the traditional opinion that it signifies the literal resurrection of the actual buried body from the tomb, and not the mere appearance of the glorified spirit of Jesus, is not only a view which it is still possible for modern Christians to hold, but is actually the only one for which there is any evidence at all. All other views rest upon mere speculation and conjecture, not evidence. The emptiness of the tomb is emphasized in all four

Gospels. In St. Luke the risen Christ exclaims, "Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have" (xxiv. 39). The original witnesses proclaim triumphantly that His flesh did not see corruption (Acts ii. 27 ff.). St. Paul also in his missionary sermon at Antioch dwells at length and with special emphasis upon the same fact (Acts xiii. 34-37). It is idle to object that there was no reporter present at Pisidian Antioch to take down St. Paul's exact words. It is *a specimen sermon* placed in St. Paul's mouth by an intimate disciple who had heard him preach on the Resurrection of Jesus hundreds of times, and was perfectly familiar with his views upon the subject. Both the Petrine and the Pauline churches took the same view of the Resurrection of the Lord (I Cor. xv. 11), and it is idle for us who live nearly two thousand years after the event, to hope that our own hazardous speculations will be nearer the truth than the clearly expressed convictions of the original witnesses. The attempt that has been made of late to argue that because, according to Pauline teaching, the

actual buried bodies of the saints will not rise, therefore the Lord's buried body did not rise, breaks down at once when we consider that the primary purpose of the Lord's resurrection was *evidential*. Christ rose, not primarily to illustrate the nature of the resurrection-bodies of believers, but to afford conclusive evidence to His immediate followers of His Divine Sonship, of the acceptance of His expiatory Sacrifice, and of the truth of His teaching. Undoubtedly His Resurrection is an earnest and pledge of the resurrection of His followers, and (provided we accept the traditional view that His Body was glorified at the Resurrection) some guide to its nature. But it does not at all follow from this that the two events are exactly parallel. Christ's actual buried body rose, because, for evidential purposes, an undeniable physical miracle was required. There is no such purpose to be fulfilled by the future resurrection of believers.

**CONCLUSION.** I incline, therefore, to believe, in spite of the present unsettlement of opinion



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in Oxford and elsewhere, that the modern world, *so far as it remains Christian*, will continue to accept the traditional creeds of the Church in their strict traditional sense. There will be endless progress in theology, the result both of internal development and of the appropriation of new and valuable ideas from outside ; but the whole development will continue to be *true to type*. Every stage of the process will be controlled in the future, as it has been in the past, by the original *deposit of faith*,\* which has not changed yet, and, as I believe, never will change.

\* Canon Streeter deprecated the use of the term "deposit," as implying that the faith cannot grow. He suggested that the metaphor of the grain of mustard-seed is more suitable. It seems to me that neither metaphor by itself is satisfactory, but that if we avail ourselves of both, both aspects of the truth are brought out. Christian doctrine develops like a grain of mustard seed, and yet remains fundamentally identical with itself, as is suggested by the term "deposit."

NOTE.—Owing to lack of space, the problem of miracles has received only very cursory treatment in the present lecture. It will be discussed at length, from the standpoint of modern philosophy and science, in a sequel to be shortly published entitled, *Miracles and Modern Thought*.



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