

"What is Christianity."  
The letter killeth but the spirit  
giveth forme.

What is christianity? is a question that seems to be forcing its way to the front again, as it has done time and time again during the centuries since the disciples and other followers of Jesus took up the work after Jesus death. James and the group at Jerusalem gave one interpretation of it, still clinging to the old Jewish forms and insisting upon the necessity of circumcision. Paul on the other hand held that it made no difference whether one were circumcised or not. To follow in spirit, to be justified by faith that was christianity. Each succeeding generation made its interpretation, as Christianity grew in numbers and forms. Finally there came a time



when the letter, the adherence to  
our essential needs, to forms, rituals,  
and the sacraments had taken the  
Christian church so far away from the  
spirit of Christianity, that it became  
necessary to go back to the source and  
make a fresh investigation into  
the nature and form of the great  
movement.

Myself, Luther, Calvin, and  
the reformers took the task of peering  
the spirit from the form. But it was  
not long before the spirit had become  
imprisoned in the form of Protestantism.  
The Pilgrims and Puritans took up the  
work of the reformers, and brought the  
spirit of Christianity to this country.  
As it has been subjected to several  
very severe cross examinations, in  
each one of those struggles the spirit  
has conquered over the letter, for  
the letter is already dead, and



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it is the attempt of the spirit - to  
escape from <sup>the</sup> dead body of form that  
causes the struggles and disturbances  
of which from time to time disturb  
the quiet of the religious world.

What is Christianity? is now  
coming to be a common question.

The reason why this question is  
being asked with such seriousness  
to-day is perhaps very far reaching  
thru at any time since the early  
days of its new born freshness.

That conception of Christianity which  
looked upon it as a peculiar and special  
mechanism by which the few were  
to be saved from the general rack and  
ruin of the world, is no longer  
one to which men can or do adhere.  
It makes little or no difference  
whether it is the Catholic Church  
the Protestant Bible, or the



crucified Christ, or any other <sup>4</sup>  
agency that is to be the controlling  
power and expositor of that  
great mechanical device by which  
a few are to be saved, & all are  
to be saved. The distinction which  
formerly was current, the dis-  
tinction between natural and  
supernatural, between natural  
and revealed religion can no longer  
be held to. If man is natural  
and Christianity is supernatural  
why of course the natural man  
cannot follow its mysteries, and  
so far as this life is concerned  
he has nothing to do with it,  
for the natural man cannot  
penetrate that which is above and  
beyond the power of his natural  
faculties. Edwards and his  
followers saw that clearly and



carried the doctrine to its logical<sup>5</sup>  
conclusions, in making the very  
fine distinction between the regenerate  
and the unregenerate.

The doctrine of the election of the  
few to be saved by the free grace  
of God, and the absolute inability  
of man <sup>to do anything towards</sup> <sup>1</sup> <sup>any</sup> to save himself is the  
only consistent and rational position  
which a man can take if he makes  
any distinction between natural  
and supernatural religion. For if  
religion is supernatural, man in his  
natural state can have nothing to  
do with it. ~~For~~ His natural powers  
do not permit him to enter into the  
realm of the supernatural, He must  
await the action of God's free grace  
for his regeneration, and the touch  
of the spirit that shall enter into  
him, and wake him supernatural.



and reveal to him the secrets of the <sup>(6)</sup>  
supernatural. It is this idea that is  
behind the doctrines of the Berkshire  
Divinity, with their ideas of man's  
absolute dependence upon God, and  
salvation by election, and ~~the~~ man's inability  
to save himself.

But history has assumed that  
doctrine of the distinction between  
natural, and supernatural in  
religion. Whether it is true or not  
we cannot say. But the fact remains  
that we no longer believe it  
to be true. If man is natural religion  
is natural. If religion is supernatural  
man is supernatural, you may  
take whichever you choose. They mean  
the same, and the thing that they  
mean is this. that man has the  
religious impulse within him, and  
to some extent feels himself to  
be spiritually related to the



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museum would about him. One hundred and fifty years have seen a wide departure from the rigid theology of Calvinism, and its followers. The gradual weathering away of the old hard and fast lines has almost resulted in a complete demolition of the whole structure. We are now in the midst of a new problem. We are asking, not "Is Christianity supernatural?" but "Is it natural?" "Is it true to life?" "Is it capable of meeting the highest needs of our life, and responding to the inward demands of man's nature for truth, goodness and beauty." In the long and at times heated discussions between science and religion, even the



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conservative ofologists of religion  
have hardly attempted to reconcile  
natural science to religion, but  
they have been concerned with  
the task of reconciling the old  
interpretations of religion to what  
are the plain facts of science.  
In other words they have been  
trying to show that Christianity  
is natural, and conforms, in so  
to the laws of nature and the soul  
in so far as we can discover them.  
To-day the methods of science  
the principles which govern  
and control the scientist, and  
guide him in his investigations  
are accepted as final. I do not  
mean to say that certain theories  
are dogmatically held to be  
true, but the scientific



habit of mind, the free and 19  
unprejudiced investigation and  
search after truth, and the use  
of that truth in arts and indus-  
tries is no longer a mere pleading  
for recognition, but it is an  
established principle. Experiment  
and testing by actual facts, and  
accepting that which the experiments  
and tests point to as being true, that  
is the accepted standard of the  
world to day. "Demonstrate the  
truth of your theory by an actual  
working test," says the world to  
the man who proposes a new  
theory. If you can demonstrate  
we will accept. If you can-  
not demonstrate, we will reject.  
It is just this test that the  
world to day is exacting of



Christianity. We care not for 10  
your theories, your plans for  
salvation, your varied notions  
about this that and the other thing?  
demonstrate to us the truth of  
your theories, give your power  
to some, by some; ~~from~~ ~~from~~  
~~the~~ test your doctrines, and  
historic claims by rigid and  
strict examination, Prove that  
the Bible is inspired by its power  
of inspiring the world? Prove  
all things told forth to that which  
is true, said the apostle Paul, and  
the world is turning upon the  
church, and Christianity with  
the same command. <sup>P</sup> What  
is Christianity? says the world.  
An answer is given by its de-  
pendence. What will it do?



says the world, an answer is given<sup>III</sup>  
by its defenders. They well says  
the world, demonstrate your  
claims.

Some very interesting and some  
very illuminating suggestions have  
been made of late as a result  
of well known events. I venture  
to present one or two of these as  
representative of various answers  
which are being given in answer  
to the world's question, "What is  
Christianity?" This was<sup>apparently</sup> written and  
<sup>apparently</sup> recently and was published  
in a recent number of "The Living Church".



Christianity, says the Living Church, must necessarily hinge about the person of Jesus Christ. If it had to deal only with natural morality, it would be absurd to apply to it the epithet Christian. Morality did not enter the world with Christ. The Hebrew prophets cried out for it. The Psalmist extolled it. The synagog worship inculcated it. The Ten Commandments enforced it. Greek philosophy dwelt upon its loveliness. Poets sang for it. . . . A Christianity, therefore, based upon pure morality alone, is untenable. Morality is older than Christianity. A Christianity based upon the moral teaching of Jesus Christ alone is equally untenable. It cannot be demonstrated that that teaching introduced new elements into the moral law. Christianity is absolutely bound up with the successive dogmas which assert the unique position of Jesus Christ as God and man. We know that Jesus Christ is alone good, because he is Son of God; we never could know that he is Son of God because he was always good on earth, because the immaculate goodness cannot be proved apart from the sonship. Christianity therefore hinges neither upon the Sermon on the Mount, nor upon the Lord's prayer, nor upon the parable of the Prodigal Son. Each of these does, indeed, illuminate the Christian life; but no one of them is sufficient to stand as the cornerstone of Christianity. That corner-stone can be nothing less than the personality of Jesus Christ. Now the personality of Jesus Christ is only sufficient to bear up the structure if it be unique wholly beyond comparison with the x of human kind. Mere goodness is not sufficient; natural morality will not do it; beautiful principles of ethics are wholly insufficient. Christianity rests on Jesus Christ; but it rests upon him as Son of God; co-equal with the Father; God of God, Light of Light; of one substance with the Father;

conceived by the Holy Ghost; born of the Virgin Mary; living, dying, rising in the fulness both of his godhead and of his manhood from the dead; ascended into heaven; reigning eternally at the right hand of God. Nothing less than this is a sufficient foundation for Christianity. Follow the agnostic argument to-day, and see how easily overthrown is a Christianity based on morality alone. Christianity is a life, based upon a life. Nothing less is Christianity. And so the creeds are no mere summaries of human deductions from natural hypotheses. As such they could have no value. They would be unworthy the subscription of an intelligent man. The mere fact that the church pledges her children to belief in the creeds shows that she has no such conception of their function. It would be an insult to 20th-century intelligence to bind it to fourth-century speculations. If there were a single speculative hypothesis in the creeds, it would be intellectual tyranny to demand subscription to them. But the creeds state the essence of Christianity. Each fact, thus stated in irreducible language, transcends human knowledge. The wisest man does not comprehend all that it involves. But all that it involves is forever bound up with Christianity. Christianity defined can be no less than the sum total of the creeds.

Sunday-School Methods as Discussed  
in Manhattan.



I do not presume to pass judgment for you, but as for myself I cannot believe that Christianity defined can be or less than the sum total of the creeds. It is for you to say whether or not it is true to your experience. But it is interesting to point out the historical fact, that there are no creeds in the New Testament. <sup>certainly</sup> and, not until the <sup>third and fourth</sup> century <sup>they not until</sup> do they appear when the life, and spiritual vigor of the Christian church had given away to form. If it is true that Jesus, the founder of Christendom, intended to leave such a statement as we find in the creeds as the <sup>test of being a Christian</sup> why do they not appear somewhere in the New Testament.



That is a sample of one ~~kind~~<sup>group</sup> of 115  
answers that ~~are~~ being given to day  
in answer to the question. What is  
Christianity?

But of course there are not the  
ideas of the modern ~~man~~<sup>even</sup> in a  
conservative church. They represent  
the ideas of the reactionists who recoil  
from the pressing questions that are  
being put to them. They are like  
the woman who stood braced against  
the side of the station, while the  
train which she wished to take  
wound off and left her standing  
there. "I thought the whole concern  
was going," said the amazed old  
lady. These creeds, these systems  
of theology are the stations at  
which the great on-moving train  
of Christian spirituality has stopped



for a woman to take on foreigners. 16  
They are stationary, and one who  
stands upon the platform of these  
stations, may expect as the simple  
old lady did, to have the whole  
thing worn on. But as a matter  
of fact the stations remain behind  
while the train wears on.

But there is an other type of  
answer that is being given to day  
to the question "What is Christianity?"  
Those who have a deep reverence for  
the old forms and old statements  
because of their associations, because  
of their close relations to the events  
of the Christian Church, are averse  
to dropping the old forms, and  
substituting <sup>new</sup> interpretations in  
their places. Such ones realize  
that we do not and cannot  
take these statements literally



They do not accept them intellectually but rather use them sentimentally for old associations sake. Into these old bottles they put new wine, and delight in the long train of associations which keeps inviolate the historic continuity of the forms as well as the spirit of the Church. They welcome new truth, new ideas, new power, and and in every way take delight in filling the old bottles with the new wine. Inwardly they are the very spirit of the free truth-seeking atmosphere of the life of Jesus, a power for truth and righteousness in the world. As an illustration of this type of answer let me quote some passages from an address of



one of the foreword of them. 18

There are two essentials of Christianity. The first is the unceasing recognition of the Great Good Will, which bars its way for every word we speak and every deed we do. This will takes many forms to meet the varying circumstances of life. - kindness, patience, modesty, charity, honesty, truth, pity, cheerfulness, temperance, courage and the like. The man who tries to observe them all as different phases and expressions of the One Good Will has the first of the two essentials of Christianity. The second essential of Christianity is the democratic attitude toward other people. To full start of the democratic attitude



toward the humblest and worst (19)  
of our fellow men, is to fall  
short of the reverent attitude  
toward the Great Good Will,  
which includes the welfare of  
the lowest equally with the  
highest, of the worst no less  
than the best. "

Here you see, is the utmost  
frankness in expressing the  
essentials of Christianity. There  
is nothing dogmatic, nothing  
bigoted or narrow, ~~is~~ nothing  
which swacks of ancient conceptions,  
nothing which denies the freedom  
of the individual to thought,  
think, and investigate for  
himself.

But this same writer passes  
from this exposition of the



essentials of Christianity to put <sup>20</sup>  
some of his new wine into the  
old bottles. For example he says.

"Is Jesus Christ the divine Son of  
God, and the Saviour of the world?"

Yes. Because in precept and  
example, in life and death, he was  
implicitly obedient to the Great  
Good Will, and included the  
lowliest and worst in his sym-  
pathy and service. Measured  
by these ~~essential standards~~  
tests. Jesus stands forth as su-  
preinely divine.

"Are we saved by the sacrifice  
of Christ?" yes. For no man, from  
Christ to his humblest disciple, can  
do the good will, and try really  
to serve others without suffering  
the enmity and hate of the



selfish and sinful, with whose<sup>21</sup>  
schemes the just and generous  
christian man is bound to interfere."  
It would be delightful to think that  
such clean sparkling wine always  
filled those old bottles. But every  
one knows that such is not the  
truth. One is really reminded of  
that figure which Jesus used  
about new fitches on old clothes.  
Much rather it is a new lining  
to the old outside.

Of course one does not wish to say  
that such clinging to old forms  
is bad. But there is an element  
of danger in such a use of  
language. It not only destroys  
the original meaning of the  
terms, but in fact it involves  
and distorts the real truth of  
the life and way of living



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that one is trying to prevent. It is  
very much as if we should  
still continue to call the head of  
our democratic nation a King,  
or to permit or to compel our President  
to wear a crown, as a symbol  
of the ~~ancient~~ ancient conception  
of the Divine right to rule. It would  
be a misuse of words and symbols,  
and lead to a misunderstanding on  
the part of those who did not fully  
understand.

On the other hand there are those  
who look upon the old forms and  
symbols as of great interest and  
significance historically. They  
have a deep reverence for them  
as symbols which interpreted  
~~these~~ great truths to an age  
that is now fast. In fact they



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have too much reverence for them  
to subject them to daily use and  
commit them to the repair shop  
of modern theology.

Take the spirit of Christianity  
leave the old forms that we cannot  
use without mutilating them  
as monuments of those who also  
tried to enter into the spirit of  
Christianity. And in this spirit  
meet the needs and demands  
of our time with all the  
wisdom and all the power  
and devotion that we have.  
Whatever form Christianity  
may take upon itself, as  
colorings of the particular age  
in which one happens to  
examine it, Its spirit  
its essential and funda:



mental ideas are the same. The fusion of the Greek genius for thinking and philosophical investigation, and scientific spirit of study, with the Jewish genius for religious worship, in the midst of the great world of Rome, makes the origin of Christianity. The spirit of truth from Greece, the spirit of worship from Israel, the spirit of activity and service from Rome, are melted together into one great movement of Christendom. The first prophet and teacher was Jesus of Nazareth. In him we find the great fountain head of the new movement. In his spirit of common sense observations, in his habit



of testing his truth by actual life <sup>(25)</sup>  
~~not~~ regardless of the tradition or teaching  
of his people, he is the incarnation  
of the Greek genius. As the writer  
of John puts in presenting to us  
the incarnation of the Greek logos  
in Jesus. The word became flesh.

In his implicit trust in God the  
Father whom he saw not only our  
light, but in the beauties of nature  
and <sup>in</sup> the secrets of his inner life  
and in the very nature of the human  
soul, he was the embodiment of  
the Jewish genius of worshipping.  
In his noble and simple minis-  
trations to the poor and needy whenever  
he found them he translated into  
its purest form the genius to  
activity which the Roman world  
gave to modern civilization.  
The subtle influences of the



one nation from the other was bound  
 to produce a new and undefined  
 and essentially ~~radical~~ different  
 group within which  
 should embody the the genius of  
 each. The first great prophet and  
 teacher was Jesus of Nazareth, to  
 his spiritual power, to his inquiring  
 spirit, to active ministrations many  
 responded. Just as we speak of  
 Lincoln as the first American, the  
 first great citizen, to embody in  
 his life the national characteristics  
 of North, South, East and West.  
 so Jesus was the first great teacher  
 who was the incarnation of the  
 the great amalgamation of  
 forces which ~~was~~ took place were  
~~being~~ taking place in those days. were  
 being fused into one power in  
 those days.



To worship God the father, to seek  
zealously after his truth, and  
to translate that truth into the  
beauty of a noble life, this is  
the great spiritual power of  
Christianity. Those who live  
in this spirit are Christians, and  
follow the spirit of the  
life of Jesus who declared in  
so uncertain terms that  
on the two commandments, "Thou  
shalt love the Lord, thy God with  
all thy heart, and with all thy  
soul, and with all mind," and "Thou  
shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,"  
hangeth the whole law and the  
prophets.

To follow, to defend, to glorify  
for the better of Christianity, is  
the most deadly work that  
one can do. But to live in the



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the spirit forever leads us nearer  
to truth, to God, and to the  
heart of war. Thus did Paul  
seek to follow in Jesus' footsteps  
for he knew as he too told us  
that "the letter killeth, but  
the spirit giveth life."