

The Finality of the Christian Religion.

By George Butterworth Foster. Prof.
of the Philosophy of Religion in
the Univ. of Chicago. Dec. 1908

"It has come about that our religion,
with a master and a message, which
claim to be the same yesterday, today
and forever, is summoned before
the judgement seat of a progressive
humanity like all other professed
pietistics, and that the human heart,
with its tumultuous experiences
is querying whether there be amid
the flux, some ~~stewol~~ Rock whereon
it can find strength, and stay and
rest." 8. Thus not in the interest
of any church or sect, or religion
but in the interest of present human
needs, Prof. Foster sets himself
the task of proclaiming the finality

of the Christian Religion, and its ¹²
worth for human life.

The wealth of his scholarship,
the depth of his own religious
nature, the history of his own
religious experiences, make this
book especially valuable. There
is nothing of sickly pessimism
in it, or sickly optimism in
it, but a strong, brave, soldier
to the deepest problems of life. Beneath
it all there is a faith which is
as solid and as unassailable as
the rock of Gibraltar. The deep
faith of the book is to me at least
one of its great delights.

But when one sets himself to
the task of reproducing in a short
space the essence, or the spirit of
this book, he is really in trouble.

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It would be easy enough to state in
a very short space the intellectual
essence of the thing. In fact
Prof. Foster very nearly does that
himself. His thesis is "Religion
without Supernaturalism, and
science without naturalism."
He wishes to ~~for~~ show that religion
and especially the Christian religion
is not an affair of the intellect,
but has to do with the will of
man. On the one hand he denies
the ~~claims of the~~ validity of the
claims to supernaturalism of the
religious Christian Religion; on the
other hand he denies the claims
of dogmatic naturalism who reduce
the universe, and man included
to a mechanical system. He is
to steer himself between these

(415)

too rough a rocky coasts upon
where stores many a ship has
foundered, in the deep and smooth
flowing channel of the human
Personality. Not a supernatural
Religion, on the one hand, nor
an infernal materialism on
the other, but a religion, divine
human personality. It makes
no difference to him whether you
say human personality, or divine per-
sonality, for he says we are living
in a world in which every thing
is both human and divine, ^{one and} at the
same time.

The worse thing ~~might be~~ is
looking to a religion of development,
of evolution, whose validity rests
not upon its claims origin, but
upon its ideals, not upon its roots
but upon its fruits, not upon its

"whence comest thou?" but its
"whither going?" We start he is
looking, not for a dead, complete
perfect religion in a static world,
but for a growing developing, un =
folding religion in a world of
"Becoming"

The first part of the work (275 pages)
is concerned with the general subject
of Authority: Religion, (Supernaturalism)
and Naturalism. In his chapter on
the ~~de~~ formation of Authority Religion
and its succeeding chapter on the
dissolution, he traces the development
of the religious deposit of power
through the externalizing forces,
until at the close of the middle
ages we find the full fledged
system of supernatural ~~of~~ religion.
in authority religion in Rome

Catholicism. Infallible book.
 infallible interpreter of the book,
 infallible approbation of the
 book, - all this belongs to the general
~~sec~~ idea of supernaturalism in
 Religion.

But the principle of universal
 priesthood, the principle that
 no human authority, claiming
 unconditional validity, is to
 come in between man and God,-
 the fundamental tenet of the
 Protestant movement, soon under-
 mined the infallible and super =
 natural authority of the church, and
 established in its place the authority
 of the Bible. But this same protestant
 principle, has also overthrown
 the idea of inspiration of the Bible.

the prophet's argument of Parity,⁷
and the miracle. "To quote

In a word, Christianity is drawn
into the power which relativizes
all that is historical, and hence
the state finally given it for
authority Religion is gone. Whether
any conception of Christian finality
is possible, or even pertinent,
in the light of universal his-
torical relativity is precisely the
problem for our further reflection.

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The chapter which by a most ~~clear~~
careful and searching criticism
shows the meanness and futility
of the claims of supernaturalism
in religion, ends in this way. And
if by anticipation the reader has
caught the suggestion, that the
dignity of things, even Christian

In the chapter, ^{IV} in which Prof. Foster discusses the dissolution of Authority Religion, examining in succession the claims before which this so-called natural structure rests. ("The authority of the Bible, identifying the old + new Testament with the concept "the word of God," is examined first, from which the result of his examination is thus expressed, "Inspiration of the book is historically untrue historically, and impossible psychologically." ⁸⁷) He then forces to consider the question as to whether or not the designation "word of God" is in its full scope applicable to the Bible given in Soliloquy, and exclusively. To which question he replies that the caviling ^{good now thought} is a natural force of elimination, and especially the caviling of the U. T. is the work of the Catholic Church, and Protestantism is in all

especially embarrassing position 9
in accepting the doctrine of the
Divine authority of the Canon, for
in so doing she accepts as authorita-
tively divine, that which has been
produced by the Catholic Church,
whose validity she denies.

The third consideration of this chapter
has to do with the so-called prophetic
argument. U.T. prophecies, and
U.T. fulfillment, in which
argument he finds no satisfactory
support for authoritarian Religion.

He then turns to the consideration
of the argument from miracles.
Spinoza as an illustration of his
line of argument in this chapter.
I will if possible point the way
in which he treats miracles.

"Instead of being naturally or
historically, or psychologically

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mediated, miraculous events
are due ~~are due~~ to immediate
particular volition of deity by
virtue of which there are causes
without their usual effects, or
effects without their usual
causes.

" Now as to the possibility of
miracles there are two questions
(1) First is a miracle compatible
with the nature of God in his
relation to nature? This is the
objective consideration of the problem
(2) Can a miracle be known by man
as miracle. This is the subject
~~consideration~~ ^{subjectively}

As to the a priori possibility
of miracle, one can neither affirm
or deny. Whether it is possible or not

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it is of no value as an authentication
of revelation. A miracle being without
the usual order of the world, an event
with unexplained causes, or a secret
cause with unusual results, we
who know things only relatively
are not competent to judge as to
whether ~~or not~~ ^{or not} ~~the~~ miracle an event
is miraculous, attributable to
particular divine causality. Hence
a miracle must be indorsed
by supernatural Revelation in order
for us to accept it. But the
miracle which demands super-
natural revelation for its validity
is of course of no value as a
witness to that Revelation upon
which it rests. So whether it is
a miracle is visible or not it
is valueless as supporting a

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supernatural religion, indeed the entire miracle argument is in a circle.

But as to whether we can experience a miracle or not is another thing. Miracle is a supernatural affair occurring in contradiction to natural laws, though where temporary abrogation alone it is possible. An outer fact is knowable only through our experience; only facts of a natural legal character can be experienced! natural causality is the condition of all outer experience. Consequently there is no experience of miracle. Whether miracle be possible or not, our experience of miracle is not possible." and equally impossible is it for an outer occurrence to have

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redeeming power. (124)

Thus the miracle become
not a theoretical, but a practical
impossibility.

Thus one after another the
pillars upon which rests the
foundation of supernatural religion
or authority religion are destroyed
and the whole superstructure
falls to the ground in ruins.

This chapter closes with these
words, "And if by anticipation
the reader has caught the
suggestion that the dignity
of things, even Christian
things

things, is disclosed, not in their cause, but in their end; not in the form of their origin, but in the worth of their content; not in their structure, but in their function; not in their credentials, but in their service.— then he has already entered upon a more excellent way than any religion of authority has ever known.

Then, too, has he exchanged the world of Stowes Aguirre for that of Kant, and Lotze and Charles Darwin. In this new world there is no room for the theory of Christianity's supernaturalness, over against which all besides is not God's work but man's; for in this new world, the opposition of human and divine

it overcome and all is human
and all is Divine at one and the
same time." 147

In the chapter on the changed
view of the world, he points
out the change ^{of changing} correction of the
Universe as involved in the
discoveries of modern science
especially of Copernicus.

But in spite of opposition on the ^{17th} part of the church, the new world conceptions have established themselves, and the old Ptolemaic world with its big flowing river and its inverted bowl for the sky is only a dream of ancient days, which we recall now days with something of a consciousness.

But with the old Ptolemaic world there were certain forms and habits of thought which no longer fit into the world of to day. "Primacy of the intellect in man; the ascetic-contemplative life, the highest life; Knowledge the chief good; dogma, or "sound doctrine" the essence of Christianity and the content of Revelation, such content guaranteed by infallibility of hope or work, whose credentials are

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necessarily miraculous; saving faith, first of all holding things to be true because folk or books say so; the finality of the Christian Religion consisting in the miraculously authenticated divinity of its doctrines — all this is of a piece, and it all fits into the old Graeco-Roman and mediæval world, with its stolic cosmology, and its stolic empire and hierarchy over the giant

The primacy of the will in man; the practical wool life, the light life; character the chief good; ideals the essence of the Christian Religion, and the content of Revelation, which latter is the history of great souls, and the sum of history; ideals

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valued teleologically, and not causally; faith not assent, but moral action; the finability of the Christian religion in its ideals.—This, too, is all of a piece and fits into the modern dynamic and biological world." 189.

This is the religion, the Christianity of the modern world. "It is open to the humblest, not to the wisest, to him & who loves, not to him who knows." (185)

As we leave behind the old Earth centric universe, we must leave behind the forms and methods peculiar to their interpretations of the religious life. There is no place for a supernaturalism in the modern world.

20 13.

But not only is the world of
humanity suffering from the
confusion of religion with
its accretions, from the transforma-
tion of products of faith, to objects
of faith, but we see desolate
is the outlook upon the world
where science has given away
to dogmatic naturalism, and
given us a closed completed
mechanism whose life consists
only in its changing forms.
Now both the Infomationalists
and naturalists have held
that the over throw of super-
naturalism meant the over-
throw of religion. The fact
is that the science of the
~~the~~ humanit movement

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has shattered beyond repair
all claims to supernatural religion.
The humanist movement has
overthrown the medieval
artificial world, and re-erected
a linked world in his position,
true to the Protestant principle.
But the man thus established
is merely the man of sense,
with his freedom, and his
fearless seeking, secure
satisfying ideas. ^{See 21¹³} The further
work is to transform the
man of sense into the man
of conscience, fully conscious
of his divine worth. In other
words we must free ourselves
from the deathly mechanism
of materialistic naturalism.

The church has been in grievous error in basing its entire claims to the validity of Christianity and even ~~the~~ religion itself upon the foundations of its supernatural origin. The church has held that to overthrow the claims to supernaturalism, is to overthrow the claims to religion it self. The world is taking the word of the church in good faith, Science has destroyed the validity of supernatural claims of Christianity and, ergo, according to the logic of the church religion has gone with it. Man has come to his own, ~~but blinded~~ world of sense but blinded by the logic of the church he is depriving himself of spiritual development.

Our hope lies not in the 22
personality Religion. The
mission of man is to be neither
brute nor God, but to become
personality."

Can the religion of Jesus
free us of any voice here?
This is the question which the
modern world is looking
for the church to answer.

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Thus having cleared away the intellectual dogmatic products of religious faith, as expressed in Authority Religion or Supernaturalism, and the dogmatic propagandists of scientific naturalism, Prof. Foster adheres himself to the constructive part of his book. His method of procedure here as he tunnels his way through the dogmatic, and so far unforsaken accretions to the essence of the Religion of Jesus, he describes under in these terms. The historical method serves not to distinguish historical fact, and sift, and systematize the material. But there is one factor, the essential factor of the religion of Jesus, and of Christianity, which historical investigation, criticism, dogma

creed & all sacrament can never reach. Religion is intensely personal, and aside from sifting and examining the manifestations of the personal, one must get at, and reproduce, and re-create the Personality of Jesus. All in all, therefore the task is not simply scientific, but moral and thus belongs to man's larger vocation of forming an ethical personality through pain and struggle, flexibility and sorrow. True personal, you must be free-free lord even of the essence of the Christian Religion."

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In Chapter VII the problem of the sources of our knowledge of the life of Jesus is discussed. The synoptic problem is dealt with; every difficulty is met fairly and squarely, and the weaknesses of his position are by no means overlooked. As he approaches the end of this chapter upon the literary sources, he summarizes, looking as a basis of his statements Maren's results of historical criticism.

In answer to the question as to what we can know of Jesus himself, i.e. from an intellectual point of view:

"On the basis of the earliest or oldest sources, we can write no biography, no

so called "life of Jesus." This
would never have been feasible,
were Mark a strictly historical
document, and did the
discourses ~~for~~ ^{of} Jesus actually
belong where Matthew or
Luke has placed them. But
the discourses in their source
lack all temporal fixation, and
Mark is only a compiler of
single traditions, which he
first — so runs the hypothesis —
unified into a whole. Mark,
moreover, lacks all personal
knowledge of localities, and
he equally lacks any clear
knowledge of the temporal

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course of the life of Jesus. And in matter concerning which Mark as historian leaves us in the dark, how can we know anything better to day? It is only of a very few words of Jesus accordingly, that we know where and where they were spoken.^{P. 381} But the closer we get to Jesus in the tradition, the worse does everything dogmatic and theological recede.

Thus we come to the final question, of getting as good a picture ~~as we can~~ of Jesus as we can from the sources we have, with the view of getting at the heart

of his life. and to discover what
there is of his life, and his religion
for the modern world.

"Live now" says Prof. Foster; "when,
at the mention of the name Jesus,
many thought of Church Doctrine,
of Christology, dogma, the old
creed, which lay like a veil
upon the personality of Jesus; they
thought of the veil, of the meanings
woven by speculation, of the
deity, of the conceived by
the Holy Ghost, born of the
virgin Mary; of resurrection,
descent into hell, ascent into
heaven; of return on the clouds;
of miracle upon miracle; of
the whole church belief

in its massive foundation 29
with its materialism and its
magic! To-day we live in a
world characterized by nothing
so much as by the absence of
any psychological soil in
which these fancies can
find nourishment. If
these things constitute the
Christian Religion, that religion
is obviously an antiquated
affair, a relic that is written
to the cultivated classes.

Christological dogmas really
signify for many children
of our time a sarcophagus
of the personality of Jesus

and of his religion, and are responsible for the sad ignorance concerning Jesus and the essence of his religion the Christians mix the gold with the dross. like fleas from Christology as from a shirt, without ever having seen Jesus." 407.

"Through the curtain to the sun, from the dogmatical fiction of the Christ to the historical fiction of Jesus," that is our journey. What follows

1st As a child of his time Jesus held to popular ~~for~~ views, which of the world

- which are no longer held.
- (2) He believed in demons, and their responsibility for disease, also in angels.
- (3) He believed in miracles, which we no longer believe in,
- (4) He believed in a being called the messiah, and probably regarded himself as in some way connected with that being. Perhaps he identified himself with the messiah. We now longer hold these things.
- (5) He believed in the ~~an~~ immediate termination of the world, and the return of the son of man in his glory. That hasn't happened yet.
- Intellectually then we are lost, and cannot be our own

with Jesus. He held to ideas 32
the truth of which there is
no evidence either subjective
or objective, to substantiate.

In moral convictions he ~~was~~
afforently made wolfish cots due
to the influence of his
messianic ideas. But at least
so far as moral subversion is
concerned we are not bound
~~to his~~ some of his ~~teachings~~, because
of changed relations. See especially
his ^{negative} ~~other~~ attitude towards state, and
on fortitude.

But there very differences
of opinion not only do not
separate us from the personality

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of Jesus. but bring us the
nearest to him. For one
relationship to him, and to each
other is not fundamentally
dependent of intellectual conformity,
but upon the responsive sympathy
of the will. The will to do
the will of God, the will to
live the good life that is
the heart and essence of
the religion of Jesus. "Not my
will but thine be done!"

The garden of Gethsemane
is the supreme moment of his life,
so far as the revelation of the essence of his religion is concerned.
But how did Jesus' faith in God
come to be what it was? How
did it happen that Jesus behaved
in a living loving forgiving
God?

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"What was certainly new was the disposition and self conscious newness of Jesus. Now there there gradually sprang up in his soul a noble judgement that was new also, namely, that not things, not even sacred things, but that persons only, are worthy. Faith in the infinite worth of the human personality in the sight of God.—if there was anything new in the thought of Jesus it was this. Jesus felt the worth of man as man, and dared to hope that man could become the home of the moral values and the religious pleasures which he felt in himself. He cherished this hope for publicans and harlots, for outcasts and prodigals, for Samaritans and

gentler for his enemies ~~and~~
and especially for children, in
whom he experienced the ~~essence~~
~~of the~~ true essence of man.

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His faith in God was born
of the conviction that the former
which sends rain, and
causes the sun to shine, which
clothes flowers, birds and men,
which lets them live, and lets
them die, has the same sense of
the worth of man, the same
joy in man, which ^{he} himself
had, and which he required of
others. He could say nothing
higher of God than what he re-
quired of man, that he was
kind to friend and foe alike.
God is like man, as man ought
to be. God is Father. Man is
child. If man knows how
to give good gifts, God's clever
workers.... Because Jesus was

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merciful, he thought of God as
the merciful Father, who seeks
the lost sheep until he finds it.
No school doctrine, no preaching
of repentance even like John's
but the glad message that
the disposition and bearing
of the Eternal will toward
man, are like those of the
merciful, fleaching Nazarene.—
this is the best that we dare
believe." 494— "God is like
Jesus" 485.

The religion of Jesus is not
an affair of the intellect, but
of the will. So will to
do the will of God, 

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will to work for the realization
of the highest, tenderest, most
loving ideals, of which the
human mind has ever
conceived. To believe God
as the expression of the best
that is in human aspiration.
To root our convictions in
our faith in God, and to
be as true to our convictions
in our world, and amidst
our moral problems, as Jesus
was true to his convictions
in his world, that it is to
be a Christian and a follower
of Jesus.

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On one hand to avoid supernatural Christianity because it is intellectual and is based upon knowledge rather than will, on the other hand to avoid naturalism for the same reason, and to fix one self in the religion of personality, the world and man and God interfused in terms of personality, and judged theologically, this is the Christianity which Prof. Foster presents to us as a first religion,

It is the religion of Personality
based upon the Philosophical
position of Divine Immannence.
The intellectual activities, and in-
terpretations of the religious experience
are products of faith, and not
objects of faith. Is not in his
birth, not in his death, not in his
stones of miracles, not in
his teachings or in his deeds as
such, is the essence of the Religion
of Jesus, but in the will of
Jesus that willing to do the will
of God, In the Garden of Gethse-
mene, the height of religious
consecration is reached. The stories
of the gospels, the creeds of christendom,
the forms the sacraments are the products
of the religious life of Jesus and
his followers, are witness to

the spiritual infusions of ~~the~~^{fervor} ~~of the~~^{of the} two;
they have no authoritative value for
us, and their worth consists in
this, that they bear witness to the
power of human fervority, and
point us towards a conception of
its infinite worth. They are the
smoke, produced by the flame
of the spiritual life, off seeming
importance as they form forth from
~~flame of the smoke~~, but they nourish
in time into thin air, and new
smoke comes to take their place.

But the burning flame of the fervority
is eternally ~~this is the smoke and~~. This
idea, this faith, is the "eternal Garden"
of Gethsemane" in which we
say "Not my will but thine be done".