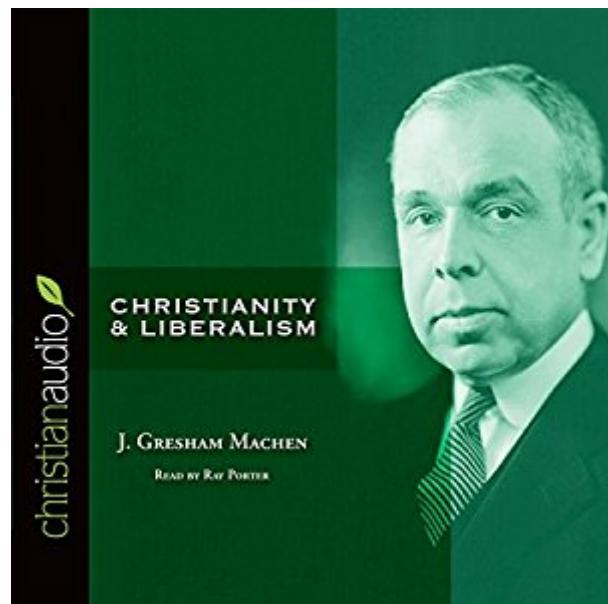


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# Christianity And Liberalism



## Synopsis

Machen's classic defense of orthodox Christianity established the importance of scriptural doctrine and contrasts the teachings of liberalism and orthodoxy on God and man, the Bible, Christ, salvation, and the church. Though originally published nearly seventy years ago, the book maintains its relevance today. It was named one of the top 100 books of the millennium by *World* magazine and one of the top 100 books of the century by *Christianity Today*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Few books have had as pivotal a role in the battle of ideas as J. Gresham Machen's Christianity and Liberalism. Machen's classic was written in the height of the battle for control over the Presbyterian Church USA (the most prominent of the "mainline denominations"), and defines with brilliance the battle lines between liberal (so-called) Christianity and the orthodox faith. Moreover, it points out exactly what is at stake: the true faith, as opposed to a perverse shadow of that faith, a shadow based on subjectivism which elevates man's sovereignty over God's and ends in believing nothing at all. It is important to understand that the liberalism Machen castigates is not political but theological (although many if not most of the liberals of the latter camp fell also in the former, numerous prominent political liberals-- such as three-time Democrat Presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan-- fought alongside Machen). This theological liberalism manifests itself in many ways, but is chiefly characterized by a rejection of Scripture as infallibly inspired, a denial of the doctrines of the Fall and of Hell, and a belief in man's evolutionary self-perfection (process theology, with progress

guided by an "enlightened" elite). Machen correctly asserts that this is not merely a different approach to the Gospel, but is in fact a different gospel: an exchange of God's sovereignty for man's, God's law-word for man's, God's eternal, unchanging standards for man's evolving, situation ethics. For this reason, Machen contends that liberalism and Christianity are separate things: rival religions, permanently at war.

Christianity and Liberalism is perhaps the best-known book length treatise against early 20th century theological liberalism in America. It was published as the famous "Fundamentalist-Modernist" controversy was heating up, and has since been one of the clearest contrasting descriptions of the heart of the difference between modernist liberal Christianity and historical Christian orthodoxy. The major thesis of the book is that Liberalism (modernist theology) and Christianity are diametrically opposed religions that unfortunately use the same language to describe their opposite views of things. He states, "the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of Christian terminology." Later he states in his thesis, "...we shall be interested in showing that despite the liberal use of traditional phraseology modern liberalism is not only a different religion from Christianity, but belongs to a totally different class of religions." Machen is interested not in necessarily proving that Liberalism is wrong as he is in explaining that it is not Christian. His burden is not to disprove the tenants of Liberalism (although he speaks some to that end), but to simply describe each clearly and make obvious the huge divergence of thinking in the two groups. Although Machen is perhaps "the" great Fundamentalists, one must keep in mind this was before Fundamentalist meant: narrow, reactionary, separatist, nationalistic, literalist, ignorant, and the like.

J. Gresham Machen's magnum opus, Christianity & Liberalism, is a book that everyone concerned about the demise of American Christianity should read. At first one might not find the title of his book all that striking, but in its day (1923), it had a little more punch. Machen was trying to show that Christianity and liberalism were two separate plans of salvation, two separate faiths--in short, two entirely different religious systems. In his day, it was thought that liberalism was a fresh new approach to Christianity, a way of practicing the faith in the modern context. But in Machen's thinking, however, liberalism had "relinquished everything distinctive of Christianity, so that what remains is in essentials only that same indefinite type of religious aspiration which was in the world before Christianity came upon the scene." Machen set out therefore to bring all the issues out into

the open and make clear-cut distinctions between the two faiths: "What that message is can be made clear, as is the case with all definition, only by way of exclusion, by way of contrast." But this approach wasn't always well received: "Presenting an issue sharply is indeed by no means a popular business at the present time....Clear-cut definition of terms in religious matters, bold facing of the logical implications of religious views, is by many persons regarded as an impious proceeding...But with such persons we cannot possibly bring ourselves to agree. Light may seem at times to be an impudent intruder, but it is always beneficial in the end. The type of religion which rejoices in the pious sound of traditional phrases, regardless of their meanings, or shrinks from "controversial" matters, will never stand amid the shocks of life.

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