

# Dr. Robert E. Speer and His Latest Book

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THE author of the book, *The Finality of Jesus Christ*,<sup>1</sup> as I pointed out in CHRISTIANITY TODAY for October, 1930, in my review of his earlier book, *Some Living Issues*, is not only one of the most distinguished missionary leaders, but also one of the most truly eloquent men, in the whole Christian world. Whatever may be thought of the direction in which he exerts his influence, it cannot be doubted at least that that influence is vast. Dr. Speer possesses a truly amazing power over the hearts and minds of men.

There are many evangelical Christians, moreover, who think that this vast influence is exerted truly to the advancement of belief in the Bible and of the clear propagation of the Christian Faith. With persons who think that I disagree. I disagree with them not because I desire to do so but because I am compelled to do so. I began with strong prejudice in favor of Dr. Speer. From my student days on, I stood under the spell of his eloquence; I admired him with all my soul; I agreed with what he said. But during the past fifteen years or so I have been obliged to reverse this attitude. My admiration for Dr. Speer's eloquence remains, but my agreement with him has given place to profound disagreement. That change has not been due to any personal likes and dislikes; but it has been due to the stern impulsion of the facts. The plain fact is that in the great issue of the day between Modernism and Christianity in the Presbyterian Church Dr. Speer is standing for a palliative, middle-of-the-road, evasive policy, which is in some ways a greater menace to the souls of men than any clear-cut Modernism could be.

## Evasion of the Issue

The issue between Christianity and Modernism has found expression during the past month in a new fight for honesty in the missionary affairs of the Church. In that fight I tried to take my part—humble part though it was—by the introduction of an overture in my own presbytery, the Presbytery of New Brunswick, looking to the reformation of the Board of Foreign Missions. Dr. Speer was asked by the Presbytery to be present. I urged him to do so, and I further begged him, in my correspondence, to engage with me in a full and open discussion of the whole question.

To this last request he declined to accede. At the beginning of his speech before the Presbytery he announced that he did not desire to engage in any controversy. His speech itself evaded almost altogether my specific charges against the Board, and soon after the set speeches were over, the previous question, in obvious deference to Dr. Speer's expressed wish, was moved, and debate was shut off.

From one point of view, I do not wonder at Dr. Speer's unwillingness to answer my charges against the Board. When a man has such an exceedingly weak case as Dr. Speer had on that occasion, and as he still has in his defense of the Board, it is quite natural for him to avoid controversy. But such a policy is regrettable all the same. I had longed for the opportunity to meet Dr. Speer in an open, friendly, man-to-man discussion. Such discussion might, indeed, have seemed to put me at a disadvantage. I can lay no claim to anything like eloquence; Dr. Speer is one of the most eloquent men in the whole bounds of the Christian world: I represent an unpopular cause;

Dr. Speer represents a popular one: I was in the presence of a Presbytery overwhelmingly dominated by the new Princeton Seminary, by signers of the Auburn Affirmation, and in general by the opponents of the cause that I represent; Dr. Speer was in the presence of his friends and supporters. Yet I longed for an open and free discussion; for such discussion would serve to promote, if not agreement, yet at least mutual understanding.

Moreover, I cannot believe that the evasion of discussion was to the ultimate advantage of the Board of Foreign Missions. Facts remain facts; and the facts included in my Brief and presented publicly at the Presbytery cannot be put out of the world because they are unpalatable.

## The Case of Mrs. Buck

What do I mean by saying that the Overture which I presented was part of a fight for honesty in the missionary policy of the Presbyterian Church? I mean something very definite, and something that I am quite sure the man in the street, and the man in the pew, can understand. What I mean may be made clear by one example. It is only one example among many, many examples; but it will serve. It is the example of Mrs. Pearl S. Buck.

Mrs. Buck is the author of an article in *Harpers Magazine* for January, 1933, which attacks the Christian Faith at its very roots. In a subsequent article, in the May number of *The Cosmopolitan*, she says plainly, what she implies in that previous article, that to her it is a matter of small importance whether "Christ" ever lived as in a "body of flesh and bone" upon this earth.

This popular exponent of unbelief was until Monday, May 1st, a missionary in good and regular standing in the Presbyterian Church. The Board was deeply involved in her destructive views. It had tolerated her for years; it had until recently recommended one of her books as a missionary textbook. Two of its leading secretaries had been reported in the newspapers as expressing themselves just recently in very favorable terms with regard to her. I am not asking whether those newspaper reports were altogether correct; indeed I understand that one of the gentlemen in question has pronounced them inaccurate. But suppose they were inaccurate; suppose they were even seriously incorrect. Still they had made their impression, and they placed upon the Board, in even clearer fashion than it already rested upon it, the bounden duty of saying plainly to all the world that it would not tolerate for one single moment such anti-Christian polemic as that which Mrs. Buck was carrying on.

Did the Board so speak out? Did it make perfectly plain where it stood? Not at all. On the contrary, it accepted Mrs. Buck's resignation "with regret."

The policy represented by that action—I say it deliberately—is a fundamentally dishonest policy. I am certainly not charging individual members of the Board with conscious dishonesty; I am certainly not charging them with unworthy motives; I am certainly not charging them with any misuse of trust funds for personal reasons; I am certainly not charging them with anything like what the law calls obtaining money under false pretences. But I am most emphatically charging the Board with adherence to the policy which dominates many of the larger Protestant churches. It is a wide-spread policy; it is a deeply entrenched policy; but it is a dishonest policy all the same,

<sup>1</sup>New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1933.

and there will never be any real blessing of God upon the churches until it is given up.

What is the policy to which I refer? It is the policy of appealing for support to Modernists on the implied ground that the Board is tolerant of Modernism—either clear and blatant Modernism like that of Mrs. Buck, or the sugar-coated but equally destructive Modernism of the Auburn Affirmation—while at the same time the Board appeals to Bible-believing Christians on the ground that it is true to the Bible and to the Confession of Faith.

What would have happened if the Board had said plainly to all the world that it would not tolerate for a moment any views resembling those of Mrs. Buck. It is perfectly plain what would have happened. A great outcry would have arisen from the Modernists against the "intolerance" of the Board; Modernist contributions would have been cut off. But something would have been preserved that is far more important than dollars and cents. Honesty would have been preserved—that deeper honesty upon which the Board has now turned its back.

### The Right and the Wrong Method of Appeal

This question of honesty arises in the case of every institution appealing for funds. It arises, for example—if the readers of CHRISTIANITY TODAY will pardon me for referring to what lies nearest to my personal knowledge—in the case of Westminster Theological Seminary. Westminster Seminary in these days is in urgent need of funds. How shall those funds be obtained? One way would be to appeal to different donors on different grounds. There are men in the Church who dislike controversy and will not support a "controversial" institution. Yet they are impressed with the fact that the graduates of Westminster Seminary, on the average, know the Bible far better and are, in general, far better grounded than the graduates of most other institutions. They might be appealed to successfully if we should only keep in the background our clear-cut stand in the great issue in the Church.

But as a matter of fact we have avoided making any such appeal. We have made it perfectly plain that we are carrying on the tradition of the old Princeton Seminary as it existed before the reorganization, and that at the very heart of that tradition, as at the very heart of the Bible, there is the duty of speaking out just as clearly against error as one speaks in defense of truth. That method of appeal may lose us funds here and there; but it is the only honest method.

Very different is the method employed by the Board of Foreign Missions. That method is the "Yes-and-No" method. It is the method of sending out a dust-throwing brigade of secretaries who denounce *Re-Thinking Missions* in the presence of Bible-believing Christians, as Dr. Speer denounced it in the Tioga Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia on the evening of December 1, 1932, while at the same time the Board carefully refrains from offending the Modernist forces in the Church by speaking out officially against the central thesis of that broadside of unbelief, unconcernedly retains a signer of the Modernist Auburn Affirmation in the exceedingly important position of Candidate Secretary, and refrains from dismissing even so vigorous an opponent of the Bible and the historic Christian Faith as Mrs. Pearl S. Buck.

The climax of this policy was reached when the resignation of Mrs. Buck, on May 1st, was accepted by the Board "with regret," without a word of disagreement with Mrs. Buck's views.

Of that evasive action Dr. Speer and Dr. McAfee are said to have been active protagonists. Certainly they have given no evidence of disagreeing with it. And with regard to it the Moderator of the last General Assembly, according to *The New York Times* of May 3rd, has made a typically Moderatorial utterance. He has said that he believes this action of the Board "will end the whole controversy." Such an utterance

is to be expected from a Moderator who at the last General Assembly appointed a signer of the Modernist Auburn Affirmation to the chairmanship of the Assembly's Committee on Foreign Missions.

But the Moderator is wrong. The action of the Board in accepting the resignation of Mrs. Buck does *not* end the whole controversy.

In saying so, I am not referring merely to the fact, which the Moderator seemed to overlook, that the Presbytery of Philadelphia, by an overwhelming vote, has sent up to the General Assembly an overture identically the same as that against which, in the Presbytery of New Brunswick, Dr. Speer had launched the whole weight of his attack. Certainly that action of the Presbytery of Philadelphia is extremely important, and profoundly encouraging to Bible-believing Christians. But I am referring to something far deeper than the action of any presbyteries or courts. I am referring to the blessing of God which does, despite men's opposition, rest upon the cause of truth.

### The Battle for Honesty

Weak, no doubt, are the human instrumentalities in this battle for truth and honesty in the Presbyterian Church; powerful are the forces ranged against it. It is a battle waged against the entire current of the times, and against a policy deeply entrenched in many of the Protestant churches of the world. We might be regarded as presumptuous in attacking what is so firmly established. But must evil always remain untouched just because its roots are so deep? Must the Church forever go on at the poor dying rate at which it has been going during these latter years? Must it forever continue to stand in contempt of honest men; must it forever depend upon policies of worldly wisdom? No, God is calling the Church back from her folly to the ways of truth and righteousness; He is calling her, by the very distresses of the time, back from the world unto Him.

The battle against the present policy of the Board of Foreign Missions is only one phase of a far larger battle. And the hopeful thing is that that battle is being carried on by young men. Professor Allan A. MacRae, of Westminster Seminary, who (entirely without suggestion from me) introduced the Overture in the Presbytery of Philadelphia is a young man, and other speakers in favor of it were young men. A new conscience is making itself felt in the Presbyterian Church. And leading spokesmen for that new conscience are young men upon whom God has laid His hand.

Whence do these men receive their warrant for entering into this conflict? Whence do all of us receive our warrant, if we seek, no matter how humbly, to do our part?

The answer is plain. We receive our warrant in the Word of God.

It is true, even common grace should be sufficient to lead a man to see that the policy of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions is wrong. Even an unregenerate man should see that a Board has no right to appeal to Modernists on the implied ground that it is tolerant of Modernism and to Christians on the ground that it is intolerant of Modernism. To see that one needs only a small modicum of common sense.

But Christian men have a far higher and far clearer warrant for the contention in which they are now engaged. Their real warrant for opposing the policy of the Board of Foreign Missions is that that policy is contrary to the Word of God.

Two forces are contending against each other in the Presbyterian Church. One is Christianity; the other is Modernism. Two Christs are being proclaimed. One is the blessed Saviour presented to us in the Bible—God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever, virgin-born, worker of miracles, raised from the tomb on the third day, ascended into heaven,

(Continued on Page 22)

holding to any religion against materialism and atheism. Rather than to bring Chinese out of their ancient, heathen religions into Christianity, he thinks "the task of the missionaries is how to hold for any faith in God those who are fast losing or have already lost any faith they ever had" (p. 157). And again he says, "It is becoming ever more clear that the struggle for this generation is far less between one religion and another than between a religious and a secular or materialistic view of life" (p. 168). Again these passages read like "Re-Thinking Missions" and our Board urged the use of this book months before "Re-Thinking Missions" was published! The old-fashioned Christian always thought that the duty of the missionary was to present Christ to the heathen. How surprised he will be to learn that the missionary's task is rather to confirm the heathen in his errors and bid him hold to them against materialism and atheism.

(4) The book, "Living Issues in China," treats all religions, including Christianity, as if they were on the same plane and as if they were of practically equal value. This very serious error that so much discussion of comparative religions makes, is patent in this book. Thus it says, "this religion (Buddhism) is sincere and simple. Who shall say that it is not found worthy in the heart of the Eternal?" (p. 155). It speaks of "Confucianist, Christian, and Buddhist" in the same breath (p. 103). Again, speaking of Confucianism, it says, "To see such profound truths cast aside as irrelevant today is almost to make one a propagandist for Confucianism" (p. 169). It quotes with more or less approval the presiding officer at a world conference of Buddhists, "T'ai Hsu . . . made a memorable statement: 'Jesus Christ is the incarnated Tao. This I now understand. But for us the chief thing is that the Tao can also be incarnated in us.' It cannot be too emphatically stated that it is this incarnation in us for which China waits" (p. 171). Once again it says, speaking of modes of worship, "Some feel that Buddhism has something to offer, and the attempt of Dr. Reichelt to combine the forms of the two faiths (Buddhism and Christianity) in a single approach to the living God has been watched with deep interest" (p. 192). Bible-believing Christians know that Christianity is the one and only, the final and absolute religion. The Modernism of this book, approved and urged for study by the Board of Foreign Missions, teaches that any religion is good enough!

(5) This book, like "Re-Thinking Missions," teaches that the Christian missionary should work with heathen religions in a common search for God. He does not have the unchanging truth of God Himself to present to the heathen, but rather he should seek, with the heathen, to find truth and to find God. Thus we read, "East and West need each other in the search for truth and right" (p. 76). "We may still see the ele-

ments of superstition in it (ancestor worship) and yet see elements of permanent value which we wish to retain" (p. 77). Christianity will wish to retain the ancestor worship of heathenism! Again the book says, "Whatever religion or religions the world may at the long last follow, . . . the form taken must, it would seem, be that which the races of the world together work out. . . . For perhaps it is true that not China nor America nor Europe can find the answer to the religious problem which is theirs today save as they work at it together in the intimate fellowship of groups concerned to find not simply a philosophy, important as that is, but a working faith that will make men more divine. . . . We need all that we can learn together in humble search and bold experiment" (pp. 175, 176, 177). This book teaches that Christianity is a search for truth and light, that it is a groping with heathen religions after God. If this be true, then why send out missionaries at all? Let us grope at home! The true Christian knows that his faith is not a blind search for truth. It is a Revelation of God!

(6) Finally, this dangerous book belittles the Bible, the pure and holy Revelation of God. It does this in several ways. For example, it misquotes the Word in a manner that dangerously verges on blasphemy and at the same time places the religions of China on the plane of the religion of the Old Testament: "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke to the fathers through the prophets, has surely come to China through such avenues (her ancient faiths), even when his name is not used and his voice is but faintly heard" (p. 170). Again it suggests that the New Testament is not to be relied upon, that its picture of Christ is mistaken: "The study in recent years of the sources of the Christian faith has led to such a rediscovery of Jesus as has bewildered many people. Various accretions of the ages have been looked at fearlessly" (p. 172).

We have examined this particular book at some length because it is the latest interdenominational study book available and because it is typical of the sort of teaching that these books have set forth for years. The situation would not be so bad if this book were unique and if this year were the only year in which a Modernistic book has been commended to our churches for study. But this situation has been noted almost every year in the past decade. We shall not take time nor space to give details of books recommended and used in former years, but it may be of value to list some of them and the pages on which Modernistic teaching is to be found. The approved mission study book for 1931-32 was "The Rural Billion," by Charles M. McConnell. Some of the statements in it to which we take violent exception are to be found on pages 21, 27, 28, 35, 37, 91. The book for 1930-31 was "India Looks to Her Future," by Oscar Mac-

Millan Buck. See pages 187, 189, 192. The book for 1929-30 was "Roads to the City of God," by Basil Mathews. Note pages 44, 56, 57, 112. The book for 1927-28 was "New Paths for Old Purposes," by Margaret E. Burton. See pages 141, 147, 167, 168, 173, 184. The book for 1926-27 was "The Moslem Faces the Future," by T. H. P. Sailer, Honorary Educational Adviser of our Board of Foreign Missions. See pages 13, 24, 83, 131, 178, 179, 180, 210, 212, 213. The study book for 1925-26 was "New Days in Latin America," by Webster E. Browning (a Presbyterian). See pages 87, 210, 163.

There is a question that will not down. Why does our Board of Foreign Missions approve and commend Modernist mission study books? And another question comes fast upon that. Can the Board, unless it changes its ways, continue to expect humble, old-fashioned Christians in our churches to support it?

### Dr. Robert E. Speer—(Continued)

seated on the right hand of God till He come to rule and to judge. The other is the Christ of the Modernist Auburn Affirmation—the Christ who possibly was and possibly was not born of a virgin, possibly did and possibly did not work miracles, possibly did and possibly did not die as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, possibly did and possibly did not rise from the dead in the same body in which He suffered.

The Board of Foreign Missions seeks to evade this issue. At best it seeks to present truth without attacking even the most blatant forms of error. It reiterates vague positive statements, but refrains from speaking out against *Re-Thinking Missions*; it claims to be a Christian Board, yet expresses no disagreement with the radically anti-Christian teachings of one of its missionaries and even accepts her resignation with regret; it presents itself as faithful to the Bible and to the Confession of Faith, yet retains a signer of the Auburn Affirmation as Candidate Secretary and permits the Candidate Department to carry on the most outrageous Modernist propaganda through the books that it recommends to the young people looking to it for guidance.

What is our ultimate warrant for disagreeing with this policy? It is simply that the policy is contrary to the Word of God.

That appears not merely in this passage of the Bible or that. No, it appears in the whole Bible. From beginning to end, the Bible is contrary to this notion that a man can make his preaching positive without making it negative, that he can be a soldier of the Cross without engaging in controversy, that he can proclaim the truth without attacking error. From beginning to end, the Bible teaches every man to say "No" to error just as earnestly and just as

clearly as he says "Yes" to truth. The Bible is above all things entirely clear. In a great conflict like that between Christianity and Modernism in the Presbyterian Church, it bids a man definitely to take sides. If a man does not take sides, he must give up all thought of being true to the Word of God.

### The Position of Dr. Robert E. Speer

Appealing, therefore, to the Bible, we have entered into a campaign for the reform of the Board of Foreign Missions. What is the chief obstacle in the way of that campaign?

I have little hesitation in saying that the chief obstacle is found in the fact that Dr. Robert E. Speer supports the present policy of the Board. There are many Bible-believing Christians in the Church whose confidence in Dr. Speer is unbounded. They know nothing of the Auburn Affirmation. They do not know that the Board is commending radically Modernist propaganda through its Candidate Department. They do not know that an official communication from its staff commends the teaching of the radical speaker, Dr. Sherwood Eddy, as being virile evangelism and as making God real to people. They do not know that the Board is officially connected with union institutions in China and elsewhere that are engaging in propaganda of the most destructive kind. But they only know that Dr. Robert E. Speer endorses the policy of the Board. That is enough for them. They refuse to examine the facts for themselves. Dr. Speer assures them that the Board is worthy of their support, and that is all that they desire to know.

In saying that, I know that I am paying the highest possible tribute to the eloquence of one who is my adversary in this debate. I pay that tribute gladly. I admit fully that Dr. Speer has an enormous power to sway the minds and hearts of men. But when I think of that power, I am appalled by the responsibility which it places upon its possessor. How glorious it would be if that power were being used for the up-building and the right guidance of the Church; but how sad, on the other hand, it is when it is being used to lead the Church astray!

An increasing number of Bible-believing Christians are coming to see that it is in this latter way that Dr. Speer's influence is being used. They began by being prejudiced in favor of Dr. Speer as I began. They could not believe that he would endorse a policy which is contrary to the Word of God. Yet facts are facts. It is a fact that in the report of the Committee on Coöperation in Latin America "the securing of the publication by well-known Spanish publishing houses of several books by Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick and other American authors" is celebrated as one of the outstanding "accomplishments of the Book department"; it is a fact that the

name of Dr. Robert E. Speer, as Chairman of the Committee, is signed to that report.<sup>1</sup> I presented these facts to the Presbytery of New Brunswick in Dr. Speer's presence. He did not deny them, and he could not deny them. They are lamentable facts; they are to many persons unexpected facts: but facts they are all the same. There are many other facts like them; and no Bible-believing Christian, who examines the facts, can possibly help seeing that Dr. Robert E. Speer is leading the Church away from the paths of truth.

An increasing number of Bible-believing Christians are examining the facts for themselves, and are thus obliged to part company with the policies advocated by Dr. Speer. But many of them still cling to their confidence in Dr. Speer's own doctrinal teaching. He is unduly complacent, they say, toward false teaching by others; but his own teaching is thoroughly sound, and he has a clear understanding of what the gospel is.

What these persons do not see is that in defending Dr. Speer's teaching they are casting the most terrible aspersions on his character. If Dr. Speer's knowledge of the gospel were as clear as these persons think that it is, then how great would be his guilt in lending aid and comfort to that "other gospel" which is doing such irreparable harm to men's souls! If Dr. Speer's own convictions were as clear as these persons think that they are, then when he belies those convictions by his entire conduct as a Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions the devastating picture in the Epistle of James of the man whose works are at variance with his faith would seem to apply in considerable measure to him.

### Dr. Speer's Latest Book

I for my part do not hold any such low view of Dr. Speer's character; and the reason why I do not do so is that I can see clearly that his confusing conduct has its roots deep in the underlying confusion that is in his mind. That appears, for example, in his latest book *The Finality of Jesus Christ*. I can deal briefly with that book because I dealt at considerable length with the previous book, *Some Living Issues*, in CHRISTIANITY TODAY for October, 1930. The new book is much longer, but exactly the same confusion appears in it as that which has appeared in all of Dr. Speer's recent works, so far as I have examined them.

There are very many things in this new book, as in the other books, which are true. An advocate of Dr. Speer could fill many pages with quotations of splendid Christian utterances, especially from the earlier part of the book. I should like very much indeed to quote such passages now, if only there were time and space. Dr. Speer says quite

<sup>1</sup>See Report of the Thirty-ninth Annual Meeting of the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, 1932, pp. 92, 114.

correctly, for example (p. 52), that "Christianity conceived as the faith of Jesus, or as the religion of Jesus, or as sharing or reproducing the religious experience of Jesus, is a mere invention." That strikes against the very heart of Modernism.

Yet the same writer who here inveighs against a Christianity that seeks to reproduce "the religion of Jesus" can write a commendatory preface to the book, *The Religion of Jesus*, by Toyohiko Kagawa! The reader is led to ask himself the question how deep Dr. Speer's opposition to the modern "religion of Jesus" can be, and whether he really differentiates that religion quite clearly from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, there are many things well said in Dr. Speer's book, and we are glad that he does not by any means go all the way with the destructive Modernism of our time. He believes in the virgin birth of Christ and in His bodily resurrection; he tries, at least, though hardly, we think, with complete success, to hold on to the teaching of Paul as well as to the Sermon on the Mount; he believes that the New Testament account of Jesus is true.

Yet the book as a whole is a confused and harmful book. We say so with sorrow; but we are obliged to say so in order to be of whatever help we may be to those who are seeking truth.

In support of this estimate of the book, we may, perhaps, single out three features for special mention. They are (1) the lack of clearness about the Bible, (2) the wrong notion of the nature of a creed, (3) the indiscriminate and commendatory quotation of Modernist writers.

### The Natural and the Supernatural

Certain other things, indeed, might with perhaps equal propriety be pointed out. We might point, for example, to the confused notion of the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. Dr. Speer does speak against "the modern world view which knows only an immanent God, part of and identified with and enclosed within His own creation" (p. 40); yet almost in the same breath (and still more clearly on p. 271), he gives comfort to the deadly error which identifies the supernatural with the spiritual and regards the supernatural as standing merely over against the material world. "The word 'supernatural,'" says Dr. Speer, "is a clumsy and confusing word. We need first to define what we mean by 'natural.'" In reply, we are bound to say that the word "supernatural" as Dr. Speer uses it, is indeed a clumsy and confusing word; but we are also bound to say that until he learns to use it not in a clumsy and confusing way but in an altogether clear and illuminating way as designating the creative acts of God in sharp distinction from the work which God carries on through the course of nature, he can hardly be a competent teacher of the Church. When Dr. Speer, in

order to show that the early Christians, as we also today, were believers in the supernatural, says (on p. 271) that "the physical and material world does not exhaust reality" and that "mind and will are not for us resolvable into any physical and material base," and when he then quotes Miss Underhill with approval in this connection, he is, to say the least, playing with fire. By implication, though no doubt he is unconscious of it, he is going a long way with that modern denial of the living and holy God which is often coupled with ascription of "deity" to the reduced and merely human Jesus of modern reconstruction.

Thus, on p. 240, in a truly amazing passage, Dr. Speer cites in proof of the fact that "the early Church believed and we believe in the deity of Christ" the contention of Dr. A. C. McGiffert in *The God of the Early Christians* to the effect that "Jesus alone was that God" in whom the early Christians believed; and then he remarks that "if we cannot go as far as Dr. McGiffert it is still absolutely clear to us that the primitive Church worshipped and prayed to Jesus Christ and classed Him, man though they recognized Him to be and rejoiced that He was, with God." Just what was that contention of Dr. McGiffert which Dr. Speer here seems to treat as a testimony to the fact that the early Christians believed in the deity of Jesus, and to which he seems to object merely on the ground that it goes too far? The answer is plainly given in Dr. McGiffert's book, of which I wrote an extensive review in *The Princeton Theological Review* for October, 1924<sup>1</sup>, and upon which I commented also in my little book, *What Is Faith?* Dr. McGiffert held that the early Gentile Christians were not theists; they did not necessarily believe at all that there was a personal God, Creator and Ruler of the world. They were not necessarily monotheists. They did not ask any metaphysical questions as to the relation between Jesus and a transcendent God. But they merely held Jesus to be their own Saviour-God. It is that non-theistic view, that view which is really diametrically opposed to any real ascription of deity to Jesus, which Dr. Speer treats with such favor and apparently regards merely as going a little too far in its zeal for the deity of Christ! We do not mean that Dr. Speer is fully aware of the destructive implications of what he is saying. But still we do think that the fact that he can involve himself in such confusion is due to a profound fault in the whole starting-point of his thinking. The true starting-point for a Christian is not the human life of Jesus, but it is the majesty and holiness of God, the Creator and Ruler of the world. That is clear in all the Bible, but it is particularly clear in the teaching of Jesus Himself. The first verse of the Bible is really the foundation of all the

rest, and unless a man makes that verse the foundation of all his thinking, his ascription of deity to Jesus is the most un-Christian thing that could possibly be imagined. To worship and glorify as God the Jesus of the Bible, the Jesus who is "God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever," is the highest exercise of man, but to worship as God a Jesus who is not one in nature with the Creator and Ruler of the world is to worship and serve the creature more than the Creator, and that is a dreadful sin.

This indifference to the first verse of Genesis, this indifference to the basic theism taught by Jesus, is one of the root errors of modern missionary endeavor. Dr. Speer has given comfort to that error. He has not done so with understanding of what he is doing; but his doing so does reveal a very serious confusion of mind.

In the second place, we might remark that Dr. Speer is vague and unsatisfactory, in this book as always—so far as we have observed—in his recent writings, when he speaks of the Cross of Christ. He seems to bring us to the threshold of the great truth; but he never brings us into the Holy of Holies, and he never brings us clearly, in this connection, into the presence of the great High Priest.

But we come now to the three features of the book which we singled out for special comment.

### The Bible

In the first place, then, we may speak of the lack of clearness about the Bible. That lack of clearness—if we may not use with regard to it some still more unfavorable term—is particularly evident in the passage in the first part of Lecture II where the author sets forth the relation between Christianity and "Judaism." Here Dr. Speer speaks in the typical Modernist way. He points out, indeed, that "the Old Testament was the only Bible of the Church at the outset, and the first Christians fed upon it and talked from it, as the Church does to this day." But he says that "the new not only grew up out of the old," but also "came down from without and above upon the old" and that "the unlikeness eclipsed the likeness." He says further:

"He [Jesus] did not exclude Himself from Israel, but He so faithfully and explicitly proclaimed Himself and His message that Israel rejected and crucified Him. Why? Because in reality He was shattering the old forms and introducing a new and different and distinctive faith, a new thought of God and of humanity, of life and destiny" (p. 66).

He fails altogether to distinguish from the false Judaism of the Pharisees and of the Judaizers the true Judaism that understood the Old Testament Scriptures. He says:

"The breach appeared between Jesus and Judaism because it was there and must inevitably appear. All that Christianity and Judaism held in common, and a rich common treasure it is, as Paul never tired of pointing out, was outweighed by their radical and fundamental difference" (p. 67).

He quotes with approval the Modernist, T. R. Glover, when Glover says that it "was a new thing when Religion in the name of truth and for the love of God, abolished the connection with a trivial past." He classes Judaism with non-Christian religions<sup>2</sup>:

"If between Christianity and Judaism there were this deep generic breach, declared with such vehemence on the side of Judaism that it set Christianity off in utter separation and effected the crucifixion of Jesus, *a fortiori* is it impossible to equalitate Christianity and other religions, all of them vastly farther removed from Christianity than Judaism with its pure monotheism, its noble ethics and its theocratic solidarity. Christianity began thus at the outset as a new and incommensurable religion, belonging in a classification by itself alone. The whole New Testament bears witness to this. And the Fathers follow it. If at first the Church sought to hold fast both to the new and to the old, it was not long before, as Jesus had foretold, the inevitable cleavage came. The Christians were expelled from the synagogues as an alien element, and came themselves to see with ever clearer vision that something better and different had come, so different that it could only be described as a brand new creation, not one more unfulfilled, wistful quest of men for God, but the one conclusive, adequate and final outgoing of God Himself for man" (p. 69).

In these passages, Dr. Speer is dealing in a very unsatisfactory way, not with the superstructure of Christian missions and of Christian work, but with the foundation. He is dealing in a very unsatisfactory way with the Bible. It is difficult to see how a man can write as Dr. Speer here writes and at the same time hold, if he is at all consistent, that there is just one true religion based on a supernatural revelation from God. I cannot see how, if he is consistent, he can really hold to the equal authority of the Old and New Testaments. Does that mean merely giving the Old Testament up? No, it means something even more serious. It means giving the New Testament up as well, because the New Testament stakes the whole weight of its authority upon just that high view of the Old Testament Scriptures which is held by despised Bible-believing Christians lately—that high view of the Old Testament which is certainly undermined, by implication if not consciously, in what Dr. Speer says.

We desire particularly at this point to be fair. It is perfectly possible for a man to hold a high view of the Old Testament and at the same time to use some unguarded expressions that would logically destroy that view. I did just that, if I may take myself as a humble example, in my course lessons, *A Rapid Survey of the Literature and History of New Testament Times*, which was first published by the Presbyterian Board of Publication in 1914. In that course of lessons, especially in the first printing, I used some expressions, in describing the relation between Christianity and "Judaism" which were erroneous in a way similar to that for which I am now criticizing Dr. Speer. Yet in that same course I presented a very high view of the authority of the whole Bible.

<sup>1</sup>In this quotation, as in some other quotations from Dr. Speer, we have omitted his footnotes, including references to Biblical passages.

<sup>2</sup>Vol. XXII, 1924, pp. 544-588.

I have regretted the errors in my course, and I am glad to correct them. I hope that Dr. Speer will not take it amiss if I point out errors in his latest book which seem to me to go very much further in the same direction.

The great trouble is that I do not remember in this latest book of Dr. Speer, or in his recent books, any clear presentation of the doctrine of supernatural revelation or of the inspiration of the whole Bible which would counterbalance the unfortunate passages to which I have referred. I cannot remember any clear-cut statement of the authority of the Bible as such. It would be difficult to imagine a more serious difference of opinion than that which here *seems*, at least, to separate us from Dr. Speer. Men may differ about the superstructure in many details, and still go on in essential harmony; but unless they are agreed about the foundation, it is difficult to see how anything like real agreement among them can be attained. The foundation of mission work, and of Christian work in general at home as well as abroad, for us Bible-believing Christians, is found in the absolute authority of the whole of God's holy Word. I do not know how far Dr. Speer understands the implications of certain things that he has said. But the matter is so fundamental and so serious that even confusion with regard to it, to say nothing of positive error, is disastrous to everything that the Church is endeavoring to do.

### The Nature of a Creed

In the second place, Dr. Speer has a wrong notion of the nature of a creed, and thus he gives comfort to what is perhaps the central error in the modern Church. Thus he says:

"Christianity did indeed cover over and weave around its original simple message many involvements, and it inevitably thought out the implication of its teaching, and did so of necessity in the thought forms of those whom it sought to reach. In part these developments confirmed and fortified the essential, central convictions, and in part they confused and burdened them. But this development came for the most part in the third century and afterwards" (p. 98).

Does Dr. Speer mean to include in this utterly derogatory presentation of the very nature of a creed the Westminster Confession of Faith which the ordination pledge presents as containing the system of doctrine taught in infallible Scriptures? I do not see how any reader can very well help answering this question in the affirmative.

On page 104, the great creeds are presented as being necessary to guard Christianity's "simple and essential historic centralities." That is a Modernist view of a creed, rather than the Christian view. Certainly it is very difficult to establish its agreement with the constitution of the Presbyterian Church. Dr. Speer says:

"That connection [connection with the mystery religions] had to be broken and Christians must come clean and stay clear of all complicity or

relationship to all other faiths. This gave Christianity its power. It was not its absorptiveness, its later syncretisms, its adoption of the thought forms of the world, its generalized philosophy and world view, its great creeds, necessary as these were to guard its simple and essential historic centralities. The permanence and success of Christianity were not secured by any of these, 'but by the simple New Testament creed, "Jesus is Lord," which permitted no compromise' " (p. 104).

These last words are quoted—quite characteristically, we are sorry to say—from the Modernist writer, Dr. S. Angus, whose propaganda has given such distress to Bible-believing Christians in Australia.

Dr. Speer contrasts the "primitive view of Christ" with "the elaborate verbiage of the creeds of the Councils," and says that "neither the creeds nor all the subsequent theologies of the Church have been able to see more in Christ and to claim more for Christ than is found in the Epistles of Paul, which, let it be remembered, antedated all four Gospels and which are the earliest statement of the faith of the Church about Christ" (p. 204). We agree, of course, that the creeds of the Councils do not contain more than that which is contained in Holy Scripture, though we decline to single out one portion of Scripture from the rest, and though we certainly prefer not to speak of the Epistles of Paul as being a "statement of the faith of the Church about Christ." But we certainly do not think that the great Ecumenical Creeds are to be charged with "elaborate verbiage." On the contrary they are admirably succinct and pithy statements of what the Scriptures teach. If one wants elaborate verbiage, he has to turn to the inordinate verbosity of the statements of the Lausanne and Jerusalem Missionary Conferences, which Dr. Speer holds in such high honor. The reason for that inordinate verbosity is that those statements are seeking to please both the Christian and the Modernist element in the Church. In order to do that they are concealing their lamentable poverty by a veritable torrent of words. The purpose of the great creeds of the Church was exactly the opposite. It was not to make room for error, but to set the truth off from error in ever greater distinctness.

Dr. Speer loves to speak of the simplicity of "the elementary faith of the first disciples and of the primitive Church" (p. 205) and of "the simple Gospel of the Primitive Church" (p. 137) in contrast with this supposed "elaborate verbiage" of the great creeds. At this point we disagree with him in the sharpest possible way. There is a true simplicity, we hold, in the great creeds, including the Westminster Confession of Faith. Those creeds contain mysteries, because they merely set forth what the Bible teaches, and wonderfully rich is the revelation which God has recorded for us in His Word. But in a profound sense they are simple. There is nothing confused about them. If we really want to find something that is confused, something that is the very reverse of simple, we have to turn to the

vagueness of Modernism, with its use of Christian terminology in an un-Christian sense; and we could turn also to the elaborate attempt of Dr. Speer, in his present book, to mediate between things that are as opposite as the poles.

But is simplicity, in this modern sense, which equates simplicity with doctrinal poverty, really to be desired? A great many people seem to think that it is. Church unionists of today are devoting their best efforts towards seeing how little of Christian truth they can get along with. But a man can never engage in any such effort as that if he is true to the Word of God. The truly Christian effort is that of searching the Scriptures to learn more and more of what God has so graciously revealed. I can find in the Bible from beginning to end no trace of this anti-creedal, anti-intellectualistic, anti-doctrinal tendency which is found so distressingly in Dr. Speer's book. That tendency really cuts much deeper than the Westminster Confession, much deeper than the great Ecumenical Creeds; it is really opposed to the whole temper of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

### Dr. Speer and Modernist Writers

In the third place, Dr. Speer's book is filled with indiscriminate and commendatory quotations from the most destructive Modernist writers. I cannot take space here to exhibit that fault in detail. To do so with any adequacy would fill whole pages of CHRISTIANITY TODAY. Dr. Speer has the habit of making some Christian utterance and then, in support of it, quoting Harnack or someone else with the words "as Harnack says," or the like. When he does that he takes back by implication almost every good thing that he has said; because when he equates his good utterance with what Harnack says he is asking his readers to interpret his good utterance in Harnack's way. These writers whom Dr. Speer loves to quote in this fashion—Harnack and a great host of others—are opposed to supernatural Christianity at its very roots. How can the result be anything but utter confusion in the minds of the readers of the book?

Perhaps it may be said that the fault to which we are here objecting is a fault merely in Dr. Speer's understanding of these modern writers and not a fault in his own understanding of the Bible or of the Christian religion. There may be a certain measure of truth in this way of looking at the matter. It is quite true that on certain occasions Dr. Speer does show himself to be amazingly unaware of the real views of the writers whom he is quoting. Thus on p. 35 he says that "those critics who are adverse to our view of Christ . . . regard as the most trustworthy history in the New Testament . . . the opening chapters of the book of Acts." It is certainly surprising that one who seems to have read so much



of the work of the writers in question should be so totally unaware of what their critical position about the New Testament is.

But we do not think that this explanation by any means goes the whole way. We cannot believe that a man whose own views of the basis of the Christian religion were really clear could quote with the utmost approval, on page after page of his book, what is said by the most vigorous opponents of the real Christian faith. Does this not give us an object lesson to show what utter folly is the notion that a man can ever hold fully to the truth if he does not stand bravely and clearly against error?

In what I have said about Dr. Speer's book, and about his teaching, I desire not to be misunderstood. I do not mean that his book contains nothing that is good; I do not mean that his life work in my judgment has been altogether in vain. I myself obtained great benefit from his preaching in my youth, and I know that countless others have obtained great benefit from it. But what I am saying is that in the great issue of the present day Dr. Speer is standing on the wrong side. He is standing on the wrong side because he is standing on neither side. Never were our Lord's words, "He that is not with me is against me," more completely to the point than they are at the present moment in the Presbyterian Church. In the great conflict between Christianity and Modernism, the actual result of Dr. Speer's influence has told powerfully and generally on the Modernist side. He has commended to us the middle-of-the-road attitude with great eloquence, but just because of that eloquence with which he has commended it, he has shown with renewed clearness that that middle-of-the-road attitude, that attitude which Dr. Frank H. Stevenson has aptly called the "yes-and-no attitude in the Presbyterian Church," is the worst possible obstacle in the way of real Christian testimony.

It is only when the Church turns away resolutely from that attitude that she will regain the power that has been lost. God grant that she might turn away from a miserable minimizing apologetic—with its stereotyped phrases, "no doctrinal issue," "no divisive theology," etc.—and might get back to the true, intolerant, offensive, glorious, powerful gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

One thing is clear. If we are to have the old power, we must pay the price. We must make a clean breach with all entangling alliances; we must make a clean breach with Modernism. We must return to the true simplicity of the gospel—the true simplicity of the great theologians, the true simplicity of the Word of God.

Modern advocates of a non-doctrinal simplicity are not truly simple at all. Dr. Speer is not truly simple when he makes conservative utterances and then quotes page after

page of Harnack, Schweitzer, and other opponents of the Faith, in support of what he says. No plain man can make head or tail out of such a self-contradictory position as that. Instead of such false simplicity, which is really a very subtle, self-contradictory thing, men and women are longing for the true simplicity of God's Word, for the full-orbed gospel that the Word contains.

It is in the interests of such true simplicity that the present movement for reform of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions has been begun. We do not know in detail how that movement will end. Some

devout Christians think that the Board of Foreign Missions can really be reformed. If that is to be done it is quite clear that the membership of the Board must be changed. Others think that the formation of a new Board that shall be true to the Bible and to the Confession of Faith of the Church should at once be undertaken. One thing at least is clear. Truth and honesty will not fail. The present situation can have no real blessing of God. But what a glorious opportunity there would be at the present moment if there were a faithful Presbyterian Board of Missions to send the true gospel to the ends of the earth!

## News of the Church

### Correspondence, General

#### Washington-Oregon-Idaho Notes

*By Dr. Roy Talmage Brumbaugh*

IF our Boards came out clean-cut for evangelical Christianity, I believe that there would be a revival of the grace of giving. Middle-of-the-roadism and modernism make negligible contributions to the work of evangelizing the world. True evangelicals cannot consistently give to causes which seem to specialize in education and medication and neglect the first duty of evangelization. Of course, it would not be good politics to eliminate middle-of-the-roadism and modernism, but the separation would be blessed by God.

The Rev. William Faucette, pastor of the Millard Avenue Presbyterian Church of Portland (Ore.) had the largest Easter crowd in the history of the church. Many attended on Easter who will not be seen until next Easter, but they heard the Gospel in the Millard Avenue Church. Mr. Faucette preached on the full meaning of Christ's resurrection.

The First Church of Hoquiam (Wash.) of which the Rev. Leonard R. Patton is pastor, celebrated its fiftieth anniversary last month. This church was host to the Presbyterian of Olympia in April.

On April 27th the First Church of Belingham celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the church and the twentieth anniversary of the dedication of the present church plant. The pastor emeritus, who was pastor at the time of the founding of the church, and Dr. John R. Macartney, the present pastor, who was also pastor when the church was erected, participated in the services.

Sixty-two new members were received into the First Presbyterian Church of Tacoma (Wash.) last month. Two thousand four hundred and eighty-nine persons at-

tended the two Easter services. Twenty new Deacons were ordained and installed in April. One hundred and twenty-five officers and members assist in the visitation of every member of the congregation every month. This church broadcasts four times a week. The morning service is broadcast over KMO from 11.00 to 12.15; Tuesday and Wednesday nights over Station KVI from 8.00 to 8.25, and Friday nights over Station KVI from 10.00 to 10.30. This church will celebrate its sixtieth anniversary in July. In the meantime it is enjoying a revival under the Holy Spirit.

TACOMA, WASH.

#### California Column

THE spring meeting of Los Angeles Presbytery was, as usual, very largely attended. More than three hundred ministers and elders taxed the capacity of our Euclids Heights Church. . . . Among the larger items of business were the request of several of our ministers for the Presbytery's sanction of salary reduction, the average amount being about twenty-five per cent. . . . Easter Sunday saw exceptionally large congregations at all of our churches, and the Immanuel Church, Dr. H. B. Smith, pastor, said to be the largest in the United States, was forced to arrange two identical morning services, one at nine o'clock and the other at eleven to accommodate the crowds. It is unfortunate that so many people do their church-going for the entire year on Easter Sunday, unfortunate for the church, but more so for the people. . . . Resolutions requesting Presbyterian Churches of the Pacific Coast to contribute \$70,000 for rehabilitation of churches damaged by the earthquake were adopted by the Presbytery. Dr. Guy W. Wadsworth, moderator of the synod of California and secretary of the