

### Introducing the argument

Quote: "The purpose of this book is not to decide the religious issue of the present day, but merely to present the issue as sharply and clearly as possible, in order that the reader may be aided in deciding it for himself. Presenting an issue sharply is indeed by no means a popular business at the present time; there are many who prefer to fight their intellectual battles in what Dr. Francis L. Patton has aptly called a 'condition of low visibility.' . . . Light may seem at times to be an impertinent intruder, but it is always beneficial in the end. . . . In the sphere of religion, as in other spheres, the things about which men are agreed are apt to be the things that are least worth holding; the really important things are the things about which men will fight."

Question: Restate Machen's argument. Why does he frame the argument of his book in this way?

### Introducing liberalism

Quote: "In the sphere of religion, in particular, the present time is a time of conflict; the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religion is called "modernism" or "liberalism." . . . But manifold as are the forms in which the movement appears, the root of the movement is one; the many varieties of modern liberal religion are rooted in naturalism--that is, in the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection with the origin of Christianity."

Question: What is the defining characteristic of liberalism, according to Machen?

### Appreciating liberalism

Quote: "The rise of this modern naturalistic liberalism has not come by chance, but has been occasioned by important changes which have recently taken place in the conditions of life. The past one hundred years have witnessed the beginning of a new era in human history . . . The change is not something that lies beneath the surface and might be visible only to the discerning eye; on the contrary it forces itself upon the attention of the plain man at a hundred points. Modern inventions and the industrialism that has been built upon them have given us in many respects a new world to live in; we can no more remove ourselves from that world than we can escape from the atmosphere that we breathe. . . . No department of knowledge can maintain its isolation from the modern lust of scientific conquest; treaties of inviolability, though hallowed by all the sanctions of age-long tradition, are being flung ruthlessly to the winds."

Question: What are some positive developments of this 'new era in human history,' and what are some concerns?

### Identifying the question

Question: "Inevitably the question arises whether the opinions of such men [from the past who believe in traditional Christianity] can ever be normative for men of the present day; in other words, whether first-century religion can ever stand in company with twentieth-century science. However the question may be answered, it presents a serious problem to the modern Church. . . ."

From every point of view, therefore, the problem in question is the most serious concern of the Church. What is the relation between Christianity and modern culture; may Christianity be maintained in a scientific age? It is this problem which modern liberalism attempts to solve.”

Question: What are some difficulties with relating Christianity and modern culture? How does liberalism attempt to solve the challenge of modernity in relation to Christianity?

Quote from Rudolf Bultmann: “For all our thinking today is shaped irrevocably by modern science. A blind acceptance of the New Testament mythology would be arbitrary, and to press for its acceptance as an article of faith would be to reduce faith to works. Wilhelm Herrmann pointed this out, and one would have thought that his demonstration was conclusive. It would involve a sacrifice of the intellect which could have only one result—a curious form of schizophrenia and insincerity. It would mean accepting a view of the world in our faith and religion which we should deny in our everyday life. Modern thought as we have inherited it brings with it criticism of the New Testament view of the world. . . . It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles. We may think we can manage it in our own lives, but to expect other to do so is to make the Christian faith unintelligible and unacceptable to the modern world” (*Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, p. 3–5).

#### Exposing liberalism

Quote: “Two lines of criticism, then, are possible with respect to the liberal attempt at reconciling science and Christianity. Modern liberalism may be criticized (1) on the ground that it is un-Christian and (2) on the ground that it is unscientific. We shall concern ourselves here chiefly with the former line of criticism; we shall be interested in showing that despite the liberal use of traditional phraseology modern liberalism not only is a different religion from Christianity but belongs in a totally different class of religions. . . . our principal concern just now is to show that the liberal attempt at reconciling Christianity with modern science has really 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.”

Question: If Machen is correct in his analysis, in what ways can we say that liberalism in the modern church is “un-Christian”?

#### Critiquing liberalism

Quote: “Scientific investigation, as has already been observed, has certainly accomplished much; it has in many respects produced a new world. But there is another aspect of the picture which should not be ignored. The modern world represents in some respects an enormous improvement over the world in which our ancestors lived; but in other respects it exhibits a lamentable decline. The improvement appears in the physical conditions of life, but in the spiritual realm there is a corresponding loss. The loss is clearest, perhaps, in the realm of art. . . . The result is an unparalleled impoverishment of human life.”

Question: How does ‘the modern world’ lead to ‘an unparalleled impoverishment of human life’?

Next Week (September 11): Read Chapter 2, “Doctrine”