THE PLACE OF HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK IN AMERICAN LIBERAL THEOLOGY

by

Keith Clifford Henders, B.A., B.D.

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Department of Divinity,
McGill University,
Montreal.

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S. T. M. DIVINITY

Keith Clifford Henders

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From an introductory section sketching the factors which gave rise to liberal theology up to and including that movement's entry onto the American theological scene, this study moves to a survey of Fosdick's life and thought, all the while attempting to determine just where this preacher-theologian fits into the pattern of religious liberalism as it developed upon the North American continent. We conclude finally that although Fosdick was not too original, nor too systematic a thinker, he nevertheless played a significant role in this thought and action current which he also represented fairly consistently, although he could on occasion stand out from it to criticize its shortcomings. In fact it was he who sounded the call for modernism to move in a new direction if it were to escape extinction. A large part of Fosdick's importance derives from his successful communication of liberal theology to the American populace; but possibly even more basic is the fact that he may be considered largely responsible for creating the climate in which this theological mood could flourish in the first place. Though he is no longer so active, Fosdick's influence promises to be with us for some time to come.

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PREFACE

A former seminary professor of mine once remarked to a group of us - in rather whimsical vein - that all we really needed in order to become first class ministers was the Bible and a book of sermons by Harry Emerson Fosdick. In spite of the exaggerated nature of this statement, there would undoubtedly be many who, along with myself, would have to admit the tremendous impact of this man, Harry Emerson Fosdick, upon their lives and their work. It was in the light of this influence that I began to ask, what was the underlying philosophy - the basis of religious faith - which gave this man's writings and teachings such compelling vigor and drive? What forces lay behind his celebrated ministry which has helped so many others like myself in coming to terms with the multiform issues of the Christian faith? Then it was suggested by one of my course directors at McGill's Faculty of Divinity that I might pursue this question further, at the same time incorporating it within the larger concerns of the total theological background out of which Fosdick came. Hence this present study - The Place of Harry Emerson Fosdick In American Liberal Theology.

We will in this work be glimpsing those forces which gave rise to the liberal spirit in religion, particularly as they affected the American scene. Then, after a look at Fosdick himself and the influences which helped shape his life, we will undertake to isolate areas of the man's thought and try to determine their relationship to the larger liberal (Protestant liberal, that is) picture. This approach seems to me to be the most satisfactory inasmuch as it will help keep us from

traversing the same ground repeatedly. However, in view of the interrelatedness of his thought, and also taking into account the fact that we are here attempting a rather systematic approach to an individual whose teachings, we shall discover, are not altogether systematic themselves, this may not always be as possible as we would like. Finally, having surveyed the more or less characteristic beliefs of liberalism (and "more or less characteristic" I have found to be an appropriate term in describing liberal beliefs; liberalism itself being such a fluid and all-encompassing movement), and endeavored to discern just where Fosdick fits into the total pattern, we shall conclude with some estimation of the man's relevance both to his own day and to ours.

My thanks go out to Dr. Kenneth Hamilton and Rev. Bill Wall for their advice and encouragement. And though it is not customary, I understand, to proffer appreciation to one's thesis director at this point, I do feel that Dr. Boorman deserves special mention for taking the extra time and trouble involved in offering direction by correspondence. I also wish to express my indebtedness to my very patient typist, Keila Waksvik. My deepest gratitude is reserved for my wife, Elaine.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The background of American liberal theology is, in the first place, that of liberal theology in general, as we shall presently see. The spirit of religious revival which had characterized the sixteenth century, the Reformation era, soon yielded to a period of ecclesiastical consolidation. By the eighteenth century, theology had, speaking generally, declined still further toward a state of religious sterility. During the next hundred years, however, the situation in the Protestant world reversed as fresh winds blew across the theological tableau, driving before them the aridness of the previous era, The mainstream of this new theological reconstruction came to be known as liberal theology.

Liberal theology, undeniably the most potent force in the world of religion during the closing decades of the nineteenth century and those which launched us into the twentieth, has to be regarded as the child of many parents. Strangely enough, some of its forebears were clearly antagonistic toward one another, and yet each was able to make some acceptable contribution toward that thought and action current the product of which was liberal theology. It is to these historic antecedents that we now turn briefly in order to set the stage upon which we will later view our protagonist as he demonstrates his right to be considered with the major figures of this movement.

One of the earliest forces making for the disintegration of the rigid scholasticism in which the Protestant churches had become sadly encumbered during the post-Reformation period was that of Pietism. This movement represented a protest of individualism sounded against

the institutionalism which had come to characterize the religious denominations of the seventeenth century. Whereas orthodoxy had by that time fallen into the snare of insisting upon doctrinal forms as the norm of faith, Pietism insisted upon the centrality of the personal experience of conversion; and while so doing, it indicated its total disregard for denominational lines. Life, not doctrine, was its watch-word. Any tenet of belief was important only insofar as it had a bearing upon the actual living of one's existence. Thus Pietism undermined respect for dogmatic theology and schooled men in distinguishing the important articles of faith from those which were less essential.[1] Pietism was later to appear in America under the banner of revivalism; but its effects here were largely the same as on the continent inasmuch as it set the believer free from dependence upon doctrine and made his own experience the sole authenticator of his faith.

Just about the same time that Pietism was sounding the recall to a living and vital religion, the rationalistic mode of thought born of the Enlightenment was playing an instrumental role in bestowing upon man a more noble sense of his own worth within the cosmos. No longer dependent upon supernatural power nor forced to grovel in intellectual submission to external authority, man set up his own reason as an autonomous final court of appeal. Gone were the passive acceptance of existing conditions and the belief that amelioration can come only in some etherial world beyond the grave. In their place stood an expanding confidence in humanity's past and present achievements and an

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1. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, The Rise of Modern Religious Ideas (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), p. 6 ff.

increasing conviction of future progress for this race. One lasting dividend paid by this new found emphasis upon the worth of the individual was the growing conviction of the universal brotherhood of man.[2] Natural religion became an influential force as Deism vied for the religious allegiance of men. At the same time, several of the doctrines of historic Christianity underwent reduction, often to the lowest possible terms - a procedure which was to be oft repeated by succeeding generations of liberal religionists.

Romanticism, stemming from such thinkers as Rousseau, and the prime force of the eighteen hundreds, stressed another side of reality which had been almost completely overlooked by the rationalistic currents of the eighteenth century. Impatient with what it regarded as the barren coldness of sheer intellectualism, this mood gave free rein to the emotional side of man. Consequently, the subjective aspect of religion once again became dominant - a feature which was later to bulk large in American liberalism.

Still, among all the forces which contributed to the new thought currents then shaping the modern world, the most prominent position has to be reserved for science and all of its dramatic discoveries and accomplishments. The findings in such fields as archaeology and biology, the publication of the work of men like Galileo and Copernicus, brought far-reaching breakthroughs with which a maturing world had seriously to reckon. And the significance of this factor was magnified by the fact that, for the first time, this expanding

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2. Ibid., p. 14.

scientific outlook and achievement became the possession of the common man. That the Christian church chose to ignore or, more often, vigorously oppose and refute these advances only served in the end to discredit the claims of orthodoxy and cast doubt upon the reliability of the church's teachings.

One very real consequence growing out of these awesome achievements wrought by the genie of science was the positing of a reduced role for God in the conduct and control of the physical universe. Supernatural activity was eased out of the picture to be replaced by mechanical causation. A corollary of this position could be observed in the increasing difficulty to accede to a belief in miracles. And, as evidences of supernatural intervention grew fewer, several questioning minds, starting with the premise that the universe was self-sustaining, began to work through to the proposition that it might be self-originating as well.[3] This process which reduced other-worldliness to the status of a theological relic was hastened by that spawn of the physical sciences, the Industrial Revolution, which increasingly caused man to focus upon the merely material aspects of life.[4]

The most telling blow struck by science originated from the discipline of biology with the enunciation of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Evolutionary ideas, of course, had not been unknown in the past, but the wealth of evidence offered by Darwin in support of his hypothesis put the whole subject on a new plane - one on which thinking people were forced to take cognizance of the plausibility of

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3. Ibid., p. 41.
4. Henry P. Van Dusen, The Vindication of Liberal Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), p. 67 ff.

development from lower to higher forms in the organic world at least, and possibly in other realms as well. The result was that several theological categories, previously held inviolate, were left completely shattered or at least listing severely. The prevailing notion of man's origin, for instance, had to be drastically rethought. Death could no longer be claimed to be a punishment for sin, as had been the orthodox teaching; now it had to be depicted as a part of the natural order of things. The traditional Christian concept of redemption seemed as well to be placed in jeopardy.

But even though some elements within Christendom strongly resisted this new biological doctrine, there were those who welcomed this advance as freeing the Divine activity from the static categories in which it had until that time been enmired. Theistic evolutionists could now behold God within the world process, actively directing it toward its divinely appointed end. This conviction had important effects on the concept of Divine immanence which was to become dominant in the nineteenth century.

A further outcome of rationalistic thought trends occurring in other areas was the increasingly critical study to which the Bible was being subjected. The Bible had previously been awarded the exalted status of infallible authority on all subjects. The traditional posture of orthodoxy, it must be remembered, had been that the inerrant scriptures furnished the basis of authority for Protestants. Since man was adjudged to be essentially depraved, both his reason and his experience were regarded as unreliable. The Bible set forth a collection of axioms simply to be received and acted upon. But when science stepped into the

picture, it disclosed the degree of error contained in the world view presented by the sacred scriptures of Christianity. Now, the historical-critical method of investigation, unhindered by any spurious notions of scriptural sanctity, gave rise to an analysis of holy writ which shook orthodoxy to its very foundations, demonstrating the mythical content of Genesis One, denying the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, calling into question the complete eyewitness authenticity of the gospels, and generally dealing a blow to the dogma of the inerrancy of scripture from which it never totally recovered. And having thus been proved wrong in matters of fact, the possibility was raised that the Bible might also be inaccurate in matters of faith.

A discussion of the formative factors in liberal theology would not be complete without some reference to the leading personalities who gathered these tendencies up and shaped them into the driving force which was so greatly to influence ensuing generations. It is not our purpose to discuss the total belief pattern of these seminal thinkers here, but simply to highlight certain features which have relevance for later sections of this study.

But before considering individual persons, a rapid survey of an entire group might be well in order; for, looking back, we find that a number of the emphases just reviewed had already been sounded earlier through the ranks of a religious body known as the Socinians. They too insisted on the centrality of reason, and were consequently quite critical in their acceptance of the Bible. In fact, their pragmatic approach to morality caused them to discredit several of the Biblical stories outright. And, in rejecting the doctrines of original sin, the

trinity, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, they were definite forerunners of much that was to become central in the later development of liberal thought patterns.

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher is credited with completing the break between the old notions which had bound religion and conduct and the new forces which were being born in his day, and thus has been the deserving recipient of the title "Father of Modern Theology". Strongly influenced by the Romanticism of his era, Schleiermacher discerned the center of religious faith as residing in the experience of the individual. Feeling, not reason, was important. Consequently, formulated doctrines, along with institutions, were assigned a lesser position in relation to this feeling which one had of absolute dependence upon the universe. Teachings he described as merely the written reflections derived from this complex experience. But in spite of the fact that he sought to avoid dogmatism in any statement constructed concerning the Divine, Schleiermacher realized that human nature requires some representation of the Eternal. As a result, he stressed the fact that while these are permissible, we must never lose sight of the fact that they are nothing more than images, and therefore never totally representative of the reality for which they stand.[5]

Schleiermacher reinterpreted several cardinal doctrines, viewing original sin, for instance, as having no reference to any original parents, but being basically an expression of the fact that the whole human race is involved in sin and in need of the redemption

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5. Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Nisbet and Company Ltd., 1937), p. 49.

which comes through Christ - a theme which was to stand out in later liberal patterns of thought. Sin, he determined, resulted from the conflict of spirit with flesh - an idea lent further credence by the theory of evolution. Within the Protestant fold, Schleiermacher was of the opinion that several of the traditions were so proximate that there was really no justification for their separation. Both the Reformed and Lutheran churches, for example, had derived from basically the same type of experience, and consequently should not exist apart. In expounding this motif, he became one of the forerunners of the modern ecumenical movement, a concern most precious to the heart of all Protestant liberals.

Then too, Schleiermacher was among the first of the great theologians of the modern era to allow a measure of goodness to the other major religions of the world. And though, like those who later followed him, he argued that Christianity was superior to those other faiths, the distinction was mainly one of degree rather than kind. Evolutionary influences were in evidence here also.

Schleiermacher saw Jesus as the center of the faith - the one who actually wrought redemption. But (and here we discern just one more theme that was to become characteristic of later liberal thought), for Schleiermacher, Jesus' uniqueness or divinity lay in the degree of God-consciousness he possessed. Again, there was no qualitative difference between him and other men. Redemption consisted in yielding ourselves to the impression and influence of the person of Jesus Christ. This non-objective, psychological approach was to gain great favor with later modernists, swayed as they were by the social sciences of their day.

And like later liberals, Schleiermacher had intellectual difficulty with the orthodox doctrine of the trinity; maintaining that it verges on nothing less than tri-theism. Hence his own views tended toward the Sabellian pattern.[6]

One other individual who contributed significantly to the development of liberal theology was the German theologian, Albrecht Ritschl. Whereas Schleiermacher had emphasized the subjective experience of religion, Ritschl, being entirely pragmatic in his approach to religion, centered his thought in the realm of the ethical. This stress on the practical nature of religion assisted in the formation of the characteristic liberal concern for morality. And coupled with Ritschl's rediscovery of the central place of the idea of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament, this feature largely provided the back-ground for the later development of the "social gospel" movement in American Protestantism.[7]

Though he too was concerned about the victory of spirit over nature in human life, the concept of sin as being basically ignorance (a theme which some later adopted as representing the principal meaning of sin) was also strong in Ritschl. He was further instrumental in the movement to restore the historical Jesus to the center of theology. The traditional doctrine according to which Christ was punished for our sins he regarded as actually sub-Christian.[8] Also unconcerned with speculating about a trinity of being, Ritschl saw God as essentially love - a teaching which resulted in the practical abandonment of the traditional doctrine

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6. Ibid., p. 78.
7. John Dillenberger & Claude Welch, Protestant Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 200.
8. Mackintosh, Types, p. 162.

of the eternal punishment of the damned; likely one of the most far-reaching accomplishments effected by the proponents of liberal thought patterns.

According to William Hordern, "The influence of Schleiermacher and Ritschl reached America late in the nineteenth century".[9] Here, strangely enough, they did not remain antagonistic as they had on their native German soil, but in this melting pot nation they blended together with the inherent liberalistic tendencies of this relatively new land to provide the basis of "... a very moderate and tolerant type of liberalism, in which the mystical emphasis of Schleiermacher and the ethical emphasis of Ritschl were both to be found side by side".[10]

Likely no other individual so gathered or promoted these tendencies on this side of the Atlantic as did Horace Bushnell, the nineteenth century Congregationalist, aptly named by Walter Marshall Horton, "the Schleiermacher of America".[11] The main contribution of this highly influential thinker lay in his emphasis upon the overwhelming importance of social environment in the development of character - an idea which was to become central in the later Social Gospel movement. Bushnell, too, was against fixed dogmas and permanent doctrines, basing his disagreement on the grounds that the meanings of words are unexact and inadequate to say all that should be said. And like liberals who came after him, he also gave extensive consideration to human personality and the immanent presence of God within it.

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9. William Hordern, A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 62.
10. Walter Marshall Horton, Theology In Transition (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931), p. 32.
11. Ibid., p. 27.

Sin, he declared, was no biological inheritance; it was derived from our necessary participation in the structures of society - a view of original sin which was to be prominently featured in the later development of Protestant thought. But if sin is thus social in nature, he went on, so also is virtue. Hence, only within society can man be directed toward redemption. The important thing to note here is that Bushnell did not feel any necessity for the soul-shaking, sudden conversion which until that time had been considered the normative religious experience. With the doctrine of total depravity fallen into disuse, he emphasized the point that man can be trained into the faith. One further tenet in which Bushnell can be considered typical of much later thought is his holding to a moral influence theory of atonement while attacking the substitutionary theories as sub-Christian. Thus we see that in several respects, Bushnell stands as the intermediary between Europe and America, where liberal theology is concerned; and, within the latter country, as the definite precursor of much contemporary liberalism - particularly that of a subjective and intuitional type.[12]

Theological reconstruction in America could be said to have begun approximately about the year 1850. Up until that time, an increasingly sterile brand of Calvinism had largely dominated the stage for several generations. True, liberal strains had been evident earlier in such men as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine who could be considered typical of rational religion in America, and then in

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12. David E. Roberts and Henry Pitney Van Dusen, Liberal Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), p. 115.

individuals like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker who more obviously displayed the influence of Romanticism. But for the greater part, the modified Calvinism, which had originated in New England, continued to hold sway throughout the land. Then about mid-century, the work of such men as Horace Bushnell and Lyman Beecher combined with the effects of the holiness or revival movements sweeping the country at that time, engendering the belief in the nearness of God in both nature and man, to set in motion the influences which were to triumph in theology within the next fifty years.

This progressive movement in the American theological world was, of course, not without its opponents. Many sincere and extremely capable divines were deeply disturbed by what they took to be the expansion of a radical form of culture-Christianity which seemed to them to almost lose sight of the uniqueness of the faith under whose banner the new religious elements paraded. Thus a counter-action on the part of the theological conservatives was launched in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and soon gave rise to some of the bitterest strife witnessed within Christendom during the modern era.

These "fundamentalists", as they soon found themselves designated, energetically applied the strategy of securing for their own number key administrative and teaching posts, while at the same time eliminating "undesirables" from church offices and professorships. They also labored for the adoption of rigid doctrinal standards for ministers within each of the major denominations, all in a vain effort to stem the rising tide of liberalism in the domain of theology.

For years this infamous struggle dragged out, leaving in its

wake an ugly trail of charges and counter-charges, heresy trials and dismissals, name calling and adverse publicity. But despite the severity of these clashes, the main battle did not really break until one Sunday in May of 1922, when a prominent liberal minister mounted his pulpit in historic Old First Presbyterian Church in New York city, and with deep conviction delivered his sermon, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?"[13] Thus was projected into the spotlight the man who is to be the subject of this study - the man who was to be the unofficial leader and spokesman of the liberal movement in the religious life of America during the years which followed - the man, Harry Emerson Fosdick.

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13. Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" The Christian Century XXXIX (June 8, 1922), 713-17.

Chapter II

LIFE

Since liberalism was not a phenomenon reserved for the realm of thought alone, but a most real historical entity, perhaps at least part of the answer to our query will be found by first looking at our subject's life and observing those influences which shaped and directed his course. This will, at the same time provide some background for what follows in succeeding chapters.

Harry Emerson Fosdick was born on May 24, 1878, into a home in which genuine spiritual values were a dominating force. With a touch of rather whimsical pride, Fosdick claims to be able to trace a strong tradition of non-conformity in his family background, as his very first ancestor on this continent was excommunicated from the church in the New England colony as penalty for being over-zealous in conducting his quest for religious liberty.

At age seven, Fosdick underwent some sort of conversion experience, and rather startled his family by immediately seeking church membership. Although raised a Baptist, young Harry attended a Presbyterian Sunday School, and later enrolled in a Methodist Young Peoples' Society; thus was the seed of ecumenicity planted very early in his spirit.[1]

Always a sensitive youngster, on occasion to the point of almost morbid conscientiousness, Fosdick suffered many wretched hours

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1. "The Liberal", Time LXI (May 25, 1953), 62-4.

in boyhood as a result of the petty legalisms, obscurantisms, and appeals to fear so frequently utilized by the church of his day. This factor too was to play a role, albeit a negative one, in determining the direction of his subsequent career.

The college years at Colgate University opened for "Fuzzy" Fosdick[2] upon a period when his religious views would permit no major deviations from the insular traditions of orthodox Christianity. Thus we realize that he actually began as a near fundamentalist. The first crack in this essentially conservative structure appeared over the question of the historicity of Sampson as opposed to that of Hercules. The reading of Andrew D. White's History of the Warfare of Science With Theology In Christendom completed the task of smashing any notions of Biblical inerrancy yet entertained by the young scholar.

During his sophomore year, the intellectual struggle over faith reached its peak in Fosdick's mind, and, for a time, he forsook the church, cleared God out of his mental universe, and furiously pursued the role of a questioning agnostic. By the time his junior year had arrived, Fosdick had begun to doubt his doubts, and new positions began to crystallize on which he found he might reasonably base his faith. Fosdick was aided in this process by the writings of John Fiske of Harvard, and most of all, by the personal example of William Newton Clarke, a professor at Colgate Theological Seminary, and a living demonstration of the possibility of remaining a believer while also keeping an open mind to all questions.

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2. So named because of his "flocculent, dark hair" - "Fosdick", Current Biography (1940), 309-10.

Between his junior and senior years, Fosdick decided upon the Christian ministry as his life's vocation - though in a teaching role rather than as a preacher. Holding no outstanding interest in any one denomination, his concern centered, as he put it, upon the desire "... to make a contribution to the spiritual life of my generation".[3] And so, with the cheque from a winning essay written in opposition to vivisection, young Fosdick was soon launched upon the preparation for his chosen career.

Entering divinity school at Colgate in 1900, he quickly came under the influence of the philosophical idealism propounded by thinkers such as Hegel, Lotze, and Schleiermacher. Later, like many of his generation, he found himself strongly attracted to Borden P. Browne's "Personalism". "At the same time," writes Fosdick, "Ritschl's emphasis on the historical revelation brought to man in Christ was very appealing, and we were influenced by the 'back to Christ' movement, which seemed to promise a middle way between literal Biblicism and metaphysical speculation. Either way, however, the old foundations of Biblical authority were shaken and, consciously or not, a direct appeal to Christian experience became more and more the factual basis for theology."[4]

In seminary, too, Fosdick came under the immediate persuasion of William Newton Clarke who helped him greatly in outflanking his intellectual difficulties by recourse to the basic experience which the doctrinal forms were attempting to express - a mode of thought to which Fosdick was later to give classic expression.[5] "Had it not been for him,"

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3. Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Living of These Days (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), p. 57. Most of the information in this chapter is based on this volume.
4. Ibid., p. 64.
5. See below, p. 83.

reflects Fosdick, "I suspect that I should never have been a Christian minister."[6]

The year following, supported by scholarship, Fosdick set out for Union Seminary in New York City. Here followed a strenuous summer working with boys and girls off the streets, after which Fosdick plunged into a devastating routine of theology at Union, philosophy at Columbia, while at the same time he helped to run the Mission at Mariners Temple on the Bowery; all the while neglecting his own physical well being. Thus, by late November, Fosdick found himself in the throes of a nervous breakdown. Returning home, he even contemplated suicide, and after several weeks was placed in a sanitarium where he underwent treatment over the next four months.

This breakdown was a critical episode in Fosdick's life. He writes of it:

> This whole horrid experience was one of the most important factors in my preparation for the ministry. For the first time in my life, I faced, at my wit's end, a situation too much for me to handle. I went down into the depths where self-confidence becomes ludicrous. There the techniques I had habitually relied upon - marshalling my wit and my volition and going strenuously after what I wanted - petered completely out. The harder I struggled, the worse I was. It was what I did the struggling with that was sick. I, who had thought myself strong, found myself beaten, unable to cope not only with outward circumstances but even with myself. In that experience I learned some things about religion that theological seminaries do not teach. I learned to pray, not because I had adequately argued out prayer's rationality, but because I desparately needed help from a Power greater than my own. I learned that God, much more than a theological proposition, is an immediately available Resource; that just as around our bodies is a physical universe from which we draw all our physical energy, so around our spirits is a spiritual Presence in living communion with whom we can find sustaining strength.[7]

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6. Ibid., p. 65
7. Ibid., p. 75

Fosdick struggled through his year at Union and then took his first summer charge in a rural frontier community on the north-west fringes of the Adirondacks. During his senior year in seminary, he served as student assistant in Madison Avenue Baptist Church. Very early then, he gained a wide experience with people of differing backgrounds which was ever to serve him in good stead.

Besides offering him a rich intellectual challenge and theological freedom, Union Seminary stirred Fosdick's interest on questions social and economic as well. Out of his experience of mental breakdown, he had concluded that he wanted to be deeply involved with people and be in a position to help them. This determination now reached its fruition in the decision to preach rather than teach. Henceforth, he was to understand his vocation as being "... an interpreter in modern, popular, understandable terms, of the best that I could find in the Christian tradition".[8]

Called to the pulpit of First Baptist Church of Montclair, New Jersey upon ordination, Fosdick plunged into developing that effective means of communicating the truth which, in time, was to become his hallmark. Fosdick pays tribute to the influence of Walter Rauschenbusch on his early preaching. Christianity and the Social Crisis appeared in 1907, and gave impetus to Fosdick's growing social awareness and concern. One other personality who deeply influenced Fosdick over the years was Rufus Jones, the Quaker mystic, later eulogized by Fosdick as the individual who helped him through the confused days of his early ministry and assisted him in finding a firm footing for faith.[9]

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8. Ibid., p. 78.
9. From the introduction, Harry Emerson Fosdick, ed., Rufus Jones Speaks to Our Time (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951).

Preaching led to writing; and, in the decades which followed, a profusion of periodical articles poured from Fosdick's pen, while his books became best sellers in several languages. In 1908 he came on staff at Union Seminary as part time lecturer on Baptist principles and polity. Three years later he moved over to the department of homiletics as an instructor, and in 1915 he was invited to assume the full time position of Morris K. Jesup Professor of Practical Theology.

"Controversies clustered around Dr. Fosdick," one later writer succintly commented, "like bees around honey."[10] His first real taste of controversy came during the war years when, after touring the allied lines on a morale boosting mission, he penned an article indicting the charges for the failure of conventional religion.[11] Its publication resulted in an uproar on all sides - conservative, liberal, and even among his friends. Returning home, Fosdick discovered that the stern confrontation with life in its depth at the front had injected a more highly practical note into all his work which was never to be lost during the years that followed.

Called to be minister at Old First Church, a Presbyterian congregation in mid town New York, Fosdick was forced to decline on the grounds that he could not conscientiously make the credal subscription required of Presbyterian clergy. Consequently he was invited simply to be guest preacher, while continuing his duties at the seminary. Preaching here to overflow crowds, Fosdick soon became dissatisfied with the absence of working relationship and personal

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10. Harold A. Bosley, "Inside Story - Preacher and Church", The Christian Century LXXIII (November 7, 1956), 1294.
11. H. E. F.,"The Trenches and the Church At Home", Atlantic Monthly CXXIII (January, 1919), 22-33.

contact with the people. Hence he initiated hours of individual consultation throughout the week. This practice "... added a note of realism to his understanding of human nature and of the plight of human beings which otherwise he might have missed".[12]

Meanwhile, the fundamentalist movement, abetted by the reactionary trends which followed in the wake of World War I, was on the upsurge. As he observed the gathering theological storm between liberals and arch-conservatives, Fosdick was aware that some fault lay on both sides of this rapidly heating issue. He afterward wrote of the situation:

> The modernists were tempted to make a supine surrender to prevalent cultural ideas, accepting them wholesale, and using them as the authoritarian standard by which to judge the truth or falsity of classical Christian affirmations. The reactionaries, sensing the peril in this shift of authority, were tempted to retreat into hidebound obscurantism, denying the discoveries of science, and insisting on the literal acceptance of every Biblical idea, which even Christians of the ancient church had avoided by means of allegorical interpretation.[13]

In his widely publicized sermon, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" Fosdick appealed for tolerance and for a church sufficiently inclusive to comprehend both points of view. It was an earnest plea for goodwill on all sides. It achieved precisely the opposite result; and the first return volley in this skirmish was fired by a Presbyterian minister, Clarence Edward Macartney, in the form of a sermon tract, "Shall Unbelief Win? - A Reply to Dr. Fosdick".[14] Thus, it was to a rather tense situation that Fosdick returned following his summer's vacation in 1922.

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12. Kenneth Cauthen, The Impact of American Religious Liberalism (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 75.
13. H. E. F., Living, p. 144.
14. "Dr. Fosdick Attacked By Conservative Presbyterians", Current Opinion LXXIV (January, 1923), 85-6.

The following months of ecclesiastical intrigue left a bitter taste on Fosdick's tongue. The fundamentalists were becoming increasingly vehement. One leading Baptist literalist, John Roach Stratton of Calvary Baptist Church in New York branded Fosdick as a "religious outlaw", "the Jesse James of the theological world", while others were yet more extreme in the epithets they hurled at the man they regarded as their most dangerous enemy, the leading symbol of everything they opposed.

As well as having his own congregation stand firmly behind him, Fosdick enjoyed the close support of a number of liberal-minded friends and associates who, like him, were battling for their freedom. Numerous letters of encouragement were received from members of faculties and student bodies in several academic institutions. The major portion of the secular press commonly reflected sympathy with the liberal cause, while religious publications such as the Christian Century were unstinting in the backing they provided Fosdick and his party.

If Fosdick and his modernist colleagues were hard beset by the fundamentalists on the right, they had also to contend with the fire drawn from a relatively small but vociferous group encamped further left still of the theological progressive position. Strangely enough, this opposing group of disenchanted liberals and left-wing religious radicals sounded a similar cry to that of the ultra-conservatives; namely that the evangelical liberals such as Fosdick should, in all honesty, quit the denominational bodies which were so unsympathetic to their standard. Harsh criticism was heard from individuals such as Dr. Alfred C. Dieffenbach, Unitarian editor of the Christian Register, who vigorously

attacked Fosdick on the grounds of moral cowardice, though this stand by no means represented the judgement of all Unitarians, many of whom spoke out quite favorably on Fosdick's behalf.

Fosdick was as adamant as his liberal detractors, however, in his conviction that control of the great, historic denominations should not be defaulted into the hands of the fundamentalists. Neither did he wish to see a major split of the churches into conservative and liberal camps as a consequence of obscured thinking. He felt confident that the process of education would someday put an end to all such outdated modes of reasoning; "... and meanwhile our place was inside the evangelical churches, patiently standing our ground, claiming our liberty, and biding our time".[15]

Located further left still was one other faction with whom twentieth century evangelical liberal thinkers had to contend, though not nearly so turbulently. This section of the populace was composed largely of the sophisticated intelligentsia who "... took exception to the entire tradition of Protestant evangelical culture".[16] Typified by such personalities as Walter Lippman, these "humanists" attempted to construct a satisfactory world view devoid of theistic framework and content, and based almost entirely on the potential of man and the inevitability of progress.[17] These "liberal" liberals also faulted the evangelical modernists of Fosdick's stripe for failing to follow their own logic through to a consistent conclusion, which, they were assured,

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15. H. E. F., Living, p. 165.
16. Donal B. Meyer, The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919-1941 (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), p. 10.
17. See: Walter Lippman, A Preface to Morals (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929).

lay in the realm of humanism. As captain of the religious liberal host, Fosdick became prime target for the criticism of this company as well. In fact, a good deal of Fosdick's more theological writing appears to have been designed expressly for the purpose of answering the charges levelled by this particular coterie.

When the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church met in 1924, it was presided over by the conservative, Dr. C. E. Macartney, who was instrumental in working out a strategy intended to impale Fosdick on the horns of a dilemma.[18] The outcome of the meeting was, briefly, that if Fosdick could accept the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church, there was nothing barring his reception as a minister in regular standing. If he could not do so, however, he ought not to continue to occupy a Presbyterian pulpit.

Friends of Harry Emerson were pleased at the conciliatory and courteous manner in which the invitation to join the Presbyterian Church was worded.[19] However, Fosdick himself, who was serving as exchange preacher in Britain when he received news of the assembly's decision, realized immediately the implications of such a verdict. He foresaw that once within the ranks of Presbyterianism, he would be confronting a heresy trial the first time he uttered a conviction which even hinted at being unorthodox. It was with sincere regret that he sent his declination to the New York Presbytery affirming his position that he could not in all good conscience subscribe to any ancient creedal state-

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18. "Fosdick Versus the Fundamentalists", Current Opinion, LXXVII (December, 1924), 756-7.
19. "The Olive Branch For Fosdick", The Literary Digest, LXXXI (June 21, 1924), 33.

ment belonging to the faith.[20] He expressed keen disappointment that after six successful years of ecumenical experimentation at Old First, the Presbyterian Church in America was returning to a "closed shop system". His next step was to tender his resignation at Old First, though agreeing to preach there until March of 1925 in order to prevent disruption of that church and wholesale withdrawal of memberships. His farewell Sunday in that congregation was one of great emotion as he was sadly thronged by the many people who had come to look to him for guidance in the thorny task of living as intelligent Christians in a difficult age.[21]

The American press, which in the years gone by had awarded Harry Emerson Fosdick more publicity than any other single clergyman, by and large retained its sympathy for this harried cleric, lauding him for the fact that he acted with dignity throughout, at no time attempting to adopt the role of a martyr; and further pointing out that it had not been he, but his opponents, intent upon scouring all traces of liberalism from the face of American Protestantism, who had opened hostilities in the first place.[22] The feeling was rife that the loss belonged mainly to the Presbyterian Church, not to Fosdick.[23] Even those who disagreed with certain of his religious views could scarcely refrain from admiring the courage, the honesty, and the frankness which Fosdick had exhibited during the previous campaign.[24]

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20. "The Resignation of Dr. Fosdick", Journal of Religion, IV (November, 1924), 643-6.
21. "Open Shop Parson", Time, XLI (March 15, 1943), 54.
22. "The Presbyterian Attack On Dr. Fosdick", The Literary Digest, LXXV (November 18, 1922), 36-7.
23. "Dr. Fosdick's Refusal to Be a Presbyterian", The Literary Digest, LXXXIII (October 25, 1924), 32-3.
24. "Dr. Fosdick's Resignation", The Outlook, CXXXVIII (October 15, 1924), 235.

"Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick has been taken by his opponents from his pulpit in First Presbyterian Church in New York city, only to become more than ever a preacher to the Nation"[25], wrote one commentator a short while later. Following his ministry at Old First, Fosdick undertook a number of guest preaching roles both in America and Europe, speaking on one occasion before the delegates and visitors to the League of Nations Assembly at the Protestant Cathedral of St. Peter in Geneva, ironically enough, the very fountainhead of Presbyterianism.[26]

Returning home, Fosdick was approached by John D. Rockefeller who besought him to succeed Cornelius Woelfkin, soon to retire from the Park Avenue Baptist Church in New York. Fosdick agreed finally, providing that the congregation were willing to meet his conditions of eliminating all sectarian restrictions on membership and undertaking to build a new and ample edifice equipped for community service. To Fosdick's surprise, the congregation readily gave its consent. And so began what was to prove one of the most fruitful ministries of the Christian era; while Dr. Dieffenbach bemoaned the fact that he who might have been captain of the host which would liberate the churches from the shackles of dogmatism had gone to be a popular preacher.[27] And so, in time, there came to be based within the walls of Riverside Church a truly ecumenical congregation, its thirty six hundred members representing at least thirty different denominational backgrounds. At last Fosdick had the

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25. Ernest Hamlin Abbott, "Dr. Fosdick's Religion", The Outlook, CXXXIX (March 11, 1925), 364.
26. "Dr. Fosdick At Geneva", The American Review of Reviews, LXXII (November, 1925), 538.
27. Albert C. Dieffenbach, "The Lost Leaders of Protestantism", The Independent, CXIX (September 17, 1927), 270-2, 288.

kind of church in which, entirely unimpeded by any doctrinal or denominational limitations, he was free to engage in the type of ministry he believed effective for both the time and locale.[28]

Despite the setbacks suffered in such events as Fosdick's ousting, liberalism's star was rising, while that of the fundamentalists was clearly waning. The moods and trends of modernist theology were winning a popular hearing while at the same time gaining control of the leading seminaries and the official organs of the major denominations.[29] Then, at the very moment of its triumph over fundamentalism, liberalism began to disintegrate as newer theological currents surged to the fore, and liberal theology came under severe criticism "... in the light of renewed appreciation of many classical Christian insights.".[30] This process had been augmented by the events of the First Great War. And although this catastrophe did not touch America as immediately as it did the continent of Europe, the depression of 1929 dashed cold water on many key liberal hopes; and it became America's turn to pause and ponder whether liberalism had been providing the correct answers after all.

A note of caution on this score had been creeping into the writings of a number of liberal thinkers ever since 1918. Young

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28. For a sampling of the controversy caused by the erection of this elaborate structure, see:
John Hyde Preston, "Dr. Fosdick's New Church", The World's Work, LVIII (July, 1929), 56-8.
The Pilgrim, "With Scrip and Staff", America, XLIV (October 25, 1930), 66-7.
"What Price the Baptist Cathedral?" The Literary Digest, CVII (November 1, 1930), 20-1.
"This Liberal Christian", Newsweek, XLVIII (October 8, 1956), 60.
"Dr. Fosdick's New Kind of Church", The Literary Digest, LXXXV (June 20, 1925), 33-4.
29. Hordern, Layman's Guide, p. 96.
30. Dillenberger & Welch, Protestant Christianity, p. 253.

modernists such as Walter Marshall Horton, John C. Bennett, and Henry P. Van Dusen were early admonishing that liberalism would have to change if it was going to continue to speak to modern man; that twentieth century liberalism could not be nineteenth century liberalism.[31]

Harry Emerson Fosdick had been preaching and writing in this vein to some extent since the conclusion of World War I.[32] He perceived genuine cause for concern amid the popular optimism of the succeeding decade, as he became increasingly aware that modernism had sounded a one-sided emphasis in stressing social progress over personal regeneration. He came to realize also that in reacting to orthodoxy's dogmatism, the liberal exaltation of reason had been too often carried to extremes. Over and again he began to decry the fact that much of liberalism had become notoriously arid, centering on protest rather than production, on criticism rather than on creation. Because of these shortcomings, liberalism was fast becoming a discredited feature of American religious life.

Then, returning to his pulpit one Sunday in 1935, after an illness which had silenced his voice for nine months, Fosdick used the occasion to preach his now famous sermon, "The Church Must Go Beyond Modernism." This was the most decisive moment in the changing course of liberalism.[33]

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31. Hordern, Layman's Guide, p. 114.
32. See for instance: Harry Emerson Fosdick, "The Sense of God's Reality", (November 6, 1919) - Harold E. Fey & Margaret Frakes, ed.s, The Christian Century Reader (New York: The Association Press, 1962), 90-6.
33. "Dr. Fosdick Shifts the Emphasis", The Christian Century, LII (November 20, 1935), 1480-2. The sermon itself can be found in: Harry Emerson Fosdick, Riverside Sermons (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 353-62.

Fosdick began his address by pointing out the need which had existed for the church to go as far as modernism if it were to escape from the grasp of outmoded and irrelevant patterns of thought. However, in its efforts to adapt to contemporary scientific thinking, modernism had become bondservant, and thereby lost its claim to be an adequate religious guide. In the first place, chided Fosdick, it had become too preoccupied with intellectualism, shutting out too entirely the experiences belonging to other realms of human existence. And yet it had failed to be as critical as necessary at the point of passing judgement upon modern culture and customs. Secondly, modernism tended toward sentimentality as consequence of its illusory belief in inevitable progress. In this regard, it had gone a long way toward expelling the God of moral judgement, while forsaking the category of dread en toto, and losing sight of the reality of sin. In the third place, modernism stood accused of watering down the reality of God in its undue emphasis upon the capabilities of man. Finally, Fosdick charged that modernism had lost the ability to effect any great moral change in the world (a point which many of his liberal friends thought he was grossly overstating). The time had come, he announced, to cease adjusting and accomodating and conceding. He concluded his delivery with the stirring appeal:

> Fundamentalism is still with us but mostly in the backwaters. The future of the churches, if we will have it so, is in the hands of modernism. Therefore let all modernists lift a new battle cry: We must go beyond modernism! And in that new enterprise the watchword will be not, Accomodate yourself to the prevailing culture! but, Stand out from it and challenge it! For this inescapable fact, which again and again in Christian history has called modernism to its senses, we face: we cannot harmonize Christ himself with modern culture. What Christ does to modern culture is to challenge it.[34]

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34. H. E. F., Riverside, p. 362.

Widely disseminated and quoted, this sermon caused considerable reaction on all sides. "The fundamentalists shouted in glee and many a liberal felt betrayed by his leader", Hordern reports. "Neither attitude was justified. Fosdick had not ordered a retreat, he had laid the plans for a new attack."[35]

This bold sermon brought into focus several of the basic tendencies inherent in this "neo-liberal" movement, which was emerging as a distinctive theological force about this time, and which was attempting to preserve the values of modernism while re-interpreting them for a new age and new conditions. These "repentant" liberals largely abandoned idealistic philosophy, resolving to face all the darkest facts of the human predicament in realistic fashion, and trying to come to terms with man's need of a savior. And although they have by no means reached full agreement as to what is meant by the divinity of Jesus, they are at least concerned to take it very seriously, and to see in him something revelatory and unique. In neo-liberalism, then, we observe a rediscovery of some of the beliefs of orthodoxy which modernists had previously surrendered.

In the years following, Fosdick continued to exercise his dynamic ministry to the immediate community, while his effectiveness was greatly augmented by radio broadcasting which carried his commanding metallic voice to millions more who otherwise might never have known his influence.[36] Intensely aware of the increasingly explosive international situation during the thirties, Fosdick devoted a major portion of his

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35. Hordern, Layman's Guide, p. 112.
36. See: "A Centennial of Worship", Newsweek, XVII (February 24, 1941), 66-7.
Bruce Bliven, "Mr. Rockefeller's Pastor", The New Republic, CXXXV (December 31, 1956), 20.
"Fosdick's Last Year", Time, XLV (June 18, 1945), 56-8.

energies to the peace effort.[37] The actual war years involved him in acute personal struggle as he sought to maintain his witness to a position which had by then been deserted by most of its former devotees. And on no occasion can he be accused of trying to sidestep controversy, although often his protestations drew down upon him a storm of denunciation. His concern throughout this conflict was always to help individuals and to keep the Church Christian despite the un-Christian nature of the war.

In May of 1946, Fosdick at last stepped down from the Riverside pulpit after a long and fruitful ministry which won him numerous honors in addition to the devotion and love of not only those close to him, but also the countless others who knew the man only through his broadcasts or books. A few months prior to his retirement, the Christian Century paid tribute to his pastorate in these highly glowing terms:

> Until some new figure of comparable stature arises, the historian of the American pulpit will have to say that the three names which "outshine myriads, though bright", are those of Henry Ward Beecher, Phillips Brooks, and Harry Emerson Fosdick.[38]

Following retirement Fosdick continued to write from his red stucco house in Bronxville, and to fill as many lectureships as his energies would permit.[39] At the same time he maintained his keen interest in several vital social projects, many of which he had originally fostered.

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37. See: The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919 - 1941, pp. 20, 371.
H.E.F., "We Were Unmercifully Gyped", Vital Speeches, III (April 15, 1937), 415-6.
38. "Dr. Fosdick Will Retire Next May", The Christian Century, LXII (June 20, 1945), 725.
39. Harold A. Bosley, "The Best Is Yet to Be", The Christian Century, LXXV (May 21, 1958), 621-2.

In May of 1953, Harry Emerson was honored at Union Seminary Alumni dinner, on which occasion John D. Rockefeller III presented a gift of a quarter million dollars to that institution to establish the Harry Emerson Fosdick Visiting Professorship, designed to bring outstanding figures, lay or clerical, from anywhere in the world, to lecture at Union and other American colleges for a one year period.[40] Speaking at the dinner, Reinhold Niebuhr warmly acknowledged his colleague as an individual who profoundly influenced the theological climate of his day both as preacher and thinker. After reviewing the theological climate of the early decades of this century, Niebuhr commented: "It was in this situation that Dr. Fosdick did his creative work and performed his theological task."[41] The fuller explication of this "creative work" and "theological task" will be our main concern in the following chapters, as we seek to more adequately evaluate the position occupied by Harry Emerson Fosdick within the world of American theological liberalism.

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40. "Honor to Dr. Fosdick", The Christian Century, LXX (May 20, 1953), 595.
41. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Significance of Dr. Fosdick In American Religious Thought", Union Seminary Quarterly Review, VII (May, 1953), 4.

Chapter III

GOD

As previously mentioned, not all liberals allowed themselves to be cast in a single mold when expressing their beliefs, and this certainly holds true for their views of Deity. Some, showing the influence of Whitehead and the other process philosophers, even went so far as to identify God with the process of the universe. A.N. Wieman, for instance, conceives of God as that part of nature upon which we depend for the production and preservation of human values.[1] And in seeking a positive proof for Divine reality, Wieman reveals himself to be unlike the majority of American liberals in that he is more typical of that liberalism stemming from Enlightenment influences rather than that which owes a larger debt to the Romantic movement.

Moving away from this position, E. S. Brightman, we note, heads another school which, while also strictly empiricist, maintains a firm belief in a personal God; albeit a limited one, who is still actively engaged in the ongoing struggle against evil.

Like Wieman, Fosdick discovers in God the support of human values, contending that nothing as rational as the cosmic processes seem to be could ever likely be the result of anything irrational or of mere accident. Furthermore, when we turn our gaze in towards the interior life of man, we are able to discern developing personality, compounded of "... enlarging truth, creative beauty, and expanding goodness"[2] ... and, since man, according to the evolutionists, develops

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1. Hordern, Layman's Guide, p. 97.
2. H. E. F., As I See Religion (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932), p. 26.

subjective needs only in response to some exterior stimulus (the development of lungs, for example, presupposes that there is air to be breathed), then there must, contests Fosdick, be some objective reality back of the universe favorable to the existence of such capacities in men. If the universe makes any sense whatsoever, then human values must be grounded in reality.

Unlike Wieman, however, Fosdick conceives of God in highly personal terms. This does not mean that we can capture the entire concept of Divinity in our mundane little categories; it does mean that, so long as we do so only on a symbolic basis, we may be permitted to turn to the highest we know in our experience - human personality - as at least pointing out the direction we may take if we are to think, however guardedly, upon this Divine reality which lies behind the universe. And in appropriating this symbol, if we are to possess the most adequate clue to God's nature, we must be certain that we include the whole orb of personality - i.e., self-conscious being that knows and purposes and loves[3] - not just one aspect such as intelligence as thinkers like David Starr Jordan have chosen.

Fosdick capably manages to refute the charges of those who find fault with this employment of personal symbolism, by pointing out that everyone, when seeking to depict the nature of ultimate reality, is forced to draw upon terms of reference from his own experience. Hence, the atheist, whether he realizes it or not, tends to contemplate this reality at best in terms of machinery or physical power, at worst,

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3. H. E. F., The Meaning of Faith (New York: The Association Press, 1917), p. 66.

in terms of cosmic dust. And as for those who Freud-like decry that personal symbolism is simply making of God a human projection, Fosdick has ready the reply:

> What the accusers obviously mean is that a man has committed an astonishing blunder when he goes down into his own experience, and there takes the best and highest that he knows for his interpretation of God. The suggestion is that when a materialist takes rocks and stars or a monist takes abstract notions like energy and law, for his idea of Deity, he has performed the sublimely ingenious feat of overleaping the boundaries of human experience and finding a symbol of God that is not anthropomorphic. Of course he has done no such thing. Can a man leap outside himself and look at the world through other than human eyes or conceive it in other than human terms? All the rocks and stars I know and can use in thought, are rocks and stars which, in the form I know them, have been made inside my experience; all the abstract ideas of energy and law I have are those of my mind's construction; the entire world in which I live and from which I can pick symbols by which to interpret God is the world of my own consciousness.[4]

Fosdick and those who thought like him were often taken to task for beginning with man, and working from there to God. But surely his case is credible when he insists that we have to start with what we know if we are even to begin the incredible journey toward what is actually forever beyond our precise knowledge.

Against the strict empiricists Fosdick maintains that although reason can certainly assist us in coming to knowledge of God, we must be wary; for all proofs concerning God are actually beyond the realm of rational substantiation. Assurance of the Divine, he advises, results in much the same way as certain other of life's most important confidences, such as love and friendship. Besides, a God arrived at by the way of reason alone would be largely an external consideration - an

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4. H. E. F., The Assurance of Immortality (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913), p. 116.

hypothesis employed for the purpose of explaining the universe. Of much greater significance than the God outwardly argued is the God inwardly experienced. Thus did Fosdick take his stand more centrally within the Schleiermacherian tradition as opposed to those liberals of the empirical schools who sought to ground religion and the knowledge of God squarely on some rational basis.

Fosdick draws several important implications from this assertion that God is primarily personal. He sees this as indicating at the very least, that God is sufficiently like us as to be able to understand and care for us. If God is not personal, Fosdick opines, then he can scarcely feel concern for us who are. "... and a God of no concern is of no consequence."[5] There is clearly no room for the watchmaker God of the deists in Fosdick's scheme of thought. Only if we are able to view the ultimate in such intimate terms as he is proposing, Fosdick contends, can we ever look up to that reality in hope and trust and adoration.

In the person of E. S. Brightman we have already noted one strain of liberal thought which regards God as definitely limited, a strain which is maintained to this day by thinkers such as Nels Ferre. In contrast to this position, however, Fosdick readily admits the omnipotence of the Divine nature. Though there are law abiding forces at the head of the universe, God must be considered not as their slave but their sovereign. And here again we mark that it was Fosdick's understanding of personality which pointed his thought in this direction.

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5. H. E. F., Faith, p. 62.

For it is in the hands of personality, he realizes, that forces become pliable. Not that they may ever be arbitrarily broken, but that within the control of a governing censor, they can be manipulated and adjusted to accomplish what otherwise would have been left undone. This is evident we find even at the level of human personality in such phenomena as the flight of heavier than air machines, which are able to overcome the limitations imposed by one law through the skilful utilization of others. How much more, then, is God the master of these constant energies he has called into being to serve his own eternal purpose.[6]

Fosdick would allow a measure of limitation to be placed upon divine providence; but then, this same measure is also permitted by the majority of the orthodox - for it is the limitations which God has placed upon himself in the very act of creation, allowing man the inward power of resistance, which forces God to actively engage in the upward struggle against evil. Again we are reminded that Fosdick's concept of the Divine is at an opposite pole to that of the Deists. For here we perceive no disinterested or absentee monarch. Here stands forth the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, who suffers with his children, and who is integrally involved in the entire cosmological process.

The basic feature of any liberal thinking about God, it will be recalled, is that of Divine immanence - a concept drawn from Idealistic philosophy. This represented a specific reinterpretation of the traditional orthodox stress upon the transcendence of God. Whereas previously God's dealings with man had been viewed implicitly if not explicitly in terms of almost crude and occasional interventionism,

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6. H. E. F. ,The Meaning of Prayer (New York: The Association Press, 1915), p. 102.

now God was held to be intimately involved in the whole of life, not just in some miraculous interruption of the normal sequences of cause and effect.[7] Here again, Science was instrumental in discrediting this notion of a God who must break into the world process in order to act upon it; while in America, Revivalism, as we have already noted, also played its part in breaking down the sense of God's remoteness.

This concept of Divine immanence gained in prominence for a time, then fell back as the attack upon it by the new theology known as "neo-orthodoxy" constantly mounted during the years following the First Great War. Well aware that this notion had become a term of opprobrium in many circles, particularly during and after the thirties, Fosdick rightly pointed out that the responsibility for its present condition of disrepute lay at the doorstep of those who had stretched this doctrine to the extreme - excessively glorifying man and his possibilities, and driving the idea of Deity beyond the border of Christian belief into the reaches of outright pantheism.

Though possibly once precariously close to a semi-pantheistic position himself,[8] Fosdick finally aligned himself clearly with that line of thought which at least tried to maintain its grasp upon both polarities. He is definitely willing to go along with the orthodox and neo-orthodox who view God as transcendent, above and beyond this world he has made, and in no way limited to it.[9] But still, of far greater im-

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7. Alec. R. Widler, Twentieth Century Defenders of the Faith (London: S.C.M. Press, 1965), p. 68.
8. Note his comment in "The Sense of God's Reality", p. 95: "As we are in our bodies, but not of them, so is God in his world."
9. H. E. F., Living, p. 253.

portance for persons is the inward and available aspect of God's two-fold nature. Besides, Fosdick is concerned to make us realize, in an age in which science is rapidly beating back the boundaries of the supernatural, to relegate God wholly to that increasingly remote realm would soon leave him stripped of a kingdom. If there is fault in this approach adopted by Fosdick and his modernist friends, it has to be considered as one of emphasis - not of error. And considering the historical situation which had previously presented itself - an arid orthodoxy with its absentee deity - one can reasonably inquire if the emphasis did not serve a worthwhile purpose at the time.

To those who, after reading the Bible, see only the message of the "otherness" of the Divine, Fosdick draws attention to the fact that his special emphasis is solidly based upon scripture also.[10] In fact he understands the essential truth of the Logos doctrine, contained in scriptures, to be that God can go forth over the abyss separating divinity from humanity and can come into the world he has created and into his creature, his child, man.[11]

It seems truly unfortunate that reaction quite often throws out whatever was of value in the thing with which it is in conflict. Possibly Fosdick and his liberal colleagues did lose sight of the primary significance of the Biblical idea of transcendence, but it was

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10. In his Garvin lectures, Fosdick specifically quotes I John 4:16, Romans 8:9, II Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 3:19, II Peter 1:4, Revelation 3:20, concluding with this demand: "If such teaching does not present a concept of God in terms of immanence, what else can its words possibly be made to mean?" - "Old and New Ideas of God", F. Lyman Windolph, ed., In Search of God and Immortality (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 87.
11. H. E. F., The Modern Use of the Bible (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924), p. 243.

equally disadvantageous for the faith that the new theologians so strongly disapproved of what less radical liberals like Fosdick had regarded as essential for providing that vital experience which alone can make God inwardly real and known.

This emphasis upon God's immanence, left liberals with relatively little to say specifically concerning the Holy Spirit; other than that it was the same spirit of God which was in Christ and also in ourselves. And references to this traditional third person of the Godhead are indeed found to be rare in Fosdick's writings, his one contribution in this area appearing to be his assertion, springing from his unswerving anti-supernaturalism, that we should never refer to this power as the "Holy Ghost"; always our designation must be "Holy Spirit".[12] And this, to Fosdick, is the power which created the quality of Jesus' life; which is striving to well up in us also; and, as our constant companion, lift us to new heights of character - a statement which would not offend the most orthodox ears, unless, of course, the listener realized what lay behind it.

The trinitarian concept as such normally occupied a subordinate role in liberalism's understanding of God.[13] And many who held teaching and preaching posts within Protestant ranks could likely be justifiably accused of wandering farthest from orthodoxy ~~more so~~ on this point than on

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12. H. E. F., Dear Mr. Brown (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. 120.
13. Claude Welch, In This Name (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), p. 28.

any other. Fosdick is not like fellow liberal Shailer Mathews, who abandons this conviction altogether; he does concede that there is a vital truth to be found in the experience which lies behind the dogma of the trinity. He realizes this as a device which the early Christians had found necessary if they wanted to tell all they possibly could of the unfathomable mystery of the Eternal, once they had found the old terminology of traditional monotheism inadequate. Still, it was truly unfortunate, he feels, that theologians could not rest content with this trinity of experience; but chose rather the road of metaphysical speculation, which had no warrant from scripture, to arrive at a relatively artificial construction that only succeeded in producing more confusion than clarification.[14] Here again we note the pragmatic element in this man's makeup, for certainly a trinity of being, concerned with the inner relationships of God, does have very little to offer of a practical nature to a man's existence; while a trinity of experience, which bears upon the relationship of God to ourselves, is of far greater import for the daily conduct of life.

And this is finally the sum of the matter. For throughout, we find that Fosdick's analysis of God is not so complex as that of an A. C. Knudson; but he does attempt all the more to relate it to our personal needs.

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14. H. E. F., Mr. Brown, ch. XII.

Chapter IV

MAN

"It can be argued with cogency that the heart of liberalism was its estimate of man", assert the co-authors of Protestant Christianity.[1] As opposed to the Augustinian (and later neo-orthodox) readiness to depict man as essentially depraved - a point of view which had governed the doctrine of man for centuries in theological circles - liberal thinkers preferred to regard man as essentially good; for he is the creation of God. Therefore, no matter how extensively his essential goodness may be corrupted, it may never be obliterated.[2]

This liberal understanding of the nature of man owed a large debt to evolutionary theory. For scientific discovery had made it scarcely tenable to any longer portray man as the inherently depraved creature fallen from pristine glory as suggested by orthodox Biblicism. The belief in progress gave impetus to the conviction that man was evolving not only physically and mentally but also morally and spiritually. The Enlightenment had affirmed the dominance of man's reason. Romanticism had added the dream of illimitable possibilities. Hence, all barriers which hindered man's upward striving were deemed to be swept aside.

This is the position with which Fosdick started, but it is one which he, as well as several others of like mind, was forced, in time, to modify drastically under the impact of neo-orthodoxy's telling criticisms.

Still, it was the challenge from another front which led Fosdick

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1. John Dillenberger & Claud Welch.
2. Roberts & Van Dusen, Liberal Theology, 192.

to develop his most thorough exposition upon the inner disposition of this unique creature, man. For no sooner had they taken their stand against what they regarded as the overly-pessimistic views of orthodoxy, than liberals of Fosdick's generation found themselves seriously challenged by the materialistically oriented humanists who insisted that man was only the most highly developed organism along the evolutionary scale. True, he was possessed of some frankly amazing faculties and capacities; yet all of these were but the outcome of mechanistic processes over which man himself exercised virtually no control. This outlook was abetted by twentieth century technological methods, which encouraged this approach to man; often, even reducing him still further to the rank of a mere machine.[3]

Fosdick countered this thrust with the incisive query - what machines could possibly ever "... think, love, distinguish between right and wrong, repent, follow ideals, sacrifice for one another, believe in God, hope for immortality, and construct philosophies to explain the universe."[4] Against this enemy, at least, liberals and conservatives could present a common front.

But in developing such ideas further, liberals again tended to diverge from traditional Christian patterns. Whereas the orthodox clung to the Biblical duality of man as soul and body, liberal thinkers, admittedly more Greek than Hebraic in outlook, and extensively influenced by developments in the field of psychology, tended to envisage man as

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3. Roger L. Shinn, Tangled World (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 145.
4. H. E. F., See Religion, p. 51.

essentially "an enduring and unifying center of individual experience".[5] And this intangible constituted his central reality.

And so, following this lead, Fosdick insists that our primary concern in dealing with man is not the physical self which can be weighed and measured.[6] It is, rather, the soul - that mysterious element comprising the "inner man", and which forever evades quantitative analysis.

> ... it is his world of loves, hates, thoughts, ambitions; in it are resident his sense of duty and his aspiration after God, and at the centre is the mystical, self-conscious memory, which survives the passage of the years, outlasts the building and breakdown of the flesh and gives continuity to all his personal experiences.[7]

Fosdick is willing to go so far as to admit that this real "self" is, in its present state of existence, dependent upon and influenced by the body. Both personality and body are seen to be growing in intimate correlation, and exert a conditioning effect upon each other. Cognitive power, for example, and subsequent knowledge or wisdom are entirely dependent upon the prior growth of the brain cells being adequate.[8] But even though it be allowed that an individual is dependent upon his biological instruments, it is sheer folly to conclude that he is his instruments, or their product. For although the personality is built up within the scaffolding of the brain tissue, it comes eventually to transcend its original condition, progressively shaping and controlling its environment to its own further advantage.

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5. Roberts & Van Dusen, Liberal Theology, p. 197.
6. It is interesting to note that Fosdick uses the terms "spirit", "soul", and "personality" interchangeably with regard to humans. See: H. E. F., Twelve Tests of Character (London: English Universities Press, 1923), p. 100.
7. H. E. F., Assurance, p. 36.
8. Ibid., p. 75.

The materialist may contend that mind, the controlling component of man's being, is entirely the result of molecular changes within a certain lobe of the brain. But if this were true, Fosdick reasons, it would rule out the creative factor in human existence - for science has demonstrated that matter tends to move in the path of least resistance. Clearly then, avers Fosdick, with all the force of his romantic heritage, the materialist's explanation could never adequately account for the outstanding achievements wrought in the fields of art, music, literature, discovery, and invention. Far more acceptable in light of the evidence confronting us is the view of scientist, Dr. Thompson, who contends that: "The gray matter does not make the person ... the person organizes a small portion of the gray matter, and uses it as an instrument for thinking".[9] Fosdick regards the very fact that we are able to discuss these molecular changes within the brain structure in such objective and detached manner as being in itself indicative that we must be more than they.[10]

One thorny question directed against this personality-oriented approach to the study of man asked at what point in the early development of mankind was the boundary traversed between the physical and the spiritual - at what juncture did man become a living soul instead of just an animate organism? Fosdick admits that it would be foolish to try to pinpoint this epoch for the race in terms of historic time. Nevertheless, we can, he testifies, glimpse essentially the same procedure repeating itself on microscopic scale in the maturation of each

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9. Quoted by Fosdick, Ibid., p. 75.
10. H. E. F., Faith, p. 104.

individual human.[11]

Fosdick was usually loathe to allow any limitations upon the possibilities of man whether suggested by the naturalists or the Calvinistic style orthodox, who regarded man as a predetermined being. Rather, as a free agent, man was called upon to grapple with his life resolutely in order to more fully become what he was divinely intended to be. At times, however, Fosdick could recall his own relative helplessness during his breakdown, and on such occasions he was perhaps not quite so confident concerning the ability of man.

His years of dealing with personality in depth within the counseling situation drew Fosdick even further down the road of psychologism. In his subsequent comments on the topic of man we find him drawing more and more heavily upon the findings of this discipline, while his terminology is accordingly modified. Thus, he posits the theory that man is not one self but many; or more precisely, various levels of integration exist upon which it is possible for a man to organize his life. And while integration upon any level will introduce a degree of equilibrium into an individual's make-up, only integration upon the highest level of selfhood (i.e., according to the pattern of Jesus Christ) brings with it any permanently valuable personal meaning. This, in fact, for Fosdick is the psychological expression of the essential significance of salvation.[12] At this point Fosdick is quite representative of the liberal tendency to behold all truth as one - a premise

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11. H. E. F., Adventurous Religion (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1926), p. 133.
12. H. E. F., On Being A Real Person (New York: Harper & Row, 1943), ch. II.

which led them to attempt to incorporate the highest findings of other disciplines within their own field of reference.

But Fosdick remains true to his religious heritage in his insistance that we can never achieve this wholesome nature simply by our own efforts of will. Our own resources are inadequate, he reveals. We must appropriate for use a power external to ourselves.[13] At this point Fosdick almost becomes conservative, at least compared to most of his colleagues. However, the moderate liberal motif still triumphs within him; for even this power, although definitely not of our own generation, is ultimately discovered to have been previously implanted within us, and latently awaits an unleashing by which it might remake character from within. These dormant forces can best be called forth by the influence and example of a superior personality acting upon our lives. Supremely this is accomplished, thinks Fosdick, by Jesus Christ.[14]

I have outlined in some detail how Fosdick developed his thought on the "essence" of man, for certainly this was an important issue at the time (and still has a great deal of relevance), and Fosdick's argument is as lucid as any we may hope to find from this particular school of thought which so exalted the "personality" aspect of man.

Liberals, then, and Fosdick among them, tended to end up with a relatively high estimate of human worth. It was the glory of this fragile and transitory creature, as proclaimed in the New Testament, to be nothing less than God's fellow workers. On that basis, liberal believers set about to uplift the downtrodden and despised, and rally

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13. H. E. F., The Hope of the World (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1933), p. 212.
14. H. E. F., Faith, p. 258.

the unbounded energies of mankind to push on toward that better day for humanity which lay just a short way beyond.

Years later, when the events of the period following 1914 had dashed cold water upon these idealistic aspirations, a chastened liberalism realized that it had been too one sided in its outlook upon this strangely puzzling creature, man. In penitent tone, a humbled Fosdick could stand up years afterward and admit that he, and others like him, had been wrong. What liberals had tended to overlook was the depths of man's sin.

This is certainly not to infer that liberals were without a belief in sin; although a few extremists such as J. S. Bixler could still defiantly contend that "... sin is a theme for the esoteric poet and the disillusioned theologian who reaches into the past to find props for his own outworn creed".[15] The main difference between the liberal and orthodox points of view was that the latter group, taking its lead from Augustine, perceived sin as affecting the very core and center of man's personal being. It left a taint on everything connected with his existence, even his goodness. Liberals on the other hand, with their characteristic optimism about man and faith in human progress, tended to regard sin as basically a hangover from man's animal past which was daily being more and more transcended.

Fosdick admits to the justice of the charge of viewing sin in relatively shallow terms for which liberalism was severely indicted.

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15. Hordern, Layman's Guide, p. 92.

However, Fosdick, and certain other moderates such as Horton, Bennett, and Van Dusen, must be spared a measure of this condemnation; for they did not share entirely in this "naive optimism", which afflicted so many other liberals of that era. Very early in his career, Fosdick came to possess a rather realistic (at least in comparison to some of his contemporaries) view of sin. Writing prior even to the end of World War I, we note his depicting sin as the innermost problem of human life, while at the same time decrying the fact that this has become so obscure to most modern minds.[16]

Fosdick seems well aware, then, that there are real depths to human iniquity. He acutely discerns that in spite of the polished fronts we present to the world, there is something intrinsically wrong with us. He writes:

> Many of us are like a rock in the woods, covered with trailing vines and externally attractive, but turn us over and what a scampering of unclean, crawling things to their holes.[17]

Sin, he realizes, is very real, and can use even the best in human nature for the worst ends - an insight which was to be prominently featured in the neo-orthodox development of this doctrine.[18] And also like the post-liberal theologians, Fosdick expounds upon sin's subtly inviting but treacherous ability to bind us to itself, and make us servitors to the very evil we had sought to avoid.[19]

But in spite of his efforts to incorporate what he recognized

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16. H. E. F., Faith, p. 239.
17. H. E. F., The Manhood of the Master (New York: The Association Press, 1913), p. 78.
18. H. E. F., Living Under Tension (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), p. 114.
19. H. E. F., On Being Fit to Live With (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), p. 239.

as the valid insights of a more traditional Christianity, Fosdick could never really break away from the pull of his basic liberalism. And the attempted blending of several modernist impressions with the ideas just expressed, unfortunately, only makes Fosdick's thought appear somewhat muddled in this key area of Christian concern. Hence, while he could in one instance acknowledge sin's depth and dread reality, and in contrast to some of his closest colleagues could state assuredly, "Sin is no mere shadow cast by good, but a demonic devastating power"[20] - on other occasions, particularly when psychological considerations appear to be overriding the theological, he does an abrupt about-face, disclosing that sin is primarily just the absence of good. Thus he quotes with apparent approval the psychophysicians who contend that there are no vices, only perverted virtues.[21] Moving further along this approach, we detect him setting up some sort of an equation between sin and sickness; not in the Old Testament sense of considering the former as causative of the latter, but rather, as seeing the two as in some sense synonymous. To the question of whether pride is sinful or not, Fosdick replies, "Let us rather say that a conceited man has a sick mind".[22]

In keeping with his notion of levels of personal integration, Fosdick holds that sin occurs whenever the personality is organized around a lower level of existence. Here, too, we note a dominant feature of liberalism - stemming from Ritschl - which presented the lower self as competing with the higher, struggling to drag it down.

Then too, a good deal of present day immoralism arises, suggests

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20. Ibid., p. 196.
21. H. E. F., Real Person, p. 170 f.
22. H. E. F., Hope of the World, p. 50.

Fosdick, not so much out of actual ill will, as from sincere confusion as to what is right.[23] So Bushnell's educational motif is not entirely absent from Fosdick's scheme of thought either.

We then find Fosdick reading from John's Gospel the concept of sin as non-existent until the light appears, and giving this idea a characteristically liberal interpretation; so that sin becomes, in one sense, belatedness - clinging to the old ways when the better had already beckoned us onward. "In wide areas of its worst exhibitions, therefore, sin means living in the present age upon the ideals and standards of an age gone by."[24] This, it will be immediately recognized, is just one more rendition of an old liberal theme.

This collection of modernist emphases as illustrative of his basic tendencies is lent even greater weight when we note the direction of sin's thrust according to Fosdick. While the orthodox divines were insisting that sin was primarily directed against God, Fosdick was joining ranks with his liberal cohorts, and hearkening back to his most fundamental premise in viewing sin as first of all contempt for personality. "Whatever hurts, hinders, degrades, destroys, or in any way prevents the growth, development, and highest expression of personality either in oneself or in others or in society at large is sin."[25] Sin, then, would appear to have a horizontal reference. It is a violation committed against man rather than God.

On this score again, Fosdick's failure to think his position

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23. H. E. F., Riverside, p. 203.
24. H. E. F., The Meaning of Service (New York: The Association Press, 1920), p. 154.
25. Cauthen, Impact, p. 76.

through to consistent conclusion clouds the picture to some extent. For we do mark a definite God-ward reference to sin in his thought inasmuch as in his prayers, Fosdick is concerned to ask forgiveness directly of God.[26] This may reflect an instance of his personal Christianity adhering more strictly to Biblical tradition than his intellectual credo; or, as suggested, the confusion may result simply because in this area, his thought appears not to have fully crystallized.

The liberal, of course, in keeping with the principle of Divine immanence could well argue that sin against man becomes sin against God. As Fosdick himself points out, "No one can be wrong with man and right with God."[27] However, the injury done man still merits primary consideration in this scheme, and that, a theologian who bases all upon the greater glory of God can scarcely abide. And yet, when one fully comprehends the dreadful havoc wreaked in human existence by the vicious assaults of sin, one may very well wonder if the liberal was really so very far wrong in his emphasis. Perhaps what is needed is a view of sin which recognizes similtaneously the dishonor and hurt done to God and to man.

Fosdick's final comment on this matter of individual sin is a typically liberal one. Liberals had repeatedly levelled the claim against their more conservative opponents that these latter were so occupied with sin in general that they paid relatively little attention to the conquest of individual sins - a claim which was not altogether unfair or ill-founded. Thus, for all our abstract commentary upon the topic, Fosdick

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26. Note, for example: H. E. F., A Book of Public Prayers (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), pp. 86, 102.
27. H. E. F., Prayer, p. 76.

reminds us that, in reality, we should be talking of "sins" rather than "sin". For, "Sin does not exist in general, it exists in concrete, particular forms".[28]

Fosdick finds himself more unequivocally within the liberal encampment when he discusses original sin. Although many liberals had been initially tempted to dispense with this doctrine altogether, the dashed hopes of the early twentieth century served to reinforce the dark vision of something fundamentally amiss in human nature; something which requires radical remedy to be put right. Hence Fosdick advises us:

> Early theologians called this inner depravity of human nature "original sin", and said we are all born with it. Freud calls it "the id", and he says we are born with it too. If you want to call this fact of primitive selfish and often perverted emotion, that makes war on ourselves and the world, "id", instead of "original sin", by all means do so, but recognize the realistic fact: A racial inheritance - Freud is right about that - rolling down from generation to generation, ruining all the fair hopes of men, and in the end the source of these tragic disappointments when our fine schemes of social reformation are wrecked.[29]

At face value this statement gives indication of being highly orthodox. However, when viewed against the background of his total outlook, we realize that Fosdick is really interpreting this doctrine, not in terms of personal inheritance so much as in the more Schleiermacherian sense of the solidarity of all men in sin, arising within the social context, and continuing from one generation to the next.

Thinkers such as Rauschenbusch, and Bushnell before him, by their emphasis upon the element of social solidarity - the dependence of

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28. H. E. F., Service, p. 164.
29. H. E. F., Under Tension, p. 116.

men upon each other - had opened the way for the liberal reappraisal of original sin to come about in this fashion. It was also Rauschenbusch who had pointed out years before that the danger of the orthodox doctrine of the fall of man into a state of depravity is that one is likely to pay less attention to the contribution to sin made by our more recent ancestors and, particularly, by ourselves - a point to which most liberals remained sensitive in their interpretation of this doctrine.[30]

Fosdick is one with his more conservative brethren in declaring that sin involves us all in guilt; and for guilt there is inevitable punishment. However, Fosdick goes on to declare his belief that a man will never be judged according to his deeds alone. Since the springs of behavior often sink far beneath the surface, the motivation underlying the deed will also have to be considered, as will also the extent of the involved individual's opportunities. Accountability must be on a par with ability.[31] On this score we find Fosdick quite typical of liberal thought which tended to shy away from the notion of guilt where it could see no responsibility.[32]

No matter what one may think of the definitely liberal tendencies Fosdick displayed in his consideration of sin, we have to concede that he did view this devastating reality in sufficiently grave light to realize what was at stake. While some liberals argued that all that was needed was more light (i.e. education) in order for man to see his way more clearly out of his moral dilemma, Fosdick found this answer insufficient. In the end he simply could not go along with these hopeful

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30. Hordern, Layman's Guide, p. 92.
31. H. E. F., Real Person, p. 251.
32. Cauthen, Impact, p. 118.

extremists who insisted that man could be schooled into a more abundant personal life. He realized all too well that sin involves us in a condition from which we are incapable of extracting ourselves. Man's only hope for overcoming this inner curse which so desolates human hopes lies in the salvation offered by Christianity; for without the saving grace of God, man is doomed.[33]

It would seem, then, that some commentators are being grossly unfair when they blandly label Fosdick a "modern Pelagian".[34] While this designation would certainly apply to those modernists who based salvation on education, it hardly seems to fit the less radical like Fosdick, who recognized that we urgently need the forgiveness of the Divine; which, while it does not take away the original fact or the memory or the consequesnces of sin, does serve to re-establish the personal relationship with God ruptured by sin; perhaps even causing it to be deeper and more satisfying than before.[35] This forgiveness which, we learn in the light of the cross, was so costly to God, is mediated in the person of Jesus Christ - the savior so urgently needed by man. What exactly this means to Fosdick constitutes the concern of the following chapter.

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33. H. E. F., Living, p. 252.
34. Note, for instance: Cauthen, Impact, p. 79.
35. H. E. F., Riverside, p. 298.

Chapter V

JESUS CHRIST

Only the more extreme of the liberal corps would deny a place of centrality to Jesus Christ. Writes one other moderate modernist, Henry Pitney Van Dusen:

> The centrality of Jesus Christ for Christian faith can hardly be affirmed too categorically and insistently. He has been, and is, in sheer fact normative for both Christian experience and Christian conviction, for Christian belief no less than for Christian practice.[1]

Nevertheless, the interpretation of that central fact ranges over a wide course; and this issue, no less than any other has seen liberals and conservatives part company and go their separate ways. Most liberals could agree with their right-wing brethren on such a point as that in Christ we know the forgiveness of God and his will for men. And both groups could similarly utter the conviction that by reference to him and to his teaching are to be judged all subsequent pronouncements of the church. But it is precisely this last point - the subsequent teachings of the church - which illustrates how interpretations of these statements might vary. For modernists were of the opinion that the majority of Christendom had gone far astray in regard to its teachings concerning Christ himself, concocting a falsely ambitious religion about Jesus, which made imperative the liberal endeavor to return to the religion of the Master.

Thus Christological studies among liberal scholars came to

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1. Roberts & Van Dusen, Liberal Theology, p. 205.

center chiefly on the quest for the historical Jesus.[2] Convinced that a subtle form of docetism had obscured the true nature of Jesus Christ even up to the present time, modernist theologians undertook to strip away all pious accretions in order to discover what really lay within the mind and heart of the humble carpenter of Nazareth - a venture which, to the credit of the liberals, did meet with some measure of success in that it portrayed Jesus as more vitally human than theology ever had before.[3]

It is from this point of view that Fosdick approaches his study of Jesus, seeing the figure of the gospels primarily as a man - a real flesh and blood human being - not the sentimentalized, stained glass artifice of later pious imagining - but a man, subject to the same limitations and temptations of mind and body as ourselves, and vassal to the common hopes and aspirations of mankind, particularly those of his own generation.[4]

Although quite candidly admitting the difficulty of seeing with any real degree of clarity into the self-consciousness of Jesus, Fosdick contends that in order to arrive at a reasonable estimation of the man, we must take into account Jesus' estimation of himself. This we can do with some degree of certitude on the basis of what Jesus said and what was said of him. Tracing these themes through the gospels, Fosdick comes out in favor of the assumption that Jesus was indeed

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2. An adequate summary of the evidence derived from this search can be found in the first chapter of Fosdick's The Man From Nazareth (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949).
3. Van Dusen, Vindication, 128 ff.
4. Such as his belief, at least during the early stage of his career, in the imminent inauguration of God's kingdom. See: H. E. F., Manhood, p. 237.

cognizant of a divinely appointed destiny; although this was, until near the end of his life and ministry, kept largely secret from the general populace whose interpretations of the messianic function were so alien to his own, based as it was upon the suffering servant of Isaiah.[5] Already we mark that, for Fosdick, Christ is more than the simple ethical teacher pictured by a Renan or a Wells.

Christ, then, is first of all perfectly man and also the perfect man, illuminating the heights of manhood in a manner never achieved before or since his time. Yet, as he brooded upon this conspiciously exceptional individual, measuring the impact of this crystalline figure upon his own life, Fosdick was driven to the awareness that somehow this simple explanation was insufficient to adequately account for Jesus Christ. And so, he arrived at a position wherein, in his own words, "... between a high Christology that discovers the divine in Christ and a low Christology which reduces him to our own mold and size, I hold a high Christology".[6] So Christ, for Fosdick, is definitely divine as well as human. At this point he seems well on the track toward orthodoxy, until we ask - what does Fosdick mean when he uses the term "divine"?

Fosdick detects in his scriptural studies a progression of thought associating Christ with the Divine, culminating in the Johannine reference to Christ as the Logos - a title identifying him with the forthcoming of God into his created world, and having the basic meaning that "... what Jesus taught and stood for is grounded in the power and goodness of ultimate reality".[7] This signifies at the very least that

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5. H. E. F., A Guide to Understanding the Bible (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1938), p. 194 f.
6. H. E. F., Mr. Brown, p. 93.
7. Cauthen, Impact, p. 81.

Christ is revelatory of the Divine. But more than that, as the original disciples were finally compelled to acknowledge, in his personality was to be discerned not just the ideal life, but as well, the very God from whom it came.[8]

Having led us thus far, Fosdick now reveals where his sympathies really lie. For, having developed the theme of Jesus Christ as both human and divine, revelatory of God and somehow incarnating Deity, Fosdick then goes on to give his Christology a characteristically liberal bent. To him, Christ could never be the Christ of the creeds. No good liberal, in fact, would ever allow that such attributes as almightiness, uncreatedness, and the like could be applied to anything which is to be categorized as absolutely human.

In this respect, some liberals went so far, it should be mentioned, as to charge the early church fathers with having sold out their reason in their effort to affirm their certainties.[9] Others more leniently excused the classic theologians on the grounds that they were acting upon the best light they had at the time. However, all were agreed that the end result of traditional speculation had been to assert a radical discontinuity between Jesus Christ and man which only served to make of Christ a monstrous and unreal being, utterly devoid of any quality of kinship with ourselves, and consequently (and this seems to be the pivotal point), incapable of being our savior.

Divinity, according to the school of thought in which Fosdick found himself a member, is not something superimposed from without;

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8. H. E. F., Riverside, p. 270.
9. Roberts & Van Dusen, Liberal Theology, p. 208.

rather, it is the perfection of the human within. It is, then, quantitative not qualitative. And it is a possession of all men, not just one unique individual. Furthermore, divinity can never be associated with any physical aspect of humanity, hence the thoroughgoing denial by Fosdick and others of the virgin birth.[10] It is in the spiritual life and character of Jesus, as indeed, of all men, that we touch the very presence, the hither side of God.

In this position just outlined, we note the application of the liberal concept of immanence to the problem of Christology. Jesus is seen to be unique because he represents the supreme flowering of the potential divinity within us all. Fosdick spoke for liberalism as a whole, then, when he voiced as the conclusion of the matter: "The divinity of Jesus was a convinced and singing faith that God can come into human life because God had come into human life".[11]

Here as well, as we have already briefly indicated, is evident the liberal principle of continuity. Man must not be wholly separated from God as certain Reformation (and later neo-Reformation) theologians tried to make out. For if he were so completely alienated, liberals argue, then the possibility of Divine incarnation within such a being is totally excluded. As H. P. Van Dusen summarizes this position:

> If radical discontinuity characterizes the normal relations of God and man, there can have taken place no Incarnation

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10. H. E. F., Man From Nazareth, p. 158 ff. Liberals, of course, can lay no exclusive claim to this idea any longer, as even neo-orthodox theologians such as Brunner have accepted their line of reasoning. Still it was a peculiarly liberal, as opposed to fundamentalist, insight to begin with.
11. H. E. F., Riverside, p. 271.

> as Christian faith affirms it... Unless God is in some measure incarnate in the life of every man, he cannot have become fully incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth.[12]

Fosdick understands, then, that the same God who was in Jesus dwells also in us. "You cannot imagine there being one God and two kinds of godlikeness"[13], he points out with consistently liberal logic. The difference between ourselves and Christ is that of a muddy pool to the ocean deeps - once again, quantitative but not qualitative. So Fosdick recognizes divinity, rather than humanity then, as our most obvious point of contact with the Master. For Christ's humanity is clearly inimitable. In terms of human goodness, he towers "... solitary and alone, an isolated phenomenon in human history..."[14] If only human, then Jesus stands before us as our judge, for he poses an ideal which we can never hope to measure up to.

At this point we suddenly realize that Fosdick is saying something which no one else seems to have said before. For in apparent contrast to those liberals who understood divinity solely as the development of humanity, Fosdick, at this stage, appears to be returning to the more orthodox construction of defining two distinct natures in Christ. However, what he then does with this two nature scheme is not in keeping with orthodox teaching either; for this allowed us some similarity to Christ, but on the human side rather than the divine. It may be that in striving to develop a point for homiletic purposes, Fosdick did not pay heed to the conflict of ideas in which he appears to have involved himself. At any rate, he seems not to have developed any further this

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12. Roberts & Van Dusen, Liberal Theology, p. 215.
13. H. E. F., Hope of the World, p. 103.
14. H. E. F., Riverside, p. 273.

notion of Christ's humanity providing a bar to our fellowship with him, being content to return from this brief sortie into independent speculation to the mainstream of liberal teaching on this issue.

Not only has the person of Jesus Christ involved Christians in controversy across the centuries, a similar dispute has resulted from the consideration of his work - the manner and method of the salvation which Christianity claims he won for mankind by his violent and voluntary death of self-sacrifice.

Fosdick is willing to concede that, since no theory of the way in which Christ's sacrifice operates to redeem mankind is explicitly set forth in the New Testament, the early apologists - Anselm, for instance, with his legalistic and feudalistic concepts - should not be faulted too greatly for their rather fallacious efforts; for they were forced to employ the limited thought patterns of their own day. Besides, all these theories, arising as they do out of a prior devotion to Christ, and despite the relative crudity and distortion of certain of them, do express the essential truth that:

> Whenever there is ignorance or sin, there is only one way out. Someone who does not have to do it, for the sake of those who do not deserve it, must voluntarily take on himself the burden of their need. That is the principle of vicarious sacrifice, and it is as deeply imbedded in the spiritual world as gravitation is in the physical world.[15]

Nevertheless, none of these more primitive conjectures really speak to the modern situation in Fosdick's opinion. Legalistic theories

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15. H. E. F., Mr. Brown, p. 131.

go against the grain of Christ's teaching such as that found in the parable of the prodigal son. Substitutionary theories, rejoins Fosdick, at least in their classical form, can now be written off as "precivilized barbarity". The mystery of the cross, revealing man at his worst, yet causing him to believe in himself at his best, is, Fosdick acknowledges, ultimately beyond our human categories of explanation. Still, the need to preserve the reasonableness of faith demands some sort of explanation; and so it is that we find Fosdick, like other liberals who wrestled with this thorny problem, finally leaning in the direction of Abelard's moral influence theory, and finding in it a more reasonable posture for the modern mind to adopt. Thus, in speaking of the cross, Fosdick expresses his conviction:

> To multitudes it has meant alike a revelation of the divine nature and a challenge to a social living of their own which they could in no wise escape. It has bowed them in gratitude, chastened them into penitence, wakened them to hope, inspired them to devotion. It has made the one who bore the Cross, not alone a religious and ethical teacher, but a personal Savior whom to meet, with whom to fall in love, by whom to be chastened, melted, subdued, forgiven and empowered, has been the beginning of the noblest living that this world has ever seen.[16]

Liberals generally shied away from stressing the objectivity of this event. For most of them it was the subjective response to this sacrifice which determined a person's salvation. Like other evangelicals such as Eugene Lyman, then, Fosdick perceives the central issue as the inspiration which we receive from Jesus. He writes: "A contagious personality always enlarges the sense of possibilities and powers in other men".[17] And this he sees Jesus as doing to an extraordinary degree,

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16. H. E. F., Modern Use, p. 231.
17. H. E. F., Faith, p. 263.

even in the event of the cross. No thought of appeasing Divine righteousness; no place for ransom to the powers of evil here; Christ is mankind's savior because he awakens men to the resources which lie within them, thereby enabling them to break free from their bondage to fear and sin. "Into a vital use of their relationship with the Divine, Christ opened the way and multitudes have followed."[18] What immediately followed for Fosdick whenever he voiced such an opinion was the thundering denunciation of his conservative opposition.[19] But in stressing this element of the atonement, liberals were surely saying something that needed to be said; although whether or not they were saying all that was necessary is perhaps an open question.[20]

One other feature of Christ's work served to emphasize the gap between liberals and fundamentalists. The latter tended to focus upon the death of Christ as the principal factor in the history of redemption. Combined with the orthodox underscoring of the virgin birth, this gave rise to the liberal charge that the conservatives had only the Christ of the cross and the cradle; when what was really important was the impact of Christ's entire life. "Too many theories of atonement," Fosdick testifies, "assume that by one single high priestly act of self-sacrifice Christ saved the world."[21] We must instead visualize the death of Christ, he insists, as but the final phase of an entire life lived out on the

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18. Ibid., p. 273.
19. J. Gresham Machen, Christianity and Liberalism (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), p. 120.
20. See: Walter Marshall Horton, Christian Theology: An Ecumenical Approach (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), pp. 185-8.
21. H. E. F., Mr. Brown, p. 135.

basis of dedicated self-sacrifice for the good of others. Jesus was just as much a savior in life as in death. His character, his ideas, are the salt that can improve human existence. Thus we comprehend that for Fosdick and his liberal friends, salvation possesses a rather different meaning than it has for the larger part of Christendom across the ages.

As one would gather, Fosdick shrinks in horror from any suggestion that salvation is some "... formal status decreed by legal enactment, as though a judge technically acquitted a prisoner".[22] Salvation is simply new life, new possibilities; and the attitude which appropriates this good news of expanding personal horizons and enlarging personal power through the influence of Christ is that of saving faith. But in extending his opposition to the traditional emphasis, Fosdick considers that salvation is not a once and for all matter, but a continuing lifelong process.

> When one, by faith, turns his face homeward from such destroyers of life, he begins to be saved; but only as he lives in fellowship with the Divine and so achieves progressive victory, does he keep on being saved.[23]

In contrast with the more orthodox Protestant persuasion of salvation as justification, "sanctification" would appear to be the key word in the liberal (and Fosdickian) interpretation of this redemptive experience.

Fosdick further displays the liberal mind in his reluctance to conceive of Christ's resurrection in terms of flesh.[24] Though he can easily enough envisage the triumph of Christ's spirit; concerning the physical aspects of the resurrection, he prefers to remain an agnostic.

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22. H. E. F., Faith, p. 264.
23. Ibid., p. 265.
24. H. E. F., "How Shall We Think of God?" Harpers Magazine, CLIII (June, 1926), 229-33.

A further liberal discard, the ascension of Christ (still a sore point with conservatives as the rebuttal drawn by recent remarks of Bishop Robinson indicates), Fosdick categorizes with such concepts as that of the flat earth. Likewise, the second coming of Christ, Fosdick writes off as "an outmoded phrasing of hope".[25] Summing up the majority liberal viewpoint on this issue, Fosdick informs us:

> I believe in the victory of righteousness upon this earth, in the coming kingdom of God whereon Christ looking shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied, but I do not believe in the physical return of Jesus.[26]

So Fosdick's Christ is evidently the Christ of a liberal; though by no means that of an extreme liberal. He can still stand with the orthodox Christ as the revealer of the human and divine. He is yet the son of God; but then, so are we all; even though none other has so realized or fulfilled this filial relationship. Like Schleiermacher, Fosdick regarded Christ as the pioneer of a new age on earth for all mankind. We could not have accomplished what he did; but because he has done it, we can share in the victorious experience with him.[27]

It is nearer to such a position as this and away from the extremes of mere humanism that many liberals returned when, following the upheavals of the early twentieth century, they were driven to the

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25. Kenneth Bagnell, "This Is Fosdick", The United Church Observer, XXIV (March 1, 1962), 20.
26. H. E. F., Modern Use, p. 104. We note on this point that Fosdick's belief in the earthly establishment of God's kingdom underwent serious modification in later years. See above: p. 47.
27. H. E. F., Riverside, p. 290.

sobering conclusion that man stood in need of a savior; one who was somehow unique; one who could in some sense be a mediator between themselves and God - a position which liberals like Fosdick seem never really to have lost sight of altogether.

Chapter VI

APOLOGETICS

Faith

The relationship of faith and reason has furnished a tilting-ground for Christian theologians since the beginnings of dogmatic theology. The difference between liberal and conservative outlooks on this topic was, of course, largely one of emphasis; the conservative nature arguing for the absolute primacy of faith, the liberal temperament seeking to win a larger place for reason than the former would ever allow.

And so it is that we observe Fosdick defending the operations of reason, vigorously maintaining that history itself serves to illustrate that there is no dwindling of faith with the increase of wisdom. Compare, for instance, he suggests, the faith of a savage with that of a modern man. The former entertains no grandiose dreams of economic justice and international brotherhood, nor does he ask such deep and searching questions about the functioning of the universe or of man's inner life, all of which cannot escape the involvement of faith - the self commital of the entire life.[1] Of course, the conservative might be inclined to accuse Fosdick of leading us astray here by playing a game with words so that

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This chapter deals with a number of concerns basic to Fosdick's religious philosophy, yet not necessarily falling within the scope of the discussion involving the major tenets of faith. Because of the breadth of topics included, it was thought advisable to provide subheadings for this one chapter only so as to distinguish between the items here considered.

1. H. E. F., Faith, p. 16.

faith is awarded a wider connotation than its normal religious one. But then, it must be remembered, liberals, in viewing reality as one, were loathe to divide life up into compartments, some of which might bear no obvious relation to specifically "religious" matters. For Fosdick all of life reflected the implications of faith.

For all his spirited defense of reason, however, Fosdick seems to allow a larger place for faith than do many who consider themselves liberal. Indeed, he discerns it as operating prior to any activity of the intelligence. We have our faith in someone or something first of all, he points out, and as a consequence we focus our intellectual ability upon the attainment of the vision which faith has set before us; or, to put it more graphically: "Faith blazes the trail; intelligence builds the avenue".[2]

Mere logical deduction, he is certain, would only block our admission into several realms which faith permits us to enter. All our most valued relationships with persons, our loftiest visions for society, our approach to moral and esthetic convictions incorporate issues which we can never hope to argue through to conclusive rational certainty. Even our acceptance of both ourselves and the world outside us are basically acts of faith. In fact, "Reason itself is a matter of faith. It is an act of faith to assert that one's thoughts have any relation to reality at all".[3]

His years as a pastor had led Fosdick to an awareness of the power of faith which might have escaped him had he followed through on

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2. H. E. F., Riverside, p. 214.
3. H. E. F., Faith, p. 46.

his earlier ambition to be a teacher of religion. And so he realized in faith, one of the most creative forces in human life, contributing toward the growth of personality in every area, providing an inner dynamic which so unifies and directs life that our inadequacies are surmounted, and we are empowered to engage in effective service. Realistically, he adds the rider that this "... does not mean that men can do what they will, overriding all obstacles to chosen goals; it means that they are aware of resources in reserve, of power around them and in them, so that they are not afraid of anything which they may face".[4]

Fosdick was then forced by his humanistic critics to defend this evangelical-liberal position against their charges that while faith could achieve some rather amazing results, it is the act of faith itself, without any reference to its object, which occasions these remarkable attainments. Faith, they insisted, is merely a psychological attitude which itself works wonders within; while that which draws this prodigious power forth is actually of little consequence. Fosdick is forced to admit that there is a modicum of truth in this allegation; for faith, however directed, can be an efficient organizer of personality. Still, as has been gathered from his views on the nature of man, different levels of organization do exist within one person; and it is entirely possible to integrate the self on a relatively low level, which, while it does lead to a comparatively stable (though likely temporary) adjustment, ends finally in the debauching of the individual's intelligence and a lowering of his moral standards. It does matter, affirms Fosdick, to our mind

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4. Ibid., p. 263.

and character, and ultimately to our behavior; in fact, to our total destiny, in what or whom we believe.[5]

The final question, as Fosdick sees it, is not one of faith or no faith; it is - by what faith or faiths shall our lives be guided? And for Fosdick, the most profound faith upon which man can base his life is that afforded by religion. The question then arises - what does Fosdick mean by "religion"?

Religion

"Religion at its fountainhead," announces Fosdick, "is an individual psychological experience"[6] - an experience which occupies the very center of one's life. Here we note the familiar liberal theme stemming from Schleiermacher and based upon the principle of autonomy, which locates the heart of religion not in any ecclesiastical body or orthodox system of theology or antiquated creed but in the personal experience of the individual (an emphasis being strongly re-sounded in our own day by men like Bishops Robinson and Pike). It is most characteristic of liberals that they regard all other elements of religion as purely secondary and of a definitely transitory nature, while the constant factor of any meaningful religion is ever held to be the vibrant, soul-transforming encounter with the Divine into which each person must freely enter for himself.

Fosdick does not neglect the objective side of this experience; though like most liberals, he can scarcely be accused of over-emphasizing

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5. Ibid., p. 261.
6. H. E. F., See Religion, p. 4.

it either. He does express his conviction that this experience, which issues in such profound metamorphosis of character, be it gradual or sudden, definitely locates its origin in the Divine; for always, God's revelation precedes man's discovery. "Our faith is our response to God's self disclosure in nature, in prophetic character, in inspired scriptures, in Christ, and in intimate, inward 'I - Thou' relationships."[7] And here is evident another liberal motif which has it that while God may be most truly known in Christ, this revelation is not different in kind from other knowledge of God - a statement which might win the approval of most Protestants, though certainly not of the Barthians, who drew the bounds of revelation somewhat more tightly.

Without this original and vital experience, religion easily becomes a second hand affair and passes from vitality to rigidity, warns Fosdick. It was because this very thing had transpired in Christendom, that liberal theology had risen in the first place to sound its protest. Devotion to the authority of ecclesiastical formula had taken precedence over experience and had thereby brought about a type of faith characterized by dullness, apathy, and morbid conscience; one which callously denied the validity of experiences not of its own mold. Reflecting upon this situation, Fosdick suggests that it was likely this same low and unethical type of religion, which did people more harm than good, with which Jesus had constantly to deal.

Approaching religion as a psychological experience, rather than as a second hand formula, muses Fosdick, tends to undercut

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7. H. E. F., Living, p. 257.

ecclesiastical and theological diversities and encourage toleration - a quality which occupied a rather large niche in the liberal temperament. Tolerance is held to be a strength, for it is nothing less than "... the unconquerable ascendency of personal goodwill over all differences of opinion".[8] Intolerance, a charge frequently laid by the exponents of liberalism against their fundamentalist opponents, is, in spite of its often severe front, actually a sign of weakness, and, ironically, does nothing but damage to the cause it ostensibly seeks to defend. When Christians stand pugnaciously and unlovingly for their convictions, they fail to commend the Christian faith, which they purportedly represent; for nothing can be desirable which so obviously cramps a man's spirit. Nevertheless, Fosdick was realistic enough to realize that even tolerance can be carried to such ridiculous extremes that religion dissipates into sentimental vagueness. He had seen too many who, choosing this as their basic approach to life, had drawn the charge of being wishy-washy upon the whole liberal movement. And so he wisely cautions that there does exist a need for definite convictions; though always, these will respect the reverences precious to other human beings.

In upholding the principle of autonomy, liberal thought often went to such lengths in its proclamation of individual freedom, that any role assigned external authority tended to be very minimal indeed. Again, however, Fosdick proves the realist by making sufficient room for this article in his personal theology. He contends that the acceptance of authority is not such an irrational process as the excessively

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8. H. E. F., "Tolerance", Harpers Magazine, CLII (May, 1926), 713.

subjective liberals tried to make out. In fact, he discloses, we live in dependence upon authority to some extent each day of our lives. For, "If a man refused to make use of any knowledge save that which he personally had proved, he would live in a universe painfully meagre and dessicated".[9] We accept, for instance, the distance from the earth to the sun as ninety two million miles; though few of us have actually measured it. Similarly, in practically every area of life, there are minds that have delved deeper than we have; and this is no less true in the spiritual realm, where men of wider vision are called upon to interpret to us the real truth of life. This in no way invalidates our personal experience; if anything it furnishes an assist for it. For the function of authority in religion, Fosdick goes on to explain, is to bring us to the place where we may see for ourselves. Authority, he relates "... can lead us up to the threshold of a great experience where we must enter each man for himself, and that service to the spiritual life is the Bible's inestimable gift".[10] Fosdick, then, makes a concession that many liberals would not - that authority can be a valuable servant in the religious domain. Still, he never wavered in his insistence that its place was definitely subordinate to that of vital experience.

We have noted from time to time that the social sciences, which were more noticeably coming into their own about the time that liberal theology was on the rise, exerted strong influences upon liberal scholars. So it is not at all surprising when we discover that basic to Fosdick's

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9. H. E. F., Assurance, p. 128.
10. H. E. F., Christianity and Progress (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1922), p. 161.

thinking is the conviction that religion is to a perceptible extent sociologically conditioned.[11] Thus, when he espied the rising conservative trends following the Second World War, he interpreted this as the consequence of an acute need for psychological security such as usually follows hard upon a period of social disruption[12] (as had also been the case after the First Great War).

Fosdick then develops this theme in order to provide some explanation which will account for the rise of Barth and Brunner and their neo-orthodox disciples of the present day. In its origins, this movement, he suggests, represented a pathological response on the part of Christians to the desperate plight of the world at a time when the forces of social evil embodied in Nazism and Fascism appeared to be triumphing.

Fosdick regards this theological perspective which depicts man as a total spiritual wreck, wholly separated from God, and which denies fervently the notion of Divine immanence - God's presence in the human soul - as "... not only a false and dangerous concept of God on rational grounds, but an obvious denial of the New Testament."[13] While granting the excesses to which the concept of divine immanence had at times been pushed, Fosdick felt compelled to leap to the defense of his liberal comrades with the counter-charge that Barth's total repudiation of this idea is "... an even more false and dangerous error...", which, when carried to its logical conclusion, makes God out to be an absolute and oft absentee

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11. It was another liberal, H. Richard Niebuhr, who developed this theme at some length. See, for instance: Christ and Culture (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951).
12. H. E. F., A Great Time to Be Alive (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), p. 178.
13. H. E. F., "Old and New Ideas", p. 86.

autocrat, while at the same time it cancels out "... the vital meaning of the indwelling and transforming Holy Spirit as the New Testament proclaims it".[14]

Fosdick discerns in the neo-orthodox "revolt against reason", particularly in the extreme forms to which certain disciples of this persuasion, such as Kraemar, have carried it, a truly serious threat to the integrity of the Christian faith. For many earnest inquirers are asking pertinent questions concerning ultimate matters; and they must, he insists, be furnished with reasonable answers and not simply be ordered to believe.[15]

Our liberal spokesman also finds cause for disturbance in the neo-orthodox tendency to disallow any credence to man's search for the Divine, so that prior to Christ and apart from Christ, all religious striving is in vain. Fosdick considers such an attitude to be monstrously egotistical on the part of Christians and contrary to the evidence provided by the spiritual experience of the entire race. To him, as to most theistic liberals, this universal hunger of the human soul for the Divine is, in all faiths, the response to God's unending search for man and self-revelation to him.[16]

Even while conceding that Barth and his school have supplied much needed correctives to the theological picture, Fosdick remains thankful that the influence of this continental thinker upon intelligent minds in America, apart from technical theologians, has not really been

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14. Ibid., p. 88.
15. H. E. F., Living, p. 259.
16. Ibid., p. 262.

that extensive. Had he been writing his autobiography a few years later, Fosdick might have had to qualify this position slightly.[17] Still, he is basically correct in his assumption; for even after Barth's visit to America, his influence on this continent appears to have remained largely restricted to academic circles. Fosdick had always tried to keep his mind open to this new conservatizing form of thought which became more prominent in his later years of ministry, and he has become close friends with several of its most zealous spokesmen. In his later theology he was undoubtedly influenced by it, but he has refused to be completely swayed by its dictates, as many of his contemporaries were, regarding this movement as something of a theological extreme which would likely be tempered with time.[18] He has consistently affirmed that neo-orthodoxy stands debtor to the liberal movement; and realizing at the same time that neither of these strains could remain as it was, he forecast some sort of synthesis between liberal and neo-orthodox theologies which would culminate in a broader, firmer intellectual basis for the Christian religion.[19] Time seems to have proven his prophecy essentially accurate. For liberalism did allow itself to be tempered by neo-orthodox insights; while neo-orthodoxy appears to have bade farewell to a number of its earlier harsh excesses, and has mellowed somewhat with the passage of the years. Perhaps the likelihood of blending is the fate of any doctrine which becomes a part of a nation possessing a strong "melting-

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17. See: Kenneth Hamilton, God Is Dead: The Anatomy of a Slogan (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), p. 40 f.
18. Bosley, "Best Is Yet to Be", p. 621.
19. H. E. F., Living, p. 266.

pot" heritage, as does America.[20]

In his role of spokesman for theological liberalism, Fosdick was called upon to defend his cause on another front as well. For in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, humanists - some atheistic, the majority preferring to be classed among that segment of the intelligentsia which normatively holds judgement in suspension - were coming to wield considerable influence in the centers of learning, and consequently their creed of agnosticism was beginning to capture the attention and devotion of several of the best minds in the land.

Looking objectively at this humanist position, Fosdick is able to discern in it a number of features to which religious liberals can readily voice assent. In the characteristically liberal mood of spiritual freedom, he voices the belief that a measure of agnosticism can be considered necessary for an intelligent faith. And he is able to agree that, in certain respects, religion in America does need to be humanized. He furthermore finds himself in entire sympathy with their rejection of supernaturalism. A law abiding universe has no use, he feels, for the sort of dualism normally implied in this doctrine.

But the basic humanist position - that the universe is not intelligent, purposive, or friendly, and that life is but an accident which will ultimately perish with the inevitable disintegration of the world - goes against the grain of the religious liberal, who suspects

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20. It is interesting to note that in all this commentary upon the sociological factors affecting religion, and the effects of historical conditioning upon the church, relatively little mention was made by liberals, Fosdick included, of the fact that their own movement has to be viewed in large measure as a product of a particular historical context. Had there not been a need for theological restatement at that time, liberal theology might never have appeared on the scene.

this outlook as a faulty philosophy portending disastrous results. And so Fosdick testifies that no matter how much the humanists try to maintain a lofty ethic, they are really just whistling in the dark to keep up their courage. For, in driving their logic through to conclusion, he determines that their ethic, lacking as it does an infinite foundation, collapses into a moral nihilism, which brings spiritual despair upon the individual and moral poverty upon his society. In a world where the highest of human values are merely transitory and of no ultimate consequence, it seems inevitable, thinks Fosdick, that one will eventually come to expect less and therefore attempt less. And although certain of these humanistic individuals admittedly seem to avoid this pattern and do succeed in living out life on a relatively high level, Fosdick still regards this rather stoic approach to life as being far less attractive or satisfying than that abundant type of existence which belongs to the believer.

Science

The rise of science as we have earlier observed was one of the forces significantly contributing to the modernist outlook. The reaction of the church to scientific discovery had been a dual one. On the one hand, theologians of a more liberal temperament hailed these new advances as a great stride forward for humanity. The more reactionary elements, however, (and for a time these shaped the majority opinion of the church) feeling the long established bases of the faith crumbling away before the force of the scientific current, waged full scale warfare against what they beheld to be the very powers of anti-Christ.

Fosdick was one who lived through this era, and like several other liberal churchmen uttered the sobering comment that this unfortunate and bitter contest need never have taken place if both participants had only been willing to realize that each of these great disciplines is authoritative within its own sphere, and not attempted to force its presuppositions upon the other - a point of view which has now gained widespread acceptance throughout most of the Protestant world except for those areas where a hard shelled fundamentalism still keeps a tight check upon anything not in strict literal accord with the Bible. We should here be aware of the fact that it is likely easier for the liberal to discern the value of science, operating as he does on the premise that all truth is one. Thus he can more readily appreciate the contributions of science as tools which can actually aid the cause of religion, particularly insofar as they can help rid the faith of many of its useless accretions and burdensome encumbrances.[21] On the other hand, the conservative, who seeks to subjugate all learning to the supposedly higher and Biblically established realm of divine truth, would have considerably more difficulty in fitting the findings of this usurper, science, into his more restricted pattern.

Nevertheless, Fosdick would never go so far as a D. C. Macintosh who specifies that the procedures of empirical science can be literally applied to the realms of religion and theology. And Fosdick realizes clearly that science must not be hailed as the messiah of the race as

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21. See: H. E. F., "Religions Debt to Science", Good Housekeeping, LXXXVI (March, 1928), 21.
H. E. F., "Science and Mystery", Atlantic Monthly, CXII (October, 1913), 529.

some mistakenly supposed. For Science is equipped to deal with only a portion of reality, and there are wants existing deep within man which science can never satisfy.[22] Fosdick's final word on the matter is one of caution blended with hope, voiced from within an era when, along with its possibilities for good, the destructive potential of science was rapidly becoming more evident.

> The splendid new powers which science furnishes are still in the hands of the old sins - greed, selfish ambition, cruelty. The innermost necessity of mankind is a spiritual life adequate to handle our new acquisition.[23]

Progress

It was the blending of scientific and technical achievement with worldwide exploration and intercommunication, the increase of knowledge, and the rise of new social hopes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which served to undermine the static world view which had been largely dominant until that time. Liberal thinkers were quick to seize upon this dynamic disclosure of progress in history, adroitly reading evolution into every area of human consideration until growth became recognized as the fundamental law of life.

By Fosdick's time, however, even many dyed-in-the-wool modernists had had second thoughts concerning the inevitability of the golden era presaged by liberal seers of an earlier generation. Fosdick observes that in their enthusiastic optimism, men had become oblivious to the

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22. H. E. F., "Will Science Displace God?" Harpers Magazine, CLIII (August, 1926), 366.
23. H. E. F., The Challenge of the Present Crisis (New York: The Association Press, 1917), p. 81.

limitations inherent in this scheme of unlimited development. This kind of liberalism, which so ardently placed its faith in unhindered progress is the kind which H. Richard Niebuhr rightly charges as being "naively optimistic".[24] It is interesting to note here that Fosdick even takes his mentor, Rauschenbusch, to task on this score.[25] Fosdick contends that man appears at last to be waking up to the fact that the idea of automatic and inevitable progress is but a flimsy dream. He feels compelled to defend Christian liberals on this issue, alleging that, as a whole, they did not surrender to this spirit, although they could not altogether escape the optimistic coloring of their generation. For this tendency, he argues, was not so much of their own creation as it was the consequence of the secular spirit of the age. Spencer, the arch-prophet of inevitable progress, he reminds us, was an agnostic. Still, we cannot escape the feeling, especially after a reading of the history of the era, that Fosdick is perhaps just a little too eager to "whitewash" the progenitors of the spiritual tradition in which he finds himself standing.

At any rate, liberals have now become, in the main, more realistic in their appraisal of life's forward motion. Fosdick sums up this altered position when he writes: "The plain fact is that human history is a strange blend of progress and regress".[26] Furthermore, he points out, the fact that something is later in time does not necessarily prove that it is better - a lesson which some liberals seem never to have learned. For this is the chronological fallacy, and the lie it contains is perhaps

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24. H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God In America (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), p. 193.
25. H. E. F., A Faith For Tough Times (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 30 f.
26. H. E. F., Progress, p. 38.

nowhere better realized than in the realms of spiritual quality and creativeness, where we note, for example, that no later sculpture has surpassed that of Pheidias; while the most excellent literature in the English tongue hails from the Shakespearian era; and the summit of spiritual vitality is marked by none other than a Jewish carpenter - preacher of the early first century A.D.

Still, having called the notion of progress to account for its previous excesses, Fosdick does not wish to fall into the error of the opposite extreme; and so he goes on to say that when we have taken into consideration the limitations surrounding the notion of progress upon the earth "... it still remains true that, in our new scientific control over the latent resources of the earth without and over our own mental and moral processes within, we have a machinery for producing change that opens up exciting prospects before humanity".[27] Thus does he voice the thought of a moderate liberalism - that progress is real and is to be welcomed so long as its limitations are clearly recognized. Thus received, it becomes a dynamic force for the bettering of mankind.

The religious liberal, aided by the historical-critical studies of the Bible, was quick to read the idea of progress into his faith. And so, citing the ascending path which man had travelled in his spiritual life, from early animism to the heights of ethical monotheism as typified by Jesus Christ, Fosdick admonishes certain segments of Protestantism, notably the more fundamentalistic confessions, for setting themselves in fearful defiance against the ongoing tide. The typically liberal trait of free enquiry is evident in his urging all religious people to

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27. Ibid., p. 41.

realize that in attaining progress, we do not surrender anything essential, but rather, develop it. In striving to achieve stability, we only succeed in achieving stagnation.

The realization of the effect of psychological and sociological patterns upon man's thought combined with a basic distrust of dogmatism led the modernist to declare that theologies are necessarily tentative. But even if these immediate expressions of belief are changeable, he usually went on, this does not imply that the basic reality which gives rise to the belief has undergone any drastic alteration, or depreciated in value. A changed category need not indicate an abandoned conviction. When, for instance, we discard an outworn picture of God, we should not think that anything has happened to God himself. This is the theme Fosdick is expounding when he writes:

> The most abiding elements in human history are the fundamental experiences of man's spirit. Everything else in man's life changes; outwardly his environment and inwardly his mental categories alter; but at the heart of him is something that changes but little if at all. This is not a matter of pious desire; it is a matter of historic faith.[28]

Although this line of thought was not original with Fosdick, he yet receives credit as the author of a phrase which comprehensively summarized this theme, and consequently was much quoted by modernist theologians when expressing this belief; the slogan or phrase - "abiding experiences in changing categories". Though astronomies change, Fosdick points out, the stars still abide. Even so must religion continually cast off its outworn garb and clothe itself in the new and better if it is to continue to be relevant to each succeeding age. This, in fact, he

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28. H. E. F., Modern Use, p. 55.

sees as the genius of liberal Protestantism - that a doctrine may be affirmed as valid, yet may not be affirmed as final, for we must constantly remain sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit which ever calls us forward. And this position, too, has won favor among a number of conservative brethren who once looked upon it rather warily. So that today we witness an essentially traditional Christian scholar stating basically the same thing when he writes: "New philosophical perspectives on the world may make it both possible and necessary to translate old dogma into a new conceptual language".[29]

In emphasizing the idea of progress, Fosdick, unlike the more extreme liberal thinkers, refrains from debunking the past. He does feel that the past is not everything, and that some Christians seem to have lost all sense of proportion in their glorification of previous ages; nevertheless, a great past, he asserts, is the surest foundation upon which to build a great future. "Almost all successful progress comes from those who know best and most deeply appreciate the achievements that have gone before them. Whenever liberalism lacks this element it inevitably grows thin and tenuous, shallow and cheap."[30] He chides those liberals who are familiar with nothing but contemporary thought as not being true liberals at all, for they are not holding themselves open to all truth; they are concentrating upon a rather narrow segment only, and with a perhaps even worse type of bigotry than that manifested by the out-and-out reactionaries.

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29. Eugene Fairweather, "The Catholic Tradition", William Kilbourn, ed., The Restless Church (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Limited, 1966), p. 68.
30. H. E. F., What Is Vital In Religion (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), p. 156.

Liberalism in general had looked to progress to supply the remedy for all public and personal imperfections. Several modernist theologians such as Rauschenbusch had been confident that the onward flow of events would find its terminus in the realization of the Kingdom of God upon earth. And no matter how far-fetched this ideal may presently seem, at least these men were being literally true to the petition contained in the Lord's prayer that God's rule might someday be an actual physical reality here in this terrestrial sphere. Even today, some apparently continue to cling to a vestige of this hope.[31] Fosdick, and liberals of like mind, who in time began to attack the Spenserian idea of automatic progress, never totally succumbed to this utopian belief that the Kingdom of God could come fully in human history upon this planet. Only beyond history would redemption be fully realized. What directed Fosdick's thoughts into this stream, however, was not so much his consciousness of the depths of human sin, as was the case with neo-orthodox thinkers; it was, rather, his understanding derived from scientific theory that the earth was a transient planet and would someday likely dissolve in fire - just one further instance of practical considerations holding the upper hand in his reasoning.

The Bible

The moderate-liberal understanding of progress typified by Fosdick, is particularly conspicious in his discussion of the Bible. Some mention has been made in the introductory section of this study as

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31. See, for instance, the position of William Adams Brown in: Roberts & Van Dusen, Liberal Theology, p. 269.

to how Biblical scholars, using the new scientific instruments and other methods at their disposal, had challenged the orthodox viewpoint that the Bible was from beginning to end equally inspired and authoritative. Fosdick won fame as "the popularizer" of this historical approach to the scriptures when he attempted to interpret these findings to the educated laity who were perplexed astto the meaning of several parts of the Christian scriptures.[32]

In reviewing the increased understanding which came from placing the Biblical documents in chronological order and tracing the great ideas of scripture from their more elementary forms in early writings through to the more relatively mature stages in later books, Fosdick here also cautions against the chronological fallacy. The fact that one Biblical book is from a later period than another is in itself no indication of superior spiritual quality. He finds, for example, that Isaiah far excels Revelation in depths of moral discernment. Nevertheless, we do, generally speaking, find here a rising curve of spiritual insights. And although continued Biblical investigation of the next generation was to cause liberals to pause and reconsider certain of their conclusions, Fosdick could still issue the general conclusion that "The new approach to the Bible once more integrates the Scriptures, saves us from our piecemeal treatment of them, and restores to us the whole book seen as a unified development from early and simple beginnings to a great conclusion".[33]

The Bible clearly occupies a pre-eminent position in Fosdick's

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32. See: H. E. F., A Guide to Understanding the Bible.
33. H. E. F., Modern Use, p. 29.

thinking; much more so than for some liberals who demoted it to the rank of a mere historical document. For Fosdick it ever remained nothing less than a "... priceless treasury of spiritual truth" which has contributed vastly to our intellectual heritage, and upon which is based the finest in human life.[34]

We find Fosdick applying his abiding experiences in changing categories formula to the Bible when he informs us that the basic experiences recorded in scripture continue to be the vital experiences of men today; still, it must be recognized that the form of these experiences have so altered that not every Biblical detail applies to our present historical situation as the more extreme conservatives still endeavor to make out. Furthermore, and on this point all religious liberals were in basic agreement, revelation had definitely not concluded with the completion of the canon. The ideas with which the scriptures opened and which they developed must not be thought of as finalized when the scriptures stopped. They continued to grow, adopting the forms supplied by each generation as the older settings became outworn, right up to the present day. For unless God continues to speak today, how, queries the liberal, can we think that he ever spoke at all?[35]

Other Religions

Magnificent as he holds the Christian scriptures to be, Fosdick is aware that in the matters they deal with, in the explanations and descriptions they offer, their thoughts are often re-echoed in the sacred

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34. Ibid., p. 3.
35. H. E. F., Adventurous Religion, p. 320.

books belonging to the other great religions of the world. They too are found to contain miracle stories, virgin births, saviors, prophets and the like. Fosdick has long been convinced that there is much of value in these other systems of belief, completely rejecting the sterner orthodox notion that if Christianity is true, then all other religions are false. He relates:

> Moreover, this attitude - Christians saved, all others damned - runs into head-on collision with the whole concept of God in the New Testament as a merciful Father of all mankind whose will is that not a single "one of these little ones shall be lost".[36]

In stating this, Fosdick is reflecting the influence of the late nineteenth-early twentieth century interest in the study of comparative religion which had arisen in close conjunction with critical Biblical study, and which had tended to emphasize the universals in all religious life; and on that basis had sought to develop more understanding relationships with the other faiths of the world. The awareness of these common features led Fosdick to foresee the day when something approaching a world wide religion could conceivably be achieved, for...

> ... when men of the most sharply divided faiths - Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Moslems - talk together seriously with mutual respect, they discover, beneath the estranging factors which separate them, a profound area of common ground where they share like experiences and understand one another very well.[37]

In spite of these highly irenic visions, however, Fosdick will still not agree with the more extreme opinion of some that one religion is just as good as another. This fact of common ground can be overstressed,

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36. H. E. F., Mr. Brown, p. 111.
37. H. E. F., "Tomorrow's Religion", United Nations World, V (December, 1956), 41.

he warns; essential differences do exist. So even though some value can be uncovered in other faiths, and it is to our advantage to be familiar with them, to some extent anyway, the glory of a religion is yet contained in the unique contribution it has to make. And as far as Fosdick is concerned, the religion which holds out the most positive gain for humanity is Christianity, which among all the world's creeds, represents, he is certain, the summit of the spiritual life. Although here again, we are reminded that for Fosdick the distinction is a quantitative rather than a qualitative one.

Christianity

Most theological liberals awarded personality a prominent place in their systems, though it is doubtful if any is more deserving of the title of high apostle of the worth of personality than Fosdick. For him, the revelation for personality is the basis of Christianity and the cornerstone of his personal theology, the theme he repeatedly sounds. It was the championing of individual personality which Fosdick regards as the one truly unique contribution of Jesus of Nazareth.[38] Nothing was sacred to him except as it benefitted personality in some manner; and, as Fosdick sees it, the measure of one's own Christianity is the extent to which one believes in the attitude incarnated in Christ toward human personality.

Christ-likeness then is the central criterion of Christianity. Like other modernist thinkers influenced to any degree by Harnack, Fosdick

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38. H. E. F., See Religion, p. 41.

contrasts the religion about Jesus with the religion of Jesus, drawing this distinction quite vividly for us with the penetrating pronouncement:

> A man can have a religion about Jesus and be a rampant militarist, a narrow nationalist, a hard-handed industrial autocrat; he can have a religion about Jesus and be unfit to live with in a home. But no one can have the religion of Jesus and be that.39

A man is a Christian then, only to the extent that his religion is the same as that of Jesus, and this, concludes Fosdick, is certainly no easy achievement.

Christ's teachings, based as they were upon universal truth, have continued to hold appeal and relevance to men in all ages. However, his followers down through the years have, laments Fosdick, consistently attempted to pour his teachings, as well as the total impact of his life upon their own, into the molds of prevailing world views; and though usually quite necessary, this practice, as we have observed, has unfortunately often issued in a second-hand style of religion in which people have contented themselves with receiving and accepting the formulated system of belief, or creed, while making no attempt to engage in the original experience - the vital personal encounter with Christ - which the system was seeking to express. This is indeed a far cry, he feels, from the early Christians who were concerned about trust, not in a clearly defined creed, or book of scriptures, or a particular church body, but in a person, Jesus of Nazareth. The results of this formalized brand of religion, contends Fosdick, have often led to the stagnation, if not outright denial, of genuine Christianity. And this has been overcome only by the religion of Jesus once again pushing itself "... up

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39. H. E. F., Adventurous Religion, p. 325.

through the obscurities and formalities of an accumulated religion concerning him..."[40] and once more taking the center of the stage.

Still, for all the drawbacks he envisages in such regulated systems, Fosdick is not so thoroughgoing as certain other liberals in discarding structured compendiums of belief.[41] He does allow a place for the role of doctrine within his theology. It is only natural, he reasons, to strive after intelligible explanations of anything that interests us deeply. He reports:

> If by doctrine one means that vital and influential outlook on life, then I should say that just now the need of the church is not for less doctrine but for more - more clear cut, luminous, intelligible teaching about God, Christ, the Scriptures, the soul, the meaning of life and immortality.[42]

But we do have to be wary, he cautions, lest the emphasis on doctrine

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40. H. E. F., "The New Religious Reformation", The Ladies Home Journal, XLIII (April, 1926), 229.

41. Indeed, when pressed by the Presbyterians during the debate of the twenties to state in what things he did believe, Fosdick offered the following statement as outlining his personal credo:

> I believe in the personal God revealed in Christ, and in His omnipresent activity and endless resources to achieve His purpose for us and all men; I believe in Christ, His deity, His sacrificial saviorhood, His resurrected and triumphant life, His rightful lordship, and the indispensableness of His message to mankind.
>
> In the indwelling Spirit I believe, and the forgiveness of sins, the redeemed and victorious life, the triumph of righteousness on earth, and the life everlasting.
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> This faith I find in the Scriptures, and the object of my ministry is to lead men to the Scriptures as the standard and norm of religious experience - the progressive revelation of God in the history of a unique people, culminating in Christ.
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> Quoted in: Dieffenbach, "Lost Leaders of Protestantism", p. 271.

42. H. E. F., "What Christian Liberals Are Driving At", The Ladies Home Journal, XLII (January, 1925), 128.

petrifies into authoritative dogma, which dictates the way all men henceforth must think. Theoretical formulations, while they can justify, clarify, and direct, must always be kept in a definitely subordinate position to the basic experience. For Jesus calls us not to the acceptance of any theory, but to the assumption of a task.

Miracles

Because of the liberal tendency to obliterate any distinction between the natural and the supernatural, while at the same time asserting the universal reign of law, the foundation for belief in miracles was virtually swept away. This posture was further reinforced by the objective study of religion which, investigating the sources, determined that the farther one proceeded from the original documents, the more marvellous the stories could be detected to become. (Compare even Mark with Matthew for example.) Furthermore, there was no type of miracle recorded in Christian scripture which could not be paralleled by the inspired writings of other religions. At any rate, mankind was now achieving, it was felt, by due regulation and manipulation of natural law, results which far surpassed the most magnificent of miracle stories. All these factors combined then, to increase the general distrust in the possibility of miracles ever having taken place.

Fosdick, however, moves out one step beyond the majority of his liberal brethren, and by a process of reinterpretation is able to make room for this belief as well within his theological framework. He reminds us that one thing usually overlooked by those who place such weight upon law, is that laws do not necessarily impose rigid restrictions

upon life; they are merely formulated expressions of what has been observed. And besides, existence has not been shown to be a closed system into which nothing novel can enter. And if there be a God, then he must surely be free to work within the structure he has erected. This line of reasoning leads Fosdick to a redefinition of miracle, which perhaps somewhat ironically, hearkens back to Augustine, the classical theologian who became in many respects the mentor of neo-orthodox thinkers. Although this notion did not enjoy wide currency in its author's day, Fosdick sees it as a useful definition that "... a miracle is God's use of his own law abiding powers to work out in ways surprising to us his will for our lives and for our world".[43] It involves then, not a rupture of law, as many supposed, but the fulfillment of a higher and greater law than we have yet understood. And in this sense, miracles may be thought of as happening all the time - though Fosdick will not go as far as Schleiermacher and proclaim that "... all is miracle"[44] - as most liberals, indeed, have, even to this present day.

It is interesting to note here that in the light of modern psychosomatic medicine, Fosdick has no difficulty with the healing miracles of Christ. Apparently, however, from what we have previously gathered, this redefinition was insufficient to permit him any literal interpretation of Christ's physical resurrection.

Proceeding from this point of miracle as being the fulfillment of a higher law, Fosdick reasons that if we are really going to deal fairly with this item of belief, then it devolves upon us to try to discover

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43. H. E. F., Modern Use, p. 162.
44. Quoted in: Dillenberger & Welch, Protestant Christianity, p. 218.

the abiding conviction which our forefathers were attempting to express when they employed the category of miracle. And at the base of this doctrine we determine that they were asserting their belief in the providence of God and in his immediate presence and activity in this world. They were saying that the divine order so underlies our lives that we should not close our eyes to the possibility of events of "luminous surprise". They were making the claim that great resources are available to man, the proper utilization of which may issue in almost unbelievable results. Belief in miracle then, declares Fosdick, when we investigate its abiding significance, is discovered to be not so much an historical problem as it is a contemporary challenge to realize in this present age and in our own lives this superhuman power in the affairs of men.

> ... to do things which cannot be done, until men find it easy to believe in God because of the evident marvels of his presence in us and through us - this is what it really means to believe in miracle. Faith in the miraculous is not primarily mental credence of past events; it is spiritual adventure into the release and use of divine power in our own day.[45]

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45. H. E. F., Modern Use, p. 166 f.

Chapter VII

ETHICS

Ethics constituted a prime concern of Christian liberals, and Fosdick proved no exception at this point. A more specific account of the varied issues in which he became involved can be found in Robert Moats Miller's American Protestantism and Social Issues;[1] a publication which gives us good reason to believe that here was a field in which Fosdick trod valiantly, with little concern for consequences to self so long as there remained a wrong to be righted. It is, in fact, one of America's leading moral theologians who writes of him: "Dr. Fosdick proved in two decades of preaching at the new Riverside Church that no one in our generation could illumine the ethical issues which modern man faced in our technical society with greater rigor and honest discrimination than he."[2] Such tribute coming from a person of Reinhold Niebuhr's stature serves well to underscore the prominence of Fosdick in this vital sphere of moral concern.

We observe that unlike those more extreme liberals who regard moral conduct as a purely relative matter, Fosdick is able to perceive in the cosmos an immutable moral law (of which the Sermon on the Mount is the noblest utterance we have).[3] Despite the seemingly endless variety of moral customs prevalent throughout this world, certain essential

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1. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1958), passim. This book, incidentally, seems to largely bear out the contention that liberal churchmen are generally more concerned than their conservative counterparts where great social issues are involved.
2. Niebuhr, "Significance of Dr. Fosdick", p. 5.
3. H. E. F., Faith For Tough Times, p. 34 ff.

standards have an eternal validity, and we neglect these at our own peril. For instance, it could never be intelligently argued, he discloses, that falsehood is better than truth, nor theft better than honesty, nor treachery superior to loyalty. The world being so founded, it becomes inevitable that whatever an individual or a civilization sows, that will determine the harvest. This insight led Fosdick to avow on the fiftieth anniversary of his preaching ministry:

> Such time as is now left for my ministry is dedicated to one major aim - to help put back again where it belongs the truth that there is an everlasting right to which our nations, our business, our social relationships, our schools and churches and our personal lives must be conformed if any salvation is to visit us.[4]

Even though he sees in Christ's teaching an enunciation of the eternal moral law, Fosdick insists that this in no way implies that the Master's ethical ideals are capable of being reduced to a set of rules and regulations. "Instead he has given us in timeless terms expressed in universally applicable life a form of conduct, a quality of spirit, which changing circumstances do not affect."[5] His concrete injunctions then, are never to be taken as an explicit code for the guidance of conduct; rather, they are illustrations symbolizing the spirit in which life is meant to be lived - a spirit which Fosdick feels is quite adequately summed up in Paul's admonition that "... love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10).

Like most liberals then, Fosdick tends to soft-pedal rigid codes of behavior, favoring instead that inward spirit which strives to

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4. H. E. F., Great Time, p. 207.
5. H. E. F., Modern Use, p. 240.

satisfy the higher eternal standards. In so doing, he is some ways anticipates the "new morality" theologians of this present generation such as Bishop Robinson and Joseph Fletcher, who, with him, regard love not as some primarily emotional condition, but "... a profoundly ethical attribute capable of deliberate exercise and direction".[6] Fosdick comprehends fully that unlike the sentimentalists who view love as a mere kindly feeling, the agape love which Jesus was able to command of people contains no soft, emotional connotations; rather it involves "understanding, redeeming, creative good will",[7] which may even, at times, be forced to express itself somewhat sternly.

Although unwilling to see the injunctions of the Bible as primarily a set of rules, Fosdick once again modifies the usual liberal position by allowing that commandment definitely does occupy a place in the service of love. It can, he feels, construct guidelines to keep love's service alert and disciplined. "The love of God may be shed abroad in our hearts and still through ignorance that love's expression may be indiscreet and mischievous."[8] It may be significant to note that it was as he advanced in years - a normally conservatizing process among humans - that Fosdick came to increase his emphasis on the need for definite precept to keep love intelligent and controlled and consecrated.[9]

Fosdick's personal ethics are thoroughly grounded in his view of personality as the basic reality of the universe. For "... ultimately morals, considering how persons should live in an intermeshing network

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6. H. E. F., Guide to Understanding the Bible, p. 137.
7. H. E. F., On Being Fit, p. 7.
8. H. E. F., The Second Mile (New York: The Association Press, 1908), p. 51.
9. H. E. F., What Is Vital, p. 165.

of personal relationships depends on personality's worth".[10] And this is precisely why Fosdick believes the materialist ethic is bankrupt and can provide for no moral responsibility in man. For if man is, in fact, nothing more than the mere pawn of physical forces, the obvious corollary is that he cannot be blamed for anything he does. He cannot be considered a responsible being for he is, being little more than a highly organized conglomerate of physical atoms, essentially powerless to amend the quality of his character or actions.

Fosdick also finds himself at odds with the humanists over their claim that it is possible to divorce ethics from any theistic framework. Fosdick maintains that enduring morals have to be grounded in true religion; for our deepest ethical living is but a response to the self-giving of God. Hence "... we are expected to live sacrificial lives, because we ourselves are the beneficiaries of sacrificial living beyond our power to equal or repay".[11] He continues:

> The heart of Christianity is to see life overshadowed by the Cross; to stand humble and grateful in the presence of immeasurable grace, to know that we have already been served beyond our possibility to make return. The inevitable consequence of such an outlook on life is tireless, self-denying usefulness without condescension, for we are hopelessly in debt ourselves, without pride, for we have nothing to give which we did not first of all receive.[12]

One major offspring of liberal thought currents in religious circles was the Social Gospel movement. Born of the insights of men like Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch, and finding a fertile seed-bed in the longstanding American dream of a perfected social order in this new land, this movement became a most significant factor on the

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10. H. E. F., See Religion, p. 86.
11. H. E. F., Service, p. 199.
12. Ibid., p. 203. Again one wonders how Cauthen can label Fosdick "a modern Pelagian". See above, p. 54.

American religious scene during the early decades of this present century. For a time, Fosdick too fell under the lure of the promise it held out, but then, his early enthusiasm for this movement gradually waned, as developing insight into man's inner life made him increasingly aware of the limitations inherent in such an idealistic venture. Thus, when writing of this movement in the mid-twenties, Fosdick voices the criticism, directed as much against himself as anyone else:

> ... we who have been concerned in it have been tempted to superficial and one sided emphasis. Our stress has fallen on social programs rather than on personality, on institutions rather than on men, on physical circumstances rather than on spiritual quality.[13]

With what he now understood as their narrow emphasis on changing the world, social gospelers had been attempting to save mankind principally through the manipulation of outward circumstances. But the passing years had convinced Fosdick that "... external reformation of circumstances without interior regeneration of character leads only to disillusionment".[14] In laboring for environmental changes, Fosdick deliberates, we must not lose sight of the fact that men have to be changed from the inside out, not vice versa. And this change, adds Fosdick, he cannot bring about by himself. In all his writing and preaching, Fosdick seems never to have lost sight of the highly evangelical note that men need to be related to a power not of their own making which is sufficient to change the personality from within.

This is not to say, however, that Fosdick completely surrenders

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13. H. E. F., "The Opportunity of the Churches", Ladies Home Journal, XLI (October, 1924), 16.
14. H. E. F., Successful Christian Living (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), p. 116.

the other polarity, so emphasized by a great many liberals - the renewal of society. And even as he emphasizes the inward renewal of persons, he spells out the pressing need to also care about social surroundings. In a sense, he opines, Christianity must always be a two-way street, trying to change men's souls in order to change their societies, while at the same time trying to change their societies in order to give their souls a better chance.[15]

The continuing relevance and validity of this second polarity for which liberals fought so tenaciously can be seen in the statement by one modern commentator:

> In every discussion of a social problem somebody sooner or later says: "The way to get a better world is to get better people", or, "The answer to that social problem (war, racial tensions, disputes between capital and labor) is to change the hearts of men". By this time in history that judgment has surely been proved wrong. We always need better people and changed hearts. But we also need better institutions to implement human generosity, and to channel organizational processes that unintentionally hurt as well as help people.[16]

As concrete illustration of his contention, this writer then points to present day Birmingham, Alabama, where progress in racial desegregation was spurred on even beyond what could be accomplished by the intelligence and good will of enlightened civic leaders simply by the dictates of the law.[17]

Liberals did well to maintain this emphasis then; but still Fosdick would have us know that, in the final analysis, it is the individual which edges out its competitor for prime consideration. It is

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15. Ibid., p. 109.
16. Shinn, Tangled World, p. 58.
17. Ibid., p. 97.

the renewal of persons which issues in useful service, transforming the world of man. "The church's best gift to mankind is redeemed personality; but redeemed personality's best gift to mankind is a better world, more fit to be a home for the family of God."[18]

Fosdick, as we have previously mentioned, devoted considerable energy to make this world just such a place. He spoke, wrote, and acted upon virtually the whole gamut of moral issues, from family centered problems to national and even international relations. Since his pronouncements upon the bulk of these issues are not essentially different from those of most other progressive thinkers, it will not be our purpose to summarize his ethical analyses here.[19] Suffice it to say that he brought

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18. H. E. F., Service, p. 34.
19. For additional articles setting forth Fosdick's views on specific problems, readers are referred to:
H. E. F., "Religion and Birth Control", The Outlook, CLII (June 19, 1929), 301.
H. E. F., "Should Your Child Be Allowed to Choose His Own Religion?" Readers' Digest, L (May, 1947), 59 ff.
H. E. F., "The Modern Child Should Guide Himself", The World's Work, LVIII (January, 1929), 54 ff.
H. E. F., "Teaching Your Child Religion", The World's Work, LVIII (February, 1929), 52 ff.
H. E. F., "America's Biggest Problem", The American Magazine, CVII (May, 1929), 11 ff.
H. E. F., "What Can the Minister Do?" The American Review of Reviews, LXXXVI (December, 1932), 44 ff.
H. E. F., "The War Against Unemployment", The American City, XLIII (December, 1930), 153.
H. E. F., "Putting Christ Into Uniform", The Christian Century, LVI (December 13, 1939), 1539 ff.
H. E. F., "Pacifism Means Peace", The American Review of Reviews, XCV (May, 1937), 54 f.
H. E. F., "If America Is Drawn Into the War", The Christian Century, LVIII (January 22, 1941), 115 ff.
H. E. F., "The Crisis Confronting the Nation", Vital Speeches, VI (September 1, 1940), 686 f.
H. E. F., "A Step Toward Fascism", Parents Magazine, XIX (November, 1944), 17.
H. E. F., "I Believe In Man", Harpers Magazine, CLI (September, 1925), 689 ff.

to each of these problems his typically moderate-liberal approach. In arguing the case for divorce, for example, he shows himself to be far ahead of much of the thinking of his day, when he argues that the then present laws governing the situation in many states were clearly antiquated, if not outrightly hypocritical. He himself would prefer to see the basis for divorce broadened to include divorce by mutual consent, and without the absurd necessity of one party having to lay charges against the other. No libertine radical, however, he would add the rider that such divorce be granted only after the elapse of one year from the time of application, so as to prevent people from taking a drastic, later to be regretted step in the heat of one unguarded and susceptible moment.[20]

Fosdick's comments upon the relationship of school and religion are interesting to note, if only to observe one reversal achieved by the liberal mind over the past few decades. For Fosdick views the school, as well as the home, as occupying a critical position with regard to the religious education of the young. And he overtly deplores the fact that the doctrine of the separation of church and state supposedly prevents the presentation in our public schools "... of this very faith from which so much of the best in our American heritage has come".[21] We cannot, he insists, logically contend that the educational system must remain religiously neutral, for certain courses may be seen to implicitly convey moral values; while at the same time, students could hardly avoid the feeling that what is omitted from the curriculum cannot be too important.

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20. H. E. F., "What Is Happening to the American Family?" American Magazine, CVI (October, 1928), 20 ff.
21. H. E. F., "Shall American School Children Be Religiously Illiterate?" School and Society, LXVI (November 29, 1947), 401.

Now, Baptist Fosdick assures us that he is all for the separation of church and state. However, by this doctrine, we must understand that either cannot control the other in its special field. "The separation of church and state does not mean, and never has meant," he urges, "that the recognition of God must be shut out from our public schools or, for that matter, from any other public agency."[22] This attitude is some distance removed from that of most modern liberals who, as the present controversy over the use of prayer in public schools in the United States well indicates, clearly desire that these two elements of society remain largely distinct and separate from each other.[23]

On the other hand, Fosdick's pronouncements upon government made at one stage of his career and those made a few years later reflect more consistently the change in the attitude of liberals toward the exercise of governmental power. In the early nineteen-fifties, we find Fosdick declaiming that the extension of government control over one area of American life after another, the ever increasing outreach of federal authority, is a matter of grave concern for the nation.[24] But scarcely half a decade had passed before he appears to have reconsidered his earlier position as he informs us: "The idea that the government is best which governs least is long outdated".[25] He now looks to the federal authorities to offer a means of protection to the common man and keep him from falling into the clutches of the vast aggregates of

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22. Ibid., p. 404.
23. See, for example: "The Court Decides Wisely", The Christian Century, LXXX (July 3, 1963), 851 f.
24. H. E. F., "Have We Lost Our Moral Heritage?" Vital Speeches, XVIII (August 1, 1952), 628 ff.
25. H. E. F., Living, p. 273.

power and wealth which would control the populace if they could. And this latter position sums up the feeling of most liberals today who look hopefully to government agencies to enter the fields of social welfare, civil rights, etc., and provide the common man with the opportunity which the vested interests would deny him.

In extending his concern to the realm of big business, Fosdick reveals that idealism is still resident in his make-up; for he dares to suggest that the world of power economics must come to be ruled by Christ's second-mile philosophy, also. The Laissez-faire system which undergirds modern capitalism only serves to habitually repress the downtrodden and the underdog. Laissez-faire was originally a liberal principle, but in this present age, Fosdick feels that it has degenerated into that extreme mode of liberalism which induces not freedom but, in the end, anarchy.[26]

One major point of contention between conservative and liberal theologians was that the former, generally speaking, sought to restrict ethics largely to the personal realm. Liberals, on the other hand, sought an application of Christian moral principles on a much wider front. Writes Fosdick: "One favorite method of evading the full force and meaning of Jesus' love ethic is to say that he meant it to apply not to national policy but only to personal relationships. All the available evidence, however, contradicts that."[27] The Christian ethic then, is not to be divorced from the larger sphere of national concern. Fosdick's basic idealism is again quite evident in his claim that, "The state can be as Christian as a man".[28] Since he has never revised this earlier statement,

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26. "The Church and 'Social Revolution'", The Literary Digest, LXIX (June 18, 1921), 30 f.
27. H. E. F., Man From Nazareth, p. 208.
28. H. E. F., Service, p. 132.

we can fairly assume that this represents the way he has continued to think, even though several leading commentators would allow that the highest level reached by the state in terms of ethical endeavor is that of justice. Fosdick, however, offers the penetrating rebuttal that if we allow Jesus' ethic to be applicable to individual relationships only, and not to national policy, have we not immediately involved ourselves in a rather dubious and dangerous doctrine of double standards? Is it reasonable, for instance, to assert that while individuals may not lie, nations can? Some may write this off as a rather shallow, or at least unrealistic, analysis of the situation; and yet it would seem to me that Fosdick has put his finger on something quite fundamental here.

Two problems in particular were close to the hearts of liberal ethical thinkers (and this probably reflects their Social Gospel heritage) - the problems of peace and race relations. And on both these scores, Fosdick, we learn, cleaves to a strong liberal line. Situated in a great multi-racial metropolitan center, he repeatedly lifted his voice against discrimination. He denounced the treatment of Jews in Christendom as "... one of the most appalling stories of truculence and bigotry that history knows".[29] The lot of the American Negro became for him a special life-long concern. On whatever grounds he could - anthropological, sociological, but mainly religious - he lashed out at the ugly demon of racial intolerance wherever it reared its malevolent visage.

Still, the lion's share of his energy and attention appears to have been devoted to the cause of peace. This topic holds particular

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29. H. E. F., A Pilgrimage to Palestine (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 275.

interest for us because it represents one area which realized a tremendous change in Fosdick's thinking between the First and Second World Wars - a change which must have been characteristic of many liberal thinkers who, like him, could be cheerfully optimistic even amid the gloom of the war years, 1914 to 1918 (for this was the war to end wars); but who, in light of the events following this great conflict, were forced to seriously reappraise their previous position. From his spirited defense of the allied campaign,[30] Fosdick, completely disillusioned when the gains promised as a result of the war effort failed to materialize, moved rapidly to the pacifist position and pursued its defence with all the customary zeal of a new convert. Fosdick is willing to admit the ambiguity of the pacifist position so far as the Christian conscience is concerned. There can be, he ascertains, no neat solution to this thorny problem.

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30. See: H. E. F., The Challenge of the Present Crisis. This book sold over 200,000 copies. Later, Fosdick repudiated it thoroughly as follows:

> It is the only book I ever wrote that I wish had not been written. To be sure, it is not so bad that it could not have been worse, and I applaud some passages in it for their endeavor to discourage hate, their fairness to opposing views, and their attempt to remain as Christian as possible even while dedicating the Christian gospel to the support of war. But the book's main objective, the defence of war I now repudiate. I was never more sincere in my life than when I wrote it, but I was wrong. What I was mainly driving at in that book was not the business of a Christian minister to be saying.
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> - The Living of These Days, p. 121.

Note also his early glorification of the military might of America in such articles as: H. E. F., "Then Our Men Came", American Magazine, LXXX VI (December, 1918), 20 f., H. E. F., "A 'Y' Canteen Next to No Man's Land", The Independent, XCVI (November 9, 1918), 162.

> Every position, pacifist or non pacifist, that a Christian can take in war involves him in an inner agony of self contradiction. Any position plunges him into a sinful compromise with evil, whether he supports war and gives it his Christian blessing or refuses to support and stands aloof from a conflict where great issues are at stake.31

Nevertheless, he is adamant in his conviction that war can be made as obsolete as a medieval torture chamber - a belief which remains a compelling theme in liberal currents of today.[32]

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31. H. E. F., Living, p. 294.
32. H. E. F., The Secret of Victorious Living (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1934), p. 29.

Chapter VII

THE CHURCH

Since the time of the Reformation, the primacy of personal religious experience has been prominent in Protestant Christianity along with a corresponding downgrading of the church. And this Protestant depreciation of the church as an institution, William Adams Brown informs us, "... reappears in accentuated form in liberalism".[1] Liberals, it seems, found themselves committed by their philosophy of life to a belief in unrestricted freedom of thought which led them to resent the limitations imposed upon them in an organized society like the church. Liberals found themselves active in social settlements, reform organizations, civil liberty associations, and the like; but paid allegiance to the institutional church only insofar as it indicated its willingness to be a useful adjunct in promoting the Kingdom of God within society. The difference between the church and the world was held to be negligible. The purpose of the church was simply to co-operate with other social agencies in promoting the ends of justice and brotherhood.

Fosdick denies that this strictly utilitarian view was true of all liberals. Certainly those of his own persuasion, he maintains, are not to be accused of undervaluing the church.[2] We note, in fact, that Fosdick's very first published work, one in which he has continued to take the utmost pride, was an article written in defense of the church against the critics of that institution.[3]

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1. Roberts & Van Dusen, Liberal Theology, p. 257.
2. H. E. F., "What Christian Liberals Are Driving At", p. 131.
3. H. E. F., "Heckling the Church", The Atlantic, CVIII (December, 1911), 735 ff.

It would likely be accurate to charge, nonetheless, that Fosdick did go along to some extent with the less ecclesiastical interpretation of the older liberals at least earlier in his career, when he held that, "The Church is primarily an instrument in God's hands to bring personal and social righteousness upon the earth".[4] But he soon came to see the church as something more than a mere co-operating agency for social improvement; and by the time that neo-liberalism had become a defined position upon the theological spectrum, several more had joined him in a larger appreciation of the church's centrality and consequence. It had by then dawned upon him that genuine Christianity was indeed dependent upon this Christian community. "... the divine love in its fulness cannot be known in solitude, it must be apprehended in fellowship."[5] As far as the Christian religion is concerned, there can be no such thing as an individual believer.

Fosdick indicates his belief that this fellowship of faith is by no means bounded by the earth, for death is not able to destroy such durable ties. And though his mention of the communion of saints is brief, it still occupies a larger place in his thought than it did for most liberals. Not that they would likely withhold their assent to such a belief, if pressed; it was just that in their pragmatic concern they did not bother to discuss this article in any detail.

And although his writings on the church are not as plentiful as those dealing with certain other subjects, we are yet able to gather from the fragments we encounter that Fosdick also recognizes a spiritual

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4. H. E. F., Progress, p. 44.
5. H. E. F., Faith, p. 291.

or invisible church. There may well be those whose names appear on no congregational role, nor have they received baptism by water; but still they exhibit the quality of Christ-likeness in their lives, and hence must be deemed to belong to him.[6] This, of course, would be a natural position for any liberal who did place value in the church; and again this belief has very practical consequences. For if God does not consider those on the outside as beyond his grace, it ill behooves the churches to adopt an exclusive stance as Fosdick saw many, particularly, but not only, among the conservative denominations, doing in his own day.

The final test of the church according to Fosdick is its ability to serve. Again the pragmatic-ethical note strongly announces its presence. And the possibilities of effective service would be greatly enhanced, he is certain, if only the churches were to join their efforts. At the very least, the churches should recognize that they do share a common purpose; and wherever the situation allows, Christians should strive to move even beyond, and without compromising conscience, pray and work toward actual denominational unification. Because of their deplorable schisms, the churches of Christendom are not only creating economic waste and theological folly, charges our practical minded modernist, but even more unfortunately, they are hindering the message of Christ from bearing influentially upon modern life. The reasons for these divisions are strictly historic, Fosdick remonstrates, and have no present relevance; adding "... it certainly is true that the deep

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6. Ibid., p. 300.

need of men calling for vital religion to make life significant and purposeful undercut them all".[7] One can hardly doubt that it is a liberal speaking at this point; and, because of his almost total lack of caution on the issue, a free-church liberal at that.

Fosdick recognizes that we have now entered a more hopeful day in the church with regard to union, informing us: "The ecumenical reaction has now set strongly in, and the Protestant churches having moved out long since from mutual persecution to toleration, and from toleration to co-operation now are headed from co-operation toward unity."[8] The great liberal dream has been in part realized. However, the fact that union discussions bog down with distressing frequency over such questions as the definition of the sacraments, the place of the ancient dogmas, or the understanding of the apostolic succession is for him a source of anxiety. The answer Fosdick supplies for these knotty issues is typical of the liberal tendency to reduce religion to its essentials. It is the recovery of the religion <u>of</u> Jesus which offers the surest hope for re-uniting Christians.

Any union which is achieved, he wisely cautions, must be one which will allow variety within that basic unity: "a chain-gang at lock step is not God's idea of the communion of the saints."[9] And ever the church must strive to be inclusive. Fosdick concludes his remarks on this subject so close to his heart with the circumspect admonition, likely directed more to the free church than anyone else: "Church union

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7. H. E. F., "Opportunity of the Churches", p. 16.
8. H. E. F., ed., <u>Great Voices of the Reformation</u> (New York: Random House, 1952), p. 545.
9. H. E. F., "Reuniting the Church", <u>The North American Review</u>, CXCVII (May, 1913), 622.

is so much to be desired that it is worth almost any sacrifice that can be made to gain it. One thing, however, is too valuable to pay out even for Christian union, and that is Christian liberty."[10] Above all else the liberal had to be certain of his freedom.

We pause at this point to reflect how the place occupied by the church in certain strains of liberal thought has drastically changed over the years. From a downgrading of the institutional church and a tendency to evaluate it in cold, hard, practical terms in the early decades of the century, we now find that it is some of the more prominent christian liberals of our day who have come to be most concerned about recovering the essential meaning of the church as the body of Christ in the world[11] - a feature undoubtedly influenced by the participation of liberal theologians in the ecumenical movement. Though unable to agree with Barth on numerous other scores, liberals now, for the most part, have even brought themselves to the place where they could agree with that continental thinker's views of the church as a society of the redeemed, quickened to new life by response to the Word of God as presented in the Bible and as preached to others.[12] Indeed, we may almost begin to suspect that today it is the fundamentalist churchman who stands closer to being accused of a kind of culture-Protestantism - for it is he who, in this day of social turmoil, more often than not attempts to wed the church to the status quo and relegate it to the role of defender of society's most established elements. With the liberal rediscovery of the church's

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10. H. E. F., "Union and Liberty In the Churches", The Outlook, CLIII (November 13, 1929), 423.
11. See, for example: George W. Webber, God's Colony In Man's World (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960).
12. Roberts & Van Dusen, Liberal Theology, p. 267.

uniqueness has come an effort to maintain the purity of this "colony of heaven", which has caused the pendulum to swing away from inclusiveness closer to exclusiveness. Fosdick's position here then must be regarded as intermediate between the old liberalism and the neo-liberalism of this present age.

A small number of liberal theologians strictly of the academic variety so intellectualized or rationalized their religion that they came to feel that they could readily dispense with worship - the primary activity of the church. The majority, however, including Fosdick - who was perhaps more preacher than scholastic - realize that as well as service to man, personal religion must have a second focus - communion with the Divine - the giving of oneself to a greater than the self. And Fosdick understands this element as being actually prior to and underlying any effective service. Public worship is the preparation required in order for the church to be able to undertake any helpful ministration to people in this life. So long as ritual does not become an end in itself, this can be the experience which liberates life and makes it worthwhile. "A man who does not worship," Fosdick picturesquely remarks, "lives in a room surrounded by mirrors."[13]

Arising out of his concern in this area, Fosdick makes one small but worthwhile contribution to Protestantism in his candid observance that of the three realms of spiritual value - truth, goodness, and beauty - the Protestant church, governed by the influence of the Reform-

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13. H. E. F., The Power To See It Through (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935), p. 37.

ation, has specialized in the first two but has grossly neglected the third. And so he calls us to a reappropriation of this insight that "... nothing in human life, least of all religion, is ever right until it is beautiful".[14] He strongly suggests that we would do well to borrow a page from the Roman communion and seek to recapture the realm of beauty in our liturgy, our architecture, and our prayer, in order to make Protestant worship more complete. This very thing he strove to accomplish in his cathedral-like Riverside Church; and the evidence of the years has testified that there has been a resurgence of Protestant interest in the very direction he indicated.

"Nothing betrays a man's genuine standpoint in theology more unerringly than his view of prayer",[15] writes Hugh Ross Mackintosh; and Fosdick's view on prayer is rather easily come by since we have from his pen what is likely the most popular treatise on the subject in the English language.[16]

Prayer always provided more of a difficulty for the questioning liberal mind than for that of his more accepting (at least in matters relating to Christian faith) conservative counterpart. Schleiermacher, it may be recalled, would permit only two types of prayer - gratitude and resignation. Anything else was to embark on the grossest sort of superstition. Such intellectual difficulties were voiced then, as the perennial question, if God is omniscient, all wise, and all good, why should we urge

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14. H. E. F., See Religion, p. 136.
15. Mackintosh, Types, p. 92.
16. The Meaning of Prayer - over half a million copies sold in four English language editions as well as translations in at least seventeen other languages.

upon him our erring and ignorant little concerns and desires? This is what prompted Schleiermacher to maintain that our attitude before God should be strictly one of reverence and humility. Taking his lead from Jesus, Fosdick counters this, however, with the reply that God's knowledge of our needs gives us all the more reason to pray with confidence. Besides, in praying, we open up the way for God to achieve his will. "Prayer cannot change God's purpose," Fosdick informs us, "but prayer can release it."[17] Christian prayer must never be regarded as a device for getting God to do what we want; rather, it is giving him an opportunity to do what he wants. And with penetrating analogy, Fosdick continues:

> God can do in and through a man who prays what he cannot do in and through a man who does not pray just as a teacher can do for a boy who studies what he cannot do for a boy who refuses. Prayer is one form of co-operation with God by which we give him the opportunity of doing in us what he has wanted to do, perhaps for years.[18]

Perhaps the most difficult problem involving prayer for the modern has to do with the efficacy of intercessory prayer. The idea that they can move God to action on behalf of some third party smacks of sacreligious opinion to some, while to others it is just plain foolishness. Fosdick, however, approaches this question armed with the basic premise that "When trust in God and love for man co-exist in any life, prayer for others inevitably follows".[19] In this world of intermeshing relationships, no man is complete by himself; we are a part of all others. (This sense of the solidarity of humankind was, as we have seen, one of the great rediscoveries of the liberal movement.) Thus, in order to be

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17. H. E. F., Prayer, p. 59.
18. H. E. F., Manhood, p. 142.
19. H. E. F., Prayer, p. 179.

genuinely human, we must be vitally concerned for all men.

Intercession, suggests Fosdick, will often have effect upon the lives of others if for no other reason than that they find power in the knowledge that others are praying for them.[20] Undeniably, the experience of the ages has disclosed that when earnest Christians unite together in unselfish prayer, salutary results do occur; and...

> To say that this effect is simply psychological, is only another way of saying that God has so ordained psychological laws that vicarious praying by a group of earnest people does bring results. So far from depreciating the value of intercession, this fact gives to it the stability of universal law.[21]

Throughout these last remarks by Fosdick there appears to be a rather subjective flow which is certainly not typical of mainstream Christian thought. At one point he takes pains to assure us that prayer is not merely a reflex action of one's own mind, as some of its detractors try to make out.[22] Here, however, he seems to be telling us that at least some of prayer's effect may be just about that. Probably, possessing the notion of immanence he does, this would not offer that great a difficulty to his mind. For even if it turns out that this is the manner in which prayer functions, it is still the way God planned it and so he still stands behind its operation.

An only slightly more objective element is offered in his next suggestion, borrowed from Rufus Jones, the Quaker mystic, that telepathy may very well prove to be true. "So that if a man believes in God, in whom all live and move and have their being, there is no basis for denying

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20. Ibid., p. 178.
21. Ibid., p. 182.
22. Ibid., p. 29.

the possibility that prayer may open up ways of personal influence even at a distance."[23] And although the first reaction of the staunch conservative might be that of pious shock at what he regards as an irreverent attempt to make God merely the operator of a clearing house for personal messages; yet, when we look with an open mind upon the subject, who is really to say that Fosdick is that far from the truth? For if there is one God who is the source of all creation, then surely the laws he has established in the psychological realm, as in all others, are not false. At least Fosdick raises a very interesting, if highly speculative, issue.

So Fosdick, we may conclude, has a very profound belief in prayer and the power of prayer to achieve. He consequently chides the present generation for going too far down the liberal path inasmuch as it has come to prize practical efficiency above all else; placing a rather narrow emphasis upon work as a means of getting things done. But there are three ways Fosdick defines by which man is able to co-operate with God. Work is certainly one. Thinking is a second form. But still other accomplishments depend upon man's praying. And it is up to each individual to determine which of these three methods is most suitable in any given situation.

Chapter IX

ETERNAL LIFE

In early twentieth-century modernist circles, the concept of progress which had given rise to the belief in the coming kingdom of God - that marvellous spiritual endeavor that many liberals assured themselves must inevitably crown the long process of historical development - caused the hope of a future heavenly bliss to be quietly ushered further and further into the background. Indeed, some liberals came to fix their attention exclusively upon the present. It was not so much that the future life was categorically denied, as it was a case of it simply being ignored.

Fosdick, however, finds deep fault with these interpreters both religious and secular whom he perceives as being unbalanced in their concern to bring heaven to earth, while neglecting any relating of this life to man's future existence. In somewhat scornful vein he writes: "The social passion finds voice in pulpits as well as on secular platforms, and proclaims there what our fathers would not have thought of saying, that our mission is not to get men into heaven, but somehow to bring heaven to earth."[1]

Fosdick himself awards a rather important place to the belief in immortality, regarding this doctrine as the inescapable conclusion of a total Christian outlook. The idea of a beneficent all powerful deity, the beholding of purpose in the universe culminating in the development

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1. H. E. F., Assurance, p. 6.

of that remarkable and self-aware creature, man, the demands of justice and the moral life - such features as these - all combine to lead him to the conclusion that: "If one holds the Christian philosophy as a whole, one cannot finish with purposeless transiency as the last word and with no prospect for the soul except a dead-end street."[2]

Theistic liberals, generally speaking, held to a belief in eternal spiritual values residing within the cosmos. But these did not necessarily depend upon human existence in order to sustain their validity.[3] Fosdick's emphasis on personality, however, leads him to observe that "... the continuance of spiritual values postulates the existence of personalities to express them".[4] With the extinguishing of personality, all spiritual values utterly vanish away. The reply might be given him that God would still be present to experience these values, but we may surmise that Fosdick would find the notion of a personal deity who allowed himself to be without other personalities who might relate to him utterly inconceivable.

For most religious liberals, eternal life came to be viewed as continuous with the process of moral growth begun in this present sphere. This means that it is possible for a man by the quality and spirit of his life to enter the kingdom now. This apparently is what Fosdick recognizes Jesus as teaching, for he writes: "The kingdom of God was interpreted by Jesus in terms of spiritual quality, so that in a real sense men enter the kingdom now and find in the future age the flowering out and full release of the life with God and with one another that

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2. H. E. F., "Faith and Immortality", Union Seminary Quarterly Review, VIII (May, 1953), 9.
3. Roberts & Van Dusen, Liberal Theology, p. 242.
4. H. E. F., Spiritual Values and Eternal Life (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), p. 137.

begins here."[5] In saying this, Fosdick is being truly representative of the liberal principle of continuity which discerns no sharp disjuncture between the reality of this world and the next so far as human beings are concerned. He develops this position further when he states:

> Life beyond the grave, however, is not an artificial addition to this present existence, but a natural continuation of it; if a man is immortal at all, he is immortal now. Eternal life, to those who are destined to live for ever, is not a possession conferred at death, but a present endowment, the full appreciation of which incalculably deepens, beautifies and solemnizes the meaning of our most common days. For if a man is immortal, he now has entered on an endless course of spiritual growth with limitless possibilities latent in it; he has now begun a journey in which death is an incident, a life story which the grave will simply punctuate to more exalted meaning.[6]

In speaking thus, Fosdick is recovering (as did other liberals) the older Greek concept that immortality is not an addative, the bestowal of which is entirely dependent upon the benevolence of the Divine. It is, rather, an inherent part of man - his, simply because he is a man. This line of reasoning, however, has not found favor among the majority of Christian thinkers who adhere to the more Hebraic understanding of the resurrection of the body; and even when they spiritualize this event, its occurrence is still entirely dependent upon the grace of God. Here again though, the liberal doctrine of immanence would likely come to the rescue of Fosdick and his fellow liberals. Fosdick quite candidly admits that he does not share the Biblical position of bodily resurrection, preferring instead the view that immortality is escape from the body. "... I believe," he declares, "in the persistence of personality through death, but I do not believe in the resurrection of the flesh."[7] Even the

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5. H. E. F., Guide to Understanding the Bible, p. 281.
6. H. E. F., Assurance, p. 96.
7. H. E. F., Modern Use, p. 45.

resurrection of Christ, Fosdick believes, took place on a spiritual basis; and he contends that the physical phenomena in later Biblical writings represent a growth in the stories from the time of the original event. It is true that Jesus taught this dogma of physical resurrection, Fosdick concedes, but this was simply because he shared in all the long-standing expectations of his own race.[8]

As liberals extended the principle of continuity into the moral realm as well, the goodness of men came to be thought of as varying only by degree. This gave rise to a general abandonment among such thinkers of the rigid orthodox distinction between the two-fold destiny of the saved and the damned. Most liberals leaned in the direction of a belief in the ultimate salvation of all mankind,[9] an idea implanted in America by the work of men like Theodore Parker. This belief took life also from the liberal conviction of God as a Divine Father who ever seeks the good of his children. Hence his punishment must not be depicted as retributive, but as corrective. "He is not the kind of God who would condemn men to an eternity of punishment; he desires that eventually all men shall be brought into full and perfect fellowship with himself."[10] Still, most modernists were humble enough to add the cautionary note that although this is what we might gather from our understanding of the world and of human life, we must take care never to presume upon the goodness of God. This liberal-fostered concept of universal salvation, originally received with abhorence by non-liberals, has come to take its place as a respectable theological option nowadays. Indeed,

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8. H. E. F., Guide to Understanding the Bible, p. 280.
9. Cauthen, Impact, p. 11.
10. Dillenberger & Welch, Protestant Christianity, p. 220.

even a neo-orthodox great such as Brunner has, in recent years, come to see considerable value residing in this very position.[11] Fosdick believes that Jesus likely believed in the eternal punishment of the wicked, although this again must be regarded as a racially inherited factor in his thinking.[12]

Fosdick himself does not comment extensively on this matter. Not being a systematic theologian, there are several details of his thought not only here but in other areas as well, that he does not spell out as explicitly as we would like. From what little he did write here, we can gather that he appears to have undergone a change of mind on this issue. For at one point we find him asserting: "Only sentimental fiction can suppose that sacrificial love is so powerful that, sooner or later, it must overcome all obstacles and melt the most reluctant heart."[13] Yet shortly thereafter, we observe Fosdick penning words which, while they do not unreservedly state his belief in universal salvation, strongly imply that his thought had come to lean very heavily in that direction.[14] And this latter position would seem more consistent with what we know of his total theology.

In contrast to the fundamentalists with their apocalyptic blueprint of the streets of heaven and detailed descriptions of the state of the redeemed, Fosdick, along with all religious liberals and most thoughtful conservatives, professes a reverent agnosticism on this point. He admits that, "Continually we are reminded that no satisfactory demonstration of life beyond the grave has ever yet been found."[15] Admittedly,

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11. Emil Brunner, Eternal Hope (London: Lutterworth Press, 1954), p. 181 f.
12. H. E. F., Guide to Understanding the Bible, p. 282.
13. H. E. F., Christian Living, p. 86.
14. See: H. E. F., Guide to Understanding the Bible, pp. 138, 189.
15. H. E. F., Assurance, p. 53.

we do not know the future. Yet this fact need not serve to obliterate the notion of a future glory; for as Fosdick rightly observes: "No truth depends upon the acceptance of man's inadequate ideas of it".[16]

Despite the lack of detail on several key points, it stands as a tribute to Fosdick's ability that even a humanist liberal such as Walter Lippman, who faulted Fosdick on numerous other scores, admits that this preacher-theologian was able to disentangle from the Bible a meaning for immortality "... which has a noble tradition behind it and is at the same time intellectually possible for a modern man".[17] This, of course, is precisely what Fosdick intended.

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16. Ibid., p. 59.
17. Lippman, Preface to Morals, p. 45.

Chapter X

CONCLUSION

We have considered the life and thought of one individual against the background of the larger movement known as theological liberalism as it pervaded American religious life during the first several decades of the present century. The time now has come to make a final evaluation of our subject and assess the total impact of this personality upon the direction taken by that thought and action stream of which he was so much a part.

The very first thing that must be said in this regard is that by no means does Fosdick qualify as a truly systematic theologian (although it must be pointed out that on the whole his thought impresses one as being more thoroughly consistent than that of most men who were first of all preachers). We have detected certain inconsistencies in a number of thoughts he has expressed; he does, for instance, appear to be terribly muddled in his thinking about sin. We have noted the sparseness of his commentary on such matters essential to Christian thought as that of the nature of the life to come. In his defense, however, we might offer the reminder that Fosdick at no time claimed to be a systematic theologian, and consequently no matter what gaps obtrude in certain sections of his work, he can hardly be faulted if some of his convictions remain unclarified.

Nor can Fosdick be considered as highly original.[1] Certain

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1. Although Robert Handy does refer to a work like Fosdick's Great Voices of the Reformation, An Anthology as a contribution of first rate importance to historical scholarship - "Dr. Fosdick's Use of History", Union Seminary Quarterly Review, VIII (May, 1953), 8.

aspects of his thought do give evidence of being basically his own; but even these usually turn out to be little more than variations upon an established theme; or else they are left undeveloped - such as is the case with his notion of our closest point of contact with Jesus Christ being his divinity as opposed to his humanity. Even at the height of his career this fact of unoriginality was strongly played up by his critics. As one reporter commented:

> Dr. Fosdick is the acknowledged leader but not the originator or even in any real sense the intellectual guide of modernism. He is great among churchmen, but not by any means equally great among theologians.[2]

On the whole, Fosdick has to be considered typical of the liberal line of thought (so long as one understands that even this is a very broad term). Kenneth Hamilton has described a number of prominent liberals as "Schleiermacher's Modern Sons"[3], and undoubtedly this appellation could be fittingly hung on Fosdick as well; for in spite of the fact that he does not refer that often to Schleiermacher in his writings, a number of principles propounded by "the father of modern theology" are plainly evident in Fosdick's creed. We recall, for instance, that Schleiermacher visualized man's highest task as that of shaping himself into an individual - a satisfying representative of humanity[4]; then we catch the ring of these words again as we read from the opening lines

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2. "Modernism In Confusion", The New Republic, XLVIII (September 1, 1926), 33.
   Note also the supporting statement of Helena Huntingdon Smith in her article on Fosdick in The Outlook: "His intellectual contributions have not been notably original or profound." - "Respectable Heretic", The Outlook, CLIII (October 9, 1929), 237.
3. Kenneth Hamilton, Revolt Against Heaven (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), Ch. VI.
4. Mackintosh, Types, p. 36 f.

of Fosdick's On Being A Real Person: "The central business of every human being is to be a real person".[5]

Similarly, the themes of the centrality of experience, of representing the eternal by means of images, of finding value in all religions - though reserving the position of prominence for Christianity, of intolerance in the face of churchly divisions, of locating the secret of sin in the conflict between spirit and flesh, of explaining original sin by means of the social solidarity which links the generations, of beholding Christ as the bringer of redemption - yet interpreting that as basically the yielding of ourselves to the influence and impression of His person, of finding fault with the traditional view of the trinity, of anti-dogmatic and anti-supernatural bias - all these proclaim most unequivocably the tradition in which Harry Emerson Foskick stands. And also, as we shall shortly see more clearly, in much the same manner as Schleiermacher undertook to make religion respectable to the educated minds of his own day, so Fosdick strove to interpret the essence of the faith in reasonable terms to the "cultured despisers" of the twentieth century. As Reinhold Niebuhr succinctly put it: Fosdick "... made it possibly for the cultured classes to appreciate the intellectual responsibility of the Christian faith".[6] Schleiermacher penned his On Religion; Fosdick gave us A Guide to Understanding the Bible and works of comparable import.

In spite of his basic kinship with theological liberalism, however, Fosdick did not prove himself a perfect son in every respect. We

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5. H. E. F., Real Person, p. 1.
6. Niebuhr, "Significance of Dr. Fosdick", p. 4.

have already witnessed the manner in which his liberalism rarely, if ever, verged on the extreme. And on certain issues he could be a most pronounced opponent of mainstream liberal thought. Walter Marshall Horton pens the interesting observation:

> As a matter of fact, Dr. Fosdick has been for years a severe critic of liberal theology. It used to be his habit to prescribe to his homiletics class the writing of a sermon on The Perils of Liberalism. In Christianity and Progress, he subjects the favorite liberal dogma, of progress, to a drastic overhauling, while in his recently published volume of sermons, The Hope of the World (1933), he exhibits what I should call distinctly "realistic" tendencies.[7]

Jaraslov Pelikan credits Fosdick with anticipating later neo-orthodox advances over liberalism on the score of sin's pervasiveness which deludes man with regard to his actual condition. He writes, "Few have seen this self righteousness more clearly, or diagnosed it more tellingly than ... Harry Emerson Fosdick."[8] This statement offers further proof of Fosdick's "realistic tendencies".

Fosdick, as we have seen, was unwilling to go along with certain of his more extreme brethren on a number of issues, such as their willingness to lose God entirely in the doctrine of immanence, their careless disregard of church and worship, their tendency to extinguish the uniqueness of Christ completely, their stubbornly uninhibited hopes for the realization of the heavenly kingdom in this world, their near total disdain for the past, for miracle, and for creed. On one occasion we discover him chiding liberals for their Harnack-inspired reductionist tendencies, claiming that many of them sometimes seem "... to be playing

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7. Horton, Transition, p. 4.
8. From the introduction - Cauthen, Impact, p. VIII.

a game to see how little a man can believe and still be a Christian".[9] Though he himself wished to see the faith freed of unnecessary encumbrances, this was no excuse, he felt, to throw the baby out with the bathwater. And so it seems that it is with complete justification, then, that a Christian Century editorial could refer to Fosdick as "... a man too individual to have been perfectly representative of an earlier liberalism..."[10] He was definitely, in the main, exemplary of liberal belief; but, he was even more typical of liberalism's spirit in that he refused to be bound by any precept with which he could not in all good conscience agree.

Writes L. Harold DeWolf: "The mood and thought of our age ... require that the gospel be communicated in terms intelligible and persuasive to twentieth century minds."[11] And the successful accomplishment of this - his "popularizing" of the Christian religion - some people regard as Fosdick's most valuable contribution. Professor John C. Bennett commented upon Fosdick in an interview not too long ago: "He showed a whole generation that it could be intellectually honest and Christian at the same time"[12] - certainly no mean feat. So, in spite of his lack of originality, perhaps this factor alone is sufficient to earn for Fosdick a place of prominence in the theological liberal movement.

Possibly we could, in this regard, liken Fosdick to a field general in the army who, while he is not called upon to furnish the

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9. H. E. F., Great Time, p. 9.
10. "Harry Emerson Fosdick", The Christian Century, LXXV (May 21, 1958), 611.
11. L. Harold DeWolf, The Case For Theology In Liberal Perspective (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), p. 43.
12. Bagnell, "This Is Fosdick", p. 40.

ordnance for battle, is required to ensure that it is effectively employed. And although it is the "armchair" commanders who block out the over-all formulae for waging the offensive, it is the field leader who must strive to make these directives practical (though he sometimes does share in the policy making also). It devolves upon him to ascertain that the thinking from higher echelons permeates down to the rank and file in such a way that it can become effective. And therein lies a goodly portion of Fosdick's genius. For undeniably he was one of the, if not the, foremost communicators of Christianity in his day. Charles B. Templeton, a practised evangelist himself, confidently asserted in his Evangelism For Tomorrow that Harry Emerson Fosdick may very well have been the outstanding evangelist of his day, simply upon the basis of his penetrating and far-reaching influence.[13] Reinhold Niebuhr remarks that Fosdick's Manhood of the Master, Meaning of Prayer, Meaning of Faith, and Meaning of Service "... probably exercised more influence in their generation than any religious volumes."[14] In clear and cogent terms, then, he persuaded multitudes into a liberal style of belief, as he met people on the main street of their lives, and successfully conveyed to them abstract concepts in everyday terminology. Alex Vidler makes the very sound observation that "Liberal Protestantism has done much more than any other version of Christian faith to enable ordinary people - as

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13. Charles B. Templeton, Evangelism For Tomorrow (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 84 f.
Part of this widespread influence derives from the fact that Fosdick had no qualms about letting his articles appear in periodicals that would scarcely qualify as "scholarly". He wrote just as gladly and just as provocatively for Good Housekeeping as for The Journal of Religion.

14. Niebuhr, "Significance of Dr. Fosdick", p. 5.

distinguished from sophisticated theologians - to continue to be professing Christians".[15] While John Macquarrie in his survey of the existing theological situation goes on to credit the preaching and writing of Harry Emerson Fosdick with having a great deal to do with this tremendous influence which modernism has exercised among religious people.[16]

Continuing our analogy, the field general of a military force is also called upon quite often to reconstruct the army's strategy according to the exigencies of the moment. Thus it was, that in the face of a growing awareness of the inadequacies of theological liberalism as then constituted, Fosdick, in the nineteen-thirties, issued a declaration to America that the time had come for liberals to regroup their forces and henceforth conduct their campaign in a somewhat modified direction.[17] The years which followed were to witness an increasing self-criticism on the part of most liberals who more and more came to swing their thoughts into line with the main theses of Fosdick's challenge.

"Liberalism today," avows Horton, "is a chastened liberalism, less idealistic and more realistic than in 1920."[18] Several principal tenets of modernism underwent extensive alteration in America during the years following the great economic depression. Gone now are the idealistic hopes for inevitable progress to be achieved through the agencies of science and education; present is a more realistic awareness of man's inner nature which, while it does allow for development in the human realm, at the same time realizes the limitations inherent in such a

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15. Vidler, Twentieth Century Defenders, p. 12.
16. John Macquarrie, Twentieth Century Religious Thought (London: S. C. M. Press, 1963), p. 188.
17. See above, p. 27 ff.
18. Horton, Ecumenical Approach, p. 31.

process. As previously mentioned, neo-liberals are more willing than their predecessors to permit Christ a position of uniqueness in the divine economy, though they still cannot be reported as having entirely forsaken the tendency to view incarnation as being general in the God-consciousness of every person.[19] And we have noted also that contemporary liberals have in their possession a concern for the church which would have caused liberals of an earlier period to regard them as almost reactionary.

But several key liberal convictions have endured to this present day. Modern theologians are generally insistent, for instance, that faith depends upon inner certitude rather than external authority such as that supplied by the Bible. And all but the most self-consciously conservative wing of Protestant theology would now affirm that the Bible "contains" the word of God rather than that it "is" the word of God.[20] Protestants are more certain also that the gospel is for all of life; that social justice as well as individual piety is the concern of religion. Post-liberal theology further displays the liberal influence inasmuch as, on the whole, it is more concerned to look to the whole life of Jesus rather than to focus almost exclusively on his passion as has been the case with fundamentalism. The liberal insistence upon the legitimate rights of reason have forced even the most conservative elements into an awareness that some provision for this feature has to be made in every theological scheme. But perhaps the most important and enduring gift of liberalism to the world of theology has been the very spirit which gave life to that movement - the spirit of tolerance and open mindedness which continues to live on in most contemporary theologians.

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19. Hamilton, Revolt Against Heaven, p. 102.
20. "Harry Emerson Fosdick", p. 612.

Modern Protestant thinking contains insights, then, which represent a definite continuation of the liberal stream as well as those which were forged out of the opposition to that earlier movement. The basic point to mark, however, is summed up by an editorial remark from The Christian Century, that "... contemporary theology, by whatever name, is still a good deal closer to Fosdick than it is to fundamentalism".[21] The liberalism which has been influential of late in our Protestant pulpits and seminaries (and which in the writer's own denomination - the United Church of Canada - seems to be definitely on the uprise. Witness the presuppositions of the church's new Christian Education curriculum.) is very near to that moderate brand which Fosdick so clearly exemplified.

More recent years have witnessed an upsurge of liberal extremism in certain sections of the American theological world. And misgivings have been raised as we behold a Harvey Cox teetering on the brink of the very culture-Protestantism from which Fosdick called us away several years ago.[22] Or even greater concern is aroused by a group of self-styled Christian atheists who deviate still further from normative Christian belief with their astounding claim that God is dead. But despite some similar themes appearing both in liberalism and the new radicalism, this latter group actually appears to have more in common with the humanist agnostics against whom Fosdick contended in the twenties, rather than with the moderate liberalism advocated by Harry Emerson.

On the occasion in which Fosdick was honored by Union Seminary, Reinhold Niebuhr made the point that not many princes of the pulpit really

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21. Ibid., p. 611.
22. See: Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1965).

count in the life of religious thought. He then continued his panegyric:

> In the case of Dr. Fosdick we have to deal with a man who by his great religious and homiletic gifts built one of the great churches of America, but who did it, as it were, "on the side" while he was occupying a chair in a theological seminary, and while as the author of many books he profoundly influenced the theological climate of his day.[23]

Perhaps these last few words contain the clue to Fosdick's most important function, at least from a purely theological point of view (his interpretive function taking pre-eminence from a general standpoint). For as Harold Bosley relates: "Dr. Fosdick led the forces that engaged and overthrew in most churches the belligerent biblical fundamentalism that cursed Christianity at the turn of the century"[24]... and in so doing he became significantly responsible for the creation of a climate in which modernistic theology could flourish all the more freely. By the struggles in which he engaged and won, he helped bring about an atmosphere upon this continent in which the liberal could think and work and carry on his creative activity without being dogged every step of the way by those reactionary forces which sought to silence the liberal's voice and expel his presence and thereby render his influence negligible.

Helena Huntingdon Smith is far from correct, then, when she matter-of-factly asserts that, "It is true enough that Dr. Fosdick has accomplished little or nothing of historical import."[25] A fitting rebuttal to this spurious allegation is Niebuhr's later observation: "The battles which Dr. Fosdick won for all of us in his day established ground upon which we still stand..."[26] Fosdick's labors made liberalism a consequential

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23. Niebuhr, "Significance of Dr. Fosdick", p. 4.
24. Bosley, "Best Is Yet To Be", p. 621.
25. Smith, "Respectable Heretic", p. 208.
26. Niebuhr, "Significance of Dr. Fosdick", p. 6.

force among the general religious populace, true; but even more basic than that is the consideration that without the work of a man like Fosdick, liberal theology may very well have remained relegated to the dark-panelled seminar rooms of a limited number of theological seminaries. By dint of personal magnetism and courageous perserverance he won for liberal theology a fair hearing which enabled it to flourish and become such a formative factor in American religious life.

Commentators of the American church scene are generally agreed that the figure of Harry Emerson Fosdick bulks large in the study of American Christianity during the first half of the twentieth century, many ranking him as the leading personality, at least in the liberal Protestant realm.[27] However, voices have since arisen to question any contemporary relevance he might have. As one critic recently charged:

> ... he (Fosdick) influenced a generation, not an age, and the wide swath he seemed to cut was wide only within the confines of a cultural Protestantism whose day is past. His characteristic insights and personal faith were undeniable, but except for his aging admirers his influence expended itself in "the living of these days".[28]

Time may very well prove that Mr. Miller has spoken just a bit prematurely. For if he were to listen to the sermons which pour forth from many Protestant pulpits - both minor and central - to work their influence on the lives of the people who must carry their Christianity from the pew to the world outside, he would quickly discover that Fosdick's admirers are neither so "aging", nor are they by any stretch of the imagination as vanishing a breed as Miller seems to imply. Fosdick's sermons are listened to by homiletics classes learning their

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27. See: Handy, "Dr. Fosdick's Use of History", pp. 6, 8; and also: "Modernism in Confusion", p. 33.
28. William Robert Miller, "Sing to the Lord a New Song", The Christian Century, LXXXIII (June 15, 1966), 772.

craft; his books continue to sell well both in hardcover editions and paperback reprints, and often form the basis for adult study groups.

So the influence of Harry Emerson Fosdick will likely be with us for some time to come. And perhaps the primary reason for this is summed up in a statement uttered by another liberal thinker, Eugene Lyman: "Theologies are judged, in the long run, not by their symmetry or elaborateness, but by their contribution to the solution of human problems."[29] If we accept this pronouncement, then Fosdick well deserves his place among the prominent theological figures of this present century; for as John Macquarrie sums up the case on Fosdick's behalf - although his "... practical undogmatic version of Christianity leaves many questions unanswered ... at least it puts little strain on our credulity, and there is no question that Fosdick's teaching has been of great help to very many people".[30]

And therein lies the justification for Fosdick's being hailed by Cauthen as a "major" theologian.[31] For although he is not completely an original voice, Fosdick is definitely far more than a mere echo; he is, in fact, the microphone through which the voice of liberal theology was spoken, modified by the medium, given fulness and resonance, and then heard by a grateful populace beset by the complicated task of being Christian in a very difficult age.

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29. Quoted in: Cauthen, Impact, p. 129.
30. MacQuarrie, Twentieth Century, p. 189.
31. Cauthen, Impact, p. xi.

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