Theological Liberalism

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Introduction

> 'When *I* use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful voice, 'it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.'
>
> 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.'
>
> 'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be Master—that's all.'

This odd conversation from *Through the Looking Glass* introduces us to the second strain on existing denominational loyalties—theological liberalism. As the term implies, this movement is seeking freedom or liberation. Its advocates do not want to be tied down by the givenness of God's revelation in Scripture—indeed, they have no conviction that God has communicated in words with men, certainly not with any accuracy or reliability. Liberals speak of the sense of release they experience when they feel no longer bound to believe all that the Bible says.

Humpty Dumpty language

Liberal theologians, like Humpty Dumpty, instead of using words in their generally understood sense, are constantly giving them their own meanings—of which their readers or hearers are not always aware. When Bishop John Robinson used the word 'God' in his book *Honest to God*, he gave it an entirely new meaning. No longer is God the almighty and sovereign Creator and Redeemer; rather, He is simply the 'Ground of Our Being', the quintessence of man. Bishop Robinson then continues to use the word 'God', but with *his* meaning attached to it—thus spreading confusion amongst those who are unaware of his definition of the word. When liberals like John Robinson or David Jenkins recite the opening clause of the creed, 'I believe in God . . .', they do not mean what we mean by it. As Alice objected to Humpty Dumpty's misuse of language, so we must object when liberal theologians do the same thing; 'The question is, whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.'

The theological Humpty Dumpties of today know the game they are playing; they understand what is at stake: 'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be Master—that's all.' The underlying issue is that of authority. Who is Master? Who is in the driving-seat? Who tells me what to do and to believe? Who has the last word? Is it

God, or is it man? Is it the unchanging Word of God in Scripture, or is it the variable opinions of men? Bible-believing Christians feel themselves bound to obey God through His written Word—and the Church of England looks *only* to Scripture as its final authority (Article VI). But the theological liberal looks somewhere else. Instead of submitting to the God of the Bible, to His moral commandments, to His view of man and His way of salvation, the liberal places his own opinions on a higher level than Scripture. What he finds 'unreasonable' in the Bible he feels free to question or reject. He may think quite sincerely that in doing this he is pursuing intellectual integrity. In reality, he is rejecting the authority of God and setting himself up as his own master. Liberals consciously reject the authority of Scripture; because the Bible is from God and has His full backing, they are also rejecting God Himself. God gave Scripture as the 'tape measure' by which we are to measure and test all spiritual and moral truth; it is that by which everything else is to be measured. If we replace this tape measure by our own opinions, then we are defying the One who gave it to us for our total obedience, and who specifically warned against adding anything to it, or taking anything away from it (Deuteronomy 4.1–2; Revelation 22.18–19).

From this exposition of Lewis Carroll—fascinating and irresistible though I find it!—let us turn to something infinitely more reliable and worthwhile, the eternally true and relevant Word of God. Exodus chapter 32, the incident of the golden calf, is a marvellous description and analysis of the process by which liberalism develops. In its contemporary form we may trace liberalism back at least to the Age of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century; yet this chapter reminds us that it is nothing new—its roots go right back to the beginning; they are deep in the heart of natural, unbelieving men in every age. What the Israelites did in the wilderness is, in essence, what theological liberals do today.

How Theological Liberalism Begins

Why did the Israelites make the golden calf? Moses had gone up Mount Sinai to meet God and to receive the Ten Commandments. As the forty days and forty nights drew to an end, the people grew impatient with this delay and with God's apparent inactivity (v.1). They had forgotten that *God* had brought them out of Egypt: they refer rather scornfully to 'this fellow Moses', apparently leaving God out of the picture (v.1). In spite of the miracles which they had seen and the deliverance which they had experienced, they made no mention of God's hand in these marvellous events. They seem to have forgotten the God who had acted, and the God whose voice they had heard speaking from the mountain. Impatient and dissatisfied with the true and invisible God, they demanded that Aaron make them a visible God: 'Come, make us gods who will go before

us. As for this Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' (v.1)

All this corresponds to the development of liberalism, which begins by impatience with God as He is revealed in Scripture—or is thought to be revealed in Scripture. Like the Israelites, the liberals of today underplay the fact that God acts. *Naturalism* insists that the creation operates according to its own in-built laws; things happen in the ordinary course of nature without any direct intervention by God. *Deism* maintains that the universe is like a vast clock which God wound up at the beginning, but which now continues under its own impetus without His hand being upon it. Like the Israelites, the liberals forget that God *has* spoken, clearly and authoritatively, and so they construct a twentieth century golden calf, a religion consisting of what men have thought and not of what God has said. It is this rejection of the God of the Bible, the God who is completely distinct from and above His creation, the God who has spoken and who does act, that is the starting point of liberalism.

This impatience with God as He is revealed in Scripture can be seen in the slightly caricatured picture drawn by Bishop David Jenkins in his speech at the General Synod in July 1986:

> We are faced with the claim that God is prepared to work knock-down physical miracles in order to let a select number of people into the secret of His incarnation, resurrection and salvation but He is not prepared to use such methods in order to deliver from Auschwitz, prevent Hiroshima, overcome famine or bring about a bloodless transformation of apartheid.

How Liberalism develops

Having rejected the true God, liberalism then proceeds to construct its own god, a golden calf which is designed to make visible, understandable and acceptable God who is invisible and, to sinful man, incomprehensible. The golden calf was to suit the needs of men and to satisfy their craving for a God that they could see. They were not satisfied with the glorious but inscrutable God of the Exodus! The golden calf was an accommodation to the sinful nature of man, as Aaron said later to Moses by way of feeble excuse: 'Do not be angry, my lord. You know how prone these people are to evil.' (v.22)

Their idol was constructed according to the religious fashion of the day—golden calves were popular in Egypt. We must always beware of religious ideas that are derived from unbelieving theologians (like the new hermeneutic) or from the current thinking of the world (like feminism and liberation theology).

It was not, of course, that the people wanted to forget the Lord altogether, for they used the same terminology ('elohim'—'gods', 'god') of their idol as they used of the Lord, Jehovah, Himself. What

the true God has done is said to have been accomplished by the idol of gold (v.4). A subtle 'foot in both camps' approach addresses the false god with the name of the true God—religious ambiguity had an early beginning.

Because Liberalism is based on unbelief—that is, not accepting God's revelation of Himself in Scripture—we find in it parallels with the unbelief of the Israelites in the wilderness. It is essentially an accommodation to unregenerate man, for it leaves out those things which offend unbelieving men—the purity and burning holiness of God, His judgment of sinners, man's total inability to please or find God, and salvation through the blood of Christ. It has its fashions and changes according to the current vogue: Darwin, Wellhausen, Bultmann, Robinson, Jenkins—the list is long and the changes as frequent as in fashions in ladies clothes! Lacking the authority of being able to refer to God's Word, they quote from one another in order to prop up the authority of their opinions. No wonder the Lord said through the prophet Jeremiah, 'I am against the prophets who steal from one another words supposedly from me.' (Jeremiah 23.30)

Theological liberalism's idolatry is concealed by its correct, orthodox terminology, used—Humpty Dumpty-like—with a new, secret meaning. Bishop John Robinson rejected the idea of a God 'up there', and of a God 'out there', of 'God' on the one hand and 'the world' on the other, of God as a 'Being existing in his own right to whom the world is related in the sort of way the earth is to the sun.'[1] God is thought of as 'the ground, source and goal of our being'. The distinction and otherness that exists between God and man in the biblical revelation is exchanged for some kind of fusion. God and man are no longer in their essential beings different. And yet we go on using the word 'God' as before. We apply the name of God to the golden calves of man's making!

One of the surprising features of the incident of the golden calf is the enthusiasm and spirit of sacrifice of the people. They were willing to sacrifice their golden ear-rings to make this useless idol (vv.2–4). Nor are the modern golden calves without their enthusiastic supporters and advocates. One certainly cannot accuse Bishop Jenkins of lack of enthusiasm, nor of being afraid to speak out. He is willing to put his head on the chopping block for the sake of his views. Like many other liberals, he has a crusading spirit. Like the Israelites in the wildernes, many liberals are not without enthusiasm for the god they have made.

Some Important Features of Theological Liberalism Today

We have seen how Liberalism springs from an unwillingness and inability to accept the God who has revealed Himself. Having rejected the true God, man makes his own god, suited to what he

feels he needs, but of which he uses the same language as is used of the true God. We now want to examine some of the main features of Theological Liberalism as typified in this chapter and seen in the church today.

1. Theological Liberalism is a Different Religion Altogether from Christianity

In his brilliant book *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923) J. Gresham Machen says, page 7:

> We shall be interested in showing that despite the liberal use of traditional phraseology modern liberalism not only is a different religion from Christianity but belongs in a totally different class of religions.

This is no over-statement. Roman Catholicism with its sacramentalism and doctrine of good works is a tragic perversion of biblical Christianity and of the gospel of grace, but at least it is based firmly upon the historical facts and affirms belief in the revelation of God in Scripture. Liberalism, on the other hand, has major doubts about these facts; it does not believe that God has revealed Himself, or that He rules the world, or performs miracles. It does not regard Christianity as primarily, or even at all, to do with salvation from sin. It has invented another god, as Gresham Machen expresses it:

> God, at least according to the logical trend of modern liberalism, is not a person separate from the world, but merely the unity that pervades the world. To say, therefore, that Jesus is God means merely that the life of God which appears in all, appears with special clearness or richness in Jesus.[2]

These are indeed prophetic words when we remember the later views of liberal theologians about Christ. John Robinson defined Him as the 'man for others' and admitted that 'the non-Christian secularist view of Jesus shades imperceptibly into the estimate of his person in Liberal Christianity[3].'

Christianity and Liberalism stand diametrically opposed at various points—the one is a revealed religion whose source is the eternal God, the other is a human philosophy whose source is the thoughts of men; the one is eternal and unchanging, in harmony with the unchangeableness of God—while the other is changing, and constantly open to correction by 'new insights'; the one sees human nature from God's viewpoint as sinful and in need of redemption—the other regards human nature with unrealistic optimism and believes that man, given the right environment, can pull himself up by his shoelaces; the one is a religion of the mighty grace and salvation of Christ, the other has reduced Christianity to an ethical

code, with no power to transform human nature and indistinguishable from every other form of humanism, both religious and secular. Liberalism, like the Sadducees, knows neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. Like the golden calf it is a powerless idol—and yet, also like the golden calf, it exercises a powerful fascination and attraction over the minds of men because it appeals to the natural unbelief of the human heart.

It is vital that we see Liberalism in this way, not as merely a 'watered down' Biblical Christianity, but as its implacable enemy. It is the modern form of paganism, and as such has crept even into evangelical Christianity. To quote Gresham Machen again:

> Paganism is that view of life which finds the highest goal of human existence in the healthy and harmonious and joyous development of existing human faculties. Very different is the Christian ideal. Paganism is optimistic with regard to unaided human nature, whereas Christianity is the religion of the broken heart.[4]

2. Theological Liberalism's Most Deadly Weapon is Ambiguity

Here we return to Humpty Dumpty and his theological counterparts. There is a fundamental dishonesty in using language to which you have given your own private meaning, but which others may understand in orthodox traditional terms. Yet this principle of ambiguity has become a major feature of official Anglicanism in our day. The introduction to Series 2 Holy Communion applied the principle of ambiguity to the drawing up of liturgy: 'We have also, where matters of eucharistic doctrine are concerned, tried to produce forms of words which are capable of various interpretations . . . Only by using such language as does not require any one interpretation can we produce a liturgy which all will be able to use, and which each will be able to interpret according to his own convictions.' Here we have an intentional, built-in ambiguity at the very heart of the Communion service—so that, when we pray that the bread and wine may 'be unto us' the body and blood of Christ, it is left open for two opposite interpretations—that some change in the elements themselves is effected through the consecration prayer, or that the worshippers may through living faith feed on Christ spiritually as they share in the bread and the wine in which case the prayer is answered through a change in the worshippers not in the bread and wine. The service is constructed to be a kind of liturgical wallpaper to cover over the differences of belief. This same principle of ambiguity continued through the Series 3 services and remains in the *Alternative Service Book*.

The Report 'Subscription and Assent to the 39 Articles' (1968) proposed to weaken the Preface and the Assent that clergy have to

give to the Articles, and stated that any new formula of assent 'must recognize that the Articles are an historic document and should be interpreted only within their historical context.' In the Bishops' Report on the Nature of Christian Belief (1986) appeal is made to this principle, notably in order to avoid the plain meaning of Article IV which states:

> Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of Man's nature: wherewith he ascended into Heaven, and there sitteth, until he returns to judge all Men at the last day.

An appeal to the supposed historical context and purpose of the Article is used to destroy the clear and straightforward meaning in order to accommodate David Jenkins and other unbelieving Bishops who will not accept the Bodily Resurrection of Christ in the normally understood sense. Nobody would have written Article IV unless they wanted to refute such heresies.

Sadly, the whole Bishops' Report is built on the principle of ambiguity. It makes some excellent affirmations, but in each case allows an escape route for those Bishops and clergy who do not believe the plain words of Scripture. Instead of saying unequivocally that Christ rose bodily on the third day, the Resurrection is spoken of as an 'objective reality', a phrase acceptable to the liberals. The empty tomb and Virginal Conception are seen as 'expressing the faith of the Church of England'—here is one way of putting it, but it can be put differently. We think in paragraph 49 that the Bishops are affirming the full bodily Resurrection of the Lord, but we are quickly disillusioned in paragraph 50 where we read:

> On the question whether, as a result of this divine act of resurrection, Christ's tomb that first Easter day was empty we recognize that scholarship can offer no conclusive demonstration; and the divergent views to be found among scholars of standing are reflected in the thinking of individual bishops.

Episcopal submission to 'scholars of standing' has replaced faith in the Word of God. In the Report itself ambiguity has won the day—although the motions passed separately by the Houses of Clergy and Laity of the General Synod in November 1986 and February 1987 attempted to reverse this. The Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai contemplated the golden calf and asked themselves, 'What does this mean? Does it represent Jehovah, the God of the whole earth who brought us out of Egypt, for we use the same name for it? Or is it another god altogether, for it is like the golden calves of Egypt? Which god is it?' Similarly, we are never quite sure with official Anglican ambiguity where we stand regarding the central

truths of the faith. The final irony came in a recent correspondence I have had with the Secretary of the Legal Advisory Commission of General Synod. When asked whether it is possible to appeal to the Articles for a precise definition of the belief of the Church of England, he replied:

> The precision for which you are seeking, as far as I am aware, is unavailable and the comprehensive nature of the faith to which the Church of England ascribes is discussed in the report by the House of Bishops 'The Nature of Christian Belief'.

We have been discussing ambiguity and double meanings, not at the edge of things, but at the very heart of our faith. In the Lord's Supper it affects the saving death of our Lord Jesus Christ; and in the Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection His Person and His final victory over sin and death are brought into question. The golden calf of ambiguity is alive and well in the official statements and in much of the life of the Church of England today.

3. Theological Liberalism Encourages Pluralism and Religious Syncretism

Let us think more about the golden calf. It was not a matter of replacing the worship of Jehovah entirely by the worship of the golden calf, but rather of mixing the two. The same name was used of the idol as of the God of Israel. It was not that they were going to abandon the worship of the Lord, but that they were going to worship Him in the form of the golden calf. Aaron, when he saw the people's enthusiasm for the calf, built an altar in front of it, and announced: 'Tomorrow there will be a festival *to the LORD*.' (v.5) The sin of that festival was mixing the worship of God and the worship of the golden calf—*religious syncretism*. This directly encouraged the idea that it is proper to worship different gods alongside one another—*religious pluralism*.

The first Commandment was directed against such mixing of religion: 'You shall have no other gods before (or, better, 'besides') me.' (Exodus 20.3) The danger that God foresaw was not that His people would forget to worship Him altogether, but that they would continue to worship Him, while putting the worship of some other god in first place, or alongside worshipping Him. Sure enough, it was always religious syncretism that was the problem in Israel, rather than the total forsaking of Jehovah. Joshua had to call upon the people to choose whom they would serve, either the Lord or the gods they had brought with them from Egypt (Chapter 24), for they were worshipping both. Solomon's sin was not to cease the outward worship of the Lord, but to worship the gods of his heathen wives as well. Elijah challenged the people no longer to 'halt between two opinions' but to decide for one option or the other—either Baal or Jehovah.

Syncretism (mixing the worship of the true God with the worship of the false) and pluralism (putting all gods on the same footing) have plagued the Christian church through the centuries. This is the abiding danger of the comprehensiveness of the Church of England—Which God are we worshipping? Is it the God who saves by grace all who repent and come to Christ who died for their sins? Or is it the God who bestows salvation through baptism and before whom a man may strengthen his hold on salvation by good works? Or is it the God who really is not concerned about sin and leaves man just to do his best and lead a decent life? Is it the God of the Bible? Or is it the god of Tractarian Anglo-Catholicism? Or the god of Theological Liberalism?—We know that only the first one is the true God. He is the only one who actually exists. The gods of sacramentalism and liberalism are modern Baals—they do not exist: they are figments of men's imagination. Yet we will sometimes worship with those who, using the same words that we do (but giving them a different meaning) are worshipping these Baals, these golden calves.

The statement of the National Evangelical Anglican Congress at Keele in 1967, paragraph 55, may have opened the way to a pluralism and syncretism that God's Word would not allow, when we consider the actual differences of belief in the Church of England:

> We call for more co-operation between parishes. We have no desire to perpetuate a spirit of isolationism, although we submit that group and team ministries create special difficulties when there are deep theological differences. We commend the idea of voluntary grouping to parishes where such theological differences exist, with a view to greater fellowship and the pooling of resources. We recognise that we could well benefit in this way from others of a different theological persuasion.

Even with a warning about the problem of conscientious doctrinal convictions, this encouraged people to go much too far along the path of theological pluralism and syncretism. Of course, we must be humble to learn from all men, including heretics and unbelievers, but we cannot give support to false gospels or share in the worship of a false god. When representatives from my parish's P.C.C. met others from the P.C.C. of a church supporting the Gay Christian Movement, in order to protest against their stand, it was agreed that we could not pray together because both ministers realized that the two churches were worshipping different gods. Such honesty is rare, but it is absolutely essential in dealing with the comprehensiveness of the Church of England and the contemporary 'multi-faith' situation. We are not all worshipping the same God.

4. Theological Liberalism Stands in Direct Conflict with the Word of God

Consider again the scene when Moses came down from Mount Sinai. On the one side was the golden calf surrounded by its idolatrous, indulgent worshippers. On the other side stood the man of God, in his hands the stone tablets engraved by God Himself. Think of the first Commandments: 'You shall have no other gods before (besides) me. You shall not make yourself an idol . . .' The golden calf made by man stands in defiant and crass opposition to the written Word of God. It is not that God has failed to make His meaning clear—either in the Ten Commandments or in the whole of Scripture. It is that man rejects what has been said and what is written, and sets himself up as a higher authority than the Word of God, and therefore than God Himself! By making his own gods, and his own watered-down version of Scripture, man is shaking his fist in defiance at his Maker! The manufacturers of golden calves are in extreme danger.

The Seriousness of Theological Liberalism

There is no doubt that on the whole evangelical Christians have not taken seriously enough the spiritual evil of theological liberalism. But God in His mercy has in each generation raised up men to warn His people—Spurgeon, Gresham Machen, Francis Schaeffer, and others.

Idolatrous worship, according to the custom of those days, led to indulgence (v.6b)—even possibly to immorality. Having defied God and broken loose from Him, the people run wild and are out of control (v.25). In their symbol of worship and their pagan revelry they are indistinguishable from the nations around who made no pretence of serving God—and are thus a laughing-stock to their enemies (v.25).

God saw this construction of the golden calf as the people turning away from Him (v.8). His holy anger burns against them, so that His immediate reaction is to want to destroy them (v.10). In such a situation of idolatry God instructs Moses to call out those who are for the Lord: they are to separate themselves from the idolatry and to execute judgment, death by the sword, amongst the people (vv.27–29). In dramatic fashion God demonstrates His utter condemnation of those who make and worship their own gods. Those who sin in this way and are unrepentant will be blotted out of God's book: they will have no share in His salvation (v.33). The people may go forward, led by God's angel, but the Lord warns, 'When the time comes to punish, I will punish them for their sin.' (v.34) In this we see God's complex reaction to the golden calves of today—an immediate and righteous wrath, a response in mercy to the prayer of the man of God

a demonstration of judgment in the present, the promise to lead His people, the reassurance that He will deal with each individual justly, but that the time will come when final judgment will fall on the sin of idolatry.

Does not this have parallels in our day?—The liberal theologian, having made his own new god, proceeds to make a 'new morality', a situation ethic, which is no longer based on the commandments of God but on a vague and subjective standard of 'love'. As John Robinson wrote:

> Chastity is the expression of charity—of caring, enough. And this is the criterion for every form of behaviour, inside marriage or out of it, in sexual ethics or in any other field. For *nothing else* makes a thing right or wrong.[6]

Such confused thinking leads to indulgence, licence and immorality. Man will always tend to interpret 'love' in terms of what he wants to do. Such a subjective morality will mean that the people will run out of control—as in our country today, where immorality, promiscuity and homosexuality are rife. The golden calf shows that spiritual apostasy leads to moral apostasy. Change your god and you will sooner or later change your morality. The new 'god' of theological liberalism is powerless to oppose immorality and perversion, not only because (as a god) it does not exist, but because it is itself the principal source of these evils.

And have not the modern golden calves made the church a laughing-stock in the eyes of the world? Pagans see that certain aspects of David Jenkins's teaching correspond exactly to what they assert. It is indeed a ridiculous sight when the Church, which claims to be distinctive and divine, is seen to be at heart just the same as the world, offering the same paganism—only covered with a thin veneer of religion.

As God expressed His anger against the golden calf at Mount Sinai and acted in judgment against it, so He has in our day. In His mercy He has not yet destroyed an apostate church. He still continues to preserve and lead His people, and extends His mercy towards the faithful remnant. At the same time He has demonstrated His anger. I believe that the numerical, spiritual and moral decline of a Church that has succumbed to the golden calf of theological liberalism can only be explained in terms of God's judgment—after all, the covenant promises of God are for the *upbuilding* of the church in holiness and truth. For those with eyes to see, the mysterious fire from heaven on York Minster is a very clear indication of what God thinks—and of what will happen when He acts with final judgment on the golden calves of today.

How Should We Deal with Theological Liberalism?

In the incident of the golden calf we cannot only see God's reaction. We can also observe in Moses how we should respond, and what God requires from us.

1. Prayer

When Moses heard of God's wrath against the people for making the golden calf, he 'sought the favour of the Lord his God' (v.11). He begged Him not to destroy the people, so that the Egyptians would not be able to say that God had only brought them out of Egypt in order to kill them in the wilderness. Moses was concerned with what the heathen would think *about God* if He acted with total judgment against His people. He reminded God of His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to make their descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and to bring them into the Promised Land. If God destroyed them in the wilderness He would be seen to have broken His covenant promises. Where is there such prayer for the visible people of God in these days? Where do we see that the motive for prayer is a fear of the judgment of God and a desire that He might be honoured in the eyes of the unbelieving world? We will get nowhere until we have the heart of prayer that Moses had. Would that Church Society could become a catalyst for such prayer amongst God's people! God relented in response to such prayer!

2. A Righteous and an Active Anger

'When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned, and he threw the tablets out of his hand, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain . . .' (v.19) God must have approved of Moses' anger, or otherwise He would have had something to say to a man who destroyed the tablets on which the Commandments had been written by God Himself. The man who has been with God and sees things from His viewpoint will feel something of the divine anger. It will not be a vindictive anger directed against the person. But it will be a total hatred of all that such people stand for and a direct confrontation with them as long as they persist in their idolatry. It will seek their repentance and conversion, as God's anger always does.

3. The Total Destruction of the Idols

What did Moses then do? 'He took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire, then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.' (v.20) Such an offence against the Holy One of Israel had to be removed completely, discredited utterly, and given no chance to be remoulded in a new form. This is how we must oppose Theological Liberalism!—not as something just

at variance with our opinion, but as something that God requires to be removed from His church, root and branch. Surely His righteous anger burns against Bishops who, in the Report on the Nature of Christian Belief, virtually refuse to exercise any doctrinal discipline. (Paragraphs 73–74).

Those who were faithful were commanded to act. The sin demanded the death penalty, but something that all the worshippers deserved was to be the fate of only about three thousand. Those who took their stand with the Lord had to be the executioners—even of members of their own family. Their faithfulness to God was costly! So will ours be. If we stand against the false gods of today, we shall lose friends, popularity, promotion. At the end of the day, we *may* even have to abandon the security of the Church of England. Gresham Machen presented the issues very clearly:

> If the liberal party really obtains full control of the councils of the Church, then no evangelical Christian can continue to support the Church's work. If a man believes that salvation from sin comes only through the atoning death of Jesus, then he cannot honestly support by his gifts and his presence a propaganda which is intended to promote exactly the opposite impression. To do so would mean the most terrible blood guiltiness which it is possible to conceive. If the liberal party, therefore, really obtains control of the Church, evangelical Christians must be prepared to withdraw no matter what it costs.[7]

For the present this demands a much higher profile from us all. In our preaching, teaching, campaigning, representation on Synods, we must expose and denounce the golden calves, and seek to destroy them. Whether we shall be agents of God's judgment like the Levites on that day, or whether we shall be granted the joy of being forerunners of Reformation and Revival, we cannot know. But our duty is clear! We can go forward confidently in the spirit of Moses and the Levites on that day, knowing that the outcome is secure in the hands of our Sovereign God, who is in all things both just and merciful, and who in the end will have *all* the honour, praise and glory for Himself alone.

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NOTES

1 J. Robinson, *Honest to God* (S.C.M. Press, 1963) p.45.
2 J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923) p.110. (Reprinted by Victory Press, 1964.)
3 *Op. cit.*, p.68.

4 *Op. cit.*, p.65.
5 Letter dated 16 June 1986.
6 *Op. cit.*, p.119.
7 *Op. cit.*, p.166.