

**MODERN INFIDELITY AND THE BEST  
METHODS OF COUNTERACTING IT:  
A PAPER READ AT THE NEW YORK  
CONFERENCE OF THE  
EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE. PP.5-61**

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**THEODORE CHRISTLIEB & R. PAYNE SMITH**

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**MODERN INFIDELITY**  
AND THE  
**BEST METHODS OF COUNTERACTING IT.**

A PAPER READ AT THE  
New York Conference of the Evangelical Alliance,

BY  
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TRANSLATED BY  
**HERBERT U. WEITBRECHT, PH.D.**

*REVISED EDITION, WITH A PREFACE*

BY THE  
**VERY REV. R. PAYNE SMITH, D.D.,**  
*Dean of Canterbury.*

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## PREFACE.

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THE following essay on Modern Infidelity, by Professor Theodore Christlieb, of the University of Bonn, when read at one of the meetings of the Evangelical Alliance at New York, in the autumn of 1873, made so profound an impression upon the audience, that he was requested to read it again, inserting those passages which, on the first occasion, he had omitted on account of the essay exceeding the usual time allotted for delivery. Upon this second occasion, the large church offered to Dr. Christlieb for the evening, was crowded in every part by a highly intelligent mass of people, who, for two hours and a half, listened with the most intense interest, elicited not by any rhetorical display on the part of the speaker—for nothing could be more quiet and simple than Dr. Christlieb's manner—but by the ability displayed throughout the paper. The writer of this short notice was himself present, and was much impressed by what he heard, and he now ventures to call the attention of the Christian public of England to Dr. Christlieb's work. It has already commanded a large sale in America, where it has been published in a separate form, distinct from the collection of papers read at the meetings of the Alliance, and which, when collected

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together, will fill one or two large volumes; and its author has now been prevailed upon to publish it in a similar manner in England, in the hope that it may help to confirm many here in the faith. The reader will find the argument calm, clear, and convincing, moderate in manner, but strong in thought; and if it gives as much pleasure in the perusal as it did in the delivery, and carries to the mind the same entire conviction of the firm basis upon which our Christianity stands, as was the general feeling impressed upon those who had the happiness to be present in person when Dr. Christlieb read this essay, the Church will have reason to congratulate herself upon so able a reasoner taking up the argument in her defence. It is a work well worthy the attentive study of all who are anxious to attain unto the truth.

R. PAYNE SMITH.

DEANERY, CANTERBURY,  
*Feb. 2, 1874.*

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## THESES.

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I. To be true to her essential spirit and character, the Evangelical Church must eschew all methods of defending her faith which do not rest upon a spiritual and moral basis, and do not aim at bringing opponents to accept the truth as it is in Christ by means of free personal persuasion and conviction.

II. The most effectual method of combating *unbelief in individuals* is the *moral isagogic*, i.e., that by which the conscience is touched, the religious need awakened, and salvation in Christ heartily and lovingly testified, from personal experience, to be the truth, which alone can satisfy the inward cravings of the soul.

III. In combating the *systems of unbelief*, success is only to be hoped for from a really *scientific* method of defence. This consists, on the one hand, in a constant employment of the ever-improving apparatus of modern investigation; on the other hand, in that quiet objective spirit, the only aim of which is to attain to the truth; both these being combined with the joyous certainty that the scientific struggle has, in all ages, contributed not a little toward grounding the Church in her holy faith, and showing how firm are its foundations.

IV. The chief systematic tendencies of modern infidelity may be comprised under these three heads:—un-christian philosophy, destructive historical criticism, and anti-miraculous natural science. The first step in an effectual scientific defence against these must be to *define clearly the extent of those doctrines which constitute the specific, and therefore inalienable nucleus of the Christian faith*, and thus to distinguish plainly between the fundamental and central truths necessary to

salvation, and those less central ones, which allow of various shades of subjective opinion; in a word, to recognise the difference between the *Biblical substance* of our religious belief and its *dogmatic formulation*.

V. Against *Antichristian speculative philosophy*, our scientific apology should especially defend the Christian idea of God, as that which alone corresponds to the conception of the Absolute, and the Christian view of the world in general, as a compact and organic unity, in all its beauty and grandeur. The central truth of this system we take to be the help vouchsafed by God in Christ to a sinful world, which approves itself to our conscience as an inward necessity for the true satisfaction of our religious and moral needs, in view of the impotence of all human self-help in overcoming evil. The uncertainty and untenableness of all, even modern philosophy, should be proved from the constant fluctuation and change of its principles, the undemonstrated character of its assumptions, the inner contradictions in its construction of the relations between God and the world, and its failure to yield any positive and lasting results.

VI. The duty of our scientific apology, as against *destructive historical criticism*, is to show that the Scriptures become unintelligible if their inspiration be denied, while at the same time we should uphold their human and Divine (not solely Divine) character, and distinguish between a justifiable and reverent criticism, and one which shows a false aversion to the miraculous. The latter must be combated by exposing its false philosophical principles, which apply merely human standards to incommensurable Divine magnitudes, its subjective caprice and *coups de force* in the treatment of details; by pointing to the growing testimony of modern archaeological research in favour of Scripture; but especially by demonstrating the impossibility of inventing the picture which the Gospels give of Christ, or of any sufficient explanation of the original Christian