

**THE GOSPEL FOR AN AGE  
OF DOUBT;  
SIXTH EDITION REVISED;  
WITH A NEW PREFACE**

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The Gospel for an Age of Doubt; Sixth Edition Revised; With a New Preface by Henry van Dyke

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**HENRY VAN DYKE**

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AN AGE OF DOUBT

## PREFACE

### TO THE SIXTH EDITION

Two years have passed since this book was first printed. A new edition is now prepared for popular use by leaving out the appendix and making the volume smaller.

In writing a new preface, I am glad of the opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the many friends who have given the book a welcome in different parts of the world, and have translated its message into other languages. I wish to acknowledge also the benefit received from those intelligent critics who have pointed out some of its faults and shortcomings, and to make some brief reply to those other critics who have misconceived its purpose and misrepresented its meaning. But most of all I would like to say a word to make the spirit and aim of the book more clear, and so to bring it into touch with the personal life of those into whose hands it may fall.

It was written in the form of a course of lectures on preaching, on the "Lyman Beecher

Foundation," and delivered before the divinity students of Yale University. But the aim of these lectures was not to teach the art of making sermons. It was to accentuate the truth that the question, What to preach, comes first, and the question, How to preach, comes afterwards. A man must have a distinct message, clear and luminous to his own soul, — a message which comes to him with a joyful sense of newness and demands utterance, — he must feel the living fitness of this precise message to the needs of the world, before he can learn to deliver it with freedom and power.

The study of theology as a science is a very important study. The training of men in the art of preaching is a very valuable discipline. But the vital experience of faith is deeper and broader than the theories of theology. The art of preaching is worth little unless it serves to enrich and ennoble the larger art of living. Religion is the secret of this larger art of living. And the power of religion to inspire and guide men to purer, stronger, happier, more beautiful lives, does not depend upon the modes and forms in which it is preached, but simply upon the concrete gospel, the good news about God and the world, which it brings into their hearts.

The audience in the Yale chapel appealed to me less as students of theology, than as young men with a life to live and a work to do in the modern world, in the present age. Around them I felt the pressure of those great, mysterious forces which are silently changing the current of human thought and the face of human society. Behind them I saw the wider circle of the young men and women of the new generation, the children of this age, born into the turmoil and confusion, the intellectual stress and storm, of a period of transition. It was to this wider circle that I really wanted to speak, through the divinity students who composed the immediate audience. I wanted to tell the men who were studying for the ministry that they must not let themselves be educated out of sympathy with the modern world; that they must understand the trials and difficulties of the present age in order to serve it effectively; that they must keep in touch with living men and women, outside of the circle of faith as well as within it, if they wished to help them.

But more than this. I wanted to show that there is a message of religion especially fitted to meet the needs of our times. There is an aspect of Christianity which comes to the world to-day as glad tidings. There is a newness in



the old gospel which shines out like a sunrise upon the darkness and despondency that overshadow so much of modern life. This aspect of Christianity centres in the person of Jesus Christ, as the human life of God. This newness of the gospel lies in believing in Him as a real man, in whose sonship the Fatherhood of God is revealed and made certain to all men. And the power of this message to enrich and ennoble life lies in the fact that those who receive it are set free from a threefold bondage: first, from the heavy thought that they are creatures of necessity whose actions and destiny are determined by heredity and environment; second, from the haunting fear that the world is governed by blind chance or brute force; and third, from the curse of sin, which is selfishness. To see Christ as the true Son of God and the brother of all men, is to be sure that the soul is free, and that God is good, and that the end of life is noble service.

This is the message that I wanted to deliver in this book, as the true gospel for an age of doubt.

The title has been misunderstood by some of the critics who have read it, apparently without going any further into the book. They have

taken it as if it were an arraignment of the present age for irreligion and infidelity. They have resented it as if it were a confession of the decline of Christianity. They have found fault with the writer for a want of sympathy with the intellectual perplexities of the men and women of to-day, and a lack of insight into their spiritual life and moral purposes.

It seems strange that any one should make such a criticism. The answer to it may be found in the first chapter, where I have tried to draw the distinction between doubt and infidelity. But in order that there may be no room for mistake, I will say what I mean again, and yet more clearly.

In calling the present "an age of doubt," I do not mean that it is the only age in which doubt has been prevalent, nor that doubt is the only characteristic of the age. I mean simply that it is one of those periods of human history in which the sudden expansion of knowledge and the breaking-up of ancient moulds of thought have produced a profound and widespread feeling of uncertainty in regard to the subject of religion. The remarkable achievements of the critical method as applied to philosophy, history, and literature, have led men to ask whether it may not be applied in

the same way to theology, and to take it for granted that the result must be destructive. The difficulty of adjusting the new discoveries of science to the established forms of theological doctrine, has produced in some reluctant and irritable minds a disposition to resent all scientific research, and to denounce it as atheistic. But in a far greater number of minds it has begotten a misgiving, that if religion needs to defend itself by denying facts it must stand on a very insecure foundation. There is a large class of people, thoughtful, earnest, sincere, who live under the shadow of this misgiving. They want religion. They are attracted by its spiritual ideals, by its moral inspiration. But they hesitate to accept it, at least in its Christian form, for fear that it may not be reasonable. The questioning temper holds possession of their minds. Their attitude toward religious things is interrogative. The secular spirit insensibly gains dominion over their thoughts and feelings. They grow weary of asking questions which seem to find no answer. The influence of the great mass of popular literature in which religion is practically ignored, tends to foster the impression that it is a subject in regard to which certainty is neither necessary nor attain-