

## Preface

This book does not profess to be a 'Christian theology', even though its title might imply as much. Nor is it designed to serve as a mere 'interpretation' of Christian theology. The writer does not regard the production of interpretations to be the important religious responsibility of this day, if indeed so serious and urgent a theme as Christian theology, concerned as it is directly with the *living* Word of God, can ever justifiably be treated in that way.

The book came into being simply through a feeling that something of good might result from a frank discussion of those historic and other causes which have led to the present "theological perplexity", which undoubtedly exists in scholarly circles, and which is reflected in the obvious uncertainty and ambiguity of the preaching of the Protestant Churches. To this, rather than to many other causes suggested, I believe, must be attributed the rapid decline of interest in the Christian faith among multitudes of people. The book was written at opportune moments during the course of the last two years; and in view of the fact that direct reference has been made in Chapters V and VII to the significance for Christians of the struggle in which our Empire is engaged, it should be said that the suggestions and anticipations recorded in these sections were written some time before the tragic events of the last few months. (The Mss. was completed in April, 1940.) As my convictions in regard to such matters as are considered there have not been essentially changed by such events, I have not found it necessary to modify the affirmations I have made.

Perhaps my interest in the beginning had been more academic than specifically Christian – a fault very common among theological professors – but, as a student for many years of the great religions of the world, it has become increasingly clear to me that no important ‘distinctiveness’ on behalf of the Christian faith and revelation can be either supported or maintained on the grounds offered by either the Orthodox or Liberal apologetics. The characteristic miracles, for instance, in respect to virgin births, prognostications, visions and revelations, abound in all the great religions; doctrines in regard to saviour-gods, moreover, with the corresponding controversies (which are strikingly similar to those Christian), present themselves in some of these religions. What is more important, however, in view of the modern Liberal understanding of the Christian “religion” so-called, the New Testament offers nothing in ethical insight and responsibility, in humane sentiment, or in religious appreciations and evaluations, to justify claims for uniqueness in these important respects. Some far more fundamental understanding of the Christian faith would seem to be necessary, if that faith is to become again a *power* among men, if it is to find in fact an adequate warrant for its great assumption that it is under obligation to evangelize the ‘heathen’ world.

That the difficulty involved here exists widely, and has become critical among thinkers to-day, is reflected in citations to be found in this book from the works of eminent scholars, and also in recent, more popular publications such as H. Kraemer’s *The Christian Message in the Non-Christian World* and Sydney Cave’s *Hinduism or Christianity* – ominously significant titles these for the Christian faith! As far as the latter books are concerned, the reader may find in them distinctions in emphasis similar to those I myself have endeavoured to make, but I confess I find in neither of them a sufficiently vigorous or searching basic theology to justify or support the distinctive claims they make for Christianity. Especially is this the case with *Hinduism or Christianity*, where the usual bland compromises and impossible syntheses, characteristic of English theology, are so very evident.

The important fact to observe is that modern Liberal Idealism, upon which this theology is built, has lost its hold on the minds of thinking men. And under the connotation Liberal Idealism, I place a great variety of seemingly different things assumed to be Christian – even that which of recent years protests a sort of aversion to Liberalism in the guise of an ecclesiasticism – everything which is governed by the underlying idealistic motives and principles, and is therefore quite incompatible with the essentials of the Christian faith.

Liberal theology has been built on three fallacious assumptions. First, it has assumed that a certain identity exists between an idealism (the norms of which are acquired empirically and are shared by all advanced religions and philosophies) and the Christian faith. The disastrous error of Liberalism is its substitution of a mode of conduct to be achieved, for what is simply and always a matter of the unmerited Grace of God. Second, it has assumed that the Christian faith can find its sufficient authentication in history or from historic evidence. Hence its obvious equivocations in regard to the work and power of the Holy Spirit in the soul. Third, it has assumed that a purely objective position can be attained by man as such, by which he may discern and evaluate truth. Only when man himself has come under the utter judgment of God's saving Word, the Truth, is he capable of 'judging all things, being judged of none.'

All of which means that Liberal theology has not known God as *He is in Jesus Christ*. True, it has had gods, aplenty, cultural, racial, national, *even* ecclesiastical, which, however, never succeed in breaking clown the egotism of the natural man, in fact, confirm him in his own conceits, because these deities are strictly me products of such conceits. Men, and this includes clergymen, are seldom as much concerned about God as about their own requirements, to which they think God must adjust Himself. The pious ecclesiastic, doubtless, would consider it an affront, were he told that he did not know God; nevertheless, it is not beyond the range of possibility that what he really worships are his own desires, prejudices and secret ambitions.

Of one thing we may be assured to-day, namely, that no preaching of a so-called Christian idealism can create what the Church of God is, or will enable men to stand before

those demonic powers abroad – secularisms, racialisms and nationalisms – which are hardly less prevalent in lands which have not openly affirmed them than in those where they are brazenly acclaimed. Liberalisms are never strong in the days of judgment, because they do not emerge from a cleansing humility, Knowing no radical repentance, they possess no fundamental confession, and therefore no absolute belief.

The urgent need to-day, therefore, is that ministers abandon their 'view-points' and strive to rediscover the Word of God – that Word, I mean, which in the beginning gave rise to Holy Scripture, and which alone gave 'existence to the Church of God, and apart from which that Church cannot stand. To assume, as many ministers do, that this Word is easily known, is the sure indication of lack of acquaintance with it.

No vocation on earth is at all comparable in importance with the Christian Ministry. But this is not a mere making of sermons, visiting of the sick, and directing of Church functions. *Nor* is the genuine minister, in the penetrating words of Soren Kierkegaard of a hundred years ago, one "seeking promotion" as his due reward, 'securing a *living* for himself and his family, supporting himself from the fact that Christ was crucified, deploring the fact that there are so few Christians in the community, certain enough however that he is one of them, for is not he himself convinced of it?" It has been the presence of those so conceiving the Ministry which has been the undoing of the Church of God in modern times. Christian preaching is at one and the same time the most dangerous and the most satisfying responsibility – dangerous because its Gospel is always an offence to the *natural* man, no matter under what name he may go, and satisfying because it has to do with things eternal.

Surely the obscure pastor of Hessen discerned what is the need of the Church to-day, when he penned the following lines:

*God needs men, not creatures  
Full of noisy, catchy phrases.  
Dogs He asks for, who their noses  
Deeply thrust into – Today,  
And there scent Eternity.*

*Should it lie too deeply buried,  
Then go on, and fiercely burrow,  
Excavate until Tomorrow.*

It would be nothing more than just to say that this book could never have come to the light of day without the unremitting labour of my wife. Because of a physical disability of my own, it was necessary for her to write practically all of the original manuscript, I am deeply indebted also to my friend, the Rev. Joseph Wasson, of Calvin Presbyterian Church, Toronto, and to my son, Mr. W. K. Bryden, M.A., for the reading and correcting of proofs, and for manifold helpful suggestions, most of which I have adopted. I desire also to express my gratitude to the publisher, Dr. N. A. MacEachern, for his helpfulness, kindness and unfailing courtesy.

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