

## PREFACE

TO ANYONE WHO is interested in the religion of the Bible, the question of miracles can never be merely academic. The religion of the Hebrews became sharply differentiated from the nature religions of the ancient world by the very fact of its awareness of the personal, challenging activity of God in history; and the essence of the New Testament Gospel is that the "Word became flesh" in a particular historic person. To think about the Bible at all, therefore, is to think about the particular ways in which God has intervened in the lives of men. The advent of the scientific study of nature and history has posed many problems for Christian thinkers, not least in connection with miracles. But there is an aspect of the theology of the past two and a half centuries which is far more interesting than the actual controversies over miracles—which have already been written about a great deal. During this period, the concepts of revelation and of faith have undergone a most profound enrichment. Our purpose is to illustrate this metamorphosis by comparing the place of miracles in the theology of the Illumination with their place in the thought of subsequent generations.

The rediscovery of the dimensions of faith is of the utmost relevance to the recent history of the church. We are indeed faced with the phenomenon of multitudes existing with little or no conscious religion. But many thoughtful people would give all they have to be possessed by a dynamic faith. The story of a communist journalist becoming a Christian is a best-seller, whilst the Victorian novels about curates losing their faith interest nobody. For faith there is in modern times, both compelling and creative. Thousands of Christians have been faithful unto death in Nazi and communist persecutions, and countless others have gone on doing their religious duties in the knowledge that the same things could befall themselves. This faith in the 20th century is no nostalgia for a bygone creed, but a

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compelling personal faith—a proof of the power of the living Christ that would have made the evidence-writers of the 18th century open their eyes with incredulity.

There are other fruits of the creative power of faith in recent times that are equally remarkable: the missionary enterprises and the growth of young churches in diverse cultures; the turning of the tide of separation and the positive efforts towards Christian unity; and the seemingly inexhaustible way in which Christian theology revivifies itself. For those who keep faith, there will be even greater “signs and wonders”.

For technical advice I am greatly indebted to three friends: the Very Rev. N. Sykes, the late Rev. Professor C. Jenkins, and the Rev. Professor F. L. Cross. For other indispensable help I am profoundly grateful to my parents and my wife and to a number of other friends.

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