

Translator's Note

I first met Emil Brunner in the fall of 1947 when I enrolled as a student at the University of Zurich. That year he was offering courses of instruction in systematic theology and homiletics, a fact indicative of his ability as both a profound Christian thinker and a popular city preacher. Brunner has not only gone down in church history as one of the most outstanding Protestant theologians since the Reformation; he has also paved the way in the communication of the gospel to modern man. His book of sermons entitled *The Great Invitation* already has influenced pulpits throughout the church in this country. And those who know something about contemporary preaching on the Continent can recognize Brunner's influence there. Yet I do not wish to idolize any preacher; I do wish to take this opportunity to thank God that he has given us a man who can both think and preach.

Many of us are familiar with the larger technical works by Brunner in the field of theology, but we know little about the way he applies his theology in the field of preaching. Because the dialectical theology came to America from Europe (I see no reason why we should not admit this!) in the form of massive volumes of theology, it has thrived primarily on university and seminary campuses but has run into some difficulty when it has tried to penetrate the parish. As a seminary student I often heard fellow Princetonians remark after almost any course that required us to read one or more books by Brunner, I wish one could preach this theology." Perhaps this book of sermons on the Apostles' Creed in its English translation will help meet this need and promote somewhat better relations between theology and homiletics than existed in my days at the seminary. I

hope that it encourages someone to explore further the questions on the boundary between theology and homiletics. Here a great service could be rendered to the church in America.

Some who read this book may not be familiar with Brunner the theologian. They will find it a most valuable introduction to the main doctrines of the Christian faith presented in language they can understand. In these sermons, the Apostles' Creed, which we repeat, sometimes mechanically, at Sunday morning worship, comes alive and shocks us with its relevance to problems all of us face: anxiety, guilt, doubt, suffering, and death. After one has listened to these sermons he feels like singing the Apostles' Creed as believers once sang it during the days of the Reformation. It may also happen that this exposition of the creed will inspire some to dig deeper into the meaning of their faith and thereby encourage a much-needed dialogue between the laity and the theologians of the church. But let me make one thing clear. I did not translate these sermons so that they could be used primarily as a study booklet in some comfortable church group or as an interesting specimen of current ideas. I translated them because I trust that through them God may speak his word of judgment and promise to us.

These sermons were preached originally during the Second World War, and some dated material that might have distracted the reader today has been removed at the suggestion of the publisher. Brunner agreed to this suggestion and co-operated fully with me in this slight revision of the sermons as originally published in German. I wish to thank both the author and the publishers' staff for all the kind, patient assistance they have given me.

John Holden

Preface

These sermons, like the ones already published in English, were preached in the Fraumunsterkirche, Zurich. Although their Biblical texts are timeless, that is, true in all times and under all circumstances, it is my conviction that in order to reach the heart and mind of the present-day reader they must be interpreted in such a way that our time—this time of anxiety and apprehensions—must be reflected in them.

It is necessary that we be placed upon firm ground that does not waver even if the whole world is shaken at its foundation. In this age, when the bond between the nations of Christendom is so lamentably disrupted, it seems to me doubly necessary to remind ourselves of the common creed of the Christian churches. It is usually called the Apostles' Creed. Those versed in history tell us that it does not stem from the apostles but was composed in the first centuries after Christ. Even so, it is still a truly common expression of early Christendom and can therefore be valid as the confession of our faith in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Its great merit is that it points to the basic facts of the life of Christ; its main weakness is that it does not speak of these facts as the apostles did, namely, as facts that only those who believe in Jesus Christ can know and of which only they can understand the meaning. In this sense, however, the Christian faith remains bound to it, and we like to use it as the shortest catechism of Christianity. This creed runs:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

For the theologians who raise the question, How far are we bound by it, how far not, and in what sense is it imperfect? my last volume of *Dogmatics*, which is soon to appear, tries to give an answer. But the average layman, who does not ask this question as much as he tries to hear through it the word of God himself, may be grateful for an interpretation that takes account of the difference between the working of our minds and that of the minds of the first centuries. Nothing is truly accomplished by regarding all that is said in the Bible or in the creed as true. True Christian faith is not “to believe something,” but to trust and obey the One who speaks to us in the Bible and through the creed, with our whole heart.

It is the intention of these twelve sermons to show in what sense faith in Jesus Christ includes the facts to which the creed refers and to show what this belief means in our life, both individually and socially.

May they lead many to that living faith in Jesus Christ, or strengthen and clarify it, and by so doing help to build his body as the light of the world and the salt of the earth within this generation, misled by illusions or beginning to doubt all meaning in life.

Emil Brunner
Zurich, July, 1959