

*The New Order
in the Church*

BY
WILLIAM ADAMS BROWN

Abingdon-Cokesbury Press

NEW YORK • NASHVILLE

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TO ALL WHO WOULD HELP
TO MAKE THE CHURCH
WHAT GOD MEANS IT TO BE

Preface

WE have been reminded in recent years with almost monotonous iteration how great is the responsibility which rests upon the Church to make its own distinctive contribution to postwar reconstruction. I yield to no one in my conviction of the magnitude of that responsibility. But I am equally convinced that no contribution which the Church may make to the political and economic reconstruction recognized on all hands as imperative will be comparable to a demonstration that the administrative and economic changes which its leaders recommend to others are practicable in the Church.

In this book I shall attempt to point out in some detail what changes in the present government and administration of the churches are needed if they are to play their part worthily in the postwar world.

In this attempt I shall draw heavily upon the lessons learned during the last third of a century in what we have grown accustomed to call the Ecumenical Movement. I believe that this movement, uniting as it does the representatives of churches of many communions and of many lands, Eastern Orthodox and Old Catholic as well as Protestant, justifies our hope that in the new world which is in the making the Church of Jesus Christ may have something significant to contribute.

I am planning in the near future to issue a companion volume which will tell the story of the Ecumenical Movement in some detail. To this book I would refer all who wish fuller information on the matters here briefly touched on.

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Where obligations are so numerous it is impossible to specify names. There is not one of the many tried comrades with whom for the last third of a century I have been associated in the Ecumenical Movement from whom I have not learned much. A special word of gratitude is due to the Reverend Roswell Barnes, who in the midst of many and engrossing duties has found time to read the manuscript as a whole, and has made many helpful suggestions. Dr. Roy G. Ross, Dr. Paul Douglass, Dr. L. S. Albright, and Professor Henry P. Van Dusen have read parts of the manuscript and given me valued counsel on specific points. Dr. Mark Dawber has shared with me information on points discussed in Chapter V. To Dr. J. H. Oldham, who more clearly than many of his contemporaries has seen how far-reaching are the changes which are needed in the life of the Church, I am indebted for the phrase which I have used in my chapter on missions—"The New Frontier."

WILLIAM ADAMS BROWN

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PART ONE

THE CHURCH IN THE NEW ORDER

Chapter One

THE PLACE OF THE CHURCH IN THE POSTWAR ORDER

THE WORLD'S NEED OF A RIGHTLY ORDERED CHURCH

SOME months ago I attended a meeting of church leaders who had come together to consider the responsibility of the Church for helping to prepare the way for a just and durable peace. It was a highly representative gathering. Leaders of all the larger denominations were there, and every important section of the country was represented. In the course of the deliberations every aspect of the post-war situation was considered—political, economic, social, and religious. But there was one notable omission. Little was said about the new order in the Church.

When I called attention to this omission, I was told that to include the economic and administrative responsibilities of the Church among the topics to be considered would divert attention from the main purpose of the meeting. However important the subject of church unity and reform might be—and everyone admitted that it was important—it was irrelevant to the purpose which had brought us together.

This seemed to me a surprising position, and this for two reasons: in the first place because the Church—in its institutional form—as a group of self-governing corporations owning and administering property under the laws of the State, is and must of necessity be a part of the postwar

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world for which we must plan; but also, and above all, because if those who are responsible for the conduct of the affairs of the Church do not show that they are competent and determined to deal courageously with that part of the postwar situation which is in their own control, it is futile to suppose that their words to others about their duties will be taken seriously.

I propose in the pages that follow to consider what changes must take place in the Church itself if it is to take its place worthily in the postwar world.

One reason why it is necessary to consider the place of the Church in the postwar world is because the Church in its institutional form, as a group of self-governing and ecclesiastically independent denominations, is itself a part of the present world system which must be changed if we are to have a just and durable peace.

There is a sense, to be sure, in which the Church not only is, but must be, apart from and above the world. As the society through which the revelation of the transcendent God is brought to finite and sinful men, it is essential that the Church should, so far as possible, hold aloof from all those transient matters which belong to the passing moment. Yet this is possible only in part. Those who must transmit the unchanging message are themselves finite and sinful. The wisest and best of them apprehend the revelation to which they witness only imperfectly. Even the Pope of Rome claims infallibility only on rare occasions, and under the most far-reaching limitations. For the rest, they have their treasure, in a very literal sense, "in earthen vessels."

The dual nature of the Church appears in every phase of its earthly ministry. Spirit, however far it may tran-