

A WORKING FAITH
FOR THE WORLD

A WORKING FAITH FOR THE WORLD

by

HUGH VERNON WHITE

*Secretary, The American Board of
Commissioners for Foreign Missions*

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS

New York and London

1938

A WORKING FAITH FOR THE WORLD

Copyright, 1938, by Harper & Brothers

Printed in the United States of America

All rights in this book are reserved.

*No part of the book may be reproduced in any
manner whatsoever without written permission.*

For information address

Harper & Brothers

FIRST EDITION

H-N

To

JOHN WRIGHT BUCKHAM

Foreword

THIS BOOK UNDERTAKES AN AMBITIOUS TASK AND NO ONE CAN BE more conscious of its imperfections and insufficiency than the author. The excuse for writing it is that even the ordinary citizen today is forced to decide, either positively or passively, issues of the widest outreach and consequence. What is the true nature of man? What is the true bond of social solidarity? Can man govern himself, or must he have a master? Once more the lines of religious faith and political theory converge—at the point of man's conception of himself and his place in the universe. Today we must have a faith and a conception of life to guide and undergird us. No failures of historic Christianity, and they have been many, should hide from us the fact that the Christian faith holds the true answer to our need.

But such an affirmation requires that we make clear what is Christian and what is not Christian. I have tried to do this at some of the most vital points. In doing so I have made use of a term now somewhat in disrepute—liberal Christianity—to designate the true Christian faith. I have tried to make clear what liberal Christianity is and what it is not. Nothing is more necessary or would be more significant today than the full flowering of an evangelical Christianity in the atmosphere and conditions of the modern world, and that is what I mean by liberal Christianity.

Roman Catholic Christianity made its historic contribution; so did Protestantism. But they were stages along the way. Revolutions in thought and in social, industrial, economic and political life have revealed intrinsic limitations in those historic

forms. They become increasingly irrelevant and obstructive to the original purpose of Christianity. The living Spirit calls for new and truer expression; the plight of the world cries out for an answer Christianity can give. But it must be a Christianity that can speak the language and work at the real tasks of the present day. It must be, no less, a Christianity vividly aware of its own essential truth and purpose, and moved by a prophetic passion for its historic mission. What has recently been known as liberalism has often lacked this depth of faith and its trend has been toward an impotent secularism. But the springs of power are in that faith, for it is faith in God and dedication to His work begun by Christ. In method liberalism has been right; its language has been that of the real world. Now it needs a return to God, to true religious faith; it needs to leave the reformer's egotism and truculence or sentimentality for the prophet's passion. A Christianity thus renewed calls for followers and claims allegiance of the peoples of the world.

Every Christian today should face these issues of a working faith. The purpose of this book is to focus attention upon them and to do something toward making clear the course the Christian Church should follow. I am greatly indebted to colleagues in the American Board, and to many others who have taught me and put me into touch with sources of information, and who have helped me to think things through. But full responsibility for all the book contains is mine. It represents my own thought and earnest conviction and, of course, my limitations of knowledge and outlook in many matters too great for me.

HUGH VERNON WHITE

Brookline, Mass.

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	ix
-----------------	----

PART I

CHRISTIANITY A WORLD FAITH

<i>Chapter I: The World's Need of a Unifying Faith</i>	3
<i>Chapter II: The Different Kinds of Religion</i>	22
<i>Chapter III: The Role of Religion in Human Life</i>	40
<i>Chapter IV: The Effect of Religion on Civilization</i>	59

PART II

CHRISTIANITY AT WORK

<i>Chapter V: The Religious Character of the World Mission</i>	81
<i>Chapter VI: "Sharing" and Beyond</i>	100
<i>Chapter VII: The Two Poles of the Christian Movement</i>	119

PART III

OBJECTIVES OF CHRISTIANITY

<i>Chapter VIII: Christian Truth</i>	141
<i>Chapter IX: Christian Personality</i>	163
<i>Chapter X: Christian Community</i>	184
<i>Conclusion</i>	208
<i>Index</i>	211

PART I

Christianity a World Faith

- I. The World's Need of a Unifying Faith
- II. The Different Kinds of Religion
- III. The Role of Religion in Human Life
- IV. The Effect of Religion on Civilization

CHAPTER I

The World's Need of a Unifying Faith

ANY RELIGION OR PHILOSOPHY WHICH PROFESSES TO HAVE A FUNDAMENTAL answer to the problem of human life faces an unusual situation of opportunity and testing today. The prevalence of confusion and violent change throughout the world may easily obscure the demand of the human spirit for a working faith, but there are abundant signs that mankind is seeking a security of life which is not merely social and economic but spiritual as well. The very passion of the peoples, as they follow national programs and range themselves behind the banners of the fascist and communist ideologies, reveals a desperate quest for a truth that can be whole-heartedly believed, and a cause to which men can give themselves in soul and body. It is a period of passionate and uncritical thinking and intemperate partisanship. Even in our own country, which is relatively peaceful and where, in the main, the orderly processes of life still go on, we are constantly charging each other with being embodiments of those evil spirits whose gigantic shadows stretch across the world.

In the midst of this stress and excitement a Christian movement that is now geographically a world movement goes on. Christianity is in the world; it is aware of the kind of a world we are in today; it is bringing to full and free expression some of the truths and principles for lack of which the world suffers—truths and principles which have too long been made impotent in organized religion but which are the answer of original Christianity to the spiritual quest of man. Man is on a

spiritual pilgrimage and Christianity has a clear and true word to say regarding the end of his journey and the spirit that can guide him successfully to the goal.

One can go to almost any country today and find men either feeling their way to new orientations of social, economic and intellectual life, or fanatically defending new forms that have not yet become firmly established. Perhaps the most significant and dramatic center of vast change just now is China, not alone because of her struggle with Japan, nor mainly so, but because, after resisting the idea of change for more than a century while the West beat upon her doors and edged itself into her domain, China has finally put her own mind upon the matter and taken into her own hands the forging of a new national life. If we would get at the heart of world change we cannot do better than to study the inner aspect of China's vast undertaking.

In October, 1935, I attended the Rotary Club meeting in Peiping. The speaker of the day was Y. S. Djang, professor of history in Tsing Hua College, the college founded by Boxer indemnity money returned to China by the United States. Professor Djang spoke on "My Year in Europe." He had spent four months each in Russia, Germany and England. His report of conditions in these three countries had to do particularly with liberty of thought and speech, industrial efficiency, and the degree of assurance the people had in their way of life.

In spite of improvement in recent years he found Russia very backward in the efficiency of her factories. He lamented the suppression or expulsion of non-conforming intellectuals, especially those in the field of history. Everywhere people eagerly asked him what he thought of Russia's achievements.

In Germany there was high technical efficiency, but no more intellectual freedom than in Russia. Germans, also, sought his good opinion of what their Nazi State was doing. When the Chinese traveler got to England he found factories operating upon a high level of productivity, and complete freedom of thought and utterance. From the Hyde Park orator to the university he found Englishmen thinking and expressing their minds freely on every conceivable subject. He could go where he pleased and see everything that was going on, but nobody ever asked him what he thought about the wonderful works of Britain or seemed to care a hang what he thought.

Professor Djang summed up his final impression as follows: "When I left China a year ago I was of the opinion that we in China need a dictator. China is so confused and disunited that she needs a strong government and it seemed to me that only some form of dictatorship could supply it. But having studied dictatorships in two countries and liberalism in another, I have come home with the profound conviction that China must work out her destiny upon the basis of a liberal order."

In Tientsin I asked Professor P. C. Chang of Nankai University what objective the government had in view in its rapidly developing educational system. He replied, "We cannot tell yet what our educational objective is, because we do not know yet what our social-economic order will be. It is certain that we shall not merely copy western capitalism, especially now that capitalism is showing such radical weaknesses in the very countries where it is most highly developed. Nor shall we take over communism as it is being worked out in Russia. We shall learn from both capitalism and communism, but we cannot tell yet what the ultimate form of our economic society will be. Since education should prepare people to under-

stand and live in society, we must know the form and ideals of our society before we can define the objectives of our education."

As this is being written it seems doubtful whether China is to be free to work out her national destiny according to her own ideas, but nevertheless these statements by two of China's thoughtful leaders are significant of a world-wide crisis of peoples striving to bring to clear expression a satisfying ideal of national life and destiny. This is a matter not alone of economics, nor even of education, but of the spiritual meaning of life as well.

The chief symptom of this spiritual travail is the prevalence of one-party government in many countries. In Russia, it is the Communist party that controls the Soviet and yet the communists number only a small percentage of the population. It is theoretically possible for some other party, with other economic and cultural objectives, to control the Soviet system. In China there is, constitutionally, a republic, but the actual power is completely in the hands of the Kuomintang. Italy, formally, is a monarchy, but so absolute is the rule of the Fascists under Il Duce that the world has all but forgotten King Immanuel. Germany has still the structure of a republic but it is Nazi rule that uses at its will all the agencies and instruments of government. In Turkey the People's Party manipulates a theoretically representative republic and tolerates no opposition party.

In soviet, republic, and monarchy, whatever the official form of government, it is the Party that really governs. There is nothing in the political structure of any of these countries to explain this fact. Some other party, if it were strong enough, could use the same governmental machinery for its own ends,

or really representative rule might exist with different parties seeking power through free elections.

There are various special reasons for the rise of one-party government in each of these countries—the stress of economic confusion, the breakdown of incipient democracy, or the fear of enemies. The one clear moral to be drawn therefrom, however, is that the form and constitution of the political state do not define the national objective nor furnish a basic philosophy for national life. Every nation must have such an ideal to give meaning and value to existence. The rise to power of the Party is due not to any new political idea but to its advocacy of a positive conception of the nation as a spiritual whole with certain values that are worth living and dying for. That this conception is hazy and unimpressive to the alien does not matter. Ultimate ideals are always only vaguely defined. Their power lies in the fact that they affirm the worth of the nation and call the individual to share in its power and glory.

The one-party system, whatever its actual course in any country today, vividly and even violently expresses the need which mankind has for a positive faith to which the whole man may be devoted, heart, intellect, and will. Such a faith is not merely an academic philosophy nor an abstract science. Academic thought is despised in such a time as this, and as for science, its methods and results are subordinated to the national program and its ethic of impartial truth is scorned.

The national obsessions that are being fostered today have much more the quality of religion than of science or philosophy. They do in fact fill the role of religion. They show dramatically that men need and will have a religion. We have been so much concerned over the attacks upon organized

Christianity in Germany and in other countries that we have overlooked the tremendous assertion in these party programs of man's basic need for a religious faith. To knit a people together in significant unity and to give the individual a spiritual home and a sense of value there must be a faith which is shared by all and which reaches to the roots of thought and feeling. This is the role of religion, and the quest of the nations today offers a direct challenge to Christianity. A true and vital Christianity has the answer to this challenge.

The Church once furnished a living, unifying faith for Christendom, but for three centuries now the Western world has been progressively secularizing its life. Education, art, philosophy, social life and politics have declared their independence of religious control. Even morality has become largely secular. All this is obvious and has often been said in recent times; but now we face a paradoxical situation and one that may mean a reversal of the policy of spiritual fragmentation. The paradox is this: men have rejected religion because of its restraints upon freedom; now they are almost joyously throwing away freedom for the sake of a pathetic substitute for religion.

For this development the prevailing form of religion itself has been largely responsible. The Church did by its dogmatic rule oppress the spirit of man. The principle of its control of human life was oriented to a future world and dominated by a doctrine which made that rule irrelevant to, or contradictory of, the real needs of men. The simple humanism of the gospels was blighted by the radical other-worldliness of the Church.

Protestantism made no real improvement over the Catholic system in this; indeed, in some ways it represented a backward step. The Lutheran churches surrendered the secular life to

the state and centered their interest in a sphere called spiritual where salvation was to be found by the special, revealed techniques of faith. This course really laid the foundation for the secular nationalism of today, and even gave divine sanction to that nationalism by making the Church a state church and thus subservient to the national interest. Even those who most deeply sympathize with the Church in Germany today and most admire it for its courage in resisting the claims of the Nazi State must see that the Church itself has had its own share of responsibility for the present exaltation of the secular state as absolute. The denouement of modern history in Germany reveals the complete fallacy of a radical separation of the organized and professed religion of a country from its general human concerns. It is pertinent to note that the present struggle between Church and State in Germany is based, not upon ethical, but upon ecclesiastical grounds. That is, the Church is not opposing the State or being opposed by the State because the Church is standing, in the name of God, for a Christian ethics in the common life. It is not social or political righteousness for which the Church is making its heroic struggle, but freedom in the realm of religious education and Church government. Even in these matters the universalism of Christianity is in opposition to the national particularism of the National Socialist philosophy, but it remains true that the cause of conflict is theological and not ethical. The Church is suffering, not because it has demanded the embodiment of Christian ideals in the common life of Germany, but because it resists the totalitarian State with its claims of ecclesiastical autonomy based upon its own doctrine of divine revelation.

The Calvinist churches did take seriously the task of order-

ing practical life according to religious principles. The result was a theocratic state. Geneva, Scotland, and New England were scenes of this attempt to bring human life under the rule of God. Great moral and social benefits have accrued from it. There were evils also which derived from this conception and those evils have perhaps been magnified in recent years. But the fundamental fallacy of the Calvinist method was its conception of the divine control as legalistic. Old Testament legalism instead of New Testament grace was the basis for the Calvinist theocracy. Since the New Testament scriptures do not contain codified laws the Calvinist churches went to the Old Testament, which does have such codes, and took both specific commandments and the legalistic principle therefrom.

Here was discipline and authority but not freedom for the human spirit. Even apart from the biblical criticism that removed the basis of formal authority upon which the theocracy rests, the demand for intellectual and spiritual freedom was bound to destroy or push aside the religious control that it exercised. The result of the failure of theocracy has been a secular development in all areas of culture and morals. In our own country the separation of Church and State, designed to insure religious liberty and to free politics from ecclesiastical control, has contributed to the development of a national life devoid of any deep and worthy bond of spiritual unity.

Now that the world situation has shown so plainly that nations need a bond of unity and a faith that gives dignity to human life, a new demand is laid upon Christianity to meet this need. For that need can be met only by a religion, and Christianity is a religion and a religion-centered way of life. The national ideologies are bound to pass away. They are