

THE NEW THEOLOGY

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Personally, I am not sorry, except for Mr. Campbell's own sake, that he has spoken and written as he has done. He is quite right in saying the kind of "theology" of which he has made himself the mouthpiece—one might now say the trumpet—is at present "in the air." It represents a tendency, a type of thought, a mode of speech, begotten of the spirit of the age, constantly being met with in books, newspapers, magazine articles, public utterances of would-be representative men, that needs to be taken account of. As every one that has had eyes to see must be aware, the thing has been smouldering below the surface in all the churches for a considerable while, and was bound to come out. I am only thankful it has broken out where it has, and not elsewhere. There was needed a clearing of the atmosphere, and this book of Mr. Campbell's, written with a surge of passion and earnestness that speak to the author's intense belief in himself and his message, will help to bring it about.

This is where good people mistake who fulminate at Mr. Campbell as if his so-called "New Theology" was only a perverse outburst of his own, instead of being, as it really is, a very significant indication of the spirit of the time. Matthew Arnold, I think it is, jests at the "hot fits" and "cold fits" of the British people, and Macaulay, satirized the zeal that wakes up every six or seven years to make a whipping boy of some individual for a class of transgressors whose offences have been winked at in the intervening period. His theology, indeed, as Mr. Campbell himself tells us, is not really "new." It is not even so new, by a long way, as he supposes. It would be the easiest thing in the world to show that its fundamental thesis has been a familiar one from the days of Lessing and Goethe, of Fichte, and Schelling, and Hegel, of Emerson and Theodore Parker, and to parallel every single position in his book with utterances a century old. He himself hints that what he says "leads back through Hegelianism to the old Greek thinkers, and beyond them again to the wise men who lived and taught in the East ages before Jesus was born" (p. 22). It is nevertheless true that the conditions of the modern time have led to a wider prevalence and to something like a precipitation and crystallization into a definite theory of these ideas. Here is where Mr. Campbell's opportunity comes in, and one is rather grateful to him than otherwise for showing us "what this new doctrine," whereof so many speak, is. There is no use scolding about it. What we have to do is to take it as typical, and to sit down calmly to see what exactly it means, and what its worth is.

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It need not be said that Mr. Campbell has no idea of following the antiquated method of drawing his theology from the teaching of Scripture. All that is discredited and done with. His sources of knowledge—the only ones, he tells us—are the universe and our own souls (pp. 20, 25, etc.). Once we have found out from these sources what God is, we can fit Jesus and religion (so far as they will go) into our scheme, but not before. Mr. Campbell, indeed, speaks often elsewhere as if it was from Jesus that we got our truest and fullest knowledge of God; but that is only one little thing which shows that he is not to be taken to the letter, but must be allowed large latitude in making seemingly incompatible assertions. If this is not granted at the outset, the "New Theology" will never get under way.

The redeeming feature in Mr. Campbell's book is his intense reverence for Jesus, for the sake of which much else may be forgiven. Many beautiful sentences occur on this point. "Jesus held the key to the riddle of existence" (p. 12). "The last word about God becomes the last word about man: it is Jesus." "I shall continue to feel compelled to believe that the power which produced Jesus must at least be equal to Jesus" (p. 21). "Christianity without Jesus is the world without the sun" (p. 69). "It is no use trying to place Jesus in row along with other religious masters. He is first, and the rest nowhere; we have no category for Him" (p. 70; cf. p. 76). Only we shall hope that Mr. Campbell does not suppose that such sentiments are any monopoly of the "New Theology." With an earnestness that is touching—because it is really born of the old faith, and not of any theology derived solely from "the universe and our own souls"—he declares that he takes over in Jesus, in his own sense, all the language of the old creeds about His Godhead (pp. 72-5). "I do believe that Jesus was very God, as I have already shown" (p. 81). He has a species of Trinity (p. 85), and tries to make room for a kind of incarnation in such statements as, "Jesus expressed fully and completely, in so far as a finite consciousness ever could, that aspect of the nature of God which we have called the eternal Son, or Christ, or ideal Man, who is the Soul of the universe, and the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (p. 94). As for the atonement, "the life and death together were a perfect self-offering, the offering of the unit to the whole, the individual to the race, the Son to the Father, and therefore the greatest manifestation of the innermost of God that has ever been made to the world" (124).

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But then—and here is the avowed severance from everything hitherto known in the avowed faith of the Christian church—all this is taken back as a distinction of Christ from others, and the same divinity, incarnate being, and atoning work which are ascribed to Him are predicated equally (in potentiality at least) of every human being. The doctrine of immanence and identity of divine and human, on the basis of which this is done, will be looked at immediately; meanwhile I note the fact. We have swelling words like these: "I start, then, with the assumption that the universe is God's thought about Himself, and in so far as I am able think it along with Him 'I and my Father (even metaphysically speaking) are one'" (p. 26). "The latter (orthodoxy) would restrict the description 'God manifest in the flesh' to Jesus alone; the New Theology would extend it in a lesser degree to all humanity, and would maintain that in the end it will be as true of every individual soul as ever it was of Jesus" (p. 83). The basis of this doctrine is "the fundamental identity of God and man" in the Hegelian or T. H. Green sense (p. 40). Humanity is divine; "the self is God" (pp. 18, 23, 34, 35, etc.); man's "surface self, his Philistine self, is the incarnation of some portion of that true eternal self which is one with God" (p. 32). There is certainly nothing "new" in this; it is an age-long story; but it has not been regarded hitherto as genuinely Christian; and, pace Mr. Campbell, is not likely yet to be. Heine tells us in his Confessions how he had his spell of this Hegelian delusion that "I myself here on earth, was God" ("For me there now existed only unbelievers who questioned my divinity"), but how he

was glad to come back in the end to the humbler faith of his grandmother and of Uncle Tom. For an exposition of the Godhead of Christ on the metaphysical lines Mr. Campbell will never get beyond the glowing sixth lecture of Flume's Doctrine of Religion, but a century of the ablest theological work the world has yet seen remained unconvinced by it.

The "New Theology" has its key-thought, we are told, in the idea of the immanence of God. It is the "rearticulations" of the fundamentals of the Christian faith "in terms of the immanence of God" (p. 3). Its starting point is "the Divine immanence in the universe and in mankind" (p. 4). Mr. Campbell, however, will not have this understood in a Pantheistic sense, for God, he admits, also infinitely transcends the universe. Pantheism, he tells us, stands for "God imprisoned in His universe, a God who cannot help Himself, and does not even know what He is about;" but his God is "the Self of the universe, and knows all about it" (p. 35). Mr. Campbell, however, cannot have it both ways. If God is really "the self of the universe"—if His life is merged in that of the universe, and His self-consciousness has no other content (as Hegel and Green say) than the relation of the universe, then we have an idealistic Pantheism, and this is the true substratum of Mr. Campbell's thinking. If, on the other hand, while admitting (as every one does) the presence and immanence of God in the world, we affirm a self-conscious personal existence of God above the world—"consciousness and definite purpose" (p. 20)—so that God is not "imprisoned in His universe," wherein does this differ from the essential thought of every sane theology? And how does Mr. Campbell arrive at his certainty that such a being cannot draw near to His creatures in special revelation, and that all we can ever know of Him must be what we can read "in His universe and in our own souls" (p. 5). On Mr. Campbell's own premises is there not a mystery—say boldly a miracle—in the appearance and sinless perfection (as he seems to allow) of such a person as Christ is; and if he cannot accept, and in his own curious way (a "three-dimensional" and "four-dimensional" space) argue for the reality of the physical resurrection (p. 222), why should he gird so strongly, and, as I think, on such superficial grounds, at the supernatural entrance of Christ into history. These are all unreconciled factors—some of them excrescences—in Mr. Campbell's theory, and it cannot stop till it has worked itself down to a considerably lower plane.

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"Immanence is a useful term, but it may be the parent of a nest of fallacies, and Mr. Campbell, with all his unnecessary gibes at the "theological mud-doling" of other people, has not escaped them. In one sense God is immanent in everything—the Cause of all causes, the Law of all laws. He is immanent in the tiger's ferocity, as well as in the saint's prayer; in the deed of the murderer who stabs his victim, as well as in the heroic sacrifice of one life to save another. Mr. Campbell cannot but see this (p. 75); so he is driven back on a verbal distinction between "Divinity" and "Divinity"—Deity being "the all-controlling consciousness of the universe," to which everything, the crocodile as well as General Booth, stands in relation; Divinity being "the innermost and all-determining quality" of the Divine nature as "perfect love" (pp. 74-5). After all, therefore, humanity is not, in the strict sense, "Divine," except as it is the expression of Divine love. "Jesus was Divine simply and solely because His life was never governed by any other principle" (p. 76). The metaphysical identity of the Divine and human with which we started undergoes here a very considerable qualification.