

**THE  
RECONSTRUCTION OF  
BELIEF. BELIEF IN GOD**

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The Reconstruction of Belief. Belief in God by Charles Gore

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**CHARLES GORE**

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THE RECONSTRUCTION OF BELIEF

# BELIEF IN GOD

BY CHARLES GORE, D.D.

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## PREFACE

1. *Homme propose : Dieu dispose.* But anyway I propose to issue an ordered and reasoned statement of my faith as a Christian, as far as may be without assumptions, or, as I call it, a "Reconstruction of Belief," in three volumes, of which this is the first, dealing respectively with Belief in God, Belief in Jesus Christ, and Belief in the Holy Spirit and in the Church. There will be no reference to ecclesiastical authority in the first two volumes, but it will be seriously considered in the last. If the critics take notice of me and argue against my conclusions, I propose to issue a fourth supplementary volume of dissertations and discussions, in order to expand, buttress, or modify arguments or conclusions.

I endeavour to appeal to the ordinary educated reader. If any such finds the book stiff, I think he would be assisted by reading first the analysis of the argument which begins the last chapter, pp. 283-8.

2. My argument is positive. It is a statement of the reasons which seem to me convincing on behalf of a certain type of belief. It is not concerned, except incidentally, in describing, or arguing against, rival beliefs. Thus I offer no survey of the rival beliefs of current philosophers, such as is offered by Mr. W. R. Matthews in his admirable *Studies in Christian*

*Philosophy* (Macmillan, 1921), but I hope I have indicated sufficiently both where I rely upon them and where they do not satisfy me.

My statement is also individual. It presents the arguments which finally, after long thinking, have seemed to satisfy my own mind. But I confess that the form of ordered argument, starting without pre-suppositions and proceeding from point to point, does not represent the way in which my convictions have been actually reached. I am conscious of certain strong predispositions towards certain beliefs, which seem to be inherent in me, and I will venture to be so far autobiographical as to enumerate them, so far as they are relevant.

(a) I have, ever since I was an undergraduate, been certain that I must be in the true sense a free thinker, and that either not to think freely about a disturbing subject, or to accept ecclesiastical authority in place of the best judgement of my own reason, would be for me an impossible treason against the light. I must go remorselessly where the argument leads me. Thus when in the early seventies I was preparing for ordination, and Ewald had seriously convinced me that the old-fashioned view of the Old Testament was impossible to hold, it never presented itself to me as possible that I could substitute the traditional view in place of the scientific in my own mind on the ground of authority or agree to teach it. There was nothing for it but to make what seemed to me fairly certain as evident as possible to my examiners for orders, and also to show how reconcilable I thought it with the Creeds. But at the same time a cordial agreement with Ruskin against the dominant Political



Economists, and other causes, prevented my ever confusing my duty to reason with any attribution of infallibility to the intellectuals of the day.

(b) I have always felt deeply, being by disposition pessimistic, the arguments against the love of God. I have always thought that the only very difficult dogma of the Church was the dogma that God is Love. But deeper than any difficulty has been the feeling that at the roots of my being I am confronted with God, from whom I cannot get away, and that the God who confronts me there is the Living God of the prophets and of Jesus Christ. Equally deep was the feeling that the Christian life was certainly "the Way," and that it was foolish to suppose that it could flourish except on its own intellectual roots and in its own proper mental soil. Also I have never been able to feel that any of the various humanitarian estimates of Christ was in any degree satisfying.

(c) Finally, though this has no bearing on the present volume or its next projected successor, I have since my childhood been what I may call a Catholic by mental constitution. I remember very well, when I was eight or nine—sixty years ago—reading a book by a Protestant author—a Presbyterian, I think—entitled *Father Clement*, about the conversion of a Catholic priest to Protestantism. I have never read it since. I had been brought up in ordinary old-fashioned English Church ways. I had only attended very Low Church services. I had never heard of the Oxford movement. I knew nothing about Catholicism, except as a strange superstition, called Popery. But the book described confession and absolution, fasting, the Real Presence,

the devotion of the Three Hours, the use of incense, etc., and I felt instinctively and at once that this sort of sacramental religion was the religion for me. From that day most of the people who influenced my intellect, when I was young, were agnostics or Protestants or "outsiders" to the Catholic faith—Carlyle, Ruskin, Edward Bowen, T. H. Green—but this predisposition remained quite unaltered. My mental life has consisted in the process of confronting such predispositions with the results, so far as I have been able to see them, of philosophy and science and criticism (with a native tendency always to anticipate the worst), and to seek a unity or synthesis in which all the light I could get would be allowed its full force, without my innermost self being quenched or blinded. What I am daring to present to the public is the result of this sort of process, continued over forty and more years.

3. Like others, as I view the world and the Church—especially the Church of England—at the present day, I cannot feel hopeful about the immediate prospect. The prophets and experience alike convince me that there can be no real social recovery except through a general return to God. And of such a return I see no signs. God has smitten; but in general we have not sought Him. Thus, taught by the prophets, I am ready to anticipate scathing judgements. But the prophets also teach us to hold with unquenchable faith to the divine purpose of progress, through all the catastrophes and judgements which widespread apostasy from God brings with it. The purpose remains, and the end is sure. No right effort is going to be lost. And the instrument through which God

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works is the "faithful remnant" of those who believe Him and obey Him at all costs. Of such, I feel persuaded, there is among us as large a body, and as genuine, as at any previous period of history. What is needful for them is to think out their principles, individually and collectively: so that they shall know what they believe and why they believe. And these volumes, which I offer to God with a prayer for His blessing, are intended to help them in the task.

CHARLES GORE.

*Michaelmas 1921.*