

Preface

What does it mean to be a Christian and [an] American today? (xi)

Chapter 1

Then, like Ash Wednesday, the passage continues with a memento mori: “They are soon gone, and we fly away. . . . So teach us to count our days / that we may gain a wise heart” (Ps. 90:12) (2)

Many of us have experienced a loss of childhood faith . . . (4)

Divided Christianity: Conservative

Conventional

Uncertain

Former

Progressive (8)

Conservative Christianity:

Belief in the absolute authority of divine revelation. . . . the infallible, literal, and absolute Word of God. (9)

Emphasis on an afterlife . . . how we will spend eternity is at stake. (9)

Sin is the critical issue in our life with God. (10)

Jesus died to pay for our sins. . . . (10)

The way to eternal life (understood to mean “heaven”) is through believing in Jesus and his saving death. (10)

“the prosperity gospel” and “the second-coming-is-soon gospel” (10)

Progressive Christianity—

Interprets the Bible historically and metaphorically (14)

Regards salvation as primarily about transformation in this life (14)

Understands the human predicament and our need as much more complex than do conservative and conventional Christians—perceives us as blind, diseased, wounded, dead in the midst of life, and our need is seeing again, healing, and rebirth (14)

Keeps Jesus at the center as decisive revelation of God—of what can be seen of God in a human life (15)

Regards “beloving” as equal in importance to or more important than “believing” —what we believe shapes our lives and has great transformative power (15)

Finds in Christianity a Way revealed by Jesus, but not the only Way (16)

Big issues are justice and peace (17-18)

Chapter 2

. . . we are all vastly improbable (19)

. . . we were soft literalists (25)

Conversion means a turning around, a major change in one’s orientation to life, a transformation. (27)

I thought of God as a supernatural person-like being and also as a loving and demanding authority figure separate from the universe, distinct from the universe, outside it and beyond it. (29)

The notion that there was one “right” way of seeing things disappeared. This was enormously liberating, even if a bit alarming. (31)

Amos was about God’s passion, God’s desire, God’s dream, God’s yearning, for the transformation of this world to a world of greater economic justice. So were the books of the prophets of ancient Israel more generally. . . . (33)

Chapter 3

From William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, characteristics of mystical experience:

Ineffability

Transiency

Passivity

Noetic quality—direct cognition without mediation of language (40)

Noetic, luminous, radical amazement, I-Thou moments, peak experiences, experiences of the golden world, cosmic consciousness (40)

It had never occurred to me that what we call “God” could be experienced. (41)

Quoting Job: “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear—but now my eye sees you.” (42)

“am-ness”; “a more” (42)

In addition to being a creator, God was also the supreme authority figure who had revealed how we should live and what we should believe. (44)

Panentheism: everything is in God. The universe—everything that is—is in God, even as God is “more” than the universe. (45)

We and everything that is are in God like fish are in water. (46)

But supernatural theism, especially since the 1600s, has dominated popular Christianity. . . . What happened has been called “the disenchantment of nature”: God, the sacred, was removed from the world. It has also been called “the domestication of transcendence” . . . (47)

“Tell me about the God you don’t believe in.” (48)

. . . there are no intrinsic conflicts between the intellect and Christianity, reason and religion. (48)

But being Christian is not having an intellectually correct theology. (49)

Task of theology: to undermine beliefs that get in the way of taking Christianity seriously and to construct a persuasive and compelling vision of the Christian life. (50)

They were all people for whom God, the sacred, the more, was anexperiential reality. . . they *knew* God. (51)