

NEW FORMS OF THE OLD FAITH

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# NEW FORMS OF THE OLD FAITH

Being the Baird Lecture  
delivered in 1946-47 under the title  
EXTRA-CHURCH SYSTEMS

JAMES BLACK D.D.

*Minister of St George's West Church, Edinburgh*

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To the people of Edinburgh, the city of my memories, and especially to the Office-Bearers, Members, and Young People of my two congregations—Broughton Place and St. George's West—in appreciation and gratitude for forty-one years of mutual service and friendship in our City and Presbytery

## PREFACE

I thank the Governors of the Baird Trust for the honour they did me in inviting me to join the honorable roll of Baird Lecturers. The twelve addresses, here published in terms of the Trust Deed, were delivered in St. George's West Church, Edinburgh, during the winter and spring of 1946-47. Since then, my main difficulty—apart from our national paper shortage—has been in trying to change the good and natural intimacies of public speech into the more formalized fashions of cold print. Even now I could wish that I had possessed the grit to discard the lectures holus-bolus, and write the chapters out afresh directly for publication! But on the other hand, they began as lectures; and according to the Baird Trust Deed, they were meant to be lectures. As far as possible, then, I have retained the lectures mainly in the form in which they were planned and delivered. If this should seem a loss to some, it may really be a gain to others.

Most of my predecessors in this lectureship, since the days of Robert Flint, W. P. Paterson, and W. M. Macgregor, have been professors, or folk of that sort, with (presumably) time for special study at their disposal, and also with ready access to all kinds of college libraries. It is another thing, however, for a busy minister of a large city congregation to command the time and leisure for such special ferreting inquiries as the pursuit of abstruse subjects generally demands. Fortunately for me, however, I gave a fairly detailed study to the whole subject of these lectures some years ago—on what the old army sergeant used to dub 'Fancy Religions'—and I published a series of papers in 1924-25 on 'extra-Church Systems' in the *Church Record*, the monthly magazine of the (former) United Free Church of Scotland. Since then, my interest in these systems has been continuous and increasing.

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Thus when the honouring invitation came to me from the Baird Trust, I gladly made use of this fresh chance of further study and examination. The result, for what it is worth, is this book of published lectures.

Apart from the Trust Deed, which demands their publication, I issue the Lectures for these reasons.

First of all—quite apart from the use or misuse of my opportunities—I am convinced that some detailed and reasoned examination of the beliefs and practices of these new religions is urgently needed by the Church at large, especially for its young and immature members. From many inquiries which I have received from different quarters of the world, ever since I published my earlier articles in 1924, I am certain that clergymen, office-bearers, and members of all churches would welcome a reasonable account and estimate of these disturbing new religions. Unfortunately many of their members are very aggressively proselytizing. They go out, not so much to win the pagan, as to induce good Christian members to join their own fold; and their perambulating missionaries either buttonhole quiet Christian folk, or deluge them with their propagandist literature. (I have had dozens of their leaflets pushed into my letter-box.) All this is very unsettling to simple people who may not be able to 'bandy texts' with these missionaries or give 'the fair answer' of reason and truth. I have the good hope therefore that a book such as this might be of some real help to our ministers and people in rebutting these insidious attacks and in confirming our members in their faith.

Again, I believe that the final defence against the errors of these modern cults is *knowledge*—a full and exact acquaintance with their history, creeds, claims, mistakes, and fallacies. Here as elsewhere, truth itself is the only perfect security against deluding or imperfect loyalties—to know the facts, and all the facts. I do not presume to say that I can do this adequately; but at least I can do it according to my conscience, my knowledge, and my discrimination.

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Further, I hope that my readers will give me credit for dealing with most of these strange religions as sympathetically and understandingly as possible, and for speaking about their arresting beliefs and claims with some appreciation. I have read many diatribes against these cults in books and pamphlets which have only made me blush or squirm. Some of the writers—who ought to have known better—have merely mistaken slanging for argument, and scorn for reason. This type of disapproval accomplishes nothing. Hence I have tried to show my appreciation of all that is good in each religion; and sometimes I have been at particular pains to prove that this or that new faith is only a natural recoil—perhaps good and needed—from the unworthy practice or imperfect beliefs of the official Churches of their own day.

Moreover, I have striven to show as fairly as I can that not one of these new systems could have outlasted its own generation unless it had within it some genuine secret germ of truth. This alone has kept each one of them alive and virile. Surely it is our duty, and should be our endeavour, to re-discover and re-welcome any neglected truths which others may have rightly emphasized for us—even if they may have foolishly *over-emphasized* them. If these neglected truths are indeed a real part of the full Christian message, we must put them back in their true place of honour—and that without delay or demur.

Thus, to speak frankly, my aim has been two-fold—on the one hand, to point out all that I consider wrong or fallacious in each system, and in doing so, to ‘make no bones about it’; and on the other hand, to indicate just as frankly the ‘good contribution’ these new faiths may offer to the full Christian message. It will be a gain to the whole Church if we can thereby see afresh and re-emphasize the neglected truths which alone have given these systems their transient permanence.

My debt to authors and their books is so wide and

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deep that it is impossible for me to acknowledge it. For years I have kept jotting down, in a kind of commonplace book, all sorts of references to these interesting systems. Not thinking that I should ever have this opportunity to republish my views, I took these notes at the time without any detailed acknowledgment or special reference to sources. Perhaps the best acknowledgment I can now offer is to admit that I have used freely and with gratitude everything I could lay my hands on from any and every quarter. But none the less I cannot blame anyone for the views, the ideas, or the criticisms I express. Let these be on my own head!

I thank my Church secretary, Miss Anna Gunn, for typing these lectures in her spare time from my crabbed and indecipherable 'hand o' write,' and my friend, Dr. Andrew Walton, for reading the typed lectures and making many valuable suggestions.

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