

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09386-6 - Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century: Illustrated from  
Writers of the Period

Bernard M. G. Reardon

Frontmatter

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BERNARD M. G. REARDON

*Lecturer in Divinity in the University of  
Newcastle upon Tyne*



CAMBRIDGE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

1966

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521060493](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521060493)

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First published 1966

Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2008

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 66-10542*

ISBN 978-0-521-06049-3 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-09386-6 paperback

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## PREFACE

The present volume is designed as a sequel to that on the religious thought of the eighteenth century by the late Professor J. M. Creed and Mr J. S. Boys Smith, now Master of St John's College, Cambridge. Their purpose—to illustrate changes and developments in religious thinking during a selected period by means of passages chosen from representative writers—has been mine too, but the method pursued differs. The authors of *Religious Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1934) judged—rightly, I think—that the importance of the age from their point of view lay in the nature of the problems, as they considered, then definitely raised for the first time, more than in the individual greatness of the writers. Their scheme of arrangement therefore was by subject-matter, and they applied it to a very useful end. For my part, however, I have found this procedure to be impracticable, for what is striking about the nineteenth century is undoubtedly the individuality, as in numerous instances also the undeniable greatness, of the writers themselves. Thus their approach to the problem of religious, and in particular, Christian belief, although in most cases they have much in common, differs as between one and another of them to such a degree that any attempt to assemble excerpts from their writings under a few general headings would hardly be very enlightening. Nineteenth-century attitudes, though readily identifiable, are less easily definable and classifiable than are those of the century preceding. Moreover, recognition of the strong individuality of these thinkers is a necessary factor in a just appreciation of their views. It would be as absurd to try to obscure the idiosyncrasy of, say, a Kierkegaard or a Coleridge or a Newman by forcing disparate opinions into an arbitrary synthesis as to underline it by a pointlessly antithetical *sic et non*. I have, accordingly, taken my authors in an order determined merely by geography and chronology. European thought is here more liberally represented than in the book by Creed and Mr Boys Smith, whilst the views of British writers are supplemented by others from across the Atlantic.

In any such enterprise as this the question of whom and what to omit is the most vexing, and the nineteenth century provides an embarrassingly rich field of choice. Some reasonably clear principle of

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selection had to be adopted, with, in consequence, unavoidable if regrettable omissions. My aim has been to illustrate what may fairly be claimed as characteristic of the age; and this assumes on the whole the form of reflective thought *about* religion, its nature and its significance. Hence beliefs widely, indeed generally, held—traditional dogmatics, I mean, either Catholic or Protestant—are not represented. To mention English divines only, Pusey on baptismal regeneration, for example, or Liddon on the incarnation, or Dale on the atonement, finds no place. On the other hand, I have felt bound to exclude writers who would not usually be regarded as having treated theological issues as a matter of specific concern. To draw the line with an unflinching hand has not, all the same, been a simple matter. I have included Matthew Arnold but not Carlyle, Kierkegaard but not Nietzsche. In any event one's judgement must, in the final resort, remain personal and something from which the critical reader may well see fit to dissent. Further—a harshly practical consideration—the book had to be of manageable bulk; but since my intention was to produce a collection of texts rather than an anthology of snippets it could easily have been twice the size.

Writers cited in translation, with one exception, are given in versions already published. I have not undertaken to make any new ones of my own.

*Acknowledgements*

Thanks are due to the following for permission to print extracts from the books mentioned: T. & T. Clark for H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart's translation of Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith* (Part 1, no. 1: 11); Ernest Benn Ltd for E. B. Saunders' translation of Harnack's *What is Christianity?* (Part 1, no. 7); Princeton University Press for D. F. Swenson's translation of Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* (Part 1, no. 8); International Universities Press for P. P. Zouboff's translation of Solovyov's *Lectures on Godmanhood* (Part 1, no. 12); John Murray Ltd for Scott Holland's contributions to *Lux Mundi* (Part 2, no. 8); and the Clarendon Press, Oxford, for Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* (Part 2, no. 9: 111).

I should also like to thank The staff of The Cambridge University Press for the great care they have bestowed on the production of the book.

B. M. G. R.

*Newcastle upon Tyne*

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