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978-0-521-35975-7 - The Ocean of Truth: A Defence of Objective Theism
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The Ocean of Truth

This short book offers an alternative reading of the impact of modernity on Christian faith to that advanced by Don Cupitt in the TV series and book *The Sea of Faith*. It is a spirited defence of belief in the objective reality of God and in life after death, as opposed to Cupitt's radically interiorised and expressivist conception of religion.

As attractive as many may find a denial of the traditional doctrines of the Church in favour of an anti-metaphysical, non-dogmatic expressivist version of Christian faith, Hebblethwaite insists that of far greater importance is the question of truth at stake here, and it is on the question of truth that he focusses his attention.

After arguing against Cupitt's response to the modern situation, the author tries to show how belief in an objective God is not only possible despite the impact of modern science and historical criticism, but indeed highly plausible.

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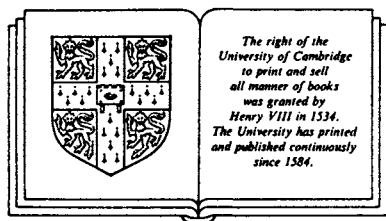
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THE OCEAN OF TRUTH

A defence of objective theism

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To myself I seem to have been only a boy playing
on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and
then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell
than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay
all undiscovered before me.

– Isaac Newton

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[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i>	ix
1 Christian belief in God		1
2 The ebbing of theistic faith		17
3 The interiorisation of faith		35
4 Theism in the modern world		53
5 The significance of Kant		71
6 The grounds of theistic belief		86
7 The question of truth		102
8 Religions – theistic and non-theistic		114
9 Life after death		126
10 The Christian Church and objective theism		139
<i>Appendix: The Church's ministry</i>		150
<i>Notes</i>		154
<i>Select bibliography</i>		161
<i>Index</i>		163

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Preface

In this short book I offer an alternative reading of the impact of modernity on Christian faith to that advanced by my friend and colleague, Don Cupitt, in the television series, *The Sea of Faith*, in the book of the same title,¹ and in the five articles in 'The Listener' which accompanied the series and which are now reprinted as an appendix to Cupitt's more recent book, *Only Human*.² *Only Human* is the third book of a trilogy in which Cupitt has been putting forward, over the last eight years, his radically interiorised and expressivist conception of religion. The other two books are *Taking Leave of God*³ and *The World to Come*.⁴

Cupitt's position is unusual, to say the least, in a priest of the Church of England. But there is no doubt that he speaks for many people on the fringe of the Churches, perhaps for many who would wish to think of themselves as Christians, who are still attracted by the figure of Jesus and by the Christian way, but who cannot bring themselves to assent to the traditional doctrines of the Church. To such people, an anti-metaphysical, non-dogmatic, expressivist version of Christian faith will seem attractive, even liberating. But there are questions of truth at stake here, and it is on the question of truth that I want to focus attention in my contribution to the debate.

Only in chapters two and three do I attempt a detailed discussion of Cupitt's position. I argue there against both his reading of the modern situation and his response to it. In the

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chapters that follow I broaden the argument, concentrating on the issues themselves, and trying to show how belief in an objective God (and in life after death) is possible, despite the impact of modern science and historical criticism – and indeed not only possible but highly plausible, given *all* the data of science, history and experience.