

Review.

None Other Gods, by W. A. Visser 'T Hooft, D.Th. (Student Christian Movement Press, 5/- net).

This book is largely "a tract for the times". Its author, Dr. Visser 'T Hooft, is Dutch, the present General Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation, and, as such, the successor of the well-known John R. Mott. In the course of his duties he has travelled widely and come into intimate contact with people of many lands, particularly of the younger generation. He is therefore specially well-qualified to speak about religious conditions to-day, and the present book is the result.

The book is divided into two almost equal parts, the first dealing with "the basis and the content of the Christian life", and the second with its relation to the great movements that are sweeping over the world, and particularly Europe, to-day.

The treatment in the first part suffers from the fact that it embodies "lectures and articles prepared in different languages and for student-groups of different countries". But the line of thought is none the less suggestive.

Beginning with the absolute necessity of a choice of guiding principles of some sort if we are to live effectively in any sense, Dr. Hooft goes on to deal with "The Christian Choice" which is, of course, Jesus Christ. He points out that there have been, and are, a great many "Jesus Christs", according as writers of different schools have tried to harness Him to their own special interests. In fact this is one of the striking things about Him, that people of very divergent views are eager to claim Him as theirs. But Christ is always "above the heads of His reporters", and He always staggers us by His demands, so much so that we cannot help feeling that in Him is the deep imperative of God, and the real question is—if we take Him seriously (which unfortunately so many of us never do)—"Can we stand the strain?" To live the Christian life is no mere experience of occasional ecstatic sensations, but an honest endeavour to live out His will on the humdrum levels of daily existence, and for this we require something more than what people vaguely speak of as "religion". In Christianity, however, we have more than idealism; we have a Gospel, and we can come into contact with Christ through His word and through prayer. But this in itself might suggest the atomistic, whereas Christianity embodies itself in a community life, in other words the Church, and, though in many respects the Church has tragically failed, it is essential to

the work of the Gospel and its task for Christ can never end until life in all directions is permeated with the Christian ideal.

But this raises at once a deeper issue—Is Christianity not already a spent force? Has it not failed to meet the demands of life, especially on the collective side? and is its place not being filled—and better filled—by other movements which claim—and undoubtedly win—the allegiance of youth to-day?

This gives us in some ways the most interesting part of the book. No one can fail to be alarmed at the wide-spread slump in Christian values to-day, especially on the Continent. Not only are the Churches being attacked but Christianity itself is fighting for its life, and at the moment no one can foresee the issue. Dr. Hooft is himself especially well-informed. He has the great advantage (in this matter) not to be an Englishman, that is to say, he can see the situation more intimately than we can. In addition, he is in constant touch with the new mind all over Europe, and his whole discussion is therefore based on wide and accurate knowledge. It is clear that the old Christendom, and the old Church organization, is either dead or on the point of being extinguished. Something new must take its place. No man can say what it will be. But it must be something simpler and honester and truer, something in fact more harmonious with the mind of Christ and the genius of essential Christianity. In this matter Baptists can view the passing of much so-called Christianity with the feelings of Amos as he looked at the "religion" of Northern Israel. For the final triumph of truth we need have no fears. But meantime the conflict is very real, and Dr. Hooft enables us to see it better and understand its issues more clearly.

Sooner or later the "half-Gods" go, whether they are wholly pagan or tepidly Christian, and then it is that Christ comes into His own. Meantime we must be patient and steadfast and true to the truth He gives us, for as Dr. Hooft says, "What could be greater joy than to know that one is enlisted in God's gracious work of giving himself to man?"

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