

'Honest to God'

FROM
THE BISHOP OF WOOLWICH.

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DEAR SIR,

I read with interest the review of *Honest to God* in your *Journal*. Your review, together with Dr. Geoffrey Parrinder's recent book, *The Christian Debate: Light from the East* (Gollancz, London, 1964), is a salutary reminder, if one were needed, that Christians can no longer indulge, even in the West, in a domestic theological discussion, as though the other world-religions scarcely existed. Certainly my mail has brought evidence enough that everything we say is now overheard. I wish that I were better equipped myself to take part in this wider debate. But I welcome, rather than fear, the sympathy with which much that I said in *Honest to God* has been received by so many within the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. I cannot agree with your somewhat sweeping statement that 'If this interpretation of Christianity were to prove true, it would mean the end of the mission of Christianity'. Of course, my inadequacies of statement on this flank (on which, like many others, I was not consciously guarding myself!) must be countered by those more competent. I have not the least desire to weaken or deny the distinctive affirmations of the Christian Faith. Among these, I should certainly wish to assert: (1) the centrality of the confession 'Jesus is Lord', in the full New Testament sense that 'in him all things cohere' (Colossians 1:17) and 'In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily' (Colossians 2:9); and (2) the centrality of the utterly *personal* relationship of communion with God summed up in Jesus' address, 'Abba, Father!' (in contrast with any kind of impersonal union in a cosmic spirit). As long as these affirmations are safeguarded, I am glad if my questioning of the necessity of the 'supranaturalistic' cast of thought (by which the *reality* of God in human experience is represented by the *existence* of gods or of a God in some other realm of being 'above' or 'beyond' the world in which we live) appears to Hindus, as well as to modern secular man, to make Christian truth less alien to them. For this picture of the universe is certainly not distinctively Christian (it is supremely illustrated in the Olympian religion of ancient Greece), though it may be characteristically Western.

Yours sincerely,
JOHN WOOLWICH