

THIS IS OUR FAITH

*An Exposition of the Statement of Faith
of The United Church of Canada*

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TO

*the little country church rising from
the open prairie or the rocky shore-
line, from the moorland or the brow
of the hill, and to that friendly com-
pany of fellow-worshippers accus-
tomed to gather there Sabbath by
Sabbath, among whom I see through
the mist of years the faces of my
father and mother and many of the
simple-hearted saints of earth.*

PREFACE

This book offers a survey of the main doctrines of the Church. It was prepared to give fuller exposition to a short Statement of Faith presented to the Ninth General Council of The United Church of Canada in 1940. The line followed is Biblical throughout. I have endeavoured to reflect the views of the Commission which drew up the Statement; but, as I was left with complete freedom of interpretation, I must accept responsibility for what is here written. This is a task from which I shrank at first and finally accepted in the hope that in this way I might make some slight return for the generosity and friendliness of the ministers, laymen, and young people of the Church in which I serve. The work had to be overtaken in what little remains of summer vacation in these days of war, and has suffered from lack of leisure of mind.

I owe much to the discussion of the Commission. I would fain have drawn more heavily upon the learning and clarity of Dr. J. M. Shaw had distance allowed. Some of my colleagues on the Commission and on the staff of Emmanuel College did me the kindness of reading certain chapters, to my mingled encouragement and correction, notably Dr. W. Harold Young, Dr. John Line, Dr. A. S. Orton, and Principal Richard Davidson, the present chairman and the guiding mind of the Commission†. Acknowledgment has been made in the footnotes of many whose published work has helped me; if any have been overlooked, I trust I may be forgiven. At every stage I have relied chiefly on the judgment and editorial skill of my wife.

JOHN DOW

*Emmanuel College,
July 19, 1943.*

†To our great loss and sorrow this rare scholar and master of theology passed from our midst on 25th May, 1944.

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FOREWORD

Down through the ages men have been constrained to travel along lines of thought that lead them to One they call God. Standing back from this amazing universe, they have sought after the underlying Cause, the Real and Ultimate behind the visible frame. Peering into its intricacies, they have marked a magnificent purposiveness, a fitting of means to ends, a cunning contriving and designing that leads them on to One who must have planned it all. They have played with its parts like children with a jigsaw puzzle; and, finding it fall into an ordered picture, they have judged that, if it is intelligible to them, a Mind far, far greater than their own must have conceived it in the beginning. They have marvelled at their own hearts with their discerning between right and wrong, and they have confessed that this is no human invention, but surely, from its inescapability, it is an overriding authority from a moral Author above and beyond. They have been shaken by ecstasies and outreachings of the soul inexplicable in their universality and insatiableness unless Another has touched our nature and kindled within us the fires of the spirit. They have wondered how the idea of a God ever came over the threshold of the mind: could they have conceived Him had He not been there?

But it is not by paths like these that we arrive at the living, loving Lord of human life. We believe that God has actually been speaking across the years: He has a will to make Himself known, and in the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments we have the record of that self-uttering of the invisible God. He has confronted men of flesh and blood like ourselves. "It would seem," writes Professor John Macleod, "as if religious experience were a kind of collision, sometimes a violent collision. We know God, so to speak, only when God pleases to hit us! This is what the prophets stammer out at us in their great hours." It is on these encounters we shall rely as persuasive evidence. And, confirming and sealing all these revelations, there is that incursion of

¹ In *A Faith for Today*, p. 17.

God into history in the Man of Nazareth: in Him we recognize the Yea and Amen to all the yearnings of the centuries. He is the Living Word who gives meaning to all the yesterdays, power to each passing day, and hope for the furthest tomorrow. And with a wise saint of God we would make confession: "We are more sure of the Person than of the doctrine about Him. We do not know it, as well as we know Him. You cannot represent theology with flaming Eyes and a healing Touch and a bleeding Heart. It is Personality that is writ that way, and it is in the revelation of Personality that we are to abide."¹

¹ J. Rendel Harris, *As Pants the Hart*, p. 247f.