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## ***The Secularization of Christianity* by E. L. Mascall (review)**

Frederick M. Jelly

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REVIEW

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### **In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

BOOKREVIEWS The Secularization of Christianity. By E. L. MASCALL. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1966. Pp. xiii + ~86. \$6.00. The thesis of this book is best expressed by the author's closing words: "The conclusion to which I have found myself forced is twofold: first that what we are being offered is not a reinterpretation of the Christian religion but a substitute for it, and secondly that the arguments offered, from whichever field of study they have been drawn, are quite unconvincing. This does not mean that traditional Christianity has nothing to learn from the new techniques and discoveries; on the contrary, it can be revived and enriched by them. This task should be enough to occupy fully at least one generation of the theologians and one cannot prescribe in advance what its results would be. All I can hope to have done in the present book is to show that there is no valid ground for the failure of nerve which has stampeded many contemporary theologians into a total intellectual capitulation to their secular environment." Dr. Mascall,

Professor of Historical Theology at the University of London and an Anglican priest of the Oratory of the Good Shepherd, is highly qualified for the task which he has undertaken. His many other writings have provided a scholarly treatment of several problems considered in *The Secularization of Christianity*. The circumstances of this book's composition were the publication of two others. One is the famous little paper-back *Honest to God* by the Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, Dr. J. A. T. Robinson, who has startled the world with his revolutionary ideas. The other, a longer and more professionally theological work, is *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* by Dr. Paul van Buren, Associate Professor of Theology at Temple University. Mascall has selected these two as "outstanding expressions of a radical and destructive attitude to traditional Christianity which has obtained a foothold in many academic circles in the United States and the United Kingdom, though until the publication of *Honest to God* it was little known to the general public and to the majority of the parochial clergy." Consequently, he has made the two main chapters of his book a detailed analysis and critique of both works. The rest of the book examines the intellectual setting in which the ideas of Robinson and van Buren are placed. Three chapters, therefore, are devoted to the philosophical, scientific and Biblical impacts of the question. The author has written much more at length on the philosophical impact in his book *Words and Images*, and on the scientific impact in *Christian Theology and Natural Science*, but now adds to his writings an evaluation of modern Biblical studies. Chapter One, "The Changeless and the Changing," establishes the author's philosophical platform in this problem, and is headed by a quotation from Pope John XXIII: "The substance of the ancient doctrine, contained in the 'deposit of faith' is one thing; its formulation is quite another." In this section are firmly founded the theological principles and Christian convictions which form Mascall's criteria in judging the works of Robinson, van Buren and others throughout the book. He gives three reasons why it is so important for the Christian theologian to relate the changeless revealed datum of Christian truth to the constantly changing intellectual framework of the world in which he lives. The first is for Christian instruction, since Christians themselves inevitably share in the intellectual climate of their time. The second reason is apologetical, in that the Church must commend its message to those outside it in language which they can understand. And thirdly, for the sake of social action, Christians should be able to see the relevance of their faith to the problems of contemporary society to influence the solution of these problems in accord with Christian concepts about man's nature, his destiny, his condition, and his resources. This most urgent and difficult theological task has been the occasion, in Mascall's thinking, of two extreme positions. One is the reactionary extreme, represented by Karl Barth, who exaggerated the changeless aspect of Christianity and considered contemporary thought, if not contemporary political...

## BOOK REVIEWS

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Chapter One, "The Churchless and Far Changing," establishes the



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