

# ***The Dawn of Personality***\*

## *An Appraisal*

Frank E. Gaebelein

### I

In reviewing Dr. Cailliet's larger work, *The Christian Approach to Culture*, the writer of this article referred to him as "an evangelical Schweitzer," the comparison resting upon the Princeton scholar's mastery of many fields of knowledge, including theology, philosophy, mathematics, science, literature, and anthropology. This new book supports the comparison, although unlike its distinguished predecessor the first impression is that of simplicity, doubtless because of the complete absence of footnotes, bibliography, and index. But the simplicity is crystal clear, leading the reader step by step into the presence of profound truth.

Sometimes the title of a book offers a valuable clue to its understanding. Thus the very words, "The Dawn of Personality," suggest that this is not a theological work but a book for the layman seeking to understand the meaning of life. Nor is the metaphor of the title without significance. This is a beautiful book, in expression graceful and in structure lucid. The tact and precision of statement reflect the author's background and are reminiscent of French prose at its best, giving the style an attractive piquancy.

But there is more in this volume than distinction of style. These pages are born of a deep concern. The author invites the reader to sit down with him and consider what life is all about. There is nothing of argumentation; rather is the book like a conversation with a wise and sympathetic friend; while not a dialogue, it is so written as constantly to call for the reader's own response. As Dr. Cailliet himself says, "I always prefer a clear indicative to a multiplicity of imperatives" (p. 215). In other words, he believes that the truth, plainly stated, is its own compelling power.

### II

What, then, is the purpose of the book? It is simply this: to meet the intelligent layman on his own ground and, quietly and unhurriedly, to show him the inadequacy of any view of life other than that of the Hebrew-Christian tradition revealed in the Bible. To use one of the author's favorite phrases, it is addressed to "the

---

\**The Dawn of Personality* by Emile Cailliet. The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., Indianapolis. 232 pages. \$3.00

man of good will," by which is meant the educated layman who, while not hostile to Christianity, is yet on the periphery of faith, either through misunderstanding or lack of reliable knowledge. By the same token, it is not an apologetic; neither is it a theological treatise, nor an evangelistic presentation. As the title implies, it deals with personality's "dawn, though it ends by confronting the reader with the ultimate spiritual reality of the new life in Christ, it does this, not through a detailed explication of this reality but through pointing to the Bible as the revelation of this new life. As a matter of fact, the publishers do not even list *The Dawn of Personality* among their religious books.

It is important to remember this, for those who overlook a writer's purpose are liable to criticize unjustly. Dr. Cailliet's book is not above criticism; very few books are. But it should be judged on the ground of what it sets out to do. And it may be emphasized that it sets out to do a very worthy thing. Christians, especially conservative Christians, need to be more concerned about the many thoughtful men and women of good education, who through the secularism that has so largely captured American education as well as through an unnecessary equating of Christianity with obscurantism, have never really faced the Biblical view of life and eternity. It is out of a life-long concern for such people that this book was written, and it is in this context that it should be evaluated.

### III

With these things in mind we go on to see how the author accomplishes his purpose. Opening with the apt analogy of men to Robinson Crusoe who, on reaching his island, looked around to see what kind of place he was in, Dr. Cailliet defines his book as "a quest, not an argument" (p. 14) -- a quest that entails the exploration of "the remote district of which we are part, so as to understand how we came to be where we are and what we are" (pp. 14, 15); or, as he restates it, a quest that seeks to reply to the query, "What kind of place -- or situation -- am I in?" and its corollary, "What should I do about it?" (p. 22).

Three answers to these questions are considered. The first is the biological answer. Here Dr. Cailliet deals with the opposition between "the will to live" and "the call to adjustment," and shows that to seek for reality on the animal or biological level is a fallacy. The second is the answer from society. Here again "the will to live" and "the call to adjustment" are locked in a conflict that can never be reconciled on any sociological basis. The third answer is the way of knowledge, as epitomized by Greek philosophy, and this too leaves the searcher far short of his goal.

There follows a little chapter, entitled "The Ulterior Concern," which is of key significance. In it man is portrayed as a being who is uniquely confronted with an awareness of death and, being so confronted, must have a concern that goes beyond this world of time. "The taboo of transcendence will never silence this ulterior concern in a man worthy of the name. A man wants to know whether there is 'a meaning to it all' . . ." (p. 94).

The next chapter, entitled "The Inescapable Alternative," achieves a crucial clarification. Drawing upon Pascal's famous argument of the Wager, Dr. Cailliet makes it plain that, when it comes to the ultimate choice, there are only two alternatives -- the affirmation of God or the denial of God. There is no such thing as indefinite suspense of judgment in skepticism; "we are in the game" (p. 103). The only valid alternative is "the reality of God in a genuinely Biblical context. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob is not to be spoken of in terms of metaphysical notion or concept. He is real; He is the Living One, the Creator and Upholder of the universe . . . Does our whole being through feelings, thoughts, actions and reactions -- nay, in its most hidden or even unconscious motivation -- affirm God or deny Him? Better make sure of this before we go any further" (pp. 104, 105).

Under the head of "The Tension Within," the author proceeds to an analysis of present day religious profession as contrasted with secular thinking in which the inner tension between mind and spirit is brought to light. This leads to a discussion of "The Authentic and the Counterfeit," the former referring to "the total landscape of reality seen by the man whose clear and well informed intellect is neither deflected nor even darkened by false views or defective impulses" and the latter relating to the intellect, when "the will has departed from its God-given path to become a blind leader of the blind" (pp. 135, 136). In this connection, there is a brilliant classification of contemporary idolatry under the three heads of Baal, Moloch, and Mammon, Baal being the current exaltation of lust, Moloch the cult of cruelty, and Mammon the worship of wealth and the power of wealth. But it is not only material things that lead to the lust for power; ideologies also tend to this perversion. So we have the deviations of naturalism and scientism, which lead to false views of man and the world.

From this background, the thought turns to the true landscape of reality, the partial emergence of which is traced through the history of the sciences with their progress from abstraction, as in mathematics, to concreteness, as in physics and particularly in biology, in which life enters the picture. These lead to the human sciences, such as psychology, with its concern for personality. At

the end of this chapter, telling reference is made to Kirkegaard with his existential insistence on man's personal involvement with God in "fear and trembling." Then there enters the new perspective of a divine transfiguration of life.

This is expounded under the head, "Personality the Crown of Life." Three great thresholds are described, leading successively to "the blue mist of the lofty summit: the threshold of life, through which the organic takes its stand on inanimate matter; the threshold of consciousness, where mere organic awareness emerges into the consciousness of a rational soul; and finally, the much narrower and higher threshold of the 'new birth,' that of the transfiguration through which a new quality of life is ushered in" (p. 173). Here are some remarkable insights, such as the contrast between entropy (the one-way running down of energy) and metabolism (the "miraculous" exchange of material in the life process), and the distinction between individuality (a unit as distinct from a group) and personality ("individual rational nature endowed with a moral sense,") (p. 178). But personality only comes to its full realization when the third threshold is crossed through the new birth, and man, as a new creature in Christ becomes "an Act of God," possessing eternal life.

Some implications of this new birth are elaborated in the penultimate chapter, "intimation of the New Nature," And in the final chapter, which the author calls "The Discriminating Look," we are shown how the born-again personality sees the spiritual and eternal in place of the mundane and transitory. "The new quality of life ... implies a new way of looking at everything ... A divine simplicity now sees all things in one because the One God is apprehended in the whole of His Creation" (pp. 224, 225). Whereupon Dr. Cailliet points the reader to the Bible as the one book which above all others brings us the true landscape of reality and teaches us "the discriminating look." So he closes by returning to the analogy of Robinson Crusoe with which he began. When Crusoe found a Bible in the chest salvaged from the wreck, his life was changed. "'What kind of place am I in?' Let the perennial Robinson Crusoe we all are, remember," says Dr. Cailliet, "that this, his basic question only began to be answered with any degree of finality after the Bible had been brought out of a salvaged chest -- to be lived" (p. 232).

#### IV

This is a book that may well achieve its purpose of leading non-Christian educated men of good will out of their secularism into a serious consideration of the Biblical landscape of reality. Not only that but it is also a book that has much to give the educated believer who knows how to read with a discerning eye. For

such, its thoughtful reading will be a broadening experience. Here is no easy assumption of familiar patterns couched in the familiar phraseology. Rather does Dr. Cailliet provide a demonstration of how it is possible to meet an intelligent non-Christian largely on his own ground and bring him face to face with the fact of the living God and the essentiality of newness of life through Christ. He does this with a wealth of cultural allusion; the best in literature, philosophy, and music, as well as great concepts of science and mathematics provide him with a glowing tapestry of illustrations. Especially striking are the references to music (Beethoven, Berlioz, and Strauss), a field upon which Dr. Cailliet did not draw in *The Christian Approach to Culture*. The book is alive with brilliant insights; cases in point are the devastating comments on progressive education, the clear-eyed treatment of the current obsession with "adjustment," the incisive critique of the present state of the family, and the clarifying treatment of the history of science, to name but a few. Even more impressive is the whole mood which combines the relaxation of fascinating conversation with a deep and increasing sense of spiritual urgency. In short, the book will help the evangelical reader who has the education to follow the richly varied and subtle unfolding of Dr. Cailliet's thought. The Lord demands our best; committal to Christ involves the mind as well as the heart. Therefore, an author who can bring the legitimate treasures of culture into captivity to Christ is one from whom we may learn.

Along with this acknowledgment, however, honesty compels the mention of certain dangers inherent in Dr. Cailliet's method. Chief among these is that of being so anxious to win the secular man of good will that too much is conceded in the endeavor to meet him on his own ground. With all respect for Dr. Cailliet, the writer must confess that at certain points he has reservations. To be specific, there is what many evangelicals will feel to be, particularly in the light of the best conservative scholarship of our time, an unnecessary assumption of some of the debatable positions of the more liberal criticism of the Old Testament which are not actually so "assured" as their proponents insist. While careful study of these passages show that Dr. Cailliet has been at pains to guard and even to qualify his language, nevertheless the conservative reader who takes the classical Reformed view of Scripture associated with scholars like Warfield and Machen in the past and others like F. F. Bruce, and Berkouwer today, could wish for less of concessiveness at this point. Similar is the assumption of organic evolution as a fact. On this point, *The Christian Approach to Culture*, with its acute treatment of some of the perils of evolutionism gives us a better view of Dr. Cailliet's thinking.

These examples are typical of certain reservations which many conservative readers will share with the writer. Yet they are not the whole story. Nor would it be fair by taking them out of context to label Dr. Cailliet accordingly. There is another side of his book. When an author says, "The Bible is far less a record of man's search for God than of God's search for man," when he talks of the vicarious atonement, of sin, of Christ the God-Man, of eternal life, of the wonder of the redeemed soul, when he exalts the uniqueness of the Bible, and when he brings his book to a climax through insisting upon the necessity of personal regeneration as he quotes our Lord's words to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again," he can hardly be denied the fellowship of evangelicals. This is something that needs to be said at a time when, along with a renaissance of evangelical scholarship, there persists a tendency to judge concerned and honest thinkers on the basis of certain points that, while important, are not themselves the center of the Gospel. After all, it was St. Paul who wrote, "No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit."

*The Dawn of Personality* is a beautiful book that may well be used to lead earnest souls to the life-changing truth of the Bible. It is also a book that has much to give the educated conservative in all fields of thought. But it is, as the author intended, simply the exposition of a "dawn." As such it does not go all the way in spelling out the whole story of redemption. Let us hope that Dr. Cailliet will be led some day to give us a sequel in which he will use his great gifts of intellect and his genius for freshness of statement, to deal with the grand particularities of Christianity and to set forth the full Biblical answer to man's need as it is perfectly met in the Lord Jesus Christ.