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CHRISTIANITY AND MODERN KNOWLEDGE, OR, RELIGION AT THE CROSS-ROADS.

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THE problem of relating Modern Knowledge to the Christian Faith is the most immediate and urgent of all the problems which face the Christian community to-day. The bases for the solution of many other problems depend upon it ; since it concerns the ultimate foundations on which a constructive view of God, Man and the Universe (and therefore of Christianity in all its varied aspects) may be effected. The criticism of religious ideas is necessary so as to bring them into consistent relations with the larger whole of knowledge.

Among the clergy ignorance of Modern Knowledge abounds, while distrust, apathy and indecision are characteristic attitudes towards it. The drift of educated youth from organised Christianity will continue unless they can be shown that the Church is more concerned about ultimate truth than the mere continuance of an inherited Tradition.

Christianity is a life—a life of fellowship with God in Christ Jesus. All else that is Christian flows from that experience. Doctrines define and formulate that experience in intellectual terms. Institutions and Rites constitute its social embodiments. The Doctrines, Institutions and Rites, however, are important and almost indispensable in forming the environment in which the Christian experience may be generated.

Three stages in the development of Christian thought may be noted :

- (1) *Theology and Christology.*
- (2) *The psychological re-expression of Theology (i.e. its manward aspect) in the doctrines of sin and grace, freedom and grace, grace and the means of grace.*
- (3) *Doctrines concerning the constitution of the Church.*

These Doctrines were hammered out amid the intellectual blows which mark the history of Doctrines.

They are the fruit of nearly 1,500 years' thought on the primary experience of the Christian life, and express that experience in the categories of the Culture during which they arose.

This Ancient-Medieval Culture included a definite logic, philosophy, psychology, and science, as well as a view of history of a very definite type. It was a unified system of knowledge—the conception of God, Man and the Universe attained by antiquity after centuries of labour. The Summa of S. Thomas Aquinas (for instance) attempted to cover the whole content of human knowledge

and to settle for ever changeless paths for the human mind to walk in.

Christianity, however (like all life), is essentially creative; it was not born of Ancient Culture, nor is it for ever to be chained to it. The Catholic Tradition has not yet transcended that Culture, though Science has raised itself above it.

Modern scientific discoveries, modern thought, and a new knowledge of history, have effected with increasing acceleration a profound revolution in our conceptions of God, Man and the Universe during the past 400 years. It is a revolution and not an orderly development, and it is still in progress.

Most of the old categories of thought have gone: a geocentric universe, solid indestructible atoms, creation by fiat a few thousand years ago, a dualistic psychology, changeless perfection. In their place we have the Universe of modern astronomy, dynamic (probably spontaneous) atoms, æons of creative evolution, the human soul rooted in inherited instinctive life, the relativity of time and space, change and movement the fundamental realities of the universe.

The "a priori" logic of the ancients has given way to the "a posteriori" logic of modern science.

Gone is the distinction of two incompatible worlds of "nature" and "grace," the "sacred" and the "secular," distinctions unknown to primitive man. The "higher" and the "lower" are but aspects of one life. The old conceptions resulted in a divided and incoherent personality, the separation of the higher sentiments from the biological functions, and the limitation of religion to a relatively narrow field of human experience. In the new conceptions, religion is concerned with the whole man, and with the whole of life.

To sum up the difference between the ancient and modern conceptions of God, Man and the Universe, we may say that a fundamentally transcendental static and catastrophic conception has been replaced by a fundamentally immanent dynamic and evolutionary conception.

In the realm of organised Christianity also there has been a profound revolution. Protestantism was the protestation (i.e. an earnest declaration) of the fundamental truth of religion—the *IMMEDIATE* apprehension of God in the human soul. Man meets the Divine in the depths of his being and by dependence on and union with God in Christ wins a new spiritual content which is rooted in an Eternal, Immanent, yet Transcendent Life.

All that Church Tradition conceived as *MEDIATED through its* elaborate system was held to be appropriated by subjective faith. Faith and Conscience (immanent and subjective) stood in antithetic relation to Sacraments and Authority (transcendent and objective).

The Theses of the Reformers involved, either explicitly or implicitly, a revision of Church Tradition, and therefore of Doctrine also. They were prepared to test all doctrines afresh by a true understanding of the Scriptures.

The Reformation led the Western Church to fix its faith on the basis of the theological work of the Middle Ages, and therein

the Roman Church Doctrine was stereotyped in the categories of an Ancient Culture from which there is no appeal. The Pseudo-Catholic Tradition was (and still is) regarded as not perfectible. (Shall man whose days are as grass, rise up and say that he has made a statement about God, Man and the Universe which shall not need revision?)

We owe a real debt to Protestant Theology, for in emphasising the immanence of God and the immediacy of the Christian experience, it anticipated in Theology the modern immanent conceptions of God, Man and the Universe, and thus prepared the way for reconciling Christianity with the scientific and philosophic thought of to-day. Christianity in Protestant lands is working itself out of the forms it was once compelled to assume, and a re-valuation of the whole content of human knowledge, and its co-ordination with Christian experience is an indispensable part of the process. As Dean Inge has said, "The work of the Reformation still awaits completion, and I believe that our Church and our Nation may complete it."

The task of giving intellectual expression to the fundamental truths of Christian experience in conformity with scientific and historic knowledge is immense. It must be undertaken by those within the Christian circle, for both knowledge and experience are necessary. It lies beyond the scope of the many, but there is a real work for the many to perform. They must learn to recognise the fact that there is a problem to solve and a work to complete. They must see that those who are capable have the opportunity of making the attempt, and that they neglect nothing of the material out of which a constructive formulation of the Faith should be made. It is almost inevitable that mistakes will be made. But the function of the mass of Christians should be that of intelligent interest and sympathetic criticism. The decisions of the Ancient Church Councils came to be regarded as authoritative only after they had been accepted by the Church as a whole. The general consensus of Christian opinion must operate in like manner to-day—not in a blind refusal to accept new light in order to conserve an old Tradition—but in an intelligent examination of the fruits of Christian scholarship and discussion, so that whatsoever is true and lovely, whatsoever makes the Faith more intelligent and edifying, may be incorporated into our expression of the Faith; and whatsoever may be found to be misleading or obsolete may be set on one side.

There appears to be a large amount of mistrust which really springs from anxiety concerning the Faith. The conflicts between Science and Religion, Philosophy and Faith, have been long and sustained; but they need not blind our eyes to the fact that every department of knowledge and investigation is contributing its quota to the richness of our conceptions of God, Man and the Universe. Faith must work for the reconciliation. The Theologian of to-day has the advantage of a larger and better sifted body of material than his predecessor in any former time. He may therefore be

spared the errors which befell former thinkers, and for which they could hardly be blamed. The abundance of the material has made the task harder by increasing the complexity of the problem. But we crave for more light, and if we are to gain it, we must not shut off any source from which it may stream.

The limitations of Science and Philosophy are becoming increasingly recognised. The supposed opposition of the scientific and the religious view of the universe is now seen to be an illusion. Both are necessary for a full knowledge of the universe and life. The philosophies have failed to discover a complete answer to our questions and problems; though they have shed much light upon them. The failure is due to the fact that they assumed that all our apprehensions of external reality can be expressed in terms of knowledge, doubt, and ignorance. They have really ignored the possibility of Faith in a Divine self-revelation as a vehicle of apprehension. Science has come to our aid by revealing to us an evolving Universe with movement and progressive change as its fundamental characteristics. The unity of Nature is abundantly testified. The eternal ground of all existence must be taken for granted. And the conclusion that this ground is the real source of all the progressive achievements of the human mind is wellnigh inevitable. The urge to completeness is found to be a fundamental instinct of all life. May we not claim that Religion is the highest expression of that instinct, through which man rises above mere sensuous existence to moral and rational life, and through Faith to fellowship with God and Eternal Life? The wonder of man's moral and spiritual evolution is disclosed, and bears witness to an Immanent yet Transcendent God ever seeking man and aiding man's highest endeavours.

Science really bears witness to the fact that the Universe and man within it has a future, a future of which as yet we can only dream, Faith stretching out into that future is still the assurance of things hoped for.

A passion for reality is the dominant note of the modern mind—a desire to face up squarely to the facts of experience in all their implications. The soul of the race will not rest until it has found a religious faith that can satisfy both its conscience and its intelligence; that is the reconciliation which we need to-day. Jesus still reigns supreme in the hearts of men, though they may not understand Him nor follow Him.

The new knowledge of man and the universe revealed by Science—the new view of History disclosed by Archæology, Anthropology and Literary Research—the new conceptions of the limitations of knowledge displayed in the criticisms of the various systems of Philosophy—have provided the material for a possible reconciliation between Faith and Knowledge which has been hitherto impossible.

The Reformation was incomplete because it lacked the material for a complete synthetic view of God, Man and the Universe. Its knowledge of origins was defective. Its dualistic psychology conceived the soul as a separately constituted and specially derived

element in human nature. It lacked the unifying and dynamic conception of Evolution. Progress in the modern sense of that term was inconceivable.

On the practical side of Christianity, however, it reached down to essentials. The essential nature of Christianity, it declared, is a personal fellowship with God in Christ Jesus. The principles of authority and freedom were rooted in this experience. The analogical interpretation of Sacraments and Orders, whereby Grace was conceived as a mysterious force transmitted through persons, things and acts (which could easily degenerate into superstition and magic) was set on one side. Grace was interpreted as the blessings which inhere in the personal contacts between God and man. Institutions and Rites which generate these personal contacts between God and man are therefore real expressions of essential Christianity. In the recognition of this principle lies the one hope of the reunion of Christendom, and therein is revealed the essential catholicity of the Churches.

The Movement which took us back to Jesus of the Gospels and to Jesus behind the Gospels has been a wholesome discipline. It has pricked the bubble of belief that the modern catholic conceptions of the Church, Orders, and Sacraments can be verified by an appeal to the Gospels. It shows that they can only be justified on the assumption that Jesus was not always conscious of His purposes and plans, and that the sub-apostolic minds saw clearly where His vision was dim, and that His followers could interpret Jesus better than He could interpret Himself in the days of His flesh. To call these conceptions and all that they involve the posthumous work of Jesus is not to mend matters. To read the Gospel aright we must read it in the light of all Christian experience and all knowledge. It is through such a renewed reading of the life and teaching of Jesus, that the experience of redemption is possible, for there we meet the fountal source of all spiritual life.

The new philosophical emphasis on religious experience, the new psychological studies of individual biography, the new emphasis on intuition as against intellect, all tend to reinforce the evangelical interpretation of Christianity, and are preparing the educated public mind for the acceptance of its central message—that ultimate Reality does not yield its secret to intellectual searching, because that Reality is personal, and can only be known through personal relations, and that within the race a Personality has appeared who, in perfect fellowship and correspondence with this personal Reality can equate the race and Him, through a supreme moral act (the Cross).

Love, Faith, Patience, Hope, and Courage are all necessary in this age of transition. The Incarnation alone gives coherence, sanity and encouragement to all our learning and efforts. Faith has no real ground for anxiety or uncertainty.

The Truth as it is in Jesus is the standard of our efforts. A true understanding of the Gospel, in the light of modern knowledge, will bring in a new era of dynamic religious life, and His promises

—“the Holy Spirit will guide you,” “Seek and ye shall find”—are the pledge and assurance that the task is worthy of our efforts.

Two ways lie before us, the one through new knowledge, new hope, and new adventure to a deeper apprehension of Truth and newness of life in Christ; the other to maintain a static outlook on Christianity which would leave the Church a static and sterile institution in the midst of a changing progressive universe.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD. Addresses given at the Cromer Convention, 1932. S.P.C.K. 2s. 6d. net.

The addresses given at the Cromer Convention last year on “The Spirit of the Living God” form a much-needed exposition of the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the special problems of the day. The Convention was fortunate in its speakers. They have combined the power of intellectual treatment with spiritual discernment, and have thus given the proceedings of the Convention a special and effective character. The opening addresses of the Archbishop of York on “The Spirit of God” and “The Holy Spirit and Human Personality” provide a peculiarly effective introduction to the whole subject. The power of the Holy Spirit came in a new way to the disciples through their companionship with Jesus Christ, and the same power will come upon us as we make more constant and deep our personal companionship with Jesus Christ. Human personality must have “a concentrated passivity over against the Holy Spirit” in order that the Holy Spirit may do His work in us and through us. Canon L. Mannering emphasised the vital need of a rediscovery of Pentecost to secure the transforming of personal life. The Rev. R. O. P. Taylor treated of “The Holy Spirit in the Universe” in a striking and original way. Two addresses by Canon C. E. Raven set out in fresh form “The Spirit creating the Fellowship” and “The Spirit Energising Fellowship.” Canon A. W. Davies considered the work of the Church in his address on “The Holy Spirit and the Christian Task.” The Bishop of Croydon, on “The Spirit inspiring Worship,” laid down the principles of true worship. The Four Bible Readings by Archdeacon Storr are examples of the clear and inspiring exegesis which we have learned to expect from him. Their subjects were “The Spirit in the Earthly Life of Jesus,” “The Spirit as the Interpreter of Christ,” “One Body and One Spirit,” and “The Spirit and the Divine Creativeness.”

The Christian Church and the Christian State is a useful booklet by Mr. Robert Stokes, B.A. (Church Book Room, 6d. net), in which the case put forward by the Church Self-Government League for an establishment in England on the model of the Church of Scotland is critically examined and its weaknesses exposed.