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THE RESPONSE OF JESUS CHRIST TO MODERN THOUGHT.

By PRESIDENT E. Y. MULLINS, D.D., LL.D.,
LOUISVILLE, KY.

The biological law is that organ and environment must correspond if life is to persist. The preacher must obey this law if his ministry is to be other than a voice crying in the wilderness of empty pews, or the echo of another voice which in some past age cried with power to living men.

Modern thought, the preacher's environment in part, is a very variable quantity. It is like the "borealis race that flits ere you can point its place." The young preacher is often bewildered by recent thought when he contemplates it in its modern, more modern, and most modern forms, in the many departments of man's rational activity, and in the endless variety of its manifestations. In particular is the young minister stirred to his depths by the fact that practically all lines of modern thought somehow or other run back into vital contact with his own sphere and function.

Not the least trying aspect of these forms of modern thought is their frequent contradictory character from the point of view of the preacher's own message to the world. It is very easy to illustrate this statement in many

ways. For example, in the realm of the philosophy of religion, one form of modern idealism asserts that incarnation and atonement are universal principles of human and divine life, but at no time taking unique form, as in the case of Jesus of Nazareth. Another form of modern idealism, as with Professor Eucken, insists on the new birth by divine power as man's only means of triumph and self-realization—but a new birth with which the historical Jesus has no necessary relation. Yet another idealist, Professor Royce, leaves the problem of Jesus wholly on one side and asserts that the Holy Spirit in the beloved community, the Church, is the key to the meaning of the world. Modern idealism again, as represented by Blewett and Bowne, tells us that a unique incarnation and atonement, as in Jesus, are the sole means of interpreting a personal God in terms of love.

In the realm of the psychology of religion and from the point of view of Christian experience, the same variety arises in the views expressed. To one modern, as in the case of Höfding, religious experience is a merely subjective play of the emotions; to Professor James it is a birth from above, a supernatural life supervening upon a dying to sin and self, but the supernatural power remains unknown. Jesus cannot be claimed as its author. Another modern, who shaped his system expressly from the point of view of modern thought, Albrecht Ritschl, claims that the one thing certainly known to us is that one thing which, according to James, we cannot know, viz., that the new life is mediated to us through Jesus Christ.

These examples could be indefinitely extended, but it is not necessary. It is clear that the young minister who desires to make terms with modern thought has before him a complex and difficult problem, unless he can find some simple and straightforward method which will relieve the strain and stress of the many problems.

The dangers to him are very real. He may lose patience with all modern thought and fall back on the stere-

otyped forms of tradition, and lose touch with modern life; or he may be so impressed and absorbed by some modern criterion of truth that he will lose contact with the gospel itself; or else he may become so weakened in conviction as to the truth of his message that the note of spiritual authority will die out of it entirely. These are real dangers, but there is an alternative to all of them. He may squarely face his task and seek to meet honestly the issues presented, and find himself in the freedom of a world of great spiritual realities, in which not chaos and confusion reign, but order and beauty. With his gospel he may thus become a loyal and self-respecting citizen in the modern kingdom of the spirit.

It is, of course, true that Jesus spoke no direct word concerning modern thought and its problems, so far as the New Testament records go. And yet he has a response which is only the more impressive and satisfying because it is indirect. For the minister of the gospel today it is a task and obligation of the greatest moment to find, if possible, what it is that Jesus says to meet these great issues and answer these great needs. No task could well be more fascinating in itself or fraught with graver issues for the welfare of mankind. For men will perish from lack of spiritual food unless the ministry can truly find itself in the modern world and can bring to men a satisfying message.

The answer of Jesus to modern thought is found in what He said, in what He was, and in what He did: His gospel, His incarnation and His atoning work.

His response to modern thought, then, may be gathered up in the following statements:

1. In His assertion of the autonomy and independence of religion, Jesus thereby declares the freedom and autonomy of all forms of human culture. The modern world is quite familiar with the ideal of freedom and autonomy in the realm of science and philosophy. The gospel of Jesus carries that ideal as an implicit teaching

at its very heart. But the truth which has too often been forgotten in more recent thought is the freedom and autonomy of religion itself. Religion interpreted in its own legitimate terms, religion as the direct approach of the soul to God, religion as the satisfaction of man's craving for the eternal, for redemption and moral perfection, religion as the freedom of the spirit of man in his supreme relation—this is the assertion of Jesus.

Jesus says to us: All the great values and satisfactions have their place. Science observes nature and formulates her laws. She applies the principle of causality. Philosophy builds up its systems on the data supplied by science. She works with the principle of rationality. Religion seeks blessedness and peace in an ethical and spiritual redemption. She works with the principle of personality. These provinces in the Kingdom of the Spirit have engaged in many wars with each other because one or another of them has not been content to be a province, and has sought rather to be the Kingdom itself. Discord and strife arise when one value, need, satisfaction, claims to rule in all realms. Physical science finds nature replete with power. But when a philosopher of religion, as was recently done, seeks to define religion as the recognition of an impersonal power outside ourselves and the effort to adjust ourselves to it, he simply ignores the characteristic element in religion in the interest of a characteristic element in physical science. A man learning to walk on stilts, an aeroplanist balancing in the clouds, a herd of buffalo fleeing before a prairie fire fulfill the requirements of the definition. An impersonal object is a non-religious object. Religion has no meaning save as fellowship between the divine and human persons. Jesus made valid forever the autonomy and independence of religion, which brings its own credentials, submits to no alien power, and refuses to be explained away by any subtle process of reasoning.

2. Again, the response of Jesus to modern thought is seen in His creation of a world of spiritual realities which

meets the modern demand for reality in all spheres. The love of reality is a scientific passion. Jesus has made it a religious passion. Make-believes in the spiritual sphere must all go. Neither God nor man can endure them. Jesus has made the spiritual universe real. Men were saying a few years ago: See how the physical universe has been extended into an infinitude of past time. See its magnitudes and illimitable reaches in space. Man is dwarfed. He has taken himself too seriously by much. Let him cower and tremble in the presence of these vast forces. Yet man has not cowered and trembled. He has dared to face the æons and the systems and the cosmic magnitudes with the unquenchable conviction that he is greater than any physical force, than all physical forces. Neither the microscope nor the telescope has found anything in the universe so significant, so startling, so wonderful as man himself. But this is due to the fact that Jesus had created the spiritual universe and set man in its context. He has kept alive the spiritual realities which feed the soul, and without Him and His revelation man would have been crushed by the terrific assault of materialism. For a great host of men and women the spiritual universe is more real than rocks and trees, than the round ocean or the living air or the starry heavens, because Jesus has made it so.

3. The answer of Jesus to modern thought is found further in the central meaning of the spiritual world He has made real. The core of that world of reality is God, the Father. God became a historic fact in Jesus. This met the ancient and it meets the modern need. Men can not feed on abstractions about God, as a vine cannot climb a moonbeam, as a tree cannot root itself in a fog bank. Philosophy was in unstable equilibrium. It is yet in unstable equilibrium, so that a modern pessimist has said philosophy is the search of a blind man in a dark room for a black cat which is not there. I do not agree with this. Jesus puts philosophy on the clew. We know

noumenal reality through Him. The idea of a first cause leaves you cold. The idea of a first cause with a purpose interests you a little. The idea of a first cause with a purpose who cares for men warms the heart. The idea of a purposive first cause who cares and who individualizes us and numbers the hairs of our heads wakes us into glad song, and when we learn that this great loving, purposive, individualizing omnipotence is our Father who folds us to His bosom, then all the joy bells of the heart begin to ring. And when this rounded and glorious thought of God, which embodies the partial results of all higher speculation and experience into a new and living unity—when this round and glorious conception is taken out of the realm of mere thought and made living in the redemptive experience in man's inner life, new power and new hope are born. The heart now dares to climb and soar, and man discovers that the spiritual universe matches his spiritual nature as the physical answers to his intellect. The true function of the preacher is to make God real to men. Unless his ministry does this, it comes short. There is no road to this power save by self-discipline into a constant realization of the spiritual realities which Jesus has brought near. It is this that makes the religion of Jesus impregnable against attack. It is eternity made real for men in time. It is the supreme reality unveiled to an age taught by science to hate make-believes and shams.

4. The response of Jesus to modern thought is seen further in the internal view He brings concerning God. "No one knoweth the Son save the Father, and no one knoweth the Father save the Son and he to whom the Son willeth to reveal him," said Jesus. "No one hath seen God. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him," said John. This is the ontology of the gospel. What God is in Himself we know through Jesus to this extent. Eternal love reigns in the Godhead. God is love. God might teach or enjoin love

in a gospel without an incarnation. But only love incarnate could reveal that God is love. The essentiality of love in God could only appear in act. Otherwise, love might remain a mere relative term of accommodation to us with no corresponding reality in God. Hence, as Jesus said, the cross is the glory of Christ and of God. It proved that the divine can stoop and suffer, and thus in a marvelous manner enlarges our conception of the infinite riches and fullness of the divine resources.

Now, all this revelation in and through the Son of God is the climax and goal, the satisfying answer to many phases of modern thought. You see it clearly, as follows: "Matter is the key to being," said materialism. "Mind is the key to matter," said idealism. "Personality is the key to mind," said personalism. "God is the key to personality, and love the key to the conception of God, and incarnation the key to love," said Jesus, and I might continue and say: Atonement is the key to incarnation; and redemption is the key to atonement; and the kingdom of God where holy love rules, is the key to redemption.

What, then, is the significance of this wonder-crowded physical universe which science has unveiled? It is the sphere for the adequate dramatization and evolution of holy love, the love essential in God, a love so vast that it requires an infinitude of time to unfold it and of space to display it, a love so high that nothing can express it save the ideas of Fatherhood and Sonship as these obtain in the divine nature itself. The necessity which reigns in nature is a necessity whose end and goal was freedom, as freedom appears in man, who is the end and goal of nature. The end and goal of freedom is Sonship and holy love from man to God in response to God's holy love. The physical phenomena of man's universal religious life mark man's instinctive effort to realize his divinely prescribed destiny. The end of the cosmos thus becomes the manifestation of the sons of God. So that the cosmic process, as well as the processes of history and grace, is the

gradual elaboration and outworking of the eternal holy love within the divine nature itself. Thus Jesus alone supplies a view which unifies the elements of reality, the fragments of human experience, which sheds a divine light upon the forward and backward path of man, and leaves him free with an absolute freedom to find himself and realize himself in all spheres of activity. And the Kingdom of God is the redemptive result and ethical and social goal of the whole movement.

The sum of all, then, is as follows: Jesus meets and matches the autonomy of science and philosophy with the autonomy of religion. He matches the realities of the spiritual order. He meets the rational demand of the soul which seeks God with the religious demand of the soul which finds God. And finally, Jesus meets the knowledge of holy love as a relative fact of human life with the revelation of holy love as an essential fact of the divine life and thus constitutes it as the eternal basis and goal of all our being, thinking and doing.