

Religion and Reality.

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No one, unless he be swayed by some peculiar preconception of Progress, is likely to deny the possibility of a new advance in the lengthy history of Religion. Nor will he refuse to admit how profound has been the effect of religious and ethical advances upon the development of social life and thought. But Progress is also marked by a growth of knowledge, an increase of ability, and a widening of interests, such that we feel we have a better grasp of what is Real and True, and a mastery of the Universe immeasurably superior to that possessed by any other age or people whose religious, spiritual, or ethical ideas, on the other hand, we may whole-heartedly appreciate. All that is said to-day of the inadequacy of religious doctrine, of the reconstruction of Religion—in a word, all adverse criticism of Religion to-day, means that the knowledge we feel we have of Reality does not permit us to find the same degree or quality of Reality in the sphere of Religion. Yet, a religion can only claim to be living when it is in harmony with what we consider to be most Real and True—if it be not better to say that a living religion should be able to claim to stand nearest to Reality. But, as it is, Religion and Reality, at the present day, seem to be on quite distinct levels of thought, whereas, all hope of the progress of Western civilization lies in a successful, natural, and rational adjustment of our ideas in the 'religious' realm with those in what may be called the 'non-religious.'

Individuals may keep their diverse thoughts and ideas in separate water-tight compartments, so to say, or they may ignore the inconvenient and discordant elements; but what is requisite is a state of mental equilibrium in the individual and in the environment, so that a place may be found in the latter for the ordinary types of religious and non-religious thought. Only in this way can individuals, varying in experience, temperament, and mental equipment, co-operate for the welfare of the whole to an extent unknown to our present conditions of heterogeneous convictions and aims. The history of social life and thought shows that the type of co-ordination required has been and can be gained, and that there can be an equilibrium the very antithesis of the 'psychical unrest' of the day.

Such an equilibrium involves a social harmony and a harmonious inter-relationship in the thought of the environment. But this harmony cannot be reached by 'going back' to some source or inspiration that is bound up in the thought and knowledge of an outgrown past, nor by the artificial elimination of whatever is felt to be incompatible, but by an advance to a new stage in the evolution of thought, where the strengthening and unifying elements in an earlier stage of social equilibrium will reappear in some new form. Just as the psychological study of 'conversion' shows how the individual can remain 'true to type' in spite of a profound spiritual rebirth, just as the comparative study of religions reflects a reassertion of fundamental ideas in newer and more developed forms, so the new co-ordination would be no 'return' but a 'reassertion'; although there might be profound advances in the general world of thought, even as resemblance between 'lower' and 'higher' organisms in the scale of organic evolution is accompanied by a great increase of capability and a wider environment.

However impossible it may be to conceive such a new stage, positive advances in thought can be realized by reference to any of the older Oriental and non-Greek methods of treating the subjects covered by our own Western mental and physical sciences. Indeed, we may see among ourselves certain tendencies in thought and research which are promising an entire reshaping of some past methods and lines of inquiry, suggesting that a future age may be able to look back upon ours in much the same way as we regard the 'pseudo-sciences' of the past. . . .

Meanwhile these years are forcing us to realize the tragic effect of ideas, bodies of thought, etc., which animate Prussian militarism, Bolshevism, and all else that we can deplore. The raging masses in Europe are at least giving expression to ideals of Freedom, Equality, and Self-determination; though we have to recognize that these need to form part of a complex of ordered life and thought, and in accordance with ideals of true Justice and a progressive Democracy if Society is to progress. What the War held together, for

defence or attack, now tends to disintegrate, as the greater unifying ideas weaken. The tremendous experiences of life and death have stirred men to some newer consciousness of the mysteries and the problems of the Universe in which they find themselves. The 'broad masses' have become self-conscious—there is a growth of personality, and they tend to find leaders among those who, from the 'middle-class' point-of-view, are extreme or fanatical. The progress of social life and thought is endangered by the possibility of anarchy and chaos, an intellectual retrogression or decadence is even feared. Perhaps, therefore, one should more clearly recognize that the great task is to educate, not the masses, but the classes—the teachers, not the taught. Will it not be agreed that, where Religion at all events is concerned, the difficulty is not to persuade the relatively uneducated, but the intelligent, the reflective, and the relatively educated? The real progress of thought has been due to the mental 'middlemen.' The awakening of the 'middle classes' which we are now witnessing is the unconscious attempt at a 'class' compromise between social extremes. But the true progress of social life and thought lies not with the 'proletariat,' as the false theory has it, but with the broad average level of *thought* which is peculiar to no one *class*, but links together and can adjust both social and intellectual extremes.

There is a characteristic impatience of thought to-day, a preference for 'direct action'—especially revolutionary action, although it should be enough to cite the names of Woodrow Wilson and of Masaryk to prove how effectively thought contributes to permanently useful action. Unfortunately, we are too apt to be swayed by words and labels. Imperfect and hasty conceptions of Religion are undoubtedly responsible for much of the present chaos, because conceptions of Religion and of Reality are interrelated. To say of data (beliefs, practices, etc.) that they are 'religious' does not dispose of them. Personal feeling and experience have normally made us accept and use the category 'Religion,' in order to express a certain distinctiveness. If, in course of time, the 'religious' diverges from the 'non-religious' and conflicts, the comparative method of study reveals fundamental points of contact between the distinctively 'religious' and the related data which are not so. The religious and the non-religious planes of experience cannot be ultimately severed, and our

Comparative Religion enters upon a new stadium when it is fully realized that, while Religion to the 'religious' individual can connote the supremest realities, it is possible to suggest an explanation of the fact why ideas of Reality, as understood by the non-religious individuals, differ as they do from those of the religious. While, on the one side, we may say that there are ultimate realities, variously apprehended by men varying in prior experience, temperament, and mental equipment; on the other side, it is beyond doubt that modern comparative studies are throwing invaluable light upon what may be called the morphology and the physiology of thought, *i.e.* of the bodies of belief and conviction which make or mar our lives.

Conceptions of the relations between man and man and between God and Man are remarkably inter-related. Ideas of Divine and of Human governance are intimately interconnected. Our highest ethical or moral ideals are not supposed by us—if we reflect—to be contrary to the order of the Universe: the supremest religious convictions are not what they claim to be if they are below the ethical. Although, at one time, the religion of the day has tolerated what morality condemned, and, at another, the morality and ethics have been inferior to the religion, the great stages in the development of social life and thought are marked by a congruence of thought, because the Ultimate Realities are apprehended congruously—and the diverse aspects of thought are co-ordinated. So, to take an example, if Religion were to be reconstructed, our ideas of a League of Nations would be regulated by our convictions of the relations between God and Man, and the highest ideals of human behaviour would be in harmony with the consciousness of Reality transcending Space and Time.

The simple fact remains that, if there were no underlying Realities such that they could be formulated as they are in Theism, there could be no intelligent study of Religion. The vicissitudes and variations in Religion can be understood in a more or less 'natural' manner; but, to employ a very imperfect figure, unless we make certain assumptions to account for what is so variously 'reflected' by the human 'mirrors'—and we can quite objectively study both the 'reflections' and the 'mirrors'—the study of Religion will always be below the intellectual requirements of the age. It is not merely that the 'religious' ideas of God, life after death, etc., are demanded by men's hearts, it

is that the actual data of religious and non-religious thought, and the relation between them, are such that only certain assumptions allow us to pursue the study of this great subject. Here one may see the rise of a new apologetic—a new challenge, for one is also led to the conclusion that, when thought is co-ordinated, the religious conceptions of the Universe will stand nearer to the Ultimate Realities than the non-religious. And this is only another way of saying that the former represent a deeper and fuller expression of man's personality.

Our conceptions of Reality are vital both for the development of personality and for the progress of the environment. If there be a moral order we hinder all progress by acting contrary to it. The more our actions are in accord with the Ultimate Realities, whatever these be, the greater their effectiveness. Hence, just as a scientific or a moral fact, once clearly recognized, cannot be cast aside with impunity, so, once we are conscious of something felt to be real and true, an advance must be made at all costs, if there is not to be retrogression or decadence. The torch is borne by the individuals or people who have become more conscious and have striven after that new co-ordination of experience and thought which marks a new stage in psychical development. Their lives, when so regulated after their newer knowledge of the Ultimate Realities, become fuller and more effective, their influence wider, and this because they

have come into nearer touch with the realities of the Universe and have obtained a greater mastery over an environment which, in its turn, is vaster than it was before.

A positive development of thought is indispensable if our civilization is to be purified and enabled to progress. This is far from saying that Religion must be adjusted to Science, or *vice versa*: the history of thought does not suggest so simple—and so one-sided—a solution. Thought has become international, the accumulation of data is so immense, the retrospect of historical development so lengthy, the knowledge of cosmic and human evolution so rich, that any further stage of progress would have to take these up and pass beyond them. Western civilization may decay, a new growth may commence—just as Western civilization superseded that which preceded it—but there is absolutely nothing to suggest that our civilization 'must' persist or 'must' disappear.

Granted that the problems of the age are real enough in all conscience, it is only by raising them to a higher level, and by associating them with the problems of the greatest realities of the Universe, that they can be successfully handled. A new enthusiasm will then be generated—let it not be forgotten that Bolshevik and allied movements are also moved by an enthusiasm!—but it will be one inspired by the highest realities, in harmony with the purest justice, and fortified by its reliance upon the true progress of knowledge.

In the Study.

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR.

Eighth Sunday after Trinity.

INTIMACY.

'At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.'—Jn 14²⁰.

'YE in me. I in you.' That is a companionship which we can know something of. It can be a direct experience of our own. Jesus Christ, come in the flesh, moving about among us on earth, talking, healing, blessing, purging, sanctifying, has made intimacy between Himself and us to be a very real matter of flesh and blood. That gathers and grows in intensity of experience; it

becomes a personal love with a more and more definite meaning and purpose.

This affectionate and delightful intimacy gives us the best idea that we can form of what the life of God really is in its Divine essence. 'I in the Father, and ye in me, and I in you.' 'Just what I am in you, and you in me, that I am in the Father. My life in communion with you is parallel with, corresponds with, the life that I live in communion with the Father.' So our Lord says. Let us take Him at His word and see how far it carries us. Put it in this way. We want to be able to think of God; to know what the word 'God' means; to give it some intelligible reality;