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by

between Religion and Science.

An Inquiry into the Relations

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND MODERN THOUGHT;

PREFACE

The title of this thesis is Christian Faith and Modern Thought, and its purpose is to enquire into the present relations between the Christian religion and contemporary secular philosophy. At first sight this might seem an overly ambitious undertaking, but one very important fact serves to reduce it to manageable proportions. The spirit or attitude of "Modern Thought" is in very large measure the creation of "Modern Science", and the Christian religion faces in this same science its most serious challenge to its claim to reveal "the life, the truth, the way". A study of the relations between Christian Faith and Modern Thought must of necessity concentrate on the conflict, real or alleged, between religion and science.

We shall approach the problem by considering the the main tenets of the three philosophical schools, Pragmatist, Realist, and Idealist, and shall then examine what each conceives the relative importance of religion and science to be and the relation between them. It is this approach which justifies the choice of title; we believe it indicates the nature and scope of the inquiry better than an alternative such as Religion and

Science. We have allowed the latter to stand in the sub-title, however, as an indication of where the main problem lies.

As to the importance of the subject, there ought to be general agreement. Alfred North Whitehead has written: "It seems as though, during the last half-century, the results of science and the beliefs of religion had come into a position of frank disagreement, from which there can be no escape, except by abandoning the clear teaching of science, or the clear teaching of religion. . . . When we consider what religion is for mankind, and what science is, it is no exaggeration to say that the future course of history depends upon the decision of this generation as to the relations between them. We have here the two strongest forces (apart from the mere impulse of the various senses) which influence men, and they seem to be set one against the other - the force of our religious intuitions, and the force of our impulse to accurate observation and logical deduction". (1)

Confronted with this conflict, the individual has three ways open to him. He may affirm as irrevocable truth some particular formulation of the Christian Faith and ascribe all that we understand by Modern Science to the machinations of the Evil One. This attitude is known as Fundamentalism. Or, he may cling just as dogmatically to the latest hypotheses of science as a revelation of

(1) Science and the Modern World, pp. 224-225.

Ultimate Reality and dismiss religion as an outmoded superstition. This attitude, which we may describe as Dogmatic Materialism, is, perhaps, less common than it was half a century ago. (1) The third way is to discover some method of thinking religion and science together, an approach which will do justice to the facts of man's religious consciousness without flying in the face of the assured results of scientific investigation, or, conversely, will conform to the legitimate demands of scientific method without denying the claims of man's moral and religious experience. This attitude is known in religious circles as Modernism, and it includes thinkers whose outlook varies all the way from orthodox theism to non-theistic humanism. (2)

(1) A distinguished scientist, R. A. Millikan, defines dogmatism as "assertiveness without knowledge". "This", he writes, "is supposed to be the especial prerogative of religion, and there have been many religious dogmatists, but not a few of them, alas, among scientists. Everyone will recognize Mr. Bryan, for example, as a pure dogmatist, but not every scientist will realize that Ernst Haeckel was an even purer one". (Evolution in Science and Religion, p. 60.)

(2) There is a fourth alternative and that is to keep one's religion and one's science in water-tight compartments, all the while hoping that time, in conjunction with the efforts of other thinkers, will bring about a reconciliation. But although this alternative seems to be one actually adopted by many people it will not be considered here. It is not a possible solution for anyone who has seriously and sincerely faced the problem; rather it is a refusal to face the issue and follow the argument whithersoever it leads.

It is not difficult, as Sir James Arthur Thomson has pointed out, (1) to see why the rapid development of science should have worked to the detriment of religion. "For religion has given man an astonishingly increased mastery over nature; science with its numerous analytic triumphs has tended to diminish, in the shallow-minded, the sense of wonder. . . Moreover, the scientific mood has been widely diffused; it has a growing fascination of its own; it easily comes to preoccupy the mind and thus tends to crowd out the aesthetic, the poetic, the religious moods". The prestige of science has declined rapidly in these last few years, however, as it has become more clearly recognized that there are some problems which science cannot solve. (2)

"Bertrand Russell and other observers of our civilization see that the development of scientific technique affords no guarantee of any significant use of that technique. The great question of their later use is as to where and how there are to be found means for relating knowledge to the great values and ends of life". (3)

(1) Article "Science" in Hastings' E.R.E. Vol. XI, p. 260.

(2) Cf. Le Roy's somewhat flamboyant description of the rise and fall of modern science; "Genuine philosophy had had its day; all metaphysics seemed deception and fantasy. . religion itself paled before science as poetry of the gray morning before the splendor of the rising sun. However, after all this pride came the turn of humility. . This deified science, borne down in its hour of triumph by too heavy a weight, had necessarily been recognized as powerless to go beyond the order of relations. . . And in this way destitution arose out of ambition itself, since thought, after trusting too exclusively to its geometrical strength, was compelled at the end of its effort to confess itself beaten when confronted with the only questions to which no man may ever be indifferent". (Bergson's New Philosophy, p. 129)

(3) E. S. Ames; Religion, p. 69.

dogmatic materialism could only be maintained as long as the facts upon which the religious interpretation of life is based were ignored. Our present situation, the threatened collapse of Western civilization under the impact of economic depression and global war, makes it impossible any longer to ignore the primary significance of values and ends. But whether this be the reason or not, "it is undeniable that. . . there has sprung up a wholly new appreciation of the independent and permanent significance of religious experience in human life". (1) Evidence of this fact is to be seen in the earnest efforts put forth by pragmatist and realist philosophers to find a place for religious values and ideals in their systems. The interpretation put upon religion by these philosophies may not be such as to satisfy the orthodox, but the fact that the attempt is made to do justice to the claims of religion marks a very significant change of attitude, and should be welcomed by every one who is interested in a comprehensive philosophy.

Our investigation of the subject will be introduced by a brief historical survey. Then we shall consider the solution offered by the pragmatist, realist, and idealist respectively. We begin with the pragmatist because this school of thought, with its emphasis on the immediate and the practical, is, perhaps, especially characteristic of the modern spirit. The pragmatist, however, relies exclusively

(1) J. H. Muirhead in the Preface to Second Series of Contemporary British Philosophy.

on method and eschews the necessity of a Weltanschauung; therefore we turn next to the realist who, beginning with the results of scientific investigation, attempts to build up a philosophical system which will correspond with reality as disclosed to natural science. The idealist joins the realist in protesting the pragmatist's neglect of ultimate questions, but accuses the realist of ignoring the witness of our values and ideals to the nature of reality. We shall, therefore, examine the idealist's claim to complete the partial insights of pragmatism and realism and to present us with a more complete and adequate picture of that Ultimate Reality which religion knows as God. A further chapter will compare and evaluate the three contributions to a solution of our problem, and we shall then attempt to set forth our own conclusions.

Finally, let us acknowledge that we are under no illusions as to the difficulties that beset our path. "We are", as Cromwell said before Dunbar, "upon an engagement most difficult". All the great problems with which the human mind has wrestled rise up before us. But, as W. Mc Neile Dixon has well said; "Our business is not to solve problems beyond mortal powers, but to see to it that our thoughts are not unworthy of the great theme". (1)

(1) The Human Situation, p. 22.

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