

RELIGION AND REASON

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WHAT is man? Whence does he come and whither is he going? What should his relations with his fellows be? These are the fundamental problems and questions which have always presented themselves to man. Their presence may be traced from the earliest recordings of thought to the present day. Amid the constant change of viewpoints, and the succession of wars and disasters, in the rise and fall of cultures one persistent and unchanging fact can be found—the ever-present inquiry about the meaning of life. The answers men have given to the question of life sum up any given period, for action is but thought realized.

At the dawn of history we find the solution bound up with religion. The view man had of God accounted for everything. There was nothing whose explanation was not found in a supernatural cause. This early view had much of imagination and of fear but very little of reason except at its foundation which was the almost instinctive realization of a Deity and causality. But as reflection developed, the explanation of life took on a more rationalistic trend and moved slowly away from the instinctive spontaneity of primitive religion. Never, however, was there a radical separation. Though natural secondary causes were discovered, the general answer to life was yet to be found in religion. For the most part, pagan mythologies contained the reasons for all actuality.

With the coming of Christianity there was no change in the direction of inquiry. Revelation became the object of belief and the Christian religion gave the answer to living. Early Christianity was not a philosophical system; there was no ordered exposition of its dogmas along philosophical lines, though the presentation of its teaching took on in the first few Councils a rational form, due undoubtedly to the presence in the Church of professional philosophers.

Reason, however, was coming to be regarded more and more as a means to interpret and solve many of the problems of life. Owing to the universal acceptance of Christianity in the West, Christian revelation was acknowledged as the ultimate norm and standard.

Any theory which contradicted dogma was given scant consideration and philosophy looked to the Church as a guide. But with the development of philosophical thought within the Church, there came the necessity of defining the limits and bounds of reason. In the Thomistic synthesis, the limitations of the human intellect in the quest of truth are clearly and distinctly set forth. Faith and Reason had come to their proper places. They are not contradictory, but supplementary. Philosophy can give an answer to reality, but not a complete and satisfying answer, for the end of man is established in that broad and deep region beyond reason—the supernatural, and is the object of faith.

It was during the Middle Ages that philosophy and religion attained for the first time perfect synchronization. Life and reality about man has an answer and it can be found but only in the acceptance of revelation and the correct use of reason. The thirteenth century was at the beginning of the only road that leads to peace and concord among peoples. Unfortunately the perfect balance did not endure. Due to diverse and multiple causes, the explanation society gave to life slowly began to lose its religious element, and the emphasis came to be placed on reason alone.

Though at the Reformation the theory of private judgment had disrupted the religious unity of Christendom, Europe as a whole was still influenced by the beliefs of the Middle Ages. Protestantism rejected Catholic dogma but held to a considerable part of its morals. The great mass of the people carried on their social and economic life much the same as before and it was by slow and gradual stages that the full effects of the break became evident. But no system of morals can endure without a solid foundation in dogma, and as the subsequent divisions of Protestantism wandered farther away from Catholic dogma the morality they propounded lost more and more of its sanction and came to be considered, not as a propriety of human action with relation to an eternal law, but as some sort of variable norm of convention or social utilitarianism.

The basis of the economic structure of to-day, the political viewpoint of modern states, the entire answer which present day society gives to life and human relations is almost completely divorced from the necessary religious considerations. The actual state of society is an anomaly. It presents a whole civilization whose attitude is practically devoid of the supernatural. For the first time man is trying to answer the fundamental questions of life without including God. That success has not resulted is painfully obvious. Relying on reason

alone the past five hundred years have accomplished little in the way of constructive thinking and nothing in the way of a synthesis of previous true philosophical thought. In many respects the present condition of philosophy, outside Scholasticism, offers the aspect of an appalling retrogression. Bergson, for example, with his theory of becoming has tried to throw thought back to the time of Heraclitus and the pre-Aristotelian era. Modern society in its effort at solving life not only presents the novel historical fact of an age without religion, but in its use of reason has stumbled into blind alleys and fallen into ditches.

The modern confusion (it can scarcely be called anything else) is not something which has come to happen suddenly. The stock market crash, or the closing of a bank in Vienna, or even the World War can not be pointed to as the sole cause of the present distress. The real answer has to be sought in those deeper things which are the springs of action. Philosophical theories and viewpoints are more responsible for the World War and the market crash than the killing of an archduke or the over-valuation of securities.

To trace and detail the course of philosophy since the Renaissance would be long and tedious, if at all possible. Philosophies and explanations of life were offered which ranged from the Materialism of Hobbes to the Immaterialism of Berkeley. Man could be a sceptic with Hume; or could, with Spinoza, hold for an indivisible infinite oneness of actuality, and turn mental acrobatics attempting to explain the obvious multiplicity of things. The abuse and aberrations of thought since the Renaissance simply prove that Truth is quite difficult to attain with any degree of fulness.

It is problematical what the present condition of affairs would be if philosophy were the sole factor in shaping events. As it is, however, there are many things which though not directly connected with philosophy guide, condition and occasion philosophical inquiry. Together with the philosophical viewpoint, they give the concrete expression of man's idea of himself and life. Two things which more than all else have influenced in a positive way the final acceptance of one particular interpretation of life, are the development of the physical sciences and the Industrial Revolution. Materialism in itself has not sufficient convincing power to be adopted on a wide scale by all ranks of society. Its intrinsic weaknesses and the dangerous consequences of its ultimate conclusions would cause its rejection was it not hidden under tremendous physical advantages. Industry and physical research have succeeded to such a degree in pro-

ducing material comfort and wide fields for the exercise of man's curiosity that Materialism could not help flourish.

There are many things which could be said against Materialism as a philosophy; its inadequacy, its futility, and its danger; but it is in its practical application that its full face is revealed. The crime of Materialism is that it robs men of their souls. In a Materialistic world man may be a bio-chemical accident, an economic unit, or something to bear arms to advance narrow nationalistic ambitions; he may be a number of things but not a human being. Economics becomes the science of acquiring money and the whole objective of work is to get rich. Factories are built not to give employment, relieve needs or make luxuries but for money profits alone. Dividends become more important than wages. Ethics becomes some sort of gauge of utility; if a thing or action fulfills its purpose it is true and good, the purpose, of course, being some material end. The effect on Politics is ruinous. Deceit, lying, treachery, any crime becomes politically good if it be for the aggrandizement of one's country. One may adopt some vague humanitarianism if he still clings to out-worn and cob-webbed notions about the dignity of man; but in a world where nothing is but matter, to act from spiritual principles and for spiritual ends is to isolate oneself from the great mass of society. And a mob hates a dissenter.

Materialism can never give a satisfying answer to life. It is a too one-sided view, and that side the less important. What makes man different from the rest of things is his soul and reason and all those higher things of life which derive from the spirit. Poetry, art, justice, friendship lose all dignity, even the very reason for their being, when based on matter alone. The emphasis on only one part of man turns everything up side down and we find cheap politicians and money-grubbers more esteemed and honored than poets and philosophers and those other "dreamers" who are human beings.

The history of man's quest for the answer to life has always revealed the presence of the religious element. When modern society attempts an explanation without God, it is flying in the face of all human experience. That religion has had a part in the solution is not due to some accidental, external circumstance but to a deeply-rooted and instinctive turning of the creature to the Creator. The expression given to this dependence has often been wrong, at times monstrous, but the fundamental fact remains that man has always acknowledged it. To toss aside all the testimony of history with some flippant and shallow argument about progress is unscientific,

which in these times is considered as something heinous. Faith and Reason working in harmony and in proper correlation are the only means by which man can gain a complete understanding of the reason for existence. With faith and the religious element excluded from the scheme of things, the explanation of life may still be had to a certain degree but with great difficulty and then only by a few and provided that philosophy interpret reality correctly. But with God left out and reason wandering in strange fields the final outcome can be nothing but disaster.