RELIGION IN THE MODERN WORLD

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I. The Historical Background

For more than four centuries religious people have thought of religion as fighting for its life. During that time such folk often have been religion's worst enemy, and often they have turned with anger upon religion's friends. Time after time, issues have been drawn and the declaration made that if certain ideas should be accepted religion would become impossible. Strangely enough, with striking regularity, religion has been discovered a few short years later flourishing side by side with general acceptance of the prescribed ideas.

Study of these recurring situations reveals a consistent pattern running through them. At each point religious people have insisted upon reserving some interpretation of experience as a sacrosanct and final authority, and as either the norm of legitimate religion or the "sine qua non" of all religion. Characteristically, then, opposition to the authority has developed, usually in terms of setting up some different standard as authoritative. But, typically, both sides in the dispute have been in hearty agreement upon the necessity of some absolute authority as the basis for religion, at the same time that they as heartily disagree upon the "nature" of that authority.

It was inevitable that this process should stimulate a crusade against any and every sort of religion. For one thing, conflicting authoritative systems and personalities have sprouted luxuriously, at the cost of bringing disrepute upon the whole idea of authority. This has united with the insistence that religion is possible only on an authoritative basis, and with the constitutional tendency of the scientist to question all authority, to produce a temper of aggressive skepticism concerning anything religious. In addition, religious institutions often have aided and abetted such a mood through recurrent displays of intolerance, bigotry, and obscurantism.

In more recent times calmer councils have prevailed among some groups of Churchmen. This is possibly due to a dawning realization that scientists, though often shortsighted, are not Satan-inspired, and that science contains a corrective for its own errors. In a word, increasing numbers have gained confidence that eventually "the truth will out," and that valid religion will not suffer thereby. More than this, a chastened spirit has resulted from a growing understanding of what the spectacle of numerous conflicting "absolute" authorities means for the standing of any claimant to authority.

Such attitudes, however, have simply stirred many to greater fury. More especially has this been true as it has become necessary to bolster the concept of authority with supports increasingly unattractive to the modern mind. Favorite objects of attack have been those who are trying to enable religion to function more effectively for our day through developing a more flexible and tentative approach to the area of religious belief. And at the opposite end of the scale are those still possessed of contempt for all attempts to find value in any process approximating historical religion.

II. Present Uncertainty and Confusion

So the prevailing temper of our generation is that of uncertainty and quest. The search sometimes leads sharply back historically, as in the neo-Thomist movement of the Roman Church. Sometimes the effort is to achieve completely new patterns of thought and practice, as in the new ecclesiastical

humanism. Sometimes the attempt is to avoid or destroy all religious interest, as among secularists both here and abroad.

For above a quarter of a century there has been a more vivid sense of urgency in Europe than in America. Dynamic reactionary movements indicate a greater intensity of spirit and a more inclusive discontent. Recently, however, within American religion there has been an accelerated tempo. A vital relationship between social change and shifts in religious thought is recognized even among those whose thought is that general culture must be brought back and adjusted to the traditional forms of Christian orthodoxy. The importance of such a relationship is doubly stressed, of course, among those who think in terms of a racial adjustment of religious thought to current ideologies.

In the midst of the turmoil and cross currents of our day, it is significant that an increasing number of those who formerly discounted religion now are showing an interest in theology or philosophy of religion.[1] In part this is perhaps due to a sudden fear lest cultural values in some way stand in intimate relationship to religion. Many had considered those values to have no necessary religious bearing. Now, standing in the midst of a world-wide attack upon cherished principles which has also become an attack upon Christianity and religion generally, it begins to seem possible that the tendency to let culture become purely secular may have been a mistake.

Beyond that, a suspicion has arisen that in the abandonment of religion there may lie the explanation of a disturbing trend in modern society, a trend which has displayed first a tendency toward paralysis of decision. This was the theme of Henryk Sienkiewicz' novel, "Without Dogma," fifty years ago, and more recently has been pictured in Aldous Huxley's "Eyeless in Gaza."[2] Following that there has come a reaction against such indecision into some frenzied and totally uncritical enthusiasm. Of late, the deliberate substitution of national leaders, or the nation itself, for the God of religion has been a method by which demagogues have made capital out of this trend.[3]

Again, an important stimulus to renewed interest in religion has come from the field of psychology. Here numerous practicing psychiatrists have found themselves unable to deal with many mental disorders save in terms of leading patients to a religious basis for reorganization of the personality. Religion appears to them as, if not the only source, the chief source for a "fixed point outside" the self without which personality tends to fall apart.[4]

III. Religion as Anti-Social and Hopelessly Archaic

As indicated above, however, renewed interest in religion is far from sweeping everything before it. A definite trend toward secularism is still a prominent note. This includes both the "indifferentism" of the man in the

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1 Wieman and Meland: *American Philosophies of Religion,* p. 4.

2 See also, Edwin E. Aubrey: *Present Theological Tendencies,* pp. 4-9.

3 This is not to be confused with the ancient deification of great men. That was an expression of a belief in the entrance of a non-human reality into human life. The modern practice constitutes or arises out of a deliberate denial of the existence of any such entity, at least as significant for human living.

4 Henry C. Link: *The Return to Religion,* pp. 62f.

C. G. Jung: *Modern Man in Search of a Soul.* "During the past thirty years, people from all the civilized countries of the earth have consulted me. I have treated many hundreds of patients. Among all my patients in the second half of life—that is to say, over thirty-five—there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life . . It seems that side by side with the decline of the religious life, the neuroses grow noticeably more frequent." pp. 264, 266.

street, and the aggressive attack upon religion as such by a significant group of intellectuals. Religion, defined in any terms which would make it meaningful to the adherents of today's living religions, is definitely the "bête noire" of such men as T. V. Smith, Harry Elmer Barnes, and their fellows.

Here an aggressive secularism dwells upon superstition and reactionary tendencies within religious institutions as a means of discrediting the value of the religious function. T. V. Smith has put the attitude of the group in a striking statement: "Religion is an outmoded short cut to the goods of life attempted by impotent people."[5] At the same time an attack is launched upon all forms of metaphysical dualism and idealism as the vestigial remains of an age of superstition.[6] Apparently this is done on the basis of the belief that religion is possible only when such philosophies are held.

Naturally, these attacks have not gone unchallenged. As is the case in most word wars, much that cannot be demonstrated has been advanced by both sides. As a matter of fact, final proof or disproof of the social values of religion depends upon something which does not now exist, an unbiased and completely thoroughgoing survey of the social process, past and present. Such a study has not yet been made, nor will it be made for a long time to come. Still, significant groups of social planners act as though the very shaky underpinnings of the anti-religious movement were definitely incontrovertible, though perhaps, for some, regrettable.[7] An examination of several considerations which indicate the questionable quality of secularist claims may prove helpful.

The first of these is that a majority of critical minds all through history have considered that religion's values overbalance its faults. The usual picture drawn, sometimes even by adherents of religion, is that of religion as supported by the sheep-like, uncritical, ignorant multitudes, but deserted by critical thinkers. Actually, a better case can be made that the multitudes have followed materialism far more than they have religion, while a preponderance of critical minds have supported religion.[8] A second and companion consideration to keep in mind is that while there is a very vocal group opposing religion today, it still constitutes a minority among critical thinkers.

But far more important than this are the methodological weaknesses of the secularists. For it is a striking fact that many of those who would eliminate religion refuse to apply to it

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[5] T. V. Smith: *The Philosophic Way of Life*, pp. 7f.

[6] Typical of this is Barnes' encyclopedic survey of western culture. An excellent work in many respects, it is distinguished by its philosophic bias. With an exclusiveness which is notable for its efficiency, he identifies those systems of thought inimical to his with "primitivism," and limits the significant developments of modern thought to the emphases of the school which he favors. *Cf.* H. E. Barnes: *An Intellectual and Cultural History of the Western World*, pp. 43, 44; 1128-1133. Far greater philosophical (and scientific) maturity is shown by Irwin Edman, who shares Barnes' general philosophical outlook, in his *Four Ways of Philosophy*. Here is a real and quite measurably successful attempt to analyze and understand the major types of philosophy. It stands in marked contrast to Barnes' attempt to justify what carries all the ear-marks of a highly emotional prejudice against anything possibly related to religion.

[7] An example of this is found in the general report of the American Youth Commission of the American Council on Education, *Youth and the Future*, published in 1942. The concern of this report is with social planning for years to come, but it almost completely ignores religion. For this type of mind, religion seems to be necessarily an *extra*, to be indulged in or not upon the basis of capricious whim.

[8] I am indebted to Professor E. S. Brightman at this point. The suggestion was made in personal correspondence. Examination of the field seems to support it.

principles recognized as necessary in any other realm of critical thought. A demonstration of this is seen in the question-begging reasoning of Harry Elmer Barnes' book, *The Twilight of Christianity*. Here he arbitrarily sets obscurantism and intolerance as the normative marks of religion, cites numerous examples of these traits in the history of Christianity, and considers the case closed. The question of the adequacy of his **method of definition** is never critically examined. In general, it would seem that the continuation of a social institution over a considerable period of time is a noteworthy testimony that a valid social function is being performed, one which would call for more than such a cursory definition of that function. A natural curiosity arises as to why this is not the case with religion. Again, it is generally accepted that origins do not necessarily determine the final worth of a social process. At this point, it becomes apparent that much criticism of religion is concerned with what prove to be characteristics of all institutions, of whatever kind.[9]

But the most important consideration has arisen out of the thoroughgoing work done in recent years in the field of the definition of religion. A survey of the historical development of religion, with a view to assessing the significance of the changes in the area of religion's functioning, increasingly seems to indicate that there are invariables of religious function and method which are a necessary part of the normal social process.[10] We do not have a choice between religion and something better, which is not religion. Nor do we have a choice between religion and something worse. There is only a choice between better or worse religion, and the dogmatic refusal to make a persistent effort to identify the unique function of religion can only help to make certain that the religion of the future shall not be better. More realistic than a sweeping attack upon religion because of the defects of its institutional vehicle would be the effort from within to neutralize the blind tendency toward conservatism which is the mark of all institutions.[11]

From this we turn to the inference of much of aggressive secularism's thought, that religion, in any approximation of its historic form, is impossible save as based upon "supernaturalism." Here a survey of the present scene within institutional religion (to say nothing of an acquaintance with the history of religion) brings the suspicion that the secularists have been unduly influenced by the claims of present-day "defenders of the faith," who hold that all religion would per-

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[9] We should remember, for instance, that institutional science has often been as stubborn toward new scientific theory as the church. At every point in biology, physics, chemistry, medicine, and practical science, proposed ideas have been dogmatically condemned by scientists without benefit of impartial examination. Anaesthesia was rejected, Pasteur's difficulties with his contemporaries are famous, the telephone was declared to be ventriloquism, the circulation of the blood was denied for forty years, Daguerre was declared to be mentally unbalanced because he experimented with photography, scientists advanced "proof" that locomotives and railroads were impossible, leading physicists ridiculed as fantastic Helmholtz' theory of the conservation of energy, Joule's theory that heat and work are interchangeable forms of energy was flatly rejected. All of which —and more—would seem to indicate that intolerance is not peculiar to religion. It is a characteristic of human nature!

[10] H. S. Dimock: "Trends In The Re-Definition of Religion," *The Journal of Religion*, July, 1928.

[11] This is not to deny that some institutions have broken with the past, as a matter of fact, the point of origin for most, if not all, institutions lies in a break with the past. But the significant fact is that seldom does an institution break with its own past. The dominant nature of an institution is to function as a conserving agent. For that reason institutions breed prophets and then disown them—even those that base themselves squarely upon the scientific method and ideals.

ish were their particular brand of metaphysics eliminated. Undeniably the traditionalists in religious thought are greatly agitated by naturalism, baptized **atheism** in their terminology.[12] And it is just possible that their position has been all too welcome to the secularists because it has provided grist for their mill.

But, aside from the fact of historic religions which have rigorously denied the existence of anything remotely resembling a "supernatural," it is obvious that a new type of naturalism is a very vigorous movement within vital religion today. In view of this, it would seem fruitful to raise the question whether naturalism in religion is not inevitable, if religion is an ineradicable function of every culture.

IV. The Origins and Logic of Supernaturalism

For a generation and more, theologians and philosophers of religion who admitted any validity to empirical methods tended to move in the direction of an intermediary position between absolute transcendentalism and the materialistic naturalism of the nineteenth century. While many still hold such a position, there is today a striking tendency to move in the direction either of an out and out transcendentalism or of a definitely naturalistic type of religious thought.[13] This trend toward a division into two camps **within organized religion** brings the suggestion that a study of contrasts between the two might prove rewarding. So we turn to a survey of the methodology basic to each type of thought.

Two general movements are involved in the method of empirical logic. The first is an imaginative leap from fact to classification, analysis, and finally an hypothesis intended to explain the facts. The second is a return to the field of data to discover whether they accurately fit known facts and whether they are fruitful in leading to the discovery of new facts. In contrast to this, the logic of supernaturalism, while it moves from observed fact to hypothesis, typically brings an hypothesis which points beyond the world of ordinary, sense-and-reason-based knowledge.

Take, for example, the "ontological proof" of the existence of God, which runs about as follows: I have an idea of God. This idea of God necessarily includes the idea of perfection, i. e., God is a perfect being. But perfection involves existence, i. e., a being in order to be perfect would have to exist. Therefore God exists, the argument concluded, **somewhere beyond** the world of usual knowledge, which is obviously limited and imperfect. Necessary to this line of reasoning was the prior conviction, of course, that for every idea in the mind there must be a corresponding reality external to the mind, a type of thought which runs back to Plato.[14]

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12 Theodore Graebner: *God and the Cosmos,* p. 12.—"When the supernatural is ruled out as non-existent before the forum of science and philosophy, the atheistic position is a matter of direct inference."

13 E. E. Aubrey, *op. cit.,* pp. 153 f. Chapter, "Naturalism vs. Supernaturalism."
Wieman and Meland, *op. cit.,* pp. 338-344.
Charles Hartshorne: *Beyond Humanism.* p. ix f.
In the field of general philosophy one observer seems to feel a similar trend. *Cf.* Edman: *Four Ways of Philosophy,* pp. 322 f.

14 Stace: *Critical History of Greek Philosophy,* p. 183. There have been two other typical "proofs" used by supernaturalists, the cosmological, and the teleological. The burden of the first is that since we live in a world of cause and effect, a world in which there exists nothing without a cause, it must be that the world itself is the effect of some prior cause. Therefore God exists as a "first cause," *back of* or *beyond* the world we know. The second declares that since this is a world in which we observe purposeful activity, and which seems to have some design or ordered pattern throughout, there must exist some great designer—*somewhere beyond* the existence which we know.

Radical supernaturalism has insisted that the supernatural realm is absolutely "other" than the world of human experience and totally inaccessible to our knowledge.[15] However, it has been pointed out, especially since Kant's day, that there is no point in reasoning about a realm which is inaccessible to reason. Philosophies of an intermediate type have realized this difficulty and have been careful to argue the validity of some other mental capacity than reason as a source of knowledge of the super-realm. The question of interest to us at this point is whether it is possible to discover the basis for this persistent tendency to insist upon the existence of a super-realm. It is notable that the foundations of a logic are often non-logical in character. What basis has there been for this persistent conviction of the logic of supernaturalism concerning the inadequacy of the natural world?

Much of our thought stems from ancient Greece, and an examination of the characteristics of early Greek thought is revealing. A number of very significant views concerning the natural world were incorporated **without critical examination** in all major Greek philosophies. The first was the picture of physical existence as at heart lifeless. This received its classic formulation in the atomism of Democritus, for whom the qualitative aspects of existence were simply errors of the mind. For him only the quantitative was real, and there was no real distinction to be made between life and matter.[16] Even more significant, however, is the fact that the thinking of Plato and Aristotle was greatly influenced by this idea. Plato opposed not only the relativism of the Sophists, but also the reductionism of Democritus which explained away all quality. His solution of the two-fold problem lay in making normative a reason which accepted moral qualities as ontologically real. In this general position Aristotle concurred. But Democritus did influence them to the extent that they accepted his portrayal of a totally inert physical world, known through the senses, as accurate. Therefore, it was logically necessary to posit the superior reality of a super-sensory world as the source of the vitality and quality which men experienced.[17]

Another factor in Greek thought which closely paralleled this tendency, and which may have been basic to it, was the influence of ancient astrology. "The Greek mind was dominated — even the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics — by the astrological notion that human history is but the reflection of the eternal circlings of the stars, and comes evermore back to the

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15 This type of mind often holds that philosophy is vicious since it leads to a dependence upon wholly inadequate reason rather than the revelation which "breaks through" human limitations in a miraculous way, and which finds its verification in some non-rational criterion. There has been some difficulty, however, in explaining why radically opposed ideas have come in the form of revelation, each receiving the required verification.

16 F. A. Lange: *History of Materialism,* Vol. I, p. 19f.

17 Aristotle confronted an atomism which saw only the quantitative as real, and Plato's idealism which saw only the qualitative as real, and tried to effect a synthesis. He held the world of sense experience to be real, a view which Plato denies, and at the same time held the reality of quality and form. He tried to avoid minimizing the standing of either realm through his concept of organism, wherein he pictured reality as an indivisible, organic union of matter and form. But always his insistence upon the indivisibility of the two factors gives way in the end to the conviction of the superior character of form. Form is that which matter assumes, and pure form exists *beyond* space and time as the necessary source of all motion. While there is completely 'matterless form,' there is no completely formless matter. Thus in the end he follows Plato in accepting Democritus' view of the natural world as accurate and in finding it necessary to move beyond that world to find a source of the qualitative.

same point."[18] This fundamental notion formed a startling contrast to certain ideas held within the Hebrew-Christian movement which adopted Greek thought. For, although the Hebrew mind lacked the philosophical bent of the Greek mind, it held firmly some ideas concerning existence as a whole. And chief among these was the conviction that something new and different can happen in the universe.[19] A head-on clash with the Platonic idea of existence as static was the result.

Still another factor complicated the above dilemma. A basic assumption of Greek thought, clearly formulated by Empedocles, was the "likeness postulate," namely , the principle that only like can produce or affect like. This view made it inevitable that Christian thought should accentuate the tendency already pointed out in Plato and Aristotle. For if the opposing notions of essential lifelessness and creativity were both held, the likeness postulate made it necessary to find two totally different realms in which they could inhere.

And beyond this, another factor heightened the Christian emphasis upon the supernatural. Its greatest influence was exerted upon the Christian movement at the point of the struggle with the Gnostic heresies. For even though Gnosticism was officially rejected, its basic tenet was accepted, all the more ardently perhaps because of the fierceness of the struggle. This was the ancient oriental view of the tangible world as being, rather than merely lifeless and without quality, radically and actively evil.

With these three views of the world of sense, as without quality, without life or creativity, and as actively evil, held as prior assumptions, it becomes apparent why thinkers found it necessary to accept a logic which ended in a realm inaccessible to human knowledge — or at least ordinary empirical knowledge. The only other alternative was to submit to a reductionism, an explanation of existence which **explained away** all experiences of quality, growth, and goodness. And, using two of these same **undemonstrated assumptions** concerning the sense world, this is precisely what traditional materialism did.

V. The Modern Metaphysical Scene

Much the same frame was set for modern thought by Gassendi, Descartes, Hobbes and the British empiricists as was set for the Socratic School by the ancient atomists and the Sophists. These men drew a picture of reality characterized chiefly by a lack of quality. The knowledge process they analyzed as embodying a sharp separation of sensation and ideation, with sensation given the pre-eminent position.[20] Bolstered by the precision of method developed in the quantitative physical sciences, with their consequent dependable findings, many ventured to assert that all existence necessarily reduced to a lifeless quantitativity. And for nearly three hundred years the laboratory seemed to confirm this.

The philosophic movement to assert the reality of quality, growth, and goodness accepted this reductionistic picture as true for the physical world, and then proceeded to subordinate it to another realm. This had its greatest exponent in Immanuel Kant. He began by denying any clear-cut distinction between sensation and ideation. He stressed the unity of the knowledge process and the fact that sensation is simply grist for the action of the conceptual capacity of the mind. In line with this he noted that the "laws" of

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[18] Wieman and Horton: *The Growth of Religion,* p. 174 f.

[19] *Ibid.* p. 174 f.

[20] This was not true of Descartes' epistemology, of course, according to the usual interpretation. However, it characterizes his position concerning the physical world, and necessitated the same sharp distinction between two realms, one quality-less, the other the source of quality and vitality.

science — following Hume's lead — are essentially intellectual creations which are not subject to sensory observation. Following this, he recognized a suspicious parallel between the regularities of "law' 'and those of the most abstract and non-sensory thought, i. e., mathematics. This led to the conclusion that the "natural," lifeless world is almost purely the creation of the mind, which shapes sensation according to the rigid categories of its own structure. So science is seen as preoccupied with making form-fitting garments for the cosmos. But to pierce beneath the surface and discover the true inner nature of reality another instrument of knowledge is necessary. This, Kant maintained, is found in the practical reason, or conscience.

Fichte, Schelling, and Schopenhauer all followed Kant in holding that **some non-logical aspect of the mind** is a superior instrument for knowing reality, and in relegating observation and reason to a secondary realm. Hegel, however, reinstated reason as supreme. But he maintained the ancient distinction between two types of knowledge in holding that sense experience is definitely inferior and that logic is the only finally valid science. His delineation of logic included vitalistic elements which made it plain that he had in mind something markedly different from the logic of purely mathematical variety. So it is not surprising to find Hegel, too, starting with the same picture of the natural or sense world and later subordinating it to the mind. It is simply a world of appearance, the accurate clue to the nature of reality being found in the processes of the mind. The natural world of matter is not final, complete, or independent, and is meaningful only as related to the supernatural world of mind.

Modern thought has, in its idealistic aspects, followed one or the other of these two trends for the most part. There has been a minor resurgence of Platonic thought, with an acceptance of the universals of the mind as the key to ultimate reality, without all the epistemological subtleties of post-Kantian idealism. But most thinkers show plainly the marks of Kant, as mediated through one or another of his interpreters. W. E. Hocking is typical of those who tend to find a non-logical aspect of mind as the key to a reality behind the world of appearance. Upon close examination, his thought resolves itself into an argument whose basic premise is apparent when he "proposes, by the aid of the labors of all coworkers, critics and criticized alike, to find the foundations of this religion, whether *in reason* or *beyond*."[21] Thus the first purpose is to find a basis for religion which shall validate it; a reasonable basis, if possible, but, at all events, a basis. To this end he decries the worth of abstract idea (apparently, idea which furnishes no basis for religion and value). The next move, how-

[21] W. E. Hocking: *The Meaning of God in Human Experience,* p. vii. The italics are mine. The principle with which Professor Hocking starts is an epistemological dualism. *Ibid.,* p. 79.

His next problem is that of bridging the gap between the idea and the idea's object. This is solved in terms of a definition of the nature of idea and of its origin. Hocking points out that the true idea is that which is denotative in character. He insists that the essential mark of truth is denotation, and that the truth of an idea does not lie in its content, but rather in the inarticulate outward reference which it bears. The original true idea—apparently because it is the one idea permanently denotative and inarticulate—is the 'idea-of-reality.' *Ibid.,* p. 79.

The results of this epistemology are readily apparent in Hocking's method of validation of his position. The ontological argument is his basic type of proof. (*Cf.* p. 570 ff.) Reality is, after all, what we think; therefore what we think—that is, when we feel deeply—is the truth. The problem of error is met in characteristic fashion. Error arises as we become so theoretical—that is, involved in the comparison of pure ideas, ideas temporarily detached from feeling—that we fail to check with our desires. (*Cf.* pp. 108, 573.)

ever, rehabilitates idea when it is identified with feeling, desire, and value. But, this desire is also religion. And all of this moves in a realm untouched and untouchable by the blighting influence of a previously devitalized nature.

Of those in America who follow Hegel, a leading figure is E. S. Brightman. In some respects he occupies an indeterminate position, possessing an empirical bent which some have felt might lead him ultimately into naturalism. Yet he is clearly Hegelian in his logic of the whole and in his relegation of the natural world to a secondary position.[22] The natural he identifies with the physical and the supernatural with the personal.[23] And, having made this step, he definitely subordinates the natural to the supernatural on the basis of a half-hearted rejection but nonetheless accompanying and determinative use of the likeness postulate.[24] He grants that naturalism has moved out of an earlier dead-level reductionism,[25] but still feels that the natural is definitely inferior.

"As far as this naturalism goes, it is true. But it leaves the axiogenetic processes uninterpreted, unrelated to the rest of existence, as flowers blooming mysteriously in a hostile soil."[26] "We may say that the spatial aspect of God is a vast, yet subordinate, area of the divine being; and that spaceless ideals and values, as well as other non-spatial types of being of which we have not the remotest inkling, make up the most important aspects of the being of God."[27]

VI. Inherent Factors As Adequate

This brings us to the point of considering a type of development in religious thought which represents a dynamic readjustment between the religious interest and naturalistic philosophy. This has been stimulated from the standpoint of religion by the

[22] *Cf.* E. S. Brightman: *A Philosophy of Religion.* In his doctrine, as in Hegel's, that "the mind is a whole and truth is a whole" (p. 186), there is implicit the tenet that existence is also a whole—since it yields truth to the coherent or "whole-seeking" method of thought. Yet that his monism is specious is shown when he indicates a preference for Kant's usage which renders meaningful the terms natural and supernatural, as over against terms more appropriate to a complete monism.

[23] *Ibid.,* pp. 212, 214, 88.

[24] *Ibid.,* p. 223.

[25] *Ibid.,* p. 149.

[25] *Ibid.,* p. 149.

[26] *Ibid.,* p. 216.

[27] *Ibid.,* p. 218. Note here the curious reference to unknown and possibly unknowable types of being. Its curiosity is twofold: First, because of his strenuous objection to such references on the part of other thinkers, *Ibid.,* pp. 224, 267f; Second, because if truth is a whole and existence a unity, and if the likeness postulate be true, then unknown *types* of being are a logical impossibility. It is a fair question whether this is not essentially an insistence on a transcendent deity growing out of a previous degradation of the natural.

An interesting and vital question is this of his use of the postulate that only 'like produces like." If, for example, the natural "can have only physico-chemical properties, and never become conscious or initiate any axiogenesis" (p. 223), then how can totally non-physical consciousness reverse the process and matter become "an order of organization of the experience of God?" (p. 226) Again, with the physical, the personal, and the neutral held to be purely "categories for the interpretation of existence" (p. 223), and with the likeness postulate true, then any real creativity is an impossibility—what we term such is simply an illusory appearance. A real supernaturalism, in which the physical and mental are ontologically disparate realities, presents no more of a problem with its mystery of interaction between two radically different realms than does this.

In fact, Professor Brightman is torn between two choices, and his halting half rejection but implicit use of the likeness postulate shows it. If the reality of creativity is maintained, then the likeness postulate must go, or monism must be rejected and an ontological supernatural be accepted in place of the present verbal one. But this alternative is difficult, for the necessary premise of a unitary existence implicit in his coherence theory of truth demands its equally necessary premise of the superior standing of consciousness and value in reality, requires the likeness postulate.

thorough re-examination of the function of religion suggested above. Within naturalistic philosophy there has been a reaction against its earlier dead-level reductionism which has arisen from recent developments in physical science, a recognition of the biological sciences as truly autonomous, and a reformulation of the epistemological problem. Professor E. E. Aubrey has described the basic postulates of the resulting position as follows: "(1) there is no disjunction between God and nature, and God's existence is inseparable from the world; (2) God is not identical with all of nature, as in pantheism, but is, rather, operative as one aspect of the natural world; and (3) God is therefore knowable in the same way that nature is knowable."[28]

The term "theistic naturalism" has been used to describe this general position, but it must be admitted that there are some drawbacks to this terminology. With a majority the term naturalism will probably carry the connotation of atheistic materialism for a long time to come. Professor W. H. Bernhardt has employed the term "absolute immanence" for this position for a number of years. This would appear to possess a number of advantages.

But whatever the terminology used, the outlines of this type of thought are plain. It bases itself squarely upon those scientific findings which point toward a pulsating force and "liveliness" at the heart of existence, and thinks of that force as organized by an inherent formative factor into ever-rising levels of complex integration. This point of view gains religious significance when man is seen as an organic part of the cosmic process, and as maintaining his truest well-being only when he lends himself to the cosmic trend of growth and creativity, even though at great cost. To the objection that this view cannot afford all of the emotional satisfactions gained under more traditional religious thought, comes the reply that to make such emotional satisfactions the test of truth is impossible.

Non-theistic naturalism denies the existence of any significant relationship between man and the rest of the cosmos. This seems to be more an emotional reaction against the excessive sentimentality of some religious viewpoints than any demand of logical consistency. Certainly it is not consistent with the scientific theory of evolution. In the headlong flight from supernaturalism there has come a plunge into an equally shaky "unnaturalism".[29] However, among many who formerly showed an antagonism toward any kind of metaphysics there is a definite tendency to abandon such a positivistic position.[30]

A second characteristic of non-theistic naturalism has been its evaluation of scientific techniques of control as over against what was described as religions' retention of superstitious magic. Analyses of the function of religion in recent years have indicated that this is an oversimplification of the facts of the field. It has been pointed out that there is a parallel to be noted between the category of the supernatural in traditional religion and the persistent factor of the non-manipulable in human experience.[31] And while naturalism abandons the one, it cannot rid itself of the necessity of dealing adequately with the other. A satisfactory adjustment to such uncontrollable factors, which has been the primary concern of historical religion, is still possible on the basis of the viewpoint of absolute immanence.

When the implications of these fac-

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[28] E. E. Aubrey: *op. cit.*, p. 174.

[29] *Cf.* H. E. Barnes, *op cit.*, p. 43: Implicit in his treatment of cultural achievements as "super-organic" is the view that the exercise of the capacity to produce cultural instruments is a thing *unnatural* to the cosmic processes.

[30] E. E. Aubrey, *op. cit.*, p. 224f.

[31] *Cf.* W. H. Bernhardt, "Significance of the Changing Function of Religion," *The Journal of Religion,* October 1932.

tors are more fully recognized and developed by the non-theistic naturalist, it seems probable that he will tend to move away from the radical and illogical bifurcation of reality which sets man over against the cosmos as a wistful orphan or a belligerent antagonist.

Such a development will cut the ground from under the militant secularism of our day. On the other hand, while it is possible that the social upheaval of our time may temporarily favor the growth of an obscurantism in religion which would deny any validity to a naturalistic type of religious thought, absolute immanence seems destined to play a vigorous part in the development of a new synthesis in religious thought. It is not altogether inapt to compare the past several centuries with the early part of the Christian era, which saw the creative amalgamation of diverse elements into a structure of religious thought which enabled religion to make an effective contribution to western culture for a thousand years.

INTELLECTUAL CEMENT

The present war is compelling college administrators and faculties to question many phases of higher education in America. They are facing the question of the purpose of education; of the apparently more efficient methods of teaching employed in the Army specialized training courses; of many other time-honored institutions of college life. Basic to every vital discussion is this fundamental question: What are the aims and functions of liberal education? Precisely what contribution does higher education make to human welfare?

A recent visitor to Denver from the Protestant Churches of England stated that not more than twenty percent of the English public attend churches at present, even in the midst of a desperate struggle for national existence. Does this mean that eighty percent of the English people are convinced that the Churches have little or no value to them? Or does it mean that the amount of work demanded of each person has increased to the point where he has no time for church? If this be true, then comparable decreases in attendance should obtain in the case of the movies and other forms of time-consuming institutions.

It is possible, of course, that the churches, like the schools, have been so busy with conventional activities that they have spent little time in a serious examination of their reason for existence. The world may have moved beyond them, leaving them as monuments to a dead past. If so, the war should provide us with an opportunity to face squarely the implications of our claims to the time, money and service of our members and constituents. What is it that we offer which justifies these demands? If the churches disappeared tomorrow, what difference would it make to the great mass of people in our various communities? These questions are forced upon the attention of English Protestants. American Protestants should consider them before the force of events compels them to do so.

The problems which face American education and religion are related to more fundamental questions which face every individual. Have we any clear-cut conception of the meaning of life itself? What are the basic convictions which serve as the intellectual cement binding together the strands of thought, emotion and action which comprise our living day by day? The women and men who now face the grim realities of life and death on countless battle-fronts will hardly be contented with platitudes or clichés. There is little cement in such time-worn words. The cement which holds life together in times of crisis must have more adhesive power than they contain. The women and men of tomorrow need living, not dead, truth.

(William H. Bernhardt)