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THE CONFIRMATION AND DEFENCE OF THE FAITH.¹

THERE are many of us who are conscious that the excellent works which were written in defence of the Christian Faith by Butler, and Paley, and others, do not really appeal to the minds of men in the present day; and that much of the traditional apologetic is not relevant to the questions which are being forced on our attention. This paper attempts to shew how this has come about, and while it does not profess to put forward a new apologetic, it is an endeavour to point out the direction in which we shall do well to look for it. Perhaps it may seem paradoxical, but I am inclined to think that the defenders of the faith have laid too much stress on the resemblances between Science and Religion, and that it is in facing their real differences that the best hope of an ultimate reconciliation lies. That is at all events the principle which underlies the present paper.

I

The first great difference is this—that Science starts from the Particular and Religion from the Universal; they begin at opposite ends. In the face of this difference it is idle to assert that there is no conflict between Science and Religion—that since Truth is one, true Science and true Religion cannot conflict. For this maxim gives no help to those who are anxiously asking 'What is truth?' and fail to find a completely convincing answer. To the man of deep spiritual conviction, Religion is *the* Truth,

¹ A paper read to the members of the Salisbury Branch of the Society of Sacred Studies, June 27, 1907.

while Science seems to be a mass of changing opinion. To the careful student of Nature, on the other hand, Science gives a body of carefully built up Truth which is verifiable in all its details—while Religion seems to rest on personal impressions which may be very vivid, and yet mistaken. The whole tone and atmosphere is so different in the two spheres of thought that we cannot take either one or other as the type of Truth, and the standard of Truth which we will apply all round. It is not possible to reassure any earnest man by this platitude about the identity of religious and scientific truth. This identification may be looked for as an ultimate result ; but we need guidance in a world where our scientific knowledge is incomplete, and our religious knowledge partial.

We may, however, get one step forward if we note one reason for the difference between religious belief and scientific attainment in the fact that they start at opposite poles. Science begins with the particular, with observation and generalization, and seeks for the Universal. Our Religion begins with the Universal—One God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, and of all things visible and invisible—and seeks to recognize a universal element—the Divine Purpose—in all particular incidents. The two approach the problem of the Universe, and the explanation of it from opposite sides, and so they seem to lie in different planes. They do not fit together ; they appear, at all events, to be mutually inconsistent. Not only are the aspects different, but neither aspect is fully apprehended, so far as our intelligence is concerned. We need not be surprised at the difficulty we feel in combining the two sides accurately. All we can hope to do is to recognize the differences between the two modes of thought ; we may perhaps find that, just because they are so different, they serve to supplement one another.

II

Even at the risk of some repetition it may be worth while to point the contrast with the habit of mind I deprecate more definitely. In the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries the differences were minimized or overlooked. There was a tendency to try to *blend science and religion*, by using so far as possible common terms, and bringing both under common ideas ;

we can now see that such attempts at forming an amalgam were premature, and did not do justice either to Science or to Religion.

In the beginning of the eighteenth century the world had been impressed by the advance of Natural Science, and the recognition of similar forces as operative under similar laws throughout the physical universe, and it seemed possible without irreverence to think and speak of the Divine Being in terms borrowed from Science. There is, as we say, Universal Causation, and then we seem to bring Science and Religion into line by speaking of God as the great First Cause. From the religious point of view this attempted accommodation to the scientific habit of mind is unsatisfying, because the conception of the Deity which is thus accentuated is so meagre; it is emptied of all that calls forth devotion or inspires to duty. The attitude of such men as William Law and John Wesley to the Rational Theologians of the day elucidates the defectiveness of such religion. The scientific conception of a cause is that of an invariable antecedent; a First Cause does not necessarily suggest either Reason or Goodness; it does not involve ideas either of Purpose or of Love. The view which it sets before us of the Universe is inadequate; it seems to reduce the whole to mere mechanical regularity, if we set ourselves to find natural law in the spiritual world. Science does not give us appropriate conceptions to apply either to the nature of God, or to the course of the world, as they appear to the religious consciousness.

There is a similar defect in this amalgam, when we view it from the side of Science. In making particular observations the observer has definite data before him—actual phenomena which he can verify over and over again. The Law of Universal Causation is a postulate without which he cannot proceed in his work; but it is a postulate, and not something which he has proved by his researches. He uses it as a help to understand the material universe better; but to take the principle, as writers on Natural Religion did, as a basis on which to build an elaborate system of thought, is a different matter. Scientific men in the eighteenth century were quite ready to use the principle in this fashion; but the advance of empirical science in the last century has brought about a change. The modern student is dissatisfied with such speculation; he seems to be taken away from actuality altogether, and to be dealing with words and phrases rather than

things. It is all in the air and unverifiable; it may be quite sound, but he feels that he does not know. In the eighteenth century Natural Religion could be taken for granted, as a body of truth which only the irrational would deny; the apologists of the day were engaged in arguing that Revealed Religion is congruent with Natural Religion and therefore is also reasonable. They aimed, as it were, at superimposing Supernatural Religion on a basis of Natural Religion. In our times it is Natural Religion that is called in question, and that seems unconvincing. Men are not certain that it is concerned with actualities at all, or that there *is* anything which corresponds to the terms used. Since the foundation of Natural Religion is thus shaken, attempts to base on it the fabric of Christian truth are necessarily unsatisfactory. The demonstrations which Natural Religion supplies may seem to be quite plausible, but they do not come home to any one as really settling the matter in dispute, and setting it at rest. They only give the opponents of Christianity an opportunity for displaying their ingenuity in dialectics, like naughty children.

III

Dismissing thus such attempts at blending or co-ordinating scientific and religious truth, we may try to note the fundamental differences between scientific apprehension and religious conviction as intellectual acts. It is enough to say that scientific apprehension occurs through the senses and the intellect; the data of science are particular occurrences in space and time, perceptible to eye and ear and touch, that can be measured and weighed, and in many cases repeated. We need not raise any question as to the reality of the external world, or the reliability of our perceptions; Science rests on the observations of particular senses combined by our intelligence. But religious conviction is of an entirely different order; it has to do with the relation of a human being as a whole to the Universe as a whole. It is not something given by any particular channel, but is a change in the consciousness of self, which gives a different character to all mental and moral activities. Religious conviction arises from the reaction of Self upon a Not-Self, which may be recognized as merely a group of opposing and conflicting forces with which it is hopeless to try and live in complete harmony; this is the

attitude of Fetichism. Or the Not-Self may be regarded as One—so that there is a possibility of entering into definite relations; and as good—a Not-ourselves-that-makes-for-Righteousness. Such conceptions of the Not-Self arise, immediately and directly, in the mind of a man who is not merely conscious of himself as a man, and a lord of creation, but as having defied a Universal Order—and as sinful—or as reconciled to the Universal Order, and as accepted with God. This is the fundamental datum in the Jewish and in the Christian religion; it may be described as felt, or as the awakening of consciousness, but it is certainly not a perception of the senses; it is a conviction as to the relations of the human personality with the totality of things, not the observation of any particular fact. Particular events may be the occasions of awakening it, but they cannot be more.

Hence it follows that the phraseology of the senses and the intellect, in which we speak of the apprehensions of Science, are not the best in which to describe the convictions of Religion. We may find it more convenient to speak in terms of Will rather than in those of Intellect. The religious man is conscious of his own Will as opposing the Universal Will—the Will of God—that is the sense of guilt. Or again, he may be conscious of himself as striving to discover the Universal Will, and to bring his own into accordance with it—that is the effort to consecrate his life. But this goes to the root of human nature, and gives a sense of reality that is far deeper than any particular apprehension of colour or sound. So long as man is conscious of himself as a person, so long as he finds himself in a Universe of which he can think as a whole, he is bound to be, in some sense, religious; he is compelled to take account of the relation between the little world, which is constituted by his thinking power and his will, and the great world in which he lives and moves and has his being. Such self-conscious activity has the highest certainty; Descartes found, in the analysis of his self-consciousness a proof of his own existence, and then tried to establish the existence of God as an inference from the element which resulted from his analysis. But the reaction of the human will against the Totality of things is also a fundamental fact in self-consciousness, and carries with it a sense of reality to which no particular external observation, however often repeated, can attain.

IV

So far for the character of Scientific apprehension and of Religious conviction ; we must touch very briefly on the progress of each, and here again the differences are noteworthy. The co-ordination of such convictions into a body of religious truth must also be very different from the co-ordinating of particular observations into a body of scientific truth. It is of course true that Religious Conviction—like the other contents of human consciousness—has striven to find expression, partly in the world of action, and partly in literary forms. It does not remain a personal conviction merely, it externalizes itself. Sacrifices and rites and vows are one mode of expression, while another is found in sacred books ; and so religious consciousness comes to be uttered in the world of sense, in place and time, it can be the subject of scientific treatment, and there is a Science of Religion. But this Science cannot be precisely similar to other humanistic studies, since the data are less complete. The expression of the religious consciousness is rarely, if ever, adequate ; we may not have insight enough to read through the expression to its full religious significance. The widow's gift of two mites was an occurrence in place and time, which could be accurately reported upon by any bystander ; but divine insight was needed to appreciate the deep devotion which found expression in that act. So with all the utterances of religion in speech or in act ; we need, not merely to get at the precise form of expression, but at the religious content, the value. Ordinary critical methods can take account of the terms of expression or the nature of the act, but its value can only be appreciated from a religious standpoint : spiritual things must be spiritually discerned.

The constant expression of religious consciousness—however inadequate it may be and to whatever misapprehension it may give rise—does give rise to the diffusion of religious opinion and the growth of religious institutions and traditions. There is a heritage of religious thought which is analogous to the heritage of scientific thought—but with a difference. In Science there is an accumulation of fact, a making of many books, and a heaping up of information on many subjects ; doubtless a developement of faculty also takes place, but it is not the thing we habitually note,

and it is difficult to gauge. In the progress of Religion the reverse is the case; there is less interest in the accumulation of particulars than in the change in the human mind itself, and the new attitude which is taken from entering into this religious heritage, or from holding it with greater intensity. The opinion of others may be taken up and verified as a fresh conviction by other men. This living consciousness is the outcome of religious progress, not embodied in storehouses of information, but diffused in many forms of expression and exemplified and appropriated in other persons, so that they are transformed by the renewing of their mind. Men thus come to know themselves as parts of a moral and spiritual world, whereas in scientific advance we continue to look at the order as external to ourselves. In the religious consciousness there is a new creation.

It follows from this that while Science can never be complete, Religion may attain its highest form. There must always be new particulars to be observed and examined and described by Science, but the religious consciousness may reach the final form of which it is capable under mundane conditions. We habitually recognize this about the philosophic or artistic consciousness; much as we may admire Mr Herbert Spencer, Mr Whistler, and Mr Bernard Shaw, we do not necessarily think them greater as philosophers and artists than Plato, Velasquez, and Shakespeare. In the capacity for thinking and feeling and expressing that thought and feeling in appropriate forms, the men of the present day do not seem to excel those of some periods of the past. In the same sort of way there may have been the most complete apprehension, possible to man, of the relation between the human will and the divine, and the most perfect harmony between the two. As Christians we hold that this not only may be so, but that it has been so, and that in the person of the man Christ Jesus, the human religious consciousness attained its perfect type. In Him there is not only the conviction of intimate union with the Eternal God, but a unique power of expressing the content of His consciousness in word and act. The content of His consciousness is most fully exhibited to us in the Gospel of St John; in reading it we may feel His perfect sense of union with His Father, His perfect confidence in offering Himself as an ideal for His brother men, and His readiness to train them through the gift of

His Spirit. In His consciousness the human and the divine are reconciled ; by participating in His consciousness of God, by having it awakened in themselves, all men may come to know themselves to be the Sons of God. The expressions of His consciousness, whether in word and doctrine or in work and act, are recorded for us that we may appreciate them and make them our own. The main elements of His statement of the relations between the individual man and the Universe—or in other words, of the Christian religion—are to be found most obviously in the words of the Catechism which summarize the gist of the Creed. I believe in God the Father who made me, and all the world ; in God the Son, who has redeemed me, and all mankind ; and in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth me, and all the elect people of God. This is our Christian faith, which occupies such a different plane from scientific investigation and its results. In what sense is it capable either of Confirmation or Defence ?

V

The Confirmation of religious truth is necessarily different from that which we look for in the realm of Science. The confirmation of scientific truth is found by the repeating of some experiment, or by the verifying of some forecast ; the confirmation of religious truth is found in the new intensity in which it takes hold. There is much diffused religious opinion in the world—held at second-hand, and believed with more or less assurance—like the favourable opinions of our Lord's teaching which were entertained by the people of Samaria ; conviction is like the first-hand knowledge of those who have heard Him for themselves. There may be confirmation in the fresh conviction with which some religious truth comes home to those who have long been earnest in their religious duties, and confirmation, too, in the first awakening of religious conviction in another mind. The doubting of St Thomas was for the confirmation of the faith ; because his conviction, after eight days of hesitancy, is a startling instance of the recognition of spiritual power as revealed in Christ. Men who find in themselves, in their own experience, the blessedness of those to whom the Lord imputeth not their sins, have set to their seals that God is true. Men who have broken through some evil habit, or advanced in self-discipline, through reliance on the aid of God's

Spirit, have tasted the powers of the world to come : they are in themselves the evidence of Christ's promise being fulfilled. This conviction of the reality of spiritual power within, seems to be a demonstration of the possibility of spiritual power in the world without ; as St Paul felt when he argued from the rising from sin to the rising from the dead. The consciousness of a creative force within is a conviction which does not and cannot remain merely subjective ; it is an inspiring power, and finds expression in this as in every other age in the fruits of the Spirit, and the works to which they prompt. Christian experience, renewed in each generation, is the abiding confirmation of the Faith.

Such confirmation of the faith need not be, perhaps it cannot be, an exact repetition of the first conviction ; but rather the proving of the old power under new conditions and circumstances. It cannot be given to one human mind to grasp the whole range of the relationship between the finite and infinite as it has come home to millions of Christians of many different races and temperaments. The conviction in each individual consciousness is limited and partial ; it is in the experience of the Church as a whole that the religious truth which was manifested in the person of Christ is confirmed in all its parts. There is a great heritage of traditional belief and devout practice which has been handed down, and is embodied for us in the Prayer Book ; so far as any part of this body of religious belief becomes a real conviction to any of us, it is confirmed in personal experience, and is set forth as a living power.

VI

And now as to the Defence of the Faith ; there have been two notable periods of Christian apology—one in primitive times, and one in the eighteenth century. The aim in the two cases was different ; in the eighteenth century they sought to prove the truth of Christianity, positively ; the early apologists had been content to try and disarm the prejudices against it. Justin Martyr and others could not attempt to shew that their religion exactly fitted with ordinary belief and practice ; they admitted that it was quite different, but they tried to shew that despite these differences it was neither mischievous nor foolish. In the

circumstances of Modern Society we shall do well to follow these earlier writers in their humbler aim ; we shall be wise not to set ourselves to demonstrate the strength of our own position, and to denounce those who do not accept it ; but we may endeavour to get them to go with us, so far as they can.

1. There is, to my mind, little contact between Science and the Christian Faith ; except at one point. The postulate of Science is so closely allied to the fundamental belief of all the Higher Religions. The unity and uniformity of Nature, which Science postulates, is an external form of the belief in the Unity and Fixity of Purpose of the Inner Principle of the Universe. The difficulties to which the belief in this uniformity gives rise are not merely between Science and Religion ; they rise within the sphere of Religion itself. The apparent conflict between the fixity of the Divine Purpose and the possibility of Divine Forgiveness is the problem of the story of Jonah. The religious man feels the same difficulty, which prevents so many from accepting the Incarnation and Resurrection, but he feels it in another form. Huxley is said to have said that there was no great difficulty about miracles as such, but only about the insufficiency of the scientific evidence for every particular miracle. To the religious mind there is difficulty about apparent caprice on the part of the Deity, when the content of the spiritual truth involved in and expressed by the miracle seems inadequate. It is not easy to see of what the miracles of Elisha were signs.

2. There is more contact, and therefore, perhaps, more apparent opposition, between Christianity and many forms of non-Christian Philanthropy in the present day. Those who are eagerly anxious to improve the condition of the poor, or to regenerate society, are apt to be irritated with the inertia of professing Christians, and to doubt the earnestness of religious men who do not join with them in demanding drastic reforms or revolutionary measures. We can never disarm this suspicion by attempting to go as far as possible on their road, but only by trying to make our own aims clear. We can insist that we are at one with them in regarding the welfare of the people as the great object of all legislative and administrative activity—but we may make it clear to ourselves, and to others, that we differ as to the means to be employed. We believe a change in men is needed, and not merely

a change in conditions, and that the extent to which a change of conditions will, in and by itself, produce an improvement in men is limited ; and secondly we hold that the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which have their roots in the Christian religion, are the most effective motive powers for producing the needed improvement in men, and ultimately in conditions. Those who cultivate them are still the salt of the earth. It is by accentuating the difference of our view from that of the Socialist—not by glozing over differences—that we can hope really to understand each other's position, and to win each other's respect.

3. It is equally desirable, in all religious discussions, to maintain the fullest sympathy with all those who have lived and are living in the profession of the Christian faith in any form ; but we cannot do this unless our enthusiasms are distinctively Christian. We are so apt to plume ourselves on the enlightenment of our age, and to speak disparagingly of the Christianity of bygone times. There appears to be a temptation to many professing Christians in the present day to find a form of expressing their belief which shall make it as little alien as possible to ordinary non-Christian minds ; in so far as we succeed in finding such a mode of expression, we may have emptied it of all its force, and removed it very far from the Gospel of Christ. What we desire to defend and maintain is the faith once delivered to the saints, in all its power, because in all the fullness of its content, as we can find it in Christian writings and Christian lives and Christian conduct. We can watch it as a living thing in the history of the last nineteen hundred years, and note the various forms in which it expressed itself, and the influence it exercised on the world. But we do not care to sever a portion of it, which is in accordance with the common sense of mankind, or satisfies the religious needs of some individual, and treat this as an irreducible minimum on which we will take our stand, and which we will defend at all hazards. By so doing we are sure to lose our sense of union with the Christians of other ages ; we are in danger of disavowing those who were, as a matter of fact, our fathers in Christ. There are some aspects of the faith of the Church which evoke response in one age, and some in another ; we are not wise to cast aside that which we do not personally appreciate, or

to disparage expressions of Christian Faith which are alien to our own temperaments. None of us can take upon himself to analyse what is essential in the Christian Faith; if he does, he will only lay stress on the aspect which commended itself especially to one place and time. It is not by trimming our doctrine to suit our surroundings, but by trying to enter as fully as possible into the consciousness of our Master—as He lived and died upon earth, and as He is reigning now—that we hope to maintain the full range of Christian truth.

4. Still more is it necessary to accentuate the Christian position in literary and historical discussions; there may be a non-religious study of sacred books, when there is no effort to read through them to the living faith which they served to express. The incidents and occasions in the development of religious consciousness, which are the subject of critical study, are of interest; but they are not of fundamental importance in regard to the faith itself. The literary setting of a conviction is the subject of literary criticism—of merely secular study; the date at which the conviction was first put on record, and the person to whom it was attributed are comparatively unimportant from the religious standpoint. The Old Testament represents Abraham as the first person who had a conviction of God as the Keeper of a Covenant; and the conception thus introduced has found a response in many minds. The existence of this faith as a power in the world is shewn by the whole history and literature of Israel; and it must have had some beginning—in some particular mind. If we know the details of that awakening to clearer religious conviction, and the definite circumstances of place and time in which it occurred, so much the better. If literary critics decide that there are no good grounds for regarding Abraham as an actual personage, there is, after all, but little loss in finding that the account of his convictions and conduct is illustration and not biography. It is well that we should appreciate the faith of Israel, but the precise occasions which called it forth first of all, the precise dating and locality, are matters of very little importance indeed, so far as Religion is concerned.

Starting from the full knowledge of the relations between God and Man, which is given us in the person of our Lord, we can feel the deep religious interest of the Old Testament, and trace

anticipations and adumbrations of truth, which went beyond the full apprehension of those who uttered them, and thus were prophetic. We need to cultivate a power of sympathetic insight in order to appreciate their religious convictions, and we ought to keep the development of this faculty in view all the time in pursuing sacred studies. To pursue sacred studies in the same fashion as if they were secular—to treat sacred writings as literary and historical documents and nothing more—is a very inadequate interpretation of our ordination vows. By the habit of devoting constant and exclusive attention to the literary setting and form of expression, we may run some risk of deadening our appreciation of spiritual truth. It is on this account that I am in doubt as to the wisdom of applying the method of examination as a stimulus to engage in sacred studies; since it tends to leave the religious aim of such studies in the background. Paley is said to have reduced the Christian religion to a form in which it could be written out in examination, but this seems to be the least of his claims to our respect. I am not confident that the multiplication of examinations—either the Honour Examinations at the Universities, or the Divinity Groups in the Local Examinations—does much to develop the habit of mind which is necessary for insight into spiritual truth, or effective defence of the Christian Faith.

W. CUNNINGHAM.