

RELIGION, ITS NATURE AND ITS RELATION TO SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY.

BY THE EDITOR.

MOST definitions of religion are too narrow because religious people think first of all of their own faith, and the anti-religious bear in mind mainly those features for the sake of which they reject religion.

In Christian catechisms religion is frequently defined as man's covenant with God or man's relation to God, and it is natural that the adherents of monotheistic religions have always insisted on the paramount importance of the idea of God. Yet it can not be denied that Buddhism, which unequivocally is one of the great world-religions, can be taught without any reference to a personal deity. We grant that the God-idea is fundamental, and we claim that the fundamental truth of it is not absent in Buddhism, but it is expressed in a different way. No religion is possible without an authority of conduct, and if we define God as that something in the world which enforces a definite morality, an authority or a power of some kind whose law can not be trespassed without impunity, we must grant that belief in God is an indispensable factor in religion, but we need not call this power God and we can describe its authority in other than theistic terms.

If we wish to characterize the essential features of religion we must bear in mind all actual religions whether theistic or not theistic, and must even think of all possible religions, conceiving them as future religions not yet actualized.

Religion has passed through many phases, and in each successive period its transient features have been made prominent. During the magical period, any person would have been deemed irreligious who had denied the magic power of prayer, sacrifice and ritual. Still further back religion was animistic and at that time

the belief in animism was uppermost in the minds of devotees so as to be thought indispensable in any religion worthy of the name. During the Middle Ages belief of the commonly accepted church dogmas was most rigorously insisted upon, while at the present time the ethical moment is emphasized, and so religion is now generally conceived first of all as ethics, or rather as supplying a motive for moral conduct.

In order to define religion so as to cover the whole ground we must bear all these difficulties in mind and think out the essential features which everywhere characterize not only religious sentiment but also religious views and actions.

Under all conditions and in all ages religion has been the main motive power in the lives of individuals as well as in the historic movements of the world, and even those who are confessedly irreligious are swayed by sentiments which, though moving in another direction, are quite analogous to what religious people call religion. There is in every normal person some supreme idea, or principle, or tendency, which characterizes his soul, pervades his sentiments, and dominates his entire conduct. It is the main factor that determines his religion; and this main factor of religion is the attitude which a thinking being takes toward the All.

This attitude is a product of natural growth.

It develops from the fact that no being is an isolated creature, but part of a greater whole, the All. Unconsciously he feels his relation toward the cosmos; and this All-feeling or panpathy finally becomes religion.

In the physical world the panpathy of each particle finds expression in gravitation. Every mass has its gravity in itself; but the action caused by gravity determines its relation toward its surroundings, and these surroundings are the great All of which it is a part.

It is the tendency of every particle as a part of the All to develop in thinking beings into a world-conception, which is characterized by more or less definite views as to the nature and purpose of existence, and thereby dominates the conduct of man.

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After these general observations we offer the following dogmatic description of religion:

Religion is a world-conception which has become a conviction. "Conviction" means a firm confidence in the correctness of an idea. Its equivalent in religious terminology is "faith." Conviction

is not opinion; conviction is serious and accepts truth as something superhuman. Truth is not made by man, but truth existed before it was found. This idea finds expression in the doctrine of revelation which is common to all religions in a certain phase of their development.

Every conviction is a motor idea and as such possesses three elements: It is of (1) the heart, (2) the head, and (3) the hand, which means

1, that it is a strong sentiment, manifesting itself frequently as zeal, or enthusiasm, or devotion;

2, that it is a notion or idea which makes it possible to have religion formulated into a *credo* or *doctrine*; and

3, that it is an impulse which dominates man's behavior from within as a motive of action.

The lower a religion is, the more instinctive are its principles, the less clearly defined and unverified are its doctrines, and the more adulterated it is with superstitions. The higher a religion ranges the more it agrees with demonstrable truth, and the nobler will be its ethics. Truth is the test of religion. Agreement with truth leads to the right kind of action called morality; superstition, (disagreement with truth) leads to the wrong action, that is to say, immorality.

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Religion is akin to science in so far as both are devoted to truth. Religion is accepted in the confidence of being the truth; and science means, (1) search for the truth, (2) the methods of this search, and (3) the results of it, viz., the assured knowledge at a given time.

Both science and religion are devoted to truth; but in popular parlance science is closely associated with the latest results of enquiry, while religion refers mostly to the tenets of established churches based upon the world-conception of their founders. But this is a secondary difference which does not touch the essential significance of either religion or science.

The main difference between science and religion is this,—that a scientific idea is purely intellectual and changes into a religious doctrine only when it becomes a conviction, that is to say, when it is espoused with fervor and is accepted as a principle regulating conduct.

As an instance of such transformation of a scientific theory into a religious idea we may mention the doctrine of evolution,

which not long ago was considered an impious heresy and is now fast becoming an integral part of our world-conception.

Masses move slowly and so religion is naturally conservative; it retains the old modes of expression and its devotees cling even to its traditional errors. It is always averse to change and resents the critical spirit of science. Masses are not imbued with a scientific spirit and are apt to forget that their religion is based upon the science of past ages. But the more education spreads the better we learn to appreciate the relation of science to religion and when the masses know that science is religion in the making, all the antagonism between science and religion will disappear.