

PROPHETS AND PROFITEERING

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IT IS not a religious activity to seek happiness through some magic formula, some stroke of good fortune, some worldly prestige or material acquisition. These do not often really contribute to our happiness, but usually prove to be obstacles thwarting our hopes and wishes. Taking both religion and happiness as genuine functional achievements in the emotional life of man, we find that they are or should be mutually inclusive and complementary; mystic perhaps in spiritual aim and exaltation, but still sharing the same functional power and possibility, the same value and destiny in the conduct of human life. Both aim at spiritual development, moral discrimination, intelligent and devout appreciation of all that is beautiful, good and true. Both have content and utility, as well as function and significance, if we but take proper care and valid methods in seeking to realize them. The true mystic and the sincere religionist share the same ascetic relations and restraints, the same social feelings and attitudes toward life, for neither can dispense with tolerance, honor, courage, justice, self-control, faith, largesse, forgiveness, heroic sacrifice and spiritual aspiration without ceasing to be loyal to the highest ideals of their loving trust in both Divinity and Humanity. The happiness one seeks, like the heaven of the other, is not a worldly goal of luxury and ease; it is a genuine condition where goodwill and creative capacity give realization to their aims.

No one, I hope, denies that the divine part of man's nature must be developed and the worldly part discouraged and repudiated. But the intellectual war, the perennial conflict of ideals and never-ending debate of issues, is over the question how this development is to be realized and this repudiation brought about. The point I am driving at is that a fallacious scheme of approach and solution is forever being advanced for merely mercenary motives; that we are, it seems eternally corrupt, ready for rewards, and have more con-

cern for the profits than for the prophets of religion; that we are constantly being urged to join some ambitious congregation, church, lodge, club, society or what-not, and all under argument of what we will get out of it, or else be hounded by the vociferous reformers and revivalists who storm and threaten with eternal damnation, fire and torment if we don't subscribe to their particular form of gas attack. Everything is so much thymism and vanity; the rhyomist first makes an epispastic flourish of amiable generosity and fellowship, but if these tactics fail he immediately returns to nature and threatens all sorts of rancor and revenge, as if hell and high water could clinch an argument when soft bribery and peremptory persuasion failed. It is a good thing that some of us are still sane, sufficiently sensible and sincere and attentive to our future welfare to keep ever before our mind's eye one simple scientific fact, and that is that *human nature was here first*, long before any artificial scheme of salvation, any clumsy legal machinery, any top-heavy institution. Church and State, religion and politics, folly and philosophy, art and science are all subsequent developments, comparatively recent expressions of man's enigmatic genius; and nearly all these group-moods of aspiration are intended to *cover up*, if not able to transfigure, the common defects, deformity, depravity or at least the finitude of human nature. Long before the first family altar or public policy was established, men were on earth with passions and pastimes, heartaches and consolations, dreams and aspirations, and the fact that we must remember is that the sincerity and urgency of these private visions, faiths, hopes, loves and sacrifices are all that still animate our religious frames and give us courage or genius to cope successfully with the many problems and temptations of life. They make up the original stock of human nature and only recently have they been somewhat artificially forced into cold corporate bodies, institutions such as Church, State, Nation, art, science, religion and philosophy. Let us hope that man's soul will not be lost in total obscurity by the trampling march of unconscious carnal interests.

However, it seems impossible to get away from the obsession we have for big things, mere quantitative values in thought and action, appreciation and creative taste. Our attention too readily flits from prophets to institutions, from mystics of meekened meditation to mechanical processes of power and plenty, and in the fickle flitting we usually "lose the spirit in our mad anxiety to save the soul."—(John Burroughs.) We seek increase of everything instead of an honest refinement of the few essential things. Authority is

transferred from natural law (God) to human lawyers, from righteousness to "rights," and everyone feels that his neighbor will bear watching. We set aside those pristine prophecies of old and take up modern twaddle about psychology, success and personal salvation; we seek to realize our own corrupt malicious wills by the establishment of churches, schools, legislatures, judiciary, penal codes and foreign policies; we worship nothing but rewards and punishments, and our neighbors feel insecure. We seek profit for ourselves and control over others, plotting ease for ourselves and hell for those who stand athwart our path, even taking umbrage and condemning whatever they unwittingly do which is not contributory to our own pet scheme of livelihood, lazy luxury, lucre-lust, love, success or salvation. I cannot too strongly emphasize the Unitarian position that human needs and natures are more important than any institution; that the proper birth, education, discipline and employment of the individual is the only reason we have organized our forces and established institutions; that all our institutions were set up in the first place only to make easier, better and more efficient ministry to our needs and natures. Why should we now reverse the proper situation and let them become Frankensteins and destroy those sturdy qualities of soul which gave them birth and sustenance? It is unconscionable to predict any such disaster, but it is already impending and with a few more decades the demoralization will be complete. No one can say with precision just how long we can stay dead without decomposition setting in, but it is safe to say that a certain ill odor begins to arise almost immediately. Decadence always strikes the vulgar first, but it soon corrupts the elect, and the genius, hero, lover, saint, philosopher or those of nobler mold are soon reduced to the necessity of choosing in an all-too-vital *either-or*, join the jazzarimbo jubilee or go hang, and very few will deliberately choose to hang before their time.

Neither man, beast, tree or stone can be truly lost, condemned or annihilated in the cosmic scheme of things; neither God, Devil nor Universe can be wholly cast out of the life of man, for he is part of them and they are part of him. Everything is Nature, and God's laws as well as the petty spites and poseury of theologians are still just so many items of the cosmic composition. The fact of life that is most persistent and indestructible is the fact of spirit, with its various functioning as faith, hope, charity, courage, justice, loyalty and forgiveness. Without these neither human nature nor the Universe would be here, nor would they have any destiny or survival value in the true eschatology of cosmic law. But with

them in open action and devout intent our lives can dispense with much of the artificial accomplishment, casuist power, arbitrary authority and hypocritical pietism so often affected by the willing dupes (?) to institutional religion. The divine in man created all the gods and bibles extant in the world today, in the same way that the malice in man has created all the devils and devilry in the world. But mere projection of will and idea does not give them external validity as really existent beings or things. Man is a dual composition of divinity and depravity. The divinity in man has often been in almost supreme potential and has been called Christ, Buddha, Brahma, Shang-Ti, Ormuzd, Allah; and has tried to express itself in an eternal procession of Testaments, Vedas, Srutis, Canons, Avestas, Kaaba carpets and muezzin calls. The great need of modern religious theory and practice is not power or profit, but just the recognition and understanding of this simple fact of life as being largely a spiritual activity, part noble and heroic, part vulgar and wicked. The proper business of education is not to make a specious blend of this duality nor to minimize the many meannesses of those selfishly inclined; but to guide, counsel, enlighten and inspire, helping men to discover themselves, to know and rightly value their spiritual powers and develop the divine possibilities lying dormant in their souls, to have good reason to realize that they are not wholly depraved, lost or subject to eternal damnation, but are (if they but make the necessary will and effort) quite capable of intelligent thoughts, heroic deeds, good works, noble faiths and loyal leadership.

It is to the door of false education that we are to lay the blame for much of our modern meanness and mischief. It seems as though our pragmatic religions, arts and philosophies are futile instruments against all the irreverence, evil, folly, misery and disease in the world. No wonder Nietzsche and Nordau decided that they have a narcotic rather than a therapeutic value in the scheme of life. Death alone was invented to terminate these mortal things, but we devise all sorts of artificial creeds and measures, pragmatic values and viewpoints, to mitigate and medicate the issues. Obscuration serves in place of understanding and our humility is reduced to an expression of cautious sophistry while our piety becomes a pose of dignified discretion. I do not know what manner of theological efficiency gave rise to the notion of exploiting God, but when we try to add religion to our herd of milch cows, *she balks*. It is as much a blasphemy to spoliolate mans' chastity by reducing Art, Science, Education and Philosophy to base creeds of utility, as it is to con-

ceive vengeful whimsical gods and try to put religion to work on the vicary of our own mischief and cupidity. The commercialism of universal exploitation seems to be part of the original theological blunder which lost man his title to Paradise. It is shrewd enough on aural defects and decretals, but utterly delinquent and quite desperate when it comes to showing genuine devotion, sacrifice or honest aspiration.

In ancient India, the laws of Manu advised men of the inexorable cosmic vengeance, the divine wrath of Siva which will inevitably descend upon them in consequence of unrestraint, ill-nature, lust, deceit and wickedness. No one living a life of shame, sham or chivalrous villainy could expect to escape the nether world of calamity and corruption. But both the Brahman Moksha and the Buddhist Nirvana offered unusual persuasion to perspective devotees who would consider the vows of poverty, chastity, renunciation of the world, and the resolute desire to transfigure or exalt all one's natural instincts, thoughts, aims and habits of life. Today these venerable destinies have been pruned of their abstract predications and promises, they comprise more definite notions presenting more concrete situations; the Brahman svarga or the Mahayana sukharati both consist in a sliding scale offering various degrees of heavenly bliss to the wise and righteous, while naraka offers various degrees of hell with unimaginable misery and torture for the wicked and corrupt. Even the lukewarm spirits of the manas or merely human, halfwise, half-infernal natures meet their true deserts in a return to kamaloka or rupaloka, in a reincarnation in either the animal or physical world.

There have been all sorts of prophets and profiteering in the world, and some of the most calloused cases have been masque plays under the name and formulism of religion. The chronicle is full to overflowing with rishis and rascals, rogues and reverend gentlemen, saints and augurs, soothsayers and scoundrels who tried and often succeeded in putting religion on a paying basis. The highly respectable Magi had the idea that a lofty sense of justice would carry the soul above all earthly seductions, but they allowed the corrupt practice of caste survival in the spiritual relations of the next world; so what would naturally become of the justicial issues under such conditions? The later Parsees and Zoroastrians considered that this was an artificial arrangement and would terminate when the apparently finite struggle was over between good and evil, light and darkness, intelligence and delusion; but they still held to the notion that the bridge Chinevat between this and the future world

was the point of justicial decision, which was an equally artificial arrangement seeing as we do that right here and now is the really decisive period. The soothsaying business in Rome found its most prosperous days under the Caesars as when the Paphlagonian Alexander furnished up gorgeous apartments and catered to the rich patricians who had ambition but lacked foresight. And money was not the only fee ever exacted, for many an overt oracle would not speak favorably on delivery of whole patrimonies, jewels, young girls, beautiful wives, or title to political office. Cicero's client Vatinius did not hesitate to sacrifice his four children when anxious to persuade the gods to favor his political ambitions. Thirteen centuries ago the monophysites or ubiquitousians who flourished under Emperor Justinian were condemned for confounding the two (spiritual and physical) natures of Christ in the Eucharist, but the specious unification is once more being made, and not for the sake of mere theory either. We are living in a mercenary vulgarian age of commercialism and spoliation, so no wonder our modern Eucharist is so accommodating when it offers extreme unction, last rites and viaticums to heaven no matter what one's life has been. This is religion operating under pragmatic sanction.

A somewhat different task was attempted by the Rosicrucians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with their alchemy, nature lore and Cabalistic clairvoyance. Numerical codes and anagogic ciphers were applied to the Scriptures and no end of chimerical reading were possible—and profitable too if we can take Eschenmayers' word for fact. They did not, however, enjoy the venerable dignity of the Druids whose doctrines are said to have dated back to Zamolais, a freed slave of Pythagoras. The oak forests and grassy grottoes of ancient Gaul resounded with the chanted hymns, judicial courts, and oracular rites of these hoary Bards and Vates. But the actual Druid who was in on the esoteric scheme was the priest who alone had authority to offer human sacrifices, who alone possessed the power or knack of divination, foresight and magic. Prayer was a common possession of Bard, Prophet and Priest alike, and even to this day of modern Eistedfods, everything is esoteric and class-conscious except prayer, and its efficacy is claimed to depend more upon social (ritual) sanction than upon individual piety. Merlin prophesied right when he read the Druid traditions behind the Nature lore and Christian heroism which inspired the poor shepherdess of Domremy to become the liberator of France in its most glorious hour of trial. These same traditions in the old Gallic Trouvères, the moralism of the Fabliaux, Bards and Celtic heroes make a saddening com-

mentary on the actual purpose of the Crusades, for they were both prophet-wise and profit-rich to the esoteric few who were clever enough to exploit them quietly behind a sanctimonious camouflage. Modern rites and rechauffes are just the same old tactics disguised in modern styles of popular apparel, but you couldn't get an honest confession out of a modern priest any more than Socrates or Diogenes could get one out of the Delphic Oracle.

There was a growing ambition in New England 85 years ago "to make Christianity a religion of political power and intimidating persuasion" which led Emerson to resign from the Second Church and render his immortal challenge in the Divinity School address at Harvard in 1838 and again later in the address before the Free Religious Association; and led Channing, Alcott, Margaret Fuller and others to espouse the transcendental doctrines of Nature-love, the Over-soul, Pre-existence, Universalism, Divine Reason and Grace, melioristic versus categorical morality, etc., even to rationalist interpretation of the Messianic Miracles. It is quite apparent in Emerson's Poems, Essays, Addresses and the ten volumes of his Journal, that he broke with historical Christianity because of its long weary kyrielle of signs and wonders, ambitious authority, intimidating tactics, emotional bribery and insatiable grasping after secular power, all within the hypocritical sovereignty of vicarious atonement and the inert traditions of copyist vicary in all one's religious experience. Such officious goodness may well take shape and pay homage under our ancestral traditions, but it is a sham virtue and befools one's intellectual honor as well as one's spiritual integrity. In fact it is taking advantage of ancestral reverence in a way quite similar to that of Ghengis Khan when he invaded Shensi, China; their basic filial piety prevented the Chinese from attacking him because he placed their aged parents in his vanguard as he advanced from town to town. Any morbid search or concern for signs and wonders, hidden meanings and imaginary hermeneutics always weakens the moral fibre anyway; one's attention is turned away from discipline and given to discerning the delicacies of ambiguity and casuist evasion. Much of our modern emphasis on consecration and sacramental power is really an emphasis on magic and the efficiency of sorcery, taboo and voodoo; there is no actual power inherent in bread and wine except as nourishment and stimulant to body and mind, all else is auto-suggestion and works with a haphazard efficiency. True consecration to a life of wisdom and virtue, even when only a mystic emotional response rather than a well-

thought-out intellectual decision, is always a spiritual function or expression, never an institutional patronage of gregarian instinct.

Prof. J. N. Caird's criticism of our futile modern attempts to translate Christianity into theology shows up the fallacy of our perennial assumption that intellectual processes, ideas, views and reflective judgments are fundamental features of a good Christian life. All these are added contents, they are of adjectival not substantive significance, and are of value to a correct understanding only rather than an emotional, volitional and active emulation of that life. Intellectual conception of a thing's value or content is far different from an active life sympathetically and spiritually patterned after it. One is perhaps coldly scientific, philosophical and idealistic, but the other is warm, congenial, aspiring and realistic. A different set of viewpoints, values, meanings, skill-limits and affections are experienced, and we should not confound what is conceptual with what is emotional, what is ideal with what is eventual and real. The blind philosopher, Duhring, says the vital antithesis of Christianity as well as of Philosophy is that perennially existing between the brute factual and the divine actual, the vulgar finite and the spiritual infinite; in his "Emphatic Philosophy of Reality," which was exceedingly anti-mystic, anti-religionistic and anti-obscurantist in attitude and tone, he adopted the Hegelian principle of sufficient reason *as a law of our thought* rather than of reality, and sought for a "substitute for religion" in the ethical sentiments and cultural aspirations which are a part of human evolution. Caird, on the other hand, takes a different view of the Neo-Hegelian theology and claimed that from the fact that "religion exists and must exist as a noble life enriched by the discipline of experience before it can be made the object of reflective thought and understanding, we may conclude that no mere ideas, no bare intellectual process or reflective interpretation can be called the fundamental element in Christianity, nor in any other religion that is actually lived rather than simply argued about." Such a vital realism brings the religious problem to a head even more forcefully than Huxley's classical lecture on Descartes or his argument from design in "Darwiniana."

However, it is well to have a certain amount of character analysis and moral exhortation for the benefit of those not yet able to stand erect in spontaneous piety and self-reliant faith. Thus in Lecky's inspiring volume on "The Map of Life" there are no anecdotal delights nor soft empirical suggestions, but a carefully laid philosophical understanding and a lucid presentation of consecration, piety, faith and exaltation as they affect our moral laws and obligations.

If we are to decide that Christianity is only "taught" and never *lived*, then Lecky's system is far more inspiring and to the point in its description of the various religious experiences than is the case with a cold, theological scheme such as the one hinging on the Westminster Catechism or the Code and Symbols of Hodge and Shedd, with all their intellectual precision, textual cross-references and artificial sanctity. Authority cannot be deliberately assumed from outside the actual sources and spiritual functions of authority, else it be nothing but the shadow play of false predication and presumption. The creed of Calvin in all its Presbyterian pomp and ambidextrous dignity is no more truly fundamental as signifying *vital* Christianity than the Baptist formulation of tactual resurrection and liberal eucharism in the blasé irresponsibilities of a vicarious atonement. Both are sectarian and secular expressions of pragmatic power, they advocate religions proposing spiritual profit, the reward of all casuists who will help exploit the prophets.

Professor Pfleiderer's forty years' work in the philosophy of religion took two courses of action in direct contra-distinction to the "actual life" theory of Duhring and the vital realism of Caird. These were the scientific approach supplied in the psychological analysis of religious consciousness and experience, and the historico-evolutionary approach supplied in the critical comparison of the different religions of the world. But both of Pfleiderer's viewpoints had one basic assumption from the very start—and this is where he diverged from his two equally famous contemporaries—that the religious life can be made the object of scientific investigation, that it can be interpreted and understood, presented and emulated the same as any other form of human interest and activity in art, literature, drama, history, science, politics or jurisprudence. One of the chief advantages of this religious philosophy is that anyone making this assumption and seeking this dual understanding will not center his attention dogmatically on Christianity as "the only religion," but will be open-minded, tolerant and considerate of all forms, creeds, aims and services in the religious life and ceremonies of all mankind. According to science, it is not so much the possible miracle of divine revelation as it is the actual human aspiration and effort toward reverent spiritual expression, which should be taken as the proper source of religious truth and authority. In other words religion originates in the soul of man and takes all its nourishment there, not in some institution's exploitation of the "law and prophets" from effete antiquity.

Kant found the majority of our motives in ceremonial practice to be grounded in irrational conceptions and purely emotional thrills and stimuli, whence those of us more philosophically inclined try to find intellectual sanction and moral support for the motives of our own religious faith and aspiration. The first sort of people bank largely on external (i. e., institutional) authority and leadership, while the latter rely more on our inward sense of right, reverence and restraint. His famous colleague, Schleiermacher, in seeking the ground for the philosophical viewpoint, tempered Kant's dualistic humanism of the pure and practical reason by adding the Spinozan security in eternal ideas, the Platonic Laws of State and Cosmos which rested on righteousness and reason, justice and integrity, virtue and utility, obligation and responsibility. But Hegel gave the whole action a popular turn by establishing a "dynamic relation between the Absolute Reality and our finite human ideality," trying thereby to show that this was a relation of identity, an ideal type or *ürphanon* of the Divine. It all resulted in a thinly veneered anthropomorphism, and its devotees have been determined on pragmatic readings and profitable redemptions ever since. The best we have is a more or less discriminating eclecticism of all past theories and interpretations; it is at least *willing* to be scientific and open-minded. Take the notion of infallibility for instance: After allowing that both religious and scientific infallibility are mistaken assumptions, we still find that the former has been buffeted around so much during the last seven decades that the Church is now just about ready to confess that some of the arguments of modern scientific psychological inquiry *do apply* to the origin and expression of humanity's vast heritage of heartache, our religious traditions, hopes, ambitions and anxieties. That some of these ideas and aspirations, rather than being prophetic by divine immediacy or inspiring through miraculous revelation and mythical resurrection, are often mere pathological symptoms of a serious emotional or intellectual disturbance (if not ultimately some social or political disorder). All religions and all the sacred writings of the world's history have had champions and apologists who claimed the same specious prestige and infallibility for their particular faith, but have since been found in the same category along with the over-emphasized dogmas of Christian inspiration, Dervish ecstasy and Sruti cipher-codes. But while we can see the cynical point of old Makkhali Gosali's criticism that religions were founded for the purpose of governing people more easily through shrewd imposition on their feelings and folly, we still have to acknowledge that the religious mind and reverent soul have

motives nobler than those of the ignorant and vulgar, that they are not mean and mercenary like the fickle Philistines, and that they are therefore entitled to some codicil of faith, some common abiding expression of the basic truths and spiritual purposes under which their lives are housed. They sanction no hypocrisy and cultivate no casuist equivocation. They live the pious life for they know by actual experience that true religious living inspires the highest morality and encourages the harmonious adjustment and welfare of all our social relations. But they also know (in controversion of Mrs. Eddy's pseudo-science) that religion does not *make* this morality, it does not *create* the rectitude of these relations; it only gives them the necessary sanction and support for our favor and faith, for our acceptance of them in a life of normal intelligence and balanced activity. Religion accommodates all our interests, but it seeks to qualify and ennoble them through the introduction of discipline and the application of restraint.