

astronomers have noticed that this direction is not exact but indicates a slight deviation, which, however, is easily explained if we take the nutation of the earth's axis into consideration. In calculating the time when, at the sunrise of the longest day of the year, the sun's rays actually fell along the line of the two directive stones so as to be first seen and greeted by the priest at the altar, it was found that it must have been the year 1680 B. C. This is about the time in which our anthropologists place the highest development and slow expiration of the stone age in northwestern Europe. The original construction of Stonehenge, we are told, is probably somewhat older. Thus astronomy and anthropology allied enable us to fathom the enthusiasm that must have inspired our forebears worshipping at a sanctuary of the deity whose visible symbol was the sun, the source of all the happiness of their existence.

There are, of course, other kinds of relics in plenty testifying to the solar worship prevailing in northern and central Europe in prehistoric times, connecting the cult of the stone age tolerably well with well-defined ceremonies that we know from the mythologies of a later day. The sun is mostly represented as a shield or as a wheel, and all over the territory of this slowly emerging civilization, we have found symbols representing the sun as carried about on some sort of vehicle. One of them has been discovered in Denmark, another in Styria, both of the bronze age. We may be sure that these pieces of sacred art were shaped in the same spirit of piety and devotion in which the quattrocentists painted their Madonnas and Thorwaldsen chiseled his statue of Christ.

## RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND THE SECULAR OBJECTION.

IN ANSWER TO THE HON. JUSTIN HENRY SHAW. FROM THE  
CATHOLIC POINT OF VIEW.<sup>1</sup>

"EVERYTHING is usually very nearly all wrong with the world," thus is the present situation excellently characterized by my secularistic friend and opponent, the Hon. J. H. Shaw. There is no chance of talking of a spiritual harmony in human society as it is constituted in these times. It seems the more propitious that two men separated by an abyss in their general outlook

<sup>1</sup> See *The Open Court*, May, 1918, pp. 257ff.

on life should to some extent principally agree in the solution of life's most important problems. It is the aim of the few lines that follow to testify to this agreement publicly, to appreciate the argument of the Hon. J. H. Shaw, and to invalidate certain objections to religious instruction in the schools supported or recognized by the State.

"To live under this American Constitution," thus the Hon. Shaw states the case very correctly, "and to accept its opportunities of religious freedom and religious liberty is the finest privilege that man has ever inherited and enjoyed from his government." I perfectly agree with my opponent. The State has no right to proclaim any laws which would outrage the religious convictions of any one person. The same principle applies to the education and instruction which our children receive in the public schools. No child should be compelled to attend a kind of religious instruction or of service which would imply doing violence to his or her religious convictions. This is exactly why I strongly object to any Bible-reading in our present public schools, and the more so since the fact which is pointed out by the Hon. Shaw, "that sectarian instruction may be given by the frequent reading, without note or comment, of judiciously selected passages," is indeed obvious. And it should not be overlooked that "the American schools are for the children of all the people of every religion and of no religion. The rights of Catholics, Jews, and infidels, agnostics and atheists, are just as much to be regarded and respected as the rights of Protestant Christians." This is why the Hon. Shaw is fully justified in emphasizing the fact that "Jewish children, or children of agnostics, or Catholic scholars of the public schools are quite justified, from social reasons, in refusing diplomas when handed to them by a Protestant preacher officiating where he is not desired, and where he ought not to appear as a religionist," viz., in cases in which the diploma is publicly handed over to the pupil in Protestant churches.

For exactly these reasons have I no patience with the introduction of compulsory instruction in "secular morality" in the public schools, for this also would be a kind of sectarian instruction, viz., a preparation of the children for the religion of secularism, which is at bottom simply a religion *sui generis*. "But ethics," thus the Hon. Shaw goes on to say, "is the science of right human character and conduct. It is in no wise primarily dependent upon religion but has suffered immeasurably by having been associated with it through all the ages." To be sure, the definition of scientific morality is at a first glance very clear and simple, but upon

closer inspection the delusion vanishes rather rapidly. It would be impossible here to subject the altruistic-utilitarian morality to which the Hon. Shaw adheres to a scholarly critique; but I should like to call the attention of my secularistic friend to an assertion made by Gustave Le Bon, certainly an authority who cannot arouse his suspicion, saying that, "*Lorsque les philosophes écriront l'histoire des erreurs de l'esprit humain, ils trouveront de précieux documents dans les traités de théologie, de sorcellerie et de morale.*" (*La vie des vérités*, Paris, 1914, p. 115.) The facts embodied in this statement came to be fully appreciated in the *Congrès international d'éducation morale*, assembled at The Hague in 1912. The most learned men present upon this occasion discovered, with Poincaré, "*qu'il n'y avait pas de morale scientifique.*" Quoting Alfred Croiset, I take the liberty of asking my secularistic friend the following question: "*Au nom de quel principe non-confessionnel enseignera-t-il [that is, the instructor in ethics in a public school] le devoir, l'obligation morale? Il interroge les philosophes et se trouve en présence des réponses les plus discordantes: . . . Il est troublé, incertain. . . . Que faire?*" (*Malaise moral.*) With Gustave Le Bon I apprehend that it is simply a delusion to believe that ethics can safely be based on reason or the intellect alone (*loc. cit.*, p. 119). Which goes to show that the morality of secularism, too, is after all nothing but a simple *matter of faith*.

We may now judge the assertion of the Hon. Shaw that "morality will come from knowledge, and from the better conditions resulting from knowledge obtained in the schools, and not from the teaching of any particular form of dogma or belief, or from any sectarian teaching of sectarian morality." We now know that all the so-called "scientific" systems of morality are after all "sectarian." Besides, daily experience teaches us that science itself is an unreliable guide to life, so that we may sum up with Fairbairn, who writes that, "religion remains thus, in all its forms and ages, a creative and architectonic force, a power all the more absolute that it is moral and intellectual rather than material, economical, or military." (*The Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, Chap. VI, Par. I, n. 3, p. 193.) The assertion made by the Hon. Shaw that, if sectarian teaching prevailed (as just quoted), "the schools and knowledge were of no use, and only religion were useful," and the reproach that the Bible is to blame for the present terrible war and that the Bible would sanction also an unjust war, I believe, should not be taken too seriously.

What I have said proves sufficiently that the easiest and sim-

plest solution of all these difficulties would be either the denominational or the interdenominational school. Thus also the convictions of secularistic children would be safeguarded, and it is unequivocally in the name of true freedom that this kind of a school is here advocated, and do not the secularists fight for an untrammelled instruction in the schools also? They do, and very honestly, I believe. For the Hon. Shaw certainly does not demand—of that I am deeply convinced—that secularism should be made the sole compulsory religious instruction in any public school.

But it may be asked by more than one of the readers of *The Open Court*, is a Catholic allowed to defend such religious liberty? The Roman Catholic Church rejects only that brand of “religious toleration” which claims that any religion will do; in all other respects, however, it is the doctrine of Catholic theologians that it is never permissible to act against one’s conscience, hopelessly erring though it may be. Romans xiv. 14-23 are completely recognized and appreciated by the Catholic Church in their full value as a rule of life.

A few remarks may be added. The quotation in which the relation between science and religion is touched upon (a question which, unless I am badly mistaken, is of supreme interest to anybody who has a religious life) is as a matter of fact not easily understood by the average reader; yet I think that the strictly technical language used in all the sciences does not differ from it in that respect. The expression “analogy,” however, is not in the least “medieval” and is indeed often used in the most modern sciences. The quotation intends to say nothing but this: The Catholic Church, to be sure, has no use for any kind of anthropomorphism, but, for that, not for agnosticism either. The agnostics are right in condemning anthropomorphism, from which, however, it cannot be deduced that in the last analysis *all* supernatural reality is *completely* unknowable.

It never was my intention to smuggle religion into the public schools under the guise of morality. Religion is a much more important force in life than morality. Likewise I regard the argument of the Hon. Shaw that the Church is unable to realize its plan for the salvation of mankind as insufficient. The Hon. Shaw would first have to prove that the cause of the miserable economic and intellectual condition of many religious peoples is really attributable to religion itself. Moreover, the Hon. Shaw certainly knows that it is by no means so very easy to lead a life devoted to duty, and I am afraid that my personal experience might accidentally be that of everybody, viz., that in the case of persons who cannot be induced



to lead a good and moral life by religious principles, all appeals to purely secular and moralistic motives are wasted energy. But should all the noble aspirations of secularism now be held responsible for this failure? Such logic would hardly win much approval.

In regard to the great number of religious criminals one should, in order to arrive at a just verdict in the matter, not merely cite statistics but to calculate, in the first place, what ratio there may exist between the numbers of religious criminals and religious persons as such; in the second place, the social conditions of individuals having criminal propensities should be studied; and in the third place, it should be demonstrated that these criminals belong among people deeply aroused by, and practising, their religion.

After this discussion it is hardly necessary to take up in detail the "nine demands" which the Hon. Shaw submits to the readers of *The Open Court*. Anybody who can see the justice in what I have tried to make plain in the above will form his own opinion regarding them, which, however, will be far from the hearty approval which the Hon. Shaw seems to anticipate.

I wish to conclude this article quoting a man as noble-minded as Holyoake, from whom intellectually my *Weltanschauung* separates me completely: "Men have a right to look beyond this world, but not to overlook it. Men, if they can, may connect themselves with eternity, but they cannot disconnect themselves from humanity without sacrificing duty." This maxim of life is scrupulously adhered to also by the Catholic Church which sees in our earthly life a means of attaining the Kingdom of God. Its philanthropic and educational institutions are the best proof for the correctness of my assertion. "Religion is not a thing," thus Mr. Holyoake continues, "to drive us from the world, not a perpetual moping over 'good' books; but being and doing good. . . . This end we reach not by a *theological*, but by a *secular*, path" (*Rationalism*, p. 117). Not until here we part. For that, however, we harbor no hostility whatever against our secularist friends, we only ask them to take into consideration that the largest part of mankind does attain this aim in a "theological," I had better say "religious," fashion. And this is a fact which secularism, too, will have to take into account, no matter whether its friends like it or not.