

THE RELIGION OF SCIENCE

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The religion of science by William Hamilton Wood

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INTRODUCTION

THE religious situation in America to-day seems far from being ideal. On the surface there is criticism, pessimism, belligerency, neglect, or honest bewilderment. The reasons for these conditions are not primarily moral as in the days of the Wesleys in England, but intellectual. This term, intellectual, is used in the sense of beliefs and would express the fact that men of to-day are searching for religious truth which they can believe. We believe that there is present to-day among us an active idealism, and moral qualities of inestimable value. But we feel hampered because of the absence of absorbing, captivating, soul-stirring, religious beliefs.

The sources of this situation are plainly discernible. The middle of the last century marks the beginning of present religious thinking. At that time there was a distinct uniformity in the presentation of what christianity is and teaches. The main items were: Hell fire; eternal damnation; the inspiration of the Bible; no salvation for the heathen; salvation by faith; the grace of God; sin; baptism; and heaven for those who believed and were faithful. Salvation was individual and not social. To doubt was one of the greatest of sins.

A spirit of unrest and of revolt began then to express itself, which, when fortified by the acquisition of new knowledge has been functioning ever since. The concrete

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evidence of the working of this new spirit is the presence of the many varieties of present-day isms. There is the Mental Science movement initiated by P. Quimby now manifest in its two large branches, Christian Science and New Thought. There is Spiritualism, Mormonism, and all the others. But the three movements which have profoundly influenced religious thinking are: Evolution, the Higher Criticism and Socialism.

The year 1859 witnessed the rebirth of the idea evolution and the revamping of the theory into its distinctive form, organic evolution. The conquest of this idea and theory has been phenomenal, and has extended far beyond what sober scientists could have foreseen. The epochal moment in relation to religious thinking came when some men of science determined to leave their own field and venture into metaphysics, philosophy and even theology. These thinkers determined upon the establishment of science as one of the big three: theology, philosophy, science. This goal was reached but the accomplishment of the aim only seemed to whet the appetite for further conquest. As in the case of the camel and the tent, when science once found its head inside the tent of the intellectuals it decided to occupy the whole tent. Instead of being satisfied with a science-theology claim was made to the whole of theology and religion. A religion of science ensued which has now arrived at the point where it is declared to be the real christianity.

Unlike Christian Science, this new religion decided against external forms and organization and elected to live in and control modern religious thinking. This inner life was possible because it has become the fashion to ac-

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cept evolution uncritically. It is almost taking one's life in his hands to venture a critical examination of this modern fetish. Unless, however, we mistake the signs of the times, there is setting in a strong tide away from this uncritical and worshipful attitude. This tendency is more marked among philosophers and the true scientists than among the religious scholars and leaders. The times now call for a religious and moral evaluation of the principles of science and the theory of evolution upon which this religion of science is based.

There is one note of regret which is strong through this whole work. It is that so much emphasis falls upon the negative side. This tendency toward criticism and negation, instead of toward constructive production is entirely too prevalent. We seem to-day to spend our strength throwing Hell fire and assisting grace out of the window; throwing epithets of warm composition at the ecclesiasticism and conservatism of the day; showing the faults and evils of every modern religious offering; driving men of modern views out of educational and other positions of influence; in short, disposing of our religious beliefs much more than trying to shape the truth of christianity into modern life-giving form. We would wish, however, to express the intention in this work in clear form, which is a critical evaluation of this Religion of Science, and not a desire to negative. It is hoped that an effort to help meet the present hunger for a positive, rational faith may be soon undertaken.

Special acknowledgment of thanks is made to the following men whose recent books have brought much valuable help and inspiration. To Professor Conklin for his cour-

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age in following Haeckel and others out into the open and thus giving us a concrete expression of the religion of science. To Professor Cooley for his clear and masterful appraisement of the principles of science. To Professor More for his incisive treatment of the limitations of science. To Professor Hocking for his rational idealism and philosophical expression of deep religious insight. To Professor Hudson for his clear defense of the truths we live by. To many others who may recognize their own expressions occasionally.

A bibliography is appended but the pages are not loaded with references. We have the feeling that this has been often overdone. If, however, our use of material has exceeded the bounds of hospitality we are ready to make amends.