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BY

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The Manward Side of Religion

It is said that one man can ask a question that requires seven wise men to answer. If so, then I am going to do just what the one man can do, for I propose to hold up an interrogation point before your eyes. Ibsen, the Norwegian dramatist, one of the very greatest thinkers of modern times, in almost all his writings raises problems without giving a solution to them. His method was deliberate. He chose to state in dramatic form and intensity the living issues of his day and people. Those issues could not be settled in his time. The future only could disclose what the solution might be. He was a philosopher and preacher rather than a prophet, so his refusal, rather than his failure, to settle the questions he raised, was necessary. His great power lay in his ability to see and state what were the real political, social, moral and religious issues of his time. He strove to get men to recognize and meet their duty rather than give his opinion as to results that only a later time would reveal. It is in the same spirit that I approach the matter that I have in mind. I shall try to state what is our present problem in the ministry, rather than give any dogmatic opinion or conclusion, to describe the situation in order to see our task. So in the beginning I shall state my mind by asking the question frankly and earnestly, What attitude are the thoughtful ministers and earnest students of the Scriptures going to take toward a certain aspect of religion that demands great attention to the godliness that is profitable for this present life rather than the life that is to come, that is concerned about a gospel of human comfort and alleviation, that seeks to make men happy rather than to glorify God? What are you going to do about this manward side of religion that is pressed so emphatically forward today? This manward side of religion, I believe to be the pronounced and distinctive religious development of our time. What attitude are you going to take toward it? Since the seminary is the training school for the leaders and teachers of religion, the question is a proper one for it to consider. This is the fundamental problem of the ministry and the seminary, for out of it grow many subordinate and occasional problems with which the church is now confronted.

There is something in the form of this question "The Manward Side of Religion" is a popular, untechnical, unbookish term. It is a

broad and exclusive phrase, but describes exactly what I have in mind. It has a correlative in the expression, "The Godward Side of Religion," which helps to explain it. These two embrace the field of religious ideas and activities. The Godward side of religion has had a formal, intellectual development in the past, and is expressed mainly and most clearly in theology; the manward side of religion is in process of intellectual formation. Its ideas are largely inchoate and are supposed to be gathered up in the utterly incomplete but insistent science of sociology. The Godward side of religion so far as its object is concerned is God, so far as its expression goes is found in the teaching of truth about God and his relation to men; the manward side of religion so far as its object is concerned is man, so far as its expression goes is found in doing something helpful. The Godward side of religion wanted to know what man to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man; the manward side of religion wants to know what value one man is to another, and what duty the individual owes to society. The Godward side of religion looked at man *sub specie aeternitatis*; the manward side of religion looks at man in the light of the present.

Then, too, "The Manward side of Religion" is not exactly the same thing as the manward side of Christianity. Religion as a term in ordinary use stands for the Christian religion, but the religion of the masses of people is only partly Christian. The man who reads current books and magazines, and who deals with men and women at first hand recognizes that there is a good deal of so-called religion in the world that is not distinctively Christianity. Our civilization is composite not only socially and racially, but also in the matter of ideas and principles of conduct. Just so, the religion of our civilization, though called Christian, is composite. It is made up of ideas and practices in part that have flowed down through the Middle Ages, even from Greece and Rome. It would not be very difficult to segregate some notions and convictions from current opinion and identify their pagan origin. And I am free to say, my brethren, that the Christian Church, and the Protestant Church itself, is now carrying a load of metaphysics and philosophy gathered in the Scholastic age, or adopted lately, to be baptized into Christian names and circulating as Christian theology. These unchristian conceptions are so inextricably mixed with the teachings of the Gospel of Christ that the two as they mutually interact and affect each other pass for

Christianity. However, taken altogether, they form the body of religious beliefs and life of the present age. They have produced a phrase of experience, evoked a certain aspect that we may properly call the manward side of religion. For, however much of Christianity is in the world today, the religion of the Bible and the Gospel of Christ are imperfectly comprehended and partially applied by the majority of people. I mean not mainly with reference to the subjective experience and personal conduct, but with reference to the more general subject matter of religion.

So, my brethren, my notion is that the Christian minister faces a world of men and women that are not only sinners, but men and women who have a sort of religion that is made up of different things modified and tempered by the Gospel.

Of course, any religion that can be understood and be of any value to human beings, must have a manward side and social application. This the religion of Jesus Christ has, and the only religion that truly has it at least and in the long run, but even when viewing its noblest benefits for men and its riches and wisdom on their behalf, its ardent adherent exclaims, "Of him, through him, and unto him are all things. To him be glory forever." But this religious spirit referred to lets the prevailing and dominant consciousness of God drop out in its warm devotion to man as such.

How the manward side of religion really measures the nature of man and the person of Christ is better seen in the philosophy and history that lie behind this whole development of emphasis upon the human in religion, for behind all these things there is a historical and philosophical cause. The intellectual, moral and spiritual experiences of mankind do not change without adequate reason. All those movements and appearances that are gathered together under the banner of progress are marshalled out of the past by perfectly clear and describable agencies. They are the fruits of a tree whose roots run backward into the soil of the past for a good long stretch.

It seems to me that three causes have met to produce the present status in religious life, and are peculiarly adapted to result in just the very emphasis that is placed upon man as such as the chief religious concern. Three things have converged at one point in history, and that point is our own time, to make man loom large in his own eyes. I throw these out for your judgment, and not with the assurance of an expert.

In the first place, the thinkers and writers of the last three centuries in the realm of philosophy, politics and literature have thought and written upon man as man. The period from DesCartes to Spinoza produced the great deistical phase of thought. While it was concerned with man in relation to the universe, it did good service in declaring and expounding the conception of order. It paid great respect to the political interests of man, made little of the divine right of Kings, despised traditions, loved to declare the equality of mankind. "Hence," as Professor Royce, of Harvard, describes it, "it generally opposes clerical interference in political matters; it gives to the kingdom of God a naturalistic interpretation, takes no interest in the jewelled walls and pearl gates of a Scriptural New Jerusalem, but undertakes to build a terrestrial one of its own on a geometrical plan of modern divising, a city not without foundation, but very sober as to ornamentation. Better a rational constitution than golden streets." This was the time when reason was crowned queen. This spirit practically and ultimately set going the tide of democracy and resulted politically in the formation of the modern nations of Continental Europe. From Locke through Berkeley and Kant onward the human mind turned itself inward. The inner world was perceived to be loved over the outer sense. All of this is to say in short, that though these names are those of philosophers, yet they gathered up and reflected the intellectual, moral and spiritual conceptions of their time. The characteristics common to them all and the thing they reflect out of the general feeling of their age for themselves and for all the people, is that the main interest was in man. His mental and rational powers were proclaimed in the realm of ideas, his own kingship was acclaimed in the sphere of government, and his emancipation from superstition was published in the courts of God's house.

Closely following and partly overlapping this period, came the astonishing discoveries of the forces of nature and the secret of her laws. Natural science and modern invention gave the world such an acquaintance with and mastery over natural forces that every man felt himself monarch of a great empire. The knowledge acquired in the last one hundred years more than equals in volume all the knowledge of the human race before that, and the mastery of nature through steam and electrical development of the last thirty years has put the human hand in skillful control of more power than during all

prior ages. It is not very surprising when you read history correctly that men nowadays should feel conscious of something marvellous within themselves. It is too easy, well nigh inevitable, certainly natural, that the sense of such physical power in the grip of the fingers should suggest, if not beget, a sense of moral and intellectual power. And the inference is not bad logic in a certain view that if man has been able to emancipate himself from the thralldom of natural limitations, sooner or later he will discover the way to free himself from the thralldom of the immoral and hurtful, if only he is patient enough and gets the requisite knowledge.

Now, there was thrown into the confluence of these two streams one of the mighty thoughts of Christianity. For ages the Church had been teaching the incarnation of Jesus Christ. He had been declared by councils and in every creed the Godman, both man and God. The Bible was open for every one to read, and there He was, certainly a historical figure, and there he stood a perfect man. With the innate tendency to believe what pleases, the world began not only never to question that Jesus Christ lived as alleged, but gladly to take Him over as the leader of the race, the type in a measure attainable by all. The main interest in him was in his incarnation not in his death, in his life and deeds and his human and humanitarian touch, rather than in his Atonement. So, now, we actually know that the crucifixion is preached as a scene, mighty and dramatic in its effects, and as the measure and example of service and sacrifice for all men. So here again the main interest was in man, all the more because God in Christ exalted man.

When these three ideas are thrown together, ideas that are familiar to all classes and creeds, holy and unholy, learned and lowly, the scholar and the workman, it is not surprising that whatever religion there was should wear the face and form that is human. The elevation of man in his own eyes as reflected in the philosophical, the scientific and industrial movements of the near past brought under the modifying influence of a partial and one-sided interpretation of the gospel and person of Jesus Christ naturally and logically produced that type of Christianity that prevails at present. The religious sentiments, ideas, aspirations, motives and practices that are so warmly devoted to the improvement of men's worldly estate are just exactly to be expected from what has taken place. Therefore, the Church and Christian ministry face a condition that is deep and

strong in the life of the world today; not the chance and uncaused emergence of a figure walking across the path of religious development, but the substantial movement of the masses; not a stray current upon the weather map, but a storm movement around the world.

This development appears in every department of life and experience. It does not knock at the door of the Church, but is inside the church. It does not merely appeal to the ministry, but is the inspiration of a large portion of the ministry. Its requirements are definite and its demands are fairly explicit and urgent. If you analyze the preaching and note the direction of ministerial endeavor, you will easily perceive what the people want, what the minister is trying to do, and at the same time what are the demands recognized by the minister today. Whatever the ideal may have been and however much of the old still may be folded in "the cloth," there are some precise and specific qualities looked for in the modern preacher.

First of all, his treatment of truth must be simple, practical and undogmatic. Perhaps when we consider the mighty mass of truth, the mysteries of divine revelation, the depth and glory of the knowledge of God, the vastness and stretch, the intricacy and difficulty, the history and meaning of all that goes to make and interpret the truths of revelation and compare these with the content of the average pulpit discourses, and take these latter as the measure of the real demands of people, then we might say that those demands are for a childish simplification of truth. The spirit of the age is impatient of dogma. Those things hard to be understood in our beloved brother Paul, or John, or Isaiah are passed over.

It is a blessed thing that there is milk of the word, but, oh! it is forgotten that there is strong meat of the word. The wayfaring man or the child may know of divine and saving truth, but there are thoughts, ideas, relations and revelations and experiences that only the mighty of thews and sinews may wrestle with. Along with this desire to escape the agony of finding out the glorious and awful in truth, goes the distrust of any foundation of fixed and organized opinion. The people want and will be satisfied with only the familiar and pragmatic statement of the gospel. There are very few theories and dogmas that are tenaciously and unequivocally held. There is no entirety of the God-head. The benevolence of the divine nature is emphasized to the depression of all other attributes. William James dogmatically justifies this attitude in one of his essays.

His holiness is obscured. God the Father is the main idea of the present requirements as to a doctrine of God, thus the sovereignty and justice of God with the consequent teachings of eternal punishment and hell are unpopular. Likewise, and as a consequence, the nature of man is misread. There is not so much stress laid upon his sinfulness as upon his misfortune and the evils of life. The inspiration of the Scriptures suffers greatly from the same cause. While not many are so radical as to believe that the Bible is merely the remains of Jewish literature, still not a majority hold to a verbal plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, but rather stand somewhere between. The Bible is the most widely circulated and best beloved of books, but largely because it is so full of human nature and human experience.

In the second place, the time and energy of the ministry are asked for in the rectification of the evils of society, rather than in the transformation of the individual soul. Everywhere there are evils calling for reformation, vices to be suppressed. This remarkable, universal, acute consciousness of the ills of human society is straining the old order in the State, in industry and commerce, and it is sweeping through the Church not only with power but with thoroughness. It is perfectly astounding to witness the great eagerness, the labor and energy that are given to this crusade against the troubles, crimes and limitations of human society. The man trained and consecrated especially to the altruistic service of his fellow men feels the impulse most strongly. His office is taken to be the sign that he is to go in for all things that press for moral and spiritual improvement. The improvement demanded is social rather than personal. So the minister is expected to be a crusader against evil rather than a preacher of redemption.

The age echoes the cry of Bacon for "fruit." The natural result is that the minister is called upon to be a leader rather than a preacher. This manward side of religion is active rather than contemplative. It knows nothing about the old controversy over faith and works, but it has a doctrine of work. "The work of the Church," and, "the work of the ministry" denote just what is expected. There is great confidence in numbers. Organization is thought to be the solution of all difficulties. Organized personal work is the ideal of the Church, and there are organizations to organize this purpose into actuality. I will not say that the Church does not believe in the

sufficiency of the power and spirit of God, and that it trusts to power and might of numerical human strength rather than a sovereign God, but the all-dominance and all-sufficiency of a sovereign God is obscured. So I think these are the three demands made on the present-day preacher; that he be a good, easy, conversational lecturer on simple Bible topics; that he be a practical social reformer; that he be a leader in benevolent activity, organization and work.

Now, I reach the question I wished to ask, How is the earnest-minded minister of God going to take his proper place in his own time, do the work of the Church as it ought to be done, fulfill its functions according to the New Testament ideal, and at the same time approach this threefold spirit of the present age? How is he going so to relate in his message and in his efforts the Godward and the manward sides of religion in due and proper measure? How is he going to be true to conscience and to God and yet meet the demands of the Church and the world as those demands at present are urged, without yielding too much. A refusal to take knowledge of what is passing and failure to engage in the combat of the living present may be carried to such excess as to make a minister useless, and I think there are some excellent men that are useless for practical purposes. On the other hand, to fly with the fashion, is certainly to miss the very thing for which preaching is intended, namely, the salvation of souls. How to be a live, useful, up-to-date preacher and still be in harmony with the New Testament conception of his duties is the problem the man of God has at present to face. It is not a new problem. "Every Scribe," says the Saviour, "instructed in the kingdom of God brings out of his treasure things both new and old." The Gospel is one and unchanging, but its glory is in its varied adaptability. The flowers are the same now as when they bloomed on the Gallilean hills, but botany has changed with every age. The stars are the same that floated over Abraham in Chaldea, but astronomy has changed. The gospel is the same as when the last Patmos vision was given, but its experiences and adaptations are changed.

Of course, this is the preacher's problem as it is the seminary's problem. The Theological Seminary is intended to fit men for their immediate tasks and responsibilities. If many impatient persons had their way, it would become a school of methods where the young man is given a course in English Bible, Sociology, Sabbath School work, and Church finance and management. How is the seminary

going to meet this demand? If it confines itself to the standard curriculum of systematic and dogmatic theology, sacred languages and rhetoric, Church history and Christian evidences, it is certainly doomed to die. Its patronage will diminish and its income be cut off. On the other hand, if it revises too much then it will be a different sort of thing from what we are used to. What will the seminary do to meet the present expectations properly? I venture an opinion founded on my own observation and that of others I have spoken to, that at present our seminaries would do best to have a wider course of instruction. There are two kinds of men really needed in the ministry, the minister who can do home missionary work, city missionary work, preaching to masses of factory and mine laborers, a man, in short, who is to meet the problems of the masses of the plain people. He ought to be a specialist and an expert. Our own Church is not reaching a vast number and ever-increasing number of this kind of people because we have so few men trained for that work. A few self-trained or who have taken special courses in various undenominational schools are doing what little is being done. Also the Church needs a class of men who are scholarly and who are trained for intellectual leadership. This training necessarily must be somewhat different from the training of practical experts. The seminary, it seems to me, could properly meet present conditions by widening its course to give training to both kinds of preachers. It may be that two sorts of degrees might be conferred somewhat after the manner of the "A. B." and "B. S." in our colleges. This would require a system of electives as to studies, a larger number of professors, a larger endowment and better equipment than most of our seminaries now have. Our seminaries in this case would be something between the regular and traditional institutions against which there is so much protest, and the new school of methods that the radicals desire. But still, there is left the larger and far more difficult problem to find how to remain in practice as well as conviction on the side of the truth that God is the center of religion and not man.

So, my brethren, I have raised a question and only a question after all. I hope I have spoken humbly and respectfully and truly, for I do not look upon the ministry lightly and I recognize that after all each man has his own burden to bear in this matter. Each must answer the question in his own way.