

Religions of the Empire

A Conference on Some Living Religions within the Empire

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Edited by

WILLIAM LOFTUS HARE

Joint Honorary Secretary to the Conference

With an Introduction by

SIR E. DENISON ROSS, C.I.E., Ph. D.

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3 HENRIETTA STREET, LONDON, W.C

The Christ went to Jerusalem and the Cross. Saint Paul had to see Rome; Saint Peter could not leave it.

It is still easy to find a Sacred City. The fantastic bulb-shaped towers of Moscow yet writhe barbaric and brilliant like the tortured soul of the Slav. The mounts of Jerusalem remember; and the evenings are long in amber-coloured Benares as when Gautama first came there illuminated, and the twilight moved clear and sweet; moreover the river yet keeps its garlands and its dead. The unearthly pillars of the Parthenon still declare their inviolability against all accidents of mortal sacrilege. Nearer home in Paris the Sainte Chapelle asserts that it was built of light, and burning colour redder than wine, while both the hills belong to God and Our Lady in their fashions. Also you may take Holy Water at the noble doors of the king-cathedral of Chartres, in a town where leaves murmur and waters gleam. Or see at Rouen how the mediæval marvel of spires and buttresses floats over the bourgeois birthplace of Madame Bovary. And in our own islands many a great Cathedral looms like a great apocalyptic gryphon over the quiet closes of a more compromising, more mundane devotion, as if waiting for winds of Pentecost.

I might multiply instances. London, however, even London, is a Sacred City. There are brooding cloisters round the great Abbey; and, a week or two ago, I saw the pigeons rifle the new garlands of the heroic dead at St. Paul's, birds as sacrosanct as any privileged things in an ancient temple. On the morning of Holy Saturday they bless the New Fire of the year at the portal of the Catholic cathedral, with a chant of crystalline sweetness. The Sacred City is here and now; and the mystery of God lies taken as simply as any bird in the toils made by a few streets of agonized humanity. I have heard the nightingale sing in the depths of the forest. I have seen the lily-lea beneath an old French castle above the Tay. I have watched the unsubstantial mountains vanish range upon range through rainy light and lighted rain into the kindred peaks of heaven. I have felt the wild cherry-trees sing their epithalamium, and the water-lilies drowse on a faëry loch. And the gods were with all these things, and with others. But, for his very Passion and his Resurrection, the god must enter into a human heart, and tread the Via Dolorosa in a Sacred City. . . .

For all delight is founded on the mystery of pain, and any god must die to rise again for the sake of the Sacred City. It is the will of the one God who is behind all the gods.

Religion and the Life of Civilization

By Mr. Christopher Dawson.

EVER since the rise of the modern scientific movement in the eighteenth century there has been a tendency among sociologists and historians of culture to neglect the study of religion in its fundamental social aspects. The apostles of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment were, above all, intent on deducing the laws of social life and progress from a small number of simple rational principles. They hacked through the luxuriant and deep-rooted growth of traditional belief with the ruthlessness of pioneers in a tropical jungle. They had felt no need to understand the development of the historic religions and their influence on the course of human history, for, to them, historic religion was essentially negative, it was the clogging and obscurantist power ever dragging back the human spirit in its path towards progress and enlightenment. With Condorcet, they traced religious origin no further than to the duplicity of the first knave and the simplicity of the first fool.

And in the nineteenth century, apart from the St. Simonian circle, the same attitude, expressed with less frankness and brutality, it is true, still dominated scientific thought, and found classical expression in England in the culture-history of Buckle and in the sociology of Herbert Spencer. Indeed, to-day, in spite of the reaction of the last thirty years, it has largely become a part of our intellectual heritage, and is taken for granted in much current sociology and anthropology. Religion was conceived of as a complex of ideas and speculations concerning the Unknowable, and thus belonged to a different world to that which was the province of sociology. The social progress, which the latter science studies, is the result of the direct response of man to his material environment and to the growth of positive knowledge concerning the material world. Thus social evolution is a unity which can be studied without reference to the numerous changing systems of religious belief and practice that have risen and fallen during its course. The latter may reflect, in some degree, the cultural circumstances under which they have arisen, but they are secondary, and in no sense a formative element in the production of culture.

Enlightenment

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Spencer

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And undoubtedly these ideas held good for the age in which they were formed. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the world of secular culture was an autonomous kingdom, where progress owed nothing to the beliefs and sanctions of the existing authoritative religion. But it is dangerous to argue back from the highly specialized conditions of an advanced and complicated civilization to the elementary principles of social development. Indeed, it needs but a moment's thought to realize that that extraordinary age of intellectual political and economic revolution is comparable with no other period in the history of the world. It was at once creative and destructive, but essentially transitional and impermanent, and this instability was due to no other cause than to that very separation and dislocation of the inner and outer worlds of human experience, which the thinkers of the age accepted as a normal condition of existence.

Religion and the Rise of Ancient Civilization

For a social culture, even of the most primitive kind, is never simply a material unity. It involves not only a certain uniformity in social organization and in the way of life, but also a continuous and conscious psychic discipline. Even a common language, one of the first requirements of civilized life, can only be produced by ages of co-operative effort—common thinking as well as common action. From the very dawn of primitive culture men have attempted, in however crude and symbolic a form, to understand the laws of life, and to adapt their social activity to their workings. Primitive man never looked on the world in the modern way, as a passive or, at most, mechanistic system, a background for human energies, mere matter for the human mind to mould. He saw the world as a living world of mysterious forces, greater than his own, in the placation and service of which his life consisted. And the first need for a people, no less vital than food or weapons, was the psychic equipment or armament, by which they fortified themselves against the powerful and mysterious forces that surrounded them. It is impossible for us to draw the line between religion and magic, between law and morals, so intimately is the whole social life of a primitive people bound up with its religion. And the same is true of the earliest civilization. The first development of a higher culture in the Near East, the beginnings of agriculture and irrigation, and the rise of city life were profoundly religious in their conception. Men did not learn to control the forces of nature, to make the earth fruitful, and to raise flocks and herds as a practical task of economic organization in which they relied on their own enterprise and hard work. They viewed it rather as a religious rite by which they co-operated as priests or hierophants in the great cosmic mystery of the fertilization and growth of nature. The mystical drama,

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annually renewed, of the mother-goddess and her dying and reviving son and spouse, was, at the same time, the economic cycle of ploughing and seed time and harvest, by which the people lived. And the king was not so much the organizing ruler of a political community, as the priest and religious head of his people, who represented the god himself and stood between the goddess and her people, interpreting to them the divine will, and eventually even offering up his own life for them in a solemn ritual ceremony.

Thus there was a profound sense that man lived not by his own strength and knowledge, but by his acting in harmony with the divine cosmic powers, and this harmony could only be attained by sacrifice and at the price of blood, whether the sacrifice of virility, as in Asia Minor; of the first-born children, as in Syria; or of the life of the king himself, as we seem to see dimly in the very dawn of history throughout the Near East.

It is even possible that agriculture and the domestication of animals were exclusively religious in their beginnings, and had their origin in the ritual observation and imitation of the processes of nature which is so characteristic of this type of religion. Certainly the mimicry of nature was carried to very great lengths, as we can see in the religion of Asia Minor in historic times. Sir William Ramsay has even suggested that the whole organization of the shrine of the great goddess at Ephesus and at other places in Lydia and Phrygia was an elaborate imitation of the life of the bees and the hive; the priestesses being named *mellissae*—the working bees; the priests, or *essenae*, representing the drones; while the goddess herself was the queen-bee, whose behaviour to her temporary partner certainly bears a striking analogy to that of the goddess to Attis in the Phrygian legend.

But it is only in highly conservative regions like Asia Minor that we can see this primitive religion in comparative simplicity. In Babylonia at the very dawn of history, in the fourth millennium B.C., it had already developed a highly specialized theology and temple ritual. The god and goddess of each city had acquired special characteristics and personalities, and had taken their place in a Sumerian pantheon. But Sumerian civilization still remained entirely religious in character. The god and the goddess were the acknowledged rulers of their city, the king was but their high-priest and steward. The temple, the house of the god, was the centre of the life of the community, for the god was the chief landowner, trader and banker, and kept a great staff of servants and administrators. The whole city territory was, moreover, the territory of the god, and the Sumerians spoke not of the boundaries of the city of Kish or the city of Lagash, but of the boundaries of the god Enlil or the god Ningirsu. All that the king did for his city was undertaken at the command of the god and for the god. Thus we read how

Entemena, of Lagash, "made the mighty canal at the boundary of Enlil for Ningirsu, the king whom he loved." At the command of Enlil, Nina and Ningirsu he cut the great canal from the Tigris to the Euphrates—the Shatt el Hai—which was one of the greatest feats of ancient engineering. And the remains of the ancient literature that have come down to us prove that this is not merely the phraseology of the State religion, it represented a profound popular belief in the interdependence and communion of the city and its divinity.

Turning to Egypt, we find a no less intensely religious spirit impregnating the archaic culture.

Never perhaps before or since has a high civilisation attained to the centralization and unification that characterized the Egyptian State in the age of the pyramid-builders. It was more than State Socialism, for it meant the entire absorption of the whole life of the individual, in a cause outside himself. The whole vast bureaucratic and economic organization of the empire was directed to a single end, the glorification of the sun-god and his child, the god-king.

It is he [the sun-god] who has adorned thee [Egypt].

It is he who has built thee.

It is he who has founded thee.

Thou dost for him everything that he says to thee

In every place where he goes.

Thou carriest to him every tree that is in thee.

Thou carriest to him all food that is in thee.

Thou carriest to him the gifts that are in thee.

Thou carriest to him everything that is in thee.

Thou carriest to him everything that shall be in thee.

Thou bringest them to him

To every place where his heart desires to be.¹

It is indeed one of the most remarkable spectacles in history to see all the resources of a great culture and a powerful State organized, not for war and conquest, not for the enrichment of a dominant class, but simply to provide the sepulchre and to endow the chantries and tomb-temples of the dead kings. And yet it was this very concentration on death and the after-life that gave Egyptian civilization its amazing stability. The sun and the Nile, Re and Osiris, the pyramid and the mummy, as long as these remained, it seemed that Egypt must stand fast, her life bound up in the unending round of prayer and ritual observance. All the great development of Egyptian art and learning—astronomy and mathematics and engineering—grew up in the service of this central religious idea, and when, in the age of final decadence, foreign powers took possession of the sacred kingdom, Libyans and Persians

¹Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt*. pp. 13-14:

Greeks and Romans all found it necessary to "take the gifts of Horus" and to disguise their upstart imperialism under the forms of the ancient solar theocracy, in order that the machinery of Egyptian civilization should continue to function.

The Decline of the Archaic Religion-Culture

Yet, both in Egypt and in Western Asia, the primitive theocratic culture had begun to decline by the second half of the third millennium B.C. The rise of the great States in Egypt and Babylonia, had, on the one hand, made man less dependent on the forces of nature, and, on the other hand, had brought him face to face with a new series of problems—moral and intellectual—which appear in a striking form in the early Egyptian literature of the Middle Kingdom. The Song of King Intef, the Admonition of Ipuwer, the Complaint of Khekheperre-Sonbu, and, above all, the so-called Dialogue of One Weary of Life with his own Soul, all bear witness to a profound criticism of life, and an intense spiritual ferment. And at the same period in Babylonia we find a similar attitude expressed in the poem of the Righteous Sufferer, the so-called Babylonian Job. Man no longer accepted the world and the State as they were, as the manifestation of the divine powers. They compared the world they knew, with the social and moral order that they believed in, and condemned the former. Consequently, for the first time we get a sense of dualism between what is and what ought to be, between the way of men and the way of the gods. The State and the kingship are no longer entirely religious in the kings of the new type—those Twelfth-Dynasty monarchs who are among the greatest and most virile monarchs that have ever reigned. We are conscious of a clear realization of human, personal power and responsibility, and at the same time of a profound disillusionment. We see this in the famous inscription which Senusret III set up at the southern boundary of Egypt, bidding his subjects not to worship his statue, but to fight for it; and yet more intimately in the warning that the founder of the dynasty, Amenemhet I, gave to his son and successor: "Fill not thy heart with a brother, know not a friend, make not for thyself intimates wherein there is no end, harden thyself against subordinates, that thou mayest be king of the earth, that thou mayest be ruler of the lands, that thou mayest increase good."¹

The same spirit of pride and self-reliance breathes in the fierce leonine faces of Senusret III and Amenemhet III, and distinguishes the sculpture of the twelfth dynasty from that of the Old Kingdom, which, for all its realism, was interpenetrated by a profoundly religious spirit. Hence, perhaps, the premature ending of this

¹ *Cambridge Ancient History*, i., 303; Breasted, *op. cit.*, p. 303, *A. R. E.*, i., 474-83.

Egypt - was the socialist State

all great Egypt had developed due to its religion

brilliant epoch, and the return, after the Hyksos invasions, to the traditional religiosity of the past, which was inseparable from the survival of the Egyptian State. That the new spirit of criticism and thought continued to be active is, however, proved by the appearance under the eighteenth dynasty, in the fourteenth century B.C., of Akenaten's bold attempt to institute a new solar monotheism as the State religion of Egypt and Syria. Here already, in the fourteenth century B.C., we find the essentials of a world-religion—a religion that is universal in its claims, and which attempts to find the source and first principle which lies behind all the changing phenomena of nature. But the traditional theocratic religion-culture of the Nile Valley was too strong for any such innovation, and the author of the reform went down to history as "the criminal of Akhetaton."

The Coming of the World-Religions

But, in the course of the following millennium B.C., a spiritual change of the most profound significance passed over the world, a change which was not confined to any one people or culture, but which made itself felt from India to the Mediterranean and from China to Persia. And it brought with it a complete revolution in culture, since it involved the destruction of the old religious civilization that was based on a co-operation with the divinized forces of nature, and the discovery of a new world of absolute and unchanging reality beside which the natural world—the world of appearances and of earthly life—paled into a shadow and became dream-like and illusory.

Alike in India and in Greece we can trace a striving towards the conception of an invisible underlying cosmic cause or essence—Atman, Logos, the One—and of the unreality of the continual flux which makes up the phenomenal world, but it was in India that the decisive step was first taken, and it was in India that the new view of reality was followed out unwaveringly in all its practical implications.

"He who, dwelling in the earth," says Yājñavalkya, "is other than the earth, whom the earth knows not, whose body the earth is, who inwardly rules the earth, is thy Self [Atman], the Inward Ruler, the deathless. He who, dwelling in all beings, is other than all beings, whom all beings know not, whose body all beings are, who inwardly rules all beings, is thy Self, the Inward Ruler, the deathless. He who, dwelling in the mind, is other than the mind, whom the mind knows not, whose body the mind is, who inwardly rules the mind, is thy Self, the Inward Ruler, the deathless. He, unseen, sees; unheard, hears; unthought, thinks; uncomprehended, comprehends. There is no other than he who

sees—hears—thinks—comprehends. He is thy Self, the Inward Ruler, the deathless. All else is fraught with sorrow."¹

Hence the one end of life, the one task for the wise man, is deliverance—to cross the bridge, to pass the ford from death to life, from appearance to reality, from time to eternity—all the goods of human life in the family or the State are vanity compared with this. "Possessed by delusion, a man toils for wife and child; but, whether he fulfil his purpose or not, he must surrender the enjoyment thereof. When one is blessed with children and flocks and his heart is clinging to them, Death carries him away as doth a tiger a sleeping deer."²

How far removed is this attitude from the simple acquiescence in the good things of this world that is shown by the nature-religions and by the archaic culture that was founded on them! The whole spirit of the new teaching is ascetic, whether it is the intellectual asceticism of the Brahman purging his soul by a kind of Socratic discipline, or the bodily asceticism of the *sannyasi*, who seeks deliverance by the gate of *tapas*—bodily penance. And so there arose in India, especially in the fifth and sixth centuries B.C., a series of "disciplines of salvation"; that of the Jains, that of the Yoga and many more, culminating in the greatest of them all, the Way of Buddha. Buddhism is perhaps the most characteristic of all the religions of new universalist and absolute type, since it seems to make the fewest metaphysical and theological assumptions, and yet to present the anti-natural, world-denying conception of life in its extremest form. Life is evil, the body is evil, matter is evil. All existence is bound to the wheel of birth and death, of suffering and desire. Not only is this human life an illusion, but the life of the gods is an illusion, too, and behind the whole cosmic process there is no underlying reality—neither Brahman nor Atman nor the Gunas. There is only the torture-wheel of sentient existence and the path of deliverance, the *via negativa* of the extinction of desire which leads to Nirvana—the Eternal Beatific Silence.

At first sight nothing could be further removed from the world-refusal of the Indian ascetic than the Hellenic attitude to life. Yet the Greeks of Ionia and Italy, during the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., were bent, no less than the Indians, on piercing the veil of appearances and reaching the underlying reality. It is true that the Greeks set out in their quest for the ultimate cosmic principle in a spirit of youthful curiosity and free rational inquiry, and thereby became the creators of natural science. But there was also the purely religious current of Orphic mysticism, with its doctrines of rebirth and immortality, and of the progressive

¹ *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad III*, vii., tr. L. D. Barnett.

² *Mahābhārata XII*, ch. 175 and ch. 174, tr. L. D. Barnett.

World
moving to
Monotheism

enlightenment and emancipation of the soul from the defilement of corporeal existence, which had a powerful influence on the Greek mind and even on Greek philosophy, until at last the vision of eternity, which had so long absorbed the mind of India, burst on the Greek world with dazzling power.

It was through the golden mouth of Plato that the vision of the two worlds—the world of appearance and shadows, and the world of timeless, changeless reality—found classic expression in the West. The Greek mind turned, with Plato, away from the many-coloured, changing world of appearance and unreality to that other world of the eternal Forms, where abides the very Being with which true knowledge is concerned, the colourless, formless, intangible essence, visible only to the mind, the pilot of the soul; "a nature which is everlasting, not growing or decaying or waxing or waning, but Beauty only, absolute, separate, simple and everlasting, which, without diminution and without increase or any change in itself, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things." "What if man had eyes to see this true Beauty—pure and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colours and vanities of human life," would not all human and terrestrial things become mean and unimportant to such a one? And is not the true end of life to return whence we came, "to fly away from earth to heaven," to recover the divine and deific vision which once "we beheld shining in pure light, pure ourselves and not yet enshrined in that living tomb which we carry about, now that we are imprisoned in the body, like the oyster in his shell." This note, so characteristic and so unforgettable, is never afterwards wholly lost in the ancient world, and it is renewed with redoubled emphasis in that final harvest of the Hellenic tradition, which is Neo-Platonism.

The World-Religions and Material Progress

It is easy for us to understand a few exceptional men, philosophers and mystics, adopting this attitude to life, but it is harder to realize how it could become the common possession of a whole society or civilization. Yet, in the course of a few centuries, it became the common possession of practically all the great cultures of the ancient world. It is true that Confucian China was a partial exception, but even China was almost submerged, for a time, by the invasion of Indian mysticism and monasticism, for which the way had already been prepared by the native Taoist tradition.

And each of these cultures had to deal with essentially the same problem—how to reconcile the new attitude to life with the old civilization that they had inherited, a civilization that had been built up so laboriously by the worship and cultivation of the powers of Nature. It is obvious that the new religions were not themselves

productive of a new material civilization; their whole tendency was away from the material and economic side of life towards the life of pure spirit. It is indeed difficult to see how the most extreme examples of this type of religion, such as Manichæanism, were reconcilable with any material social culture whatever. In other cases, however, especially in India, the archaic culture was able to maintain itself almost intact, in spite of the dominance of the new religions. As Professor Slater has well said, it is in the great temple cities of Dravidian India that we can still see before us to-day the vanished civilizations of Egypt and Babylonia.¹

To the teacher or ascetic of the new religion the ancient rites have acquired an esoteric and symbolic significance, while the common people still find in them their ancient meaning, and seek contact through them with the beneficent or destructive powers of Nature that rule the peasant's life. In yet other cases, above all in Islam, this dualism is impossible, and the whole of life is brought into direct relation with the new religious conception. Terrestrial life loses its intrinsic importance, it is but as "the beat of a gnat's wing" in comparison with the eternal. But it acquires importance as a preparation, a time of training and warfare, of which the discipline and suffering are repaid by the eternal joys of Paradise.

Thus the new religions in these three main types are, on the whole, not favourable to material progress. In some cases they are even retrograde. Sir William Ramsay has shewn, in the case of Asia Minor, how the passing of the old nature-religions had a depressing effect on agriculture, on economic prosperity and even perhaps on hygiene; and the same thing is no doubt true, in some degree, of many different regions. The great achievements of the new culture lie in the domain of literature and art. But, from the material point of view, there is expansion rather than progress. The new culture simply gave a new form and a new spirit to the materials that it had received from the archaic civilization. In all essentials Babylonia, in the time of Hammurabi, and even earlier, had reached a pitch of material civilization which has never since been surpassed in Asia. After the artistic flowering of the early Middle Ages the great religion-cultures became stationary and even decadent. Eternity was changeless, and why should man, who lived for eternity, change?

This is the secret of the "Unchanging East," which has impressed so many Western observers, and which gives to a civilization such as that of Burma its remarkable attractiveness and charm. But such societies are living on the past; they do not advance in power

¹ "In other parts of India, one feels oneself sometimes carried back into the Middle Ages . . . in such a temple as that of Menakshi and Siva in Madura one can only dream of having revisited some great shrine of Isis and Osiris in Egypt, or of Marduk in Babylon."—Slater, *The Dravidian Element in Indian Culture*, p. 167.

Plato's role in Synthesis.

and knowledge, it even seems as though they are retreating step by step before the powers of primitive nature until at last they disappear, as the marvellous achievements of Ankhor and Anuradapura have been swallowed up by the jungle.

The Rise of the Modern Scientific Culture

But a ferment of change, a new principle of movement and progress has entered the world with the civilization of modern Europe.

The development of the European culture was, of course, largely conditioned by religious traditions the consideration of which lie outside the limits of this enquiry. It was, however, not until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that the new principle, which characterized the rise of modern civilization, made its appearance. It was then that there arose—first in Italy and afterwards throughout Western Europe—the new attitude to life that has been well named Humanism. It was, in fact, a reaction against the whole transcendent spiritualist view of existence, a return from the divine and the absolute to the human and the finite. Man turned away from the pure white light of eternity to the warmth and colour of the earth. He rediscovered Nature, not, indeed, as the divine and mysterious power that men had served and worshipped in the first ages of civilization, but as a reasonable order which he could know by science and art, and which he could use to serve his own purpose.

"Experiment," says Leonardo da Vinci, the great precursor, "is the true interpreter between Nature and man." Experience is never at fault. What is at fault is man's laziness and ignorance. "Thou, O God, dost sell us all good things for the price of work."

This is the essential note of the new European movement; it was applied science, not abstract, speculative knowledge, as with the Greeks. "Mechanics," says Leonardo again, "are the Paradise of the mathematical sciences, for in them the fruits of the latter are reaped." And the same principles of realism and practical reason are applied in political life.

The state was no longer an ideal hierarchy that symbolized and reflected the order of the spiritual world. It was the embodiment of human power, whose only law was Necessity.

Yet no complete break was made with the past. The people remained faithful to the religious tradition. Here and there a Giordano Bruno in philosophy or a Machiavelli in statecraft gave their whole-hearted adhesion to Naturalism, but for the most part both statesmen and philosophers endeavoured to serve two masters, like Descartes or Richelieu. They remained fervent Christians, but at the same time they separated the sphere of religion from the sphere of reason, and made the latter an independent autonomous kingdom in which the greater part of their lives was spent.

It was only in the eighteenth century that this compromise, which so long dominated European culture, broke down before the assaults of the new humanists, the encyclopædists and the men of the Enlightenment in France, England and Germany. We have already described the attitude of that age to religion—its attempt to sweep away the old accumulation of tradition and to refound civilization on a rational and naturalistic basis. And the negative side of this programme was, indeed, successfully carried out. European civilization was thoroughly secularized. The traditional European polity, with its semi-divine royalty, its State Churches and its hereditary aristocratic hierarchy, was swept away and its place was taken by the liberal bourgeois State of the nineteenth century, which aimed, above all, at industrial prosperity and commercial expansion. But the positive side of the achievement was much less secure. It is true that Western Europe and the United States of America advanced enormously in wealth and population, and in control over the forces of nature; while the type of culture that they had developed spread itself victoriously over the old world of Asia and the new world of Africa and Oceania, first by material conquest, and later by its intellectual and scientific prestige, so that the great Oriental religion-cultures began to lose their age-long, unquestioned dominance over the daily life and thought of the peoples of the East; at least, among the educated classes.

Progress and Disillusionment the Meaning of Modern Social Unrest

But there was not a corresponding progress in spiritual things. As Comte had foreseen, the progressive civilization of the West, without any unifying spiritual force, and without an intellectual synthesis, tended to fall back into social anarchy. The abandonment of the old religious traditions did not bring humanity together in a natural and moral unity, as the eighteenth-century philosophers had hoped. On the contrary, it allowed the fundamental differences of race and nationality, of class and private interest, to appear in their naked antagonism. The progress in wealth and power did nothing to appease these rivalries; rather it added fuel to them, by accentuating the contrasts of wealth and poverty, and widening the field of international competition. The new economic imperialism, as it developed in the last generation of the nineteenth century, was as grasping, as unmoral, and as full of dangers of war, as any of the imperialisms of the old order. And, while under the old order the state had recognized its limits as against a spiritual power, and had only extended its claims over a part of human life, the modern state admitted no limitations, and embraced the whole life of the individual citizen in its economic and military organization.

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Hence the rise of a new type of social unrest. Political disturbances are as old as human nature; in every age misgovernment and oppression has been met by violence and disorder, but it is a new thing, and perhaps a phenomenon peculiar to our modern Western civilization, that men should work and think and agitate for the complete remodelling of society according to some ideal of social perfection. It belongs to the order of religion, rather than to that of politics, as politics were formerly understood. It finds its only parallel in the past in movements of the most extreme religious type, like that of the Anabaptists in sixteenth-century Germany, and the Levellers and Fifth Monarchy Men of Puritan England. And when we study the lives of the founders of modern Socialism, the great Anarchists and even some of the apostles of Nationalist Liberalism like Mazzini, we feel at once that we are in the presence of religious leaders, whether prophets or heresiarchs, saints or fanatics. Behind the hard rational surface of Karl Marx's materialist and Socialist interpretation of history there burns the flame of an apocalyptic vision. For what was that social revolution in which he put his hope but a nineteenth-century version of the Day of the Lord, in which the rich and the powerful of the earth should be consumed, and the princes of the Gentiles brought low, and the poor and disinherited should reign in a regenerated universe? So, too, Marx, in spite of his professed atheism, looked for the realization of this hope, not, like St. Simon and his fellow idealist Socialists, to the conversion of the individual and to human efforts towards the attainment of a new social ideal, but to "the arm of the Lord," the necessary, ineluctable working-out of the Eternal Law, which human will and human effort are alike powerless to change or stay.

But the religious impulse behind these social movements is not a constructive one. It is as absolute in its demands as that of the old religions, and it admits of no compromise with reality. As soon as the victory is gained, and the phase of destruction and revolution is ended, the inspiration fades away before the tasks of practical realization. We look in vain in the history of United Italy for the religious enthusiasm that sustained Mazzini and his fellows, and it took very few years to transform the Rousseauian idealism of revolutionary France, the Religion of Humanity, into Napoleonic and even Macchiavellian realism.

The revolutionary attitude—and it is perhaps the characteristic religious attitude of modern Europe—is, in fact, but another symptom of the divorce between religion and social life. The nineteenth-century revolutionaries—the Anarchists, the Socialists and, to some extent, the Liberals—were driven to their destructive activities by the sense that actual European society was a mere embodiment of material force and fraud—"magnum latrocinium,"

as St. Augustine says—that it was based on no principle of justice, and organized for no spiritual or ideal end; and the more the simpler and more obvious remedies—republicanism, universal suffrage, national self-determination—proved disappointing to the reformers, the deeper became their dissatisfaction with the whole structure of existing society. And finally, when the process of disillusionment is complete, this religious impulse that lies behind the revolutionary attitude may turn itself against social life altogether, or at least against the whole system of civilization that had been built up in the last two centuries. This attitude of mind seems endemic in Russia, partly, perhaps, as an inheritance of the Byzantine religious tradition. We see it appearing in different forms in Tolstoi, in Dostoevski and in the Nihilists, and it is present as a psychic undercurrent in most of the Russian revolutionary movements. It is the spirit which seeks not political reform, not the improvement of social conditions, but escape, liberation—Nirvana. In the words of a modern poet (Francis Adams), it is

To wreck the great guilty temple,
And give us Rest.

And in the years since the war, when the failure of the vast machinery of modern civilization has seemed so imminent, this view of life has become more common even in the West. It has inspired the poetry of Albert Ehrenstein and many others.¹

Mr. D. H. Lawrence has well expressed it in Count Psanek's profession of faith, in *The Ladybird* (pp. 43-4).

I have found my God. The god of destruction. The god of anger, who throws down the steeples and factory chimneys.

Not the trees, these chestnuts, for example—not these—nor the chattering sorcerers, the squirrels—nor the hawk that comes. Not those.

What grudge have I against a world where even the hedges are full of berries, branches of black berries that hang down and red berries that thrust up? Never would I hate the world. But the world of man—I hate it.

I believe in the power of my dark red heart. God has put the hammer in my breast—the little eternal hammer. Hit—hit—hit. It hits on the world of man. It hits, it hits. And it hears the thin sound of cracking.

Oh, may I live long. May I live long, so that my hammer may strike and strike, and the cracks go deeper, deeper. Ah, the world of man. Ah, the joy, the passion in every heart-beat. Strike home

¹ For instance, the following verse:

Ich beschwöre euch, zerstampet die Stadt.
Ich beschwöre euch, zertrümmert die Städte.
Ich beschwöre euch, zerstört die Maschine.
Ich beschwöre euch, zerstört den Staat.

ideal
of
social
perf.
new

idealism
want
escape

polit.
relig.
mix

strike, true, strike sure. Strike to destroy it. Strike. Strike. To destroy the world of man. Ah, God. Ah, God, prisoner of peace.

It may seem to some that these instances are negligible, mere morbid extravagances, but it is impossible to exaggerate the dangers that must inevitably arise when once social life has become separated from the religious impulse.

We have only to look at the history of the ancient world and we shall see how tremendous are these consequences. The Roman Empire, and the Hellenistic civilization of which it was the vehicle, became separated in this way from any living religious basis, which all the efforts of Augustus and his helpers were powerless to restore; and thereby, in spite of its high material and intellectual culture, the dominant civilization became hateful in the eyes of the subject oriental world. Rome was to them not the ideal world-city of Virgil's dream, but the incarnation of all that was anti-spiritual—Babylon the great, the Mother of Abominations, who bewitched and enslaved all the peoples of the earth, and on whom, at last, the slaughter of the saints and the oppression of the poor would be terribly avenged. And so all that was strongest and most living in the moral life of the time separated itself from the life of society and from the service of the State, as from something unworthy and even morally evil. And so we see in Egypt in the fourth century, over against the great Hellenistic city of Alexandria, filled with art and learning and all that made life delightful, a new power growing up, the power of the men of the desert, the naked, fasting monks and ascetics, in whom, however, the new world recognised its masters. When, in the fifth century, the greatest of the late Latin writers summed up the history of the great Roman tradition, it is in a spirit of profound hostility and disillusionment: "*Acceperunt mercedem suam,*" says he, in an unforgettable sentence, "*vani vanam.*"

This spiritual alienation of its own greatest minds is the price that every civilization has to pay when it loses its religious foundations, and is contented with a purely material success. We are only just beginning to understand how intimately and profoundly the vitality of a society is bound up with its religion. It is the religious impulse which supplies the cohesive force which unifies a society and a culture. The great civilizations of the world do not produce the great religions as a kind of cultural by-product; in a very real sense, the great religions are the foundations on which the great civilizations rest. A society which has lost its religion becomes sooner or later a society which has lost its culture.

What then is to be the fate of this great modern civilization of ours? A civilization which has gained an extension and a wealth of power and knowledge which the world has never known before.

Is it to waste its forces in the pursuit of selfish and mutually destructive aims, and to perish for lack of vision? Or can we hope that society will once again become animated by a common faith and hope, which will have the power to order our material and intellectual achievements in an enduring spiritual unity?

For the answer to these questions we must wait—who knows how long? But at least during the last week we have learnt to know more of the religious traditions and movements which have moulded the great oriental civilizations of the past, for the lack of knowledge of which our Western interpretations of world-history have so often failed. We, too, possess a great spiritual inheritance, and the deeper go our mutual understanding and comprehension the better are the prospects for the future of civilization. For as a Western philosopher and poet, Campanella, has said:

Conciliabit amor fraternus cognitus omnes.