

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF RELIGION

A SOCIOLOGICAL VIEW

BY

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To my son,

WALTER BRECKENRIDGE ELLWOOD,

and to all of his generation,
who have before them the heavy
task of building a world of
justice, good will, and peace.

PREFACE

IN previous works the author has repeatedly said: "One of the greatest social needs of the present is a religion adapted to the requirements of modern life and in harmony with modern science."¹ Since the beginning of the Great War a number of the most dispassionate and detached thinkers of our time have expressed the same general idea. Two eminent British sociologists have recently expressed themselves thus: "We are compelled to the admission (one hard for the student, the man of pure or applied science), that the essential problem of life is not material, but psychical. In a word, life needs to be *eupsychic*; or in an older word, religious."² In May, 1916, Mr. G. Lowes Dickinson said in a private conversation with the author, "If I should guess, I would say that the great need of the world, just at present, is more religion. Of course, I mean religion of the right sort; of religion of a certain sort there is a plenty, but not enough of the right sort."³ Again, in March, 1915, the author had the pleasure of visiting with Mr. Frederic Harrison, the veteran leader of the English Positivists. Mr. Harrison forcefully expressed the opinion that the Great War was due to the decadence of ethical religion, and that the problem of world peace and order would never be settled until the religious question was settled.

¹ See *Introduction to Social Psychology*, p. 273; *The Social Problem*, Revised Edition, p. 217.

² Branford and Geddes, *The Coming Polity*, p. 242.

³ See also the statements in his work, *Religion: a Criticism and a Forecast*.

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He has since expressed substantially the same view in recent books.¹

Unlike the last two social thinkers just cited, the present writer would find the religion needed by the modern world in a more rational, revitalized, socialized Christianity. He agrees much more nearly with another eminent leader of Anglo-American ethical and religious thinking, who, though like the two preceding in his detachment from conventional religious circles, yet has found it possible to say: "Christianity, as soon as it has become transfused with the spirit and transformed by the method of modern science, will bring about the Millennium."² The thesis of this book, however, is rather that it is only a Christianity of this sort which is equal to the task of saving modern civilization, and of harmonizing its warring interests, classes, nations, and races. To this extent the author is in accord with those thinkers who see in a religious awakening the only hope of bringing our world back to social sanity and good will.³ But he would add that the religious spirit can be revived only when religion is brought into harmony with men's unquestioned scientific beliefs and with their social needs—that is, into harmony with science and democracy. Intelligence rather than emotion or tradition should guide, accordingly, in the religious life.

The modern world is completely torn asunder by conflicting ideals of life. It will continue to remain in this condition until there is some unity in social doctrine. But there is hope in all this confusion that the mass of men are coming to see that it is impossible for either

¹ See especially *The German Peril*, pp. 266-269.

² Dr. Stanton Coit, *The Soul of America*, p. 247.

³ See especially Kidd, *The Science of Power*; also Patrick, *The Psychology of Social Reconstruction*, p. 286.

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individuals or nations to live together harmoniously upon the basis of the pagan and barbarous ideals of life which have been handed down in the traditions of our civilization and which some men, without adequate sociological knowledge, have endorsed. There is hope, in other words, that through calamity, if in no other way, men are slowly coming to a sense of the value of likemindedness and of good will among all men. Science, through its progressive demonstration of the truth in all fields of human interest, is slowly showing men how to achieve likemindedness as regards the essential problems of human living. But the program of applied social science cannot be carried out without good will among men; and herein lies the supreme importance of social religion. Religion concerns itself with social values. By intensifying and universalizing them it gives rise to the life-mood of human beings and thus furnishes a control which is competent to achieve universal good will. This, in the opinion of the writer, is the solution of the problem of securing adequate motivation for a better social order, which is so much debated at the present time; and if correct, it obviously places a heavy responsibility upon the Church.

The religious revolution of the last two generations, which undermined theological Christianity, however, has left the Church all but prostrate and powerless before the immense social task which now confronts it. It is the object of this book to help show how the breath of life may again be breathed into its nostrils, and how the Church can again become that "spiritual power" which the world needs to energize and harmonize its life. To be sure, a host of goodly books are attempting, at this moment, to do the very same thing. The author would claim only the merit of a specific point of view—that of

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social science¹—in adding his work to the many that already exist. It must be, however, the social sciences to which the world must look more and more for guidance and hence to which religion also must look. The significance of the social sciences for religion, he believes, is not yet appreciated, and his task is to attempt to disclose, in part, that significance. He does not attempt, accordingly, to discuss specifically the metaphysical and theological questions which are usually raised whenever religion is mentioned. He attempts to discuss the reconstruction of religion only from a sociological, not from a philosophical or theological viewpoint. It is true that in a few places in the book rather definite theological views have been expressed. If these are found by any one to be bad theology, it will not affect the argument of the book. For it cannot be too strongly asserted that neither the vitality nor the social power of religion is bound up with the fate of any *specific* theological doctrine. This truth, to which both history and anthropology abundantly testify, needs emphasis especially in a period of religious reconstruction like the present. Religion must be freed from the trammels of theological dogmatism if it is to be free to develop in such a way as to meet the requirements of modern life.

In brief, religion as a practical program for dealing with the world's ills must be based upon social science—it must be ever guided by growing social knowledge. On the other hand, social science must find its completion in social religion. These two should become but different aspects of one fundamental attitude in all normal, edu-

¹ The term, "social science," as used in this book, refers not only to sociology, but to all the social sciences taken collectively, including anthropology, social psychology, social ethics and social philosophy, so far as these latter are based upon science.

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cated minds. The writer is not unaware of the dangers and difficulties of such a position. In the present condition of both the scientific and the religious world it may seem mere rashness to affirm that completed science leads to religion and that the conclusions of social science, moreover, are practically at one with those of the new social Christianity. Such a position can scarcely be expected to please the conservatives in either science or religion. The writer is willing to accept the full consequences of this position, and, in the words of a great humanitarian statesman, "to play for the verdict of mankind." He would go further and say that beyond the merely descriptive tasks of science are its tasks of evaluation, and that upon the social sciences especially rests the responsibility of guiding ethical and religious evaluations. It is the duty of the sociologist to aid in the solution of the religious problem. In a fully scientific world not only would a scientific man who had knowledge of the conditions of human living be expected to "preach" (as, indeed, we now expect our health experts to do), but "preaching" without scientific knowledge of human conditions would not be tolerated.

Some misunderstanding may perhaps be avoided if we say that science—that is, accurate, rationalized knowledge—cannot, of course, be everything in religion. Science, at most, can furnish but one of the bases of religion. Science is not religion, nor can it become a substitute for religion. *Religion is and must remain essentially in the realm of faith*; it necessarily transcends science, but it can and should become a rational faith, energizing men for better living both individually and socially, and seeking the aid of science, especially the social sciences, for the building of a better human world. That, again, in brief, is the practical plea of this book.

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The book is necessarily a book of value-judgments, of conclusions rather than mere facts. The facts upon which the conclusions are based will be found scattered throughout the literature of the social sciences, especially of anthropology and sociology. A few of the sources have been indicated in the citations in the foot-notes, and they are more fully indicated in the author's other published works, of which this volume may be considered an elaboration on the ethical and religious side. It is hoped also that the foot-notes may be found useful by those who wish guidance for further reading. The central argument of the book will be found stated in Chapters II, III, V, and XI. The other chapters elaborate or apply the viewpoints developed in these central chapters.

As the book attempts a constructive application of the principles of sociology and social psychology to the religious problem of our time, the theoretical principles made use of are naturally those stated in the author's *Introduction to Social Psychology*, and also, in a more brief and popular form, in his book, *The Social Problem: A Reconstructive Analysis*. The general philosophical background may best be found, by those who may be interested, in Hobhouse's *Development and Purpose* and his *Morals in Evolution*.

No citations are made from the Bible, not because the author has not a deep appreciation of the value of that book for the religious life, but because he would not profess to have any adequate equipment for technical New Testament interpretation, and even more because he wishes his work regarded solely as a work in applied social science. Such citations, it is believed, would add little, if anything, to the value of the book. The reality with which the sociologist is concerned is the objective Christian movement; and the animating principle of that movement is

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the Christian tradition, the fountain head of which is the Bible, especially the Gospels. The great value of the Bible is, therefore, in defining and fixing the Christian tradition¹; and if the discussions in the following pages shall move any to examine carefully and open-mindedly the teachings of the Gospels in connection with the great problems of our time, then the author will be more than repaid for his labors.

So many friends have helped in the preparation of this book by their suggestions and criticisms that it is impossible for me to acknowledge my indebtedness to all of them. I feel, however, particularly indebted to Professor George A. Coe of Union Theological Seminary, whose suggestions and criticisms have been invaluable to me. Also I am indebted to Professor Herbert N. Shenton of Columbia University who has read large portions of the manuscript. These kind friends should not, however, be held responsible for anything in the book, as that responsibility is solely my own. I am also indebted to a number of my colleagues at the University of Missouri, especially to Professor A. F. Kuhlman of my department, who has helped me in correcting both the manuscript and the proofs.

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November 24, 1921.

¹ For a full statement of the author's attitude toward the Bible, see pp. 145, 152 and 153.

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CHAPTER I

THE RELIGIOUS REVOLUTION

A CRISIS confronts religion in the modern world. A New Reformation is necessary within the Christian Church, if it is to survive, besides which the Protestant Reformation will seem insignificant.¹ Like all our other institutions, religion is in revolution. Either some new form of Christianity² or sheer atheism will soon become dominant in the more advanced nations, with agnostic scientific positivism as a third possibility. A fourth possibility, of course, is that our whole civilization may revert to a lower level, and that older and cruder forms of religion may again appear and become common. But this could scarcely occur until the foundations of the higher forms of religion had become sapped; while for psycho-

¹ See Fitch, *Can the Church Survive in the Changing Order?*, especially pp. 69-79.

² We shall use this term, unless qualified, to mean the religion of Jesus—surely its proper sense. When educated people discuss the merits of Buddhism, they usually mean the religion of Gautama Buddha, not the hodge-podge which goes by that name in various lands. So in a scientific discussion of religion, it is only fair to let Christianity be the name for the religion of Jesus rather than the clutter of historical beliefs which have at one time or another assumed that name.

logical reasons (which we shall later discuss) any widespread dissemination and popular acceptance of an agnostic positivism is improbable. Practically, therefore, the alternatives before the modern world in a religious way would seem to be either radical irreligion or some more socialized and rationalized form of the religion of Jesus than has yet been attained. The final outcome of the religious revolution through which we are passing¹ is not yet discernible; but its possibilities are, and it is time for thoughtful men to choose among these possibilities while they are still free to shape the future of religion.

The crisis in the religious world has been brought about by the failure of existing religion to adapt itself to the two outstanding facts in our civilization—science and democracy. The church must learn to adapt itself to these two mighty forces which are building our civilization. Of these two, science is the more outstanding and dominant. It is the foundation of our views of life and of the universe, as well as of our material progress, and so it has largely created the conditions which have favored the rise of modern democracy. Yet the maladjustment of religion with science remains pronounced. Often are we assured by some one in the name of science that science can find nothing in religion except superstition, error, or “the will-to-power” of some privileged class; while, on the other hand, the representatives of religion not infre-

¹ Says Professor E. G. Conklin (*The Direction of Human Evolution*, p. 244): “To-day we are in the midst of a religious revolution, which is going on so quietly that many do not notice it, although it is a greater and more fundamental revolution than any since the early years of the Christian era.” And, he asks: “Can Christianity become the religion of reason and science as well as of emotion and faith, and be made the power for individual and social progress which its founder intended?” The reader will note that the phrase “religious revolution” is used in this book like the phrase “industrial revolution,” not to indicate a violent change, but a great transformation. The Protestant Reformation was a religious revolution in this sense.

quently proclaim it outside of the field of science and represent its scientific evaluation as a species of "sacrilege." Both attitudes have made difficult the attainment of rational religion; that is, a religion in accord with the established facts of human experience.¹

But if religion is a vital element in civilization (as we hope to show), then the attainment of a rational, ethical religion is one of the greatest and most fundamental of our social needs, and nothing could be more short-sighted and stupid than an irrational attitude toward religion, whether on the part of its defenders or of its critics. In the reconstruction of our civilization which we now face, it is time that scientific thinkers and the representatives of religion join hands in seeking to promote the development of rational religion as the world's supreme need.

For we shall not be able to reconstruct our civilization without the reconstruction of religion; and the first thing to be aimed at in the reconstruction of religion is to make it rational.² Science, as we have noted, is the outstanding and dominating fact in modern civilization. A religion which is "adapted to the requirements of modern life" must first of all be adjusted to modern science. A religion which is not in harmony with modern science cannot possibly remain the religion of the thinking class of the future. The hope for religion, as for our social life generally, must lie in following reason, not in thwarting it.

¹ Almost equally regrettable, because harmful to the true interests of religion, is the attitude of those religious people who resent all criticism of religious beliefs and institutions by scientific men, even when made with constructive intent. Constructive criticism should always be welcome, for it is the normal method by which institutions grow. See my *Introduction to Social Psychology*, p. 149f.

² For a critical discussion of all that is implied in this word and for the presuppositions of the argument of this book, the reader cannot do better than to consult Professor Hobhouse's recent work, *The Rational Good*, especially Chapters I and III.

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This may be evident, but there are difficulties in the way. Strangely enough, the defenders as well as the critics of religion have often held that to make it rational would be to destroy it. Ever since Immanuel Kant wrote his treatise on *Religion Within the Limits of Mere Reason*, there has been continual controversy between those whom we may call the rationalists in religion and those who have stood for some form of irrationalism, whether traditionalism, mysticism, or some other.¹ Without denying that there are necessary elements of tradition and mystery in all religion (even science has these), it would seem that this conflict is no longer unresolvable. Scarcely any one would be willing to acknowledge that his particular religious faith is unreasonable. Every one acknowledges, in one way or another, the supremacy of the human reason as the ultimate means of testing beliefs and actions.² The whole world has become rationalistic in the sense that it acknowledges that the validity of everything must ultimately be tested through rational processes;³ and religion

¹ The solution of the problem of the relations of religion and science proposed in this book is, in a sense, the opposite of that proposed by Kant. Kant claimed that the problems of religion could not be approached through science or ordinary rational knowledge, but that religious beliefs were necessary, rational, *postulates* of the moral life. Thus he created a dualism in intelligence.

² Even those persons, one may add, who use reason to refute reason or to show its limitations. For a statement of various anti-intellectual attitudes toward religion, see Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, Chap. 4. It may be well to state at the outset that no intellectualistic theory of religion is proposed in this book. All that is proposed is to bring religion within the purview of science.

³ This statement is true only when we critically judge the implications of modern irrationalism. For a brief exposition of irrationalism in modern science itself, see Hobhouse, *The Rational Good*, Chap. I. Much of the prevalent irrationalism is due to misunderstanding the term "reason." "Much of the prejudice against reason," says Professor Hobhouse, "is due to a misconception for which its friends are as much responsible as its enemies. By both alike reason is often taken as a thing apart. On the side of knowledge it is divorced from experience, on the side of conduct from feeling. In both cases the

can scarcely hope that the processes which men make use of in judging other affairs of life will not be applied to it also. A religion which will meet the needs of modern life must accordingly be not merely remotely in some possible harmony with science, but it must be directly indicated by science as a necessity for the development of "a humanity adjusted to the requirements of its existence."

It may seem sheer audacity to declare that rational religion is not merely reconcilable with science, but that developed and completed science is a foundation for rational religion. Here, of course, it is necessary to guard oneself against being misunderstood. Fragmentary science, a science which sees the universe merely in bits, and which fails to recognize the social and spiritual life of man as subject-matter for its understanding, will see nothing in religion. Of such science there is an abundance in the world at the present time; but it would be as unfair to judge science by it as it would be to judge democracy by the pitiful examples of it also to be found all too frequently in the modern world. A science which envisages the total of reality, which aims at accurate knowledge of everything which exists, including the total life of man, will surely neither leave religion out of account nor be found antagonistic to rational religion. When we assert that science logically leads to, and will become a support of, religion, we only mean, therefore, that accurate knowledge of the universe and of the total life of man will do this. The more we know of the universe and of man, the more we shall know of God.

divorce is fatal to a true understanding" (p. 19). "The conception of reason," he says later, "is not one of a faculty prior to and apart from experience . . . It is the conception rather of a principle operative within experience the work of which is always partial and incomplete, . . . the process by which understanding deepens, error is repeatedly eliminated, and truth constantly enlarged." (pp. 73-75)

But some one may say that science is only a method; that it is not coextensive with the term "accurate knowledge"; and furthermore, that the accurate knowledge which we have or can get concerns such a small part of the universe or of human life that it cannot possibly have anything to do with religion;¹ and that we must be content, therefore, to keep our science in one compartment of our mind and our religion in another. Science and religion have nothing to do with each other and should leave each other alone. The reply is that science is not merely a method; that it aims at accurate knowledge of everything which exists, including religion itself; and that while its work is far from complete, its trend, its general direction, is such that we are able to see, in part at least, which way we must go if we follow its lead. Science, indeed, is itself nothing but the rationalizing activity of the human mind brought to bear upon the tangible problems of life. It may, and does, regard its work as incomplete, wherever the evidence needed for a judgment upon those problems is incomplete. Thus it hands over to philosophy the work of formulating rational inferences regarding ultimate problems. But modern philosophy aims more and more to become scientific; and religion, if it is to survive in a scientific and rationalizing world, must move along the same path. As a recent writer has well said: "If religion is nothing but the sub-

¹ The arbitrary limitations put upon science both by its friends and by its critics at times, are as absurd as those put upon religion. Thus it is said that science is merely the method of measurement, or the tracing of casual mechanistic sequences; that it cannot take teleology into account, even though human purposes are a part of human experience, etc. The contrary assumption of this book is that the development of science can be limited only by human experience; that science is "a movement towards the knowledge of reality"; and that consequently everything within human experience may be brought to its tests. See Hobhouse, *Development and Purpose*, especially Part II, Chap. II.