

His Incarnate Word. And thus His every act of tender compassion, of patient endurance, and of loving self-sacrifice shines out in its perfect beauty as a revelation of God's own nature, and of His gracious disposition towards us.

If on the other hand *the form of God* is laid aside in *taking the form of a servant*, and the influence of the Divine nature thus suppressed, as in kenotic theories, the life of Christ on earth may still serve for our example, by showing what *man* may possibly attain when endued with the fullness of grace and power by the Holy Spirit; but by ceasing to be a direct revelation of the character of God it loses the power "to clothe eternal love with breathing life."¹

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THE DISSOLUTION OF RELIGION.

MARK XII. 38-40. MATTHEW XXIII. LUKE XX. 45-47 (XI. 37-52).

BEFORE Jesus left the Temple for the last time He spoke at less or greater length upon the characteristic features of Jewish religion as they were incessantly obtruded on His notice. Its various types and representatives, scribes and Pharisees, lawyers and Herodians, had assailed Him one after another with tempting questions; the whole moral phenomenon had been, as it were, paraded before Him; and it was natural that when He had cleared the field of His insidious enemies He should speak out the impression they made upon Him. In Mark and Luke all we find is a few lines warning the disciples, "in the hearing of all the people," to beware of the scribes, with their ambitious vanity, hypocrisy, and greed; in Matthew there is a long discourse, addressed to "the multitudes and the disciples," in which the religion of the scribes and Pharisees is elaborately characterized, and a sevenfold woe pronounced upon

¹ Hutton, *Theological Essays*, p. 289.

it. Part of this discourse is found in Luke (xi. 39-52) in a different connection. Jesus delivered it, we are told, at the table of a Pharisee who had invited Him to dine with him. Possibly this was the original occasion of the sayings about the cup and the platter, though, as they stand in the third Gospel, they seem rather violent and unprovoked, and, if we compare them with the corresponding report in Matthew, probably not so clearly understood by the evangelist; but, in any case, they are part of our Lord's verdict on a decadent religion, and as such have an appropriate place in the great denunciation in Matthew. When one critic tells us that the three verses in Mark are the original, and another that they are a meagre extract from Matthew, we can say that synoptic criticism has got past such alternatives; we know that the whole of the matter in the passages noted at the head of this paper belongs to what is oldest and best authenticated in evangelic tradition, and we can study it without misgiving as our Lord's judgment on the Jewish religion in the last stages of its decay.

The judgment is delivered with all possible publicity: "He spoke to the multitudes." On the other great occasion on which Jesus came into conflict with the current religion (Matt. xv. 1-20; Mark vii. 1-23) it was the same: "He called to Him the multitude, and said, Hear, all of you, and understand." In one sense our Lord, like every reformer or restorer of religion, made His appeal from the conventions of a religion which had become professional to the unsophisticated conscience of mankind. A religion, He constantly implied, which is not everybody's affair is not true. A religion which can only belong to a class, which cannot be observed and enjoyed except under special conditions, which generates and is supported by an artificial conscience, is not true. True religion appeals to the common conscience and the light of day; it is level to the intelligence and the life of all mankind. To make it pro-

fessional is to ruin it ; even to maintain a professional class in connection with it, necessary as it may be, is to expose both it and them to the gravest peril.

Jesus recognises frankly the authority of the scribes and Pharisees as the successors of Moses. He never doubted the reality or the worth of the revelation enshrined in the Old Testament, for He had come Himself to fulfil the law and the prophets ; and as the scribes only claimed to interpret, and the Pharisees to apply, the law, their work was at least in idea legitimate. In an earlier encounter, indeed, Jesus had denounced the traditional legislation as virtually annulling the law of God ; but here, to begin with, He lets it pass. What He emphasizes is not the contradiction between the teaching of the scribes and the law they profess to interpret, but the contradiction between their teaching and their conduct. " They say and do not." This is the danger of professionalism in religion. It is not like a sunken rock, on which one might strike unawares ; it is rather like a cliff with a beacon perpetually burning on it, yet for ever crowded with new wrecks. It seems to be fearfully difficult for a man whose business it is to teach religion to escape from the delusion that in teaching he has exhausted his responsibility towards it. The more exclusive the professional class becomes, the more separate, collectively, from the body of the Church, the more serious is this danger ; and in looking back even on the history of Christianity, one cannot see how it could have been preserved from moral dissolution but for the incessant revolt from beneath of the unsophisticated conscience of the multitudes.

According to Luke, this reproach (xi. 46) was addressed to the lawyers ; of the Pharisees it could hardly be said, They say and do not. Doing was their strong point. They not only did all the law prescribed, but a great deal more. But their doing was vitiated by its motive : " all

their works they do to be seen of men." This too, with all that it involves, belongs to the decadence of religion; it is an ominous symptom that the heart of truth and reverence has been eaten out of it. But for the fact that Christian history itself is an illustrated commentary upon it, one would read with amazed incredulity the description of professional vanity and ambition among the Jews. If true religion is anything, it is the consciousness of God; it fills the soul with reverence, with humility, with a horror of ostentation. But if a man thinks he knows more about religion than others—and how can the member of a professional religious class avoid thinking so?—must he not, almost inevitably, presume upon this superiority, and make claims, and indulge a temper, which are fatal to the very existence of religion? Men see in such a case what the professional religionist wants, and are ready for their own ends, which have nothing to do with religion, to meet him more than half way. Unless he is utterly blinded by conceit, the modern teacher of religion must sometimes be humiliated by having the claims which are supposed to be made by his order only too willingly conceded—by getting the chief seat at feasts, or greetings in the market place, or honorary titles and degrees, from men whose indifference to religion is all that is certain about them. Yet so deep-seated in human nature is this pitiable vanity that at this point, and at this alone, Jesus interrupts His discourse to warn His own disciples especially against it. "Call you no man Rabbi. Call no man your Father on earth. Neither be ye called leaders." Such vain honours as marked the decadence of religion among the Jews were neither to be given nor received among Christians.

Thus far the discourse of Jesus has had a certain generality, but He now proceeds to expose and denounce in detail the vices of the corrupt religion of the Jews. The beatitudes in the fifth chapter of Matthew reveal in

heavenly beauty and attractiveness the true characters of religion; to compare with them the maledictions of this chapter is to get a tremendous illustration of the aphorism—*corruptio optimi pessima*. Nothing could be more repulsive than the character on which Jesus here passes solemn sentence; yet it is the character of men who thought themselves, and were thought by others, more than commonly religious. Its features are those of all religious delusion, and it is not difficult to apply them to the corruptions of Christianity itself.

The first woe is denounced upon exclusiveness. "You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces; you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to do so." In Luke's report (xi. 52) this stands last, as if it were the worst enormity of all; but no stress can be laid upon the order. A clue to the meaning is given in the expression preserved in Luke: "Ye have taken away the key of knowledge." It is knowledge, our Lord implies, which is the key of the kingdom of heaven (a hint, surely, somewhat neglected in the interpretation of Matthew xvi. 19 f., and an argument for the genuineness of that passage); and the vice here charged on the religious leaders is that of keeping the people in ignorance. To the scribes and Pharisees the multitudes were of no value; they regarded them with contempt; "this people, that knoweth not the law, are accursed" (John vii. 49). To Jesus they were the lost sheep of the house of Israel, a people perishing for lack of knowledge; and, moved with compassion, He "taught them many things." Their ignorance, in which the official leaders of religion acquiesced as the proper condition for such classes, made His heart ache; He spent His life striving to enlighten them. It is an ominous symptom in a Church when it is content to look upon the masses in darkness, when it discourages every attempt to make their share in the common heritage accessible to them, when it sets itself

to thwart upward movements, and becomes the symbol of things as they are. There is hardly an organized Church, of whatever name, which has not had to plead guilty to this charge; and there are Churches whose history for centuries might almost be summed up in one word: "Ye have taken away the key of knowledge; ye have locked the kingdom of heaven in men's faces." Now, it belongs to the very conception of Christianity that there is nothing in it for any man which is not there for all; it is missionary and communicative, or it is worse than dead. It is here first that the word "hypocrites" is used in Matthew, for it is here that the utter dishonesty of the life denounced is unmistakable.

The next woe seems to fall upon a precisely opposite vice: instead of exclusiveness, it is proselytizing which marks the decadence of religion. "Ye compass the sea and the dry land to make one proselyte, and when he is made ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." This is the only time Christ speaks of proselytes, and one is amazed at His vehemence. But if we put this woe, and the one which precedes it, side by side, it is very intelligible: He is moved with indignation when He sees men who will not lift a finger for their own flesh and blood, but in defiance of God's will and the claims of humanity deliberately keep them in ignorance, spare no pains to gain a paltry addition from without to their own clique or faction. Jesus was the great Evangelist, calling men to the kingdom; but nothing was so alien to Him as the spirit of the proselytizer, recruiting adherents to gratify his vanity, or to further his ambition. The motive of the evangelist is love; the proselytizer's motive, whatever it is, lies within, not without. He cannot be disinterested; he cannot see the dimensions of the kingdom; he cannot let those whom he has won enter into its liberty and forget him. In modern language, it is nothing to him to make men Chris-

tians, unless he makes them Episcopalians or Presbyterians, Baptists or Plymouthists. But such persuasions do not come of Him who calls men : they are earthly, sensual, devilish, and the curse of Jesus rests on them. When we are told that the proselyte becomes twofold more the child of hell than the proselytizers, it means that his ruin is even surer than theirs. He has put himself into a false relation to men, which makes him more incapable than he was before of ever assuming a true relation to the truth. He is a kind of Janizary to his new faith, a more hopeless fanatic than its born adherents. The moral phenomena connected with such "conversions" are familiar enough, and intensely hateful to Christ. What is not sufficiently remarked is that they are the signs not of a religion renewing its youth, but of one in the last stages of corruption and decay.

The third indication of this same corruption is denounced by our Lord as a sophistication of the simple sense of truth. "Woe unto you, blind guides, who say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple must keep his oath." Strange things have been written by some historians of morals about the sense of truth. According to M. Renan, it is really one of the fruits of the study of physical science. Mr. Lecky holds that in the middle ages, and indeed as early as patristic times, it had been almost totally destroyed by influences proceeding from theology. "Pious frauds" were esteemed not only legitimate but praiseworthy; credulity was proclaimed a virtue by the classes most addicted to falsehood, and the revival of the sense of truth was due to the secular philosophers of the seventeenth century—men like Bacon, Descartes and Locke. As far as there is truth in this, it only proves that the Christian religion has been in the course of its history as profoundly corrupted as the Jewish. But it is absurd to

date the sense of truth from the birth of modern science or philosophy. The obligation to "speak truth to one's neighbour" is urged again and again in the Old Testament, and there is nothing more characteristic of Achilles, the moral ideal of the earliest Greek society visible to the historian, than the familiar lines: "Who dares think one thing and another tell, My heart detests him like the gates of hell." Respect for truth must ever be one of the bases of all virtue, just as contrivances to evade obligation are a root of every kind of vice. The amazing thing is that such contrivances should be elaborated and sanctioned by religion, that the very light that is in man should become darkness. It is the most flagrant of contradictions, and the men under whose auspices it is accomplished are a contradiction in themselves: they are denounced by Jesus as "blind guides." The special type of casuistry sentenced here may have originated in circumstances foreign to our time; but every society, and especially every Church, in which many profess a common creed and act as far as possible in concert, has urgent need to guard with vigilance its sense of truth. Occasions will arise in which a strong temptation will be felt to find a form of words, for instance, which will possess the maximum of formal solemnity, and the minimum of binding sanctity; and persons who must act will find it hard to resist its attraction. Ambiguity is a resource for politicians of a certain type, and politicians of a certain type may come in evil days to dominate the Church. A statement like that of Mr. Balfour (*Foundations of Belief* p. 275), that "something very different is or ought to be involved in the acceptance or rejection of common formulas than an announcement to the world of a purely speculative agreement regarding the niceties of doctrinal statement," may, no doubt, be unimpeachably innocent. But everything depends on the application made of it, and to apply it easily and freely

would probably indicate a conscience not very sensitive to the virtue of truth.

The fourth woe is pronounced upon what is popularly regarded as the essence of Pharisaism—the distortion of the moral sense, and preference of punctilios to the serious duties of life. “Ye give tithes of mint, anise and cummin, and neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith, . . . ye strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel.” This is not the vice of professionalism only, but of all who love reputation in religion. It is not clear whether the law (Deut. xiv. 22f.; Lev. xxvii. 30) required such garden herbs as those specified to pay tithe: even if it did, the want of a sense of moral proportion betrayed in putting them before justice, mercy and good faith was a symptom that the religion expressing itself in such conduct had lost its vital force. The common moralities are always the soul of religion. The word of Jesus to the ruler retains its authority. “What shall I do to inherit eternal life? Keep the commandments. He saith unto him. Which?” As if one could have a choice of commandments. The same commandments, Jesus answers, as are given to all men—the moral law of Sinai. A religion is decadent when it does not lay the main emphasis here. It is morally blinded when it does not recognise and appreciate at its full value the moral worth even of a churchless life, which pays no tithes of mint or anise or cummin, but is marked by integrity, charity and loyalty to engagements. In a distinct and visible society the visible conventions are always intruding into the place and authority of the invisible realities; hypocrisy, as Dr. Glover puts it, deals with customs instead of character, doctrines instead of life, proprieties instead of love. It almost seems as if man had only a fixed *quantum* of moral force, which he could use, first, either on the weightier or on the more trivial matters of the law; and that to begin with the last,

as if they were the more important, is inevitably to sacrifice the first. It is the man who strains out the gnat who also swallows the camel. It is the scrupulous person who is at the same time unscrupulous. It is the punctilious who can show himself unjust, unkind, and untrue.

The next woe in Matthew's narrative is that which Luke records in connection with an entertainment in a Pharisee's house. The sin which it dooms is much akin to the one just spoken of. "Ye cleanse the outside of the cup and the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess." Jesus had repeated occasion to observe, at Pharisaic tables, the scrupulosity about Levitical cleanliness (Luke vii. 36 ff., xi. 37 ff., xiv. 1 ff.). Everywhere also He was impressed at the same time with the Pharisaic love of money, and unscrupulousness about the means of obtaining it. The whole of the sixteenth chapter of Luke is a woe upon covetousness, and especially upon Pharisaic covetousness; notice especially *v.* 14, which is the link between the parable of the unjust steward and that of the rich man and Lazarus. Here we have substantially the same indication of a rotten religion: men scrupulous about the purity of their cups and platters, who never ask how they were filled. To make an honest living, to fill one's cup and platter not by extortion, not by *ἀκρασία*, the temper which takes all it can lay hands on without regard to God or man, is an elementary religious duty. It is one for the neglect of which no regard for pious proprieties can do anything to atone. The bitterness with which men who make their living by labour have sometimes revolted against the Churches, has been due in great part to sympathy with the doctrine here taught by Jesus. It has been a kind of practical assent to His Woe! a protest against regarding as religious, on the ground of formal observances, men who filled their cup and platter by means that would not bear investigation. If the background of all these pro-

prieties is made up of oppressed servants, defrauded clients, harsh indifference to others' rights, even plundered widows' houses, it is no more than the whitewash on a grave. It is good enough to look at, but it does not remove the impurity of the grave; it only makes more hideous by contrast the rottenness within. The woe of Jesus is repeated on this particular manifestation of hypocrisy, as though it were doubly revolting to Him. Luke, indeed, with his characteristic love of charity, tells us that even here Jesus spoke of it as the antidote to the vice He was denouncing; "give for alms those things which are within (*i.e.*, the contents of the dish), and behold all things are clean unto you"; but the thought, though undoubtedly our Lord's, can hardly be right in this connection. Charity does sanctify wealth; it even does something to expiate avarice, which at least cannot be expiated without it; but it is out of place here. Jesus is exposing the corruptions of religion, not prescribing for their removal; and it is one of the most odious when a man can be scrupulously religious in all the forms, and not concerned at all as to the nature of the business by which he makes his living. Woe to the Church and the persons who are indifferent to this.

The last woe stands by itself, and seems to be quite unrelated to those which precede. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye bear witness to yourselves that ye are sons of them that murdered the prophets. Fill up then the measure of your fathers." It is plain from this that one of the most serious corruptions of religion is a wrong relation to its own past. The true religion has had a history. God has been at work in the world as far back as we can see; He has wrought, in particular, along one historical line;

His presence has been in Israel and in Christendom as it has been nowhere else ; the past is full of voices possessed of religious authority. The contemporaries of Jesus were proud of their past, and devoted to it. They had canonized its religious writings, and acknowledged in them a divine authority. They held in reverence the law of Moses, and the prophets and the psalms. They canonized its saints and martyrs too, and loaded them with posthumous honours. Their fathers had killed them, but they built their tombs. With awful irony, Jesus regards this as the continuation and completion of their father's work, and bids them carry it out to the end. It will only be acting in character if they put the finishing touch to what the murderers of the prophets had been at from the beginning by murdering Him. It is evident from this that the last woe is pronounced on those who do not recognise the voice of God when it speaks out of the present. Dead prophets they can understand, but not a living prophet. That God spoke they can believe, not that God speaks ; that God once interposed in human affairs, not that He interposes now. They can believe in records, in authorities, in councils, in assemblies, in fathers ; not in the living God, nor in the Holy Ghost, nor in the continuance of inspiration. They canonize the dead prophets, and excommunicate or murder, as their fathers did, the living ones. It is this inability to believe in the living God which is the clearest token of the dissolution of religion. Not that a community may not survive in such disbelief ; it may survive and display the most pernicious and stubborn activity ; but it survives under the woe pronounced by Jesus ; it survives as a conspicuous illustration of what the true religion is not.

Undoubtedly it is hard for a community to do justice both to the past and the present. The Christian Church itself was hardly born till a party appeared in it to whom men like Stephen and Saul, the true representatives of the

new era, seemed dangerous revolutionaries, casting down the tombs of the prophets, and overturning the very house of God. The situation recurs perpetually. The past claims our reverence, but God is not imprisoned in the past. There are new voices ever arising, in which He makes appeal to conscience; new glimpses are given into Christian truths, new and wider ideas of Christian duty; new aspects of the Christian ideal are presented to the mind. Woe to those who are blind to heavenly visions, because they cannot find them in the ancient fathers; to those who so glorify the past as to exclude God from speaking and acting in the present. They are the spiritual children of those who murdered the prophets and crucified the Son of God.

The long series of woes is terminated by two utterances in which we see in the heart of our Lord that same conflict of emotions which is so characteristic of the divine Spirit as revealed, for instance, in Hosea and Jeremiah. There is an inexorable sentence, and a yearning love which seems to rebel against it. Jesus looks on to the future in which the representatives of the Jewish religion are to consummate their guilt, and regards it as the fulfilment of a divine purpose. "Therefore," he says in *v.* 34—that is, in order that you may fill up the measure of your fathers—"Therefore do I send to you prophets and wise men and scribes." In St. Luke it is, "Therefore also the wisdom of God said, I will send to them prophets and apostles." This is very puzzling, but as the word "apostles" is certainly due to this evangelist, who uses it six times for once each in Matthew and Mark, it seems more likely that "the wisdom of God" (cf. Luke vii. 35) is also his own expression. He may have substituted it for "I," in the idea that "prophets" could only refer to the Old Testament messengers of God, and that it is the whole course of God's dealings with Israel, not what was to

follow the death of Jesus, that is in view. But however this may be, it is clear that Jesus foresaw the treatment which His messengers should receive at the hands of those who represented that decadent religion which He had denounced. Their rejection by the Jews should be the supreme guilt which made the cup run over, and brought down upon that very generation the accumulated and long-suspended judgment of heaven. Yes, on that very generation: Jesus solemnly pledges His word for it. From the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah (the first and last murder recorded in the Jewish canon, Gen. iv., 2 Chron. xxiv.), the responsibility for all innocent blood would be brought home to them.¹ Yet neither the review of their age-long iniquity, nor the sight of their religious corruption, nor the prospect of their persistent impenitence, can reconcile the heart of Jesus to leave them to their fate. He was much moved as He looked round for the last time on the city that killed the prophets and stoned them that were sent unto her. What a history, what numberless histories, are condensed in the two words, ἠθέλησα . . . οὐκ ἠθέλησατε! It is the last which is the decisive word, and with all this passion of love in His heart Jesus is compelled to go away. The solemn woes which fill this chapter, the thrilling cry with which it closes, the awful silence in which Jesus leaves the temple, are a signal illustration of His own word about the dissolution of religion: "If *the salt* have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is henceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."

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¹ There has been much ado about the description of Zechariah as son of Berachiah. The Zechariah who was murdered was not son of Berachiah (Luke has not the father's name at all, so that it was probably wanting in the common source), but of Jehoiada: the first evangelist probably wrote "son of Berachiah" almost unconsciously, the phrase being familiar from Zechariah i. 1. To suppose that he referred to a certain Zechariah son of Baruch who was murdered by the Zealots in the last days of Jerusalem, and that he believed Jesus to be referring prophetically to this (Weiss) is a very unnecessary expedient to explain a very simple slip.