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INTRODUCTION

I

If the eighteenth century can be summarily characterized as the Age of Reason its successor is less amenable to facile generalization: the tendencies and developments of which the historian has to take note are more numerous, diverse and complex. In particular the nineteenth century, far more obviously than its predecessor, was an era of change. Again, a large measure of the appeal which the latter has for the modern mind lies not only in its comparative simplicity of aspect but in its remoteness: to study it is to encounter, as it were, a prepossessing stranger. With the nineteenth century, however, we are aware of a closer affinity, so that it has for us the sometimes tiresome familiarity of a kinsman. Yet the student of religion is likelier to find it of much greater interest. Its forerunner represents a time when the religious spirit blew but fitfully; convention, decorum and prudence were the usually accepted marks of a right-thinking man, and faith itself admitted reason as its better part. By contrast the century which began with revolution and general war, and whose early temper was displayed in the emotional and imaginative vagaries of the Romantic movement, turned to religion with a new concern, as to something holding the key, it might be, to the interpretation of man's historic life itself, a belief fostered and stimulated by a growing knowledge and appreciation of the phases through which that life had actually passed. If man has in his hands the means of shaping his own terrestrial destiny—as in this century it was increasingly realized that he had—it was because, nevertheless, he himself was the product of an historical evolution no part of which was irrelevant to the self-comprehension to which he aspired. His life might be many-sided, intricate and devious—far more so than the rationalists of an earlier day had supposed—but it might also be possible to detect a purpose within it which gave confident hope—and as the century advanced this expectation swelled—of a richer, ampler future. If, then, one does venture to epitomize the epoch in a phrase one might call it the Age of Progress. It is not surprising that religion itself should have both reflected and promoted the current forward-looking idealism.

This at least is true of Protestantism, for Catholicism remained to all

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showing obdurately committed to the past. The former, more amorphous than its ancient rival, was less resistant to the pressure of change, and although a residuum of the old Protestant orthodoxy, on the European continent, in Britain and in America, survived the rigour of a growingly adverse intellectual climate, Protestant thought generally, if in varying degree, felt the need of coming to terms in one way or another with an age in which science, technology and social revolution had together led to what was fast becoming a universal reassessment of inherited values. As between the diverse Christian traditions the old lines of difference seemed to have less point or meaning. The result is that the type of Christian thinking which seems representative of the period is, broadly speaking, liberal, anti-dogmatic and humanistic. Further, the paradox—as it would appear—that the opposition which these trends provoked was itself but a feature of the new outlook is really none at all. Reaction too is a form of action and can be explained only by reference to the forces against which it contends. Newman—to cite the most striking example of this—was as much the child of his times as, say, J. S. Mill or Matthew Arnold. Mill indeed, earnest rationalist that he was, is in some ways more of a hark-back to an older world. But to take the true measure of our period we must return for a moment to the great disruption of western Christendom in the sixteenth century.

The Protestant Reformation, as well as its Catholic counterpart, was as a religious movement not so much the beginning of a new era as a temporary infusion of fresh life into the old. Medieval and even ancient modes of thought persisted. The watchword was Back! rather than Forward! The distant past, it was believed, possessed a truth which later generations had corrupted or obscured. Its repository was the Scriptures, as interpreted by the early Fathers and—now—the champions of reform. Life was at any rate still conceived primarily in theological terms and to its problems, men assumed, religion alone had the answer. Occasionally no doubt the great reformers themselves expressed ideas and insights which afterwards bore fruit; in the immediate aftermath of ecclesiastical revolution, however, these were forgotten or suppressed. Thus the Reformation, in impulse if not in its ultimate character, was a counter-stroke to what is called, however loosely, the Renaissance. Yet without the intellectual ferment which preceded it the religious revival would have been the less effective: Luther owed more to Erasmus than he ever wished to acknowledge. For the

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reformers were able to take advantage of conditions which, when revolt came, brought down the immemorial religious edifice in ruins, though Roman Catholicism had in truth imbibed more of the humanist spirit than had Protestantism, within which the reassertion of Renaissance aims was long delayed.

In its basic orthodoxy, an inheritance from Christian antiquity which it in the main never questioned, Reformation Protestantism was at one with Catholicism. Indeed the reformers themselves were unmistakable products of the Middle Ages and shared most of their opponents' presuppositions. In substance their respective conceptions of revelation, inspiration, authority and salvation were the same. The issues on which they differed were clear-cut. Where teaching arose which undermined their shared positions they vied with one another in their zeal to repress it. It is no exaggeration to say, therefore, that despite the great doctrinal cleavage of the sixteenth century and the bitter theological controversies to which it gave rise, the fundamental unity of Christian thought in the west continued unimpaired until the latter part of the eighteenth century. But by that time it was becoming evident that the dogmatic tradition in both its Catholic and Protestant forms would have to meet the incursion of intellectual forces tending increasingly to isolate it from the prevailing outlook. Unless faith were to fall back on the stronghold of an absolute authority it must somehow endeavour to compromise with the new conditions. During the nineteenth century Catholicism, as we have said, chose the former alternative and matched it with an appropriate ecclesiastical policy. Protestantism, if with much misgiving, found the latter on the whole unavoidable.

For the sceptical rationalism of the eighteenth century the very idea of a special divine revelation presented difficulty. But the difficulty arose from the fact that the conception of revelation as a publication of divine truths beyond reach of the human intellect was one which it shared with orthodox Christianity. Such truths might belong to the realm of authority and faith, but, as Hume insisted, because they could not be attained neither could they truly be possessed by the reason. Revelation that was rational and hence alone fitted to the proper nature of man had been known to him, in effect, since his first essays in reasoning. 'If', argued the English deist, Matthew Tindal, 'all own, that God, at no Time, cou'd have any Motive to give Laws to Mankind, but for their Good; and that he is, at all Times, equally good, and, at all Times, acts upon the same Motives; must they not own with me, except they

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are inconsistent with themselves, that his Laws, at all Times, must be the Same?' It was to be concluded that all religions, in their essential teaching, were at one and that there must be an 'exact agreement' between natural and revealed. The further inference, it need hardly be stressed, was that the differential doctrines of Christianity, in which it claimed to preserve a special and all-important revelation, could be disregarded by any reasonable man. The appearance of such doctrines was to be attributed to credulity and priestcraft.

That the criterion so applied to the phenomena of positive religion was shallow and inadequate the nineteenth-century thinkers very soon discerned. If man is not a discarnate intelligence but a creature of time and place, if, that is, his life is historically determined, then his apprehension even of ultimate truth must be subject to historical conditions. Although in course of the ages the knowledge of truth will be both broadened and deepened, no single phase of the process, however partial its understanding, should be discounted. History accordingly is a significant study in its own right and infinitely more than a copy-book of moral examples and awful warnings. Nay, the vista of things long past acquires in the perspective of time an enchantment by comparison with which the present seems only humdrum and commonplace. Nostalgia of this sort, voiced at first in the literature of the time, lessened with the cooling of Romantic enthusiasms, but the historical sense, to which Hegelianism gave metaphysical lustre, was perhaps above all else the nineteenth century's most characteristic development. It provided the impulse whereby historiography was established not as the pastime of literary amateurs but as a science. Ancient documents simply as such became the objects of searching investigation and canons of historico-literary criticism, inspired though they might be by current philosophy, gained widespread academic acceptance. Religious writings, and through them religion itself as an important aspect of human culture, could gain no immunity from similar inquiry; and indeed the Bible, since it offered so sharp a challenge to the critical intelligence, was itself a major stimulus to the more rigorous application of the new methods. The brash procedures of the eighteenth-century rationalists might thus be shown to rest largely on ignorance and misconception. On the other hand, the historical study of the Scriptures quickly suggested that traditional ideas concerning revelation and inspiration, as well as the customary style of literalist exegesis, were due for revision. If historical study could so easily discredit deist assumptions it yet

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pointed to consequences hardly less encouraging to the orthodox appeal to rational 'evidences'.

This scientific approach to man's understanding of his own past had for background an increasingly elaborate systematized knowledge of the universe in which his life is set. The beginnings of modern natural science no doubt long antedated the age of Darwin, but the theory of evolution imparted to the idea of nature a depth and consistency which hitherto it had for the most part lacked. Man himself was now seen unmistakably to be a part of nature; and if 'natural' in his physical constitution why not also in his mental and moral, so that even his highest cultural achievements may in the last resort be seen as homogeneous with what they rest upon and to be subject to laws analogous, in their fashion, with those which the natural scientist so confidently formulates for the primary levels of experienced reality? Voices soon were heard which had no doubt of an affirmative answer. Thus science, it appeared, could be identified not only with a growing corpus of factual knowledge but with a philosophy claiming the all-sufficiency of such knowledge. For religious thought the menace of positivism lay not merely in its denial of religious truth but in the explanation of it which it plausibly offered. It allowed no 'breaks' in the continuity of man's natural existence, so that if the concept of divine revelation were to retain any meaning at all theology would have to recognize that revelation can occur only through and under the conditions of the natural. The 'supernaturalism' of traditional belief was only a lingering survival of the myth-thinking of a far-off past.

The main philosophical influence was that of Immanuel Kant. The Koenigsberg master cannot himself be described as a Romantic, but he was not unmoved by Rousseau, however distasteful he found Rousseau's sentimentalism, and he later dissociated himself from the rationalist theology of Leibniz and Wolff by which he had been so strongly affected in his student days. The Pietist strain also is evident and the echo of an older Lutheranism is caught in the preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where the author proposes 'to abolish knowledge to make room for faith', which alone, he considers, is religion's proper basis; although the type of faith he envisages—a 'rational faith' (*Vernunftsglaube*), he calls it—is by no means that of Luther himself, the one work he devotes as a whole to the treatment of the religious problem bearing the very un-Lutheran title of *Religion within the Limits of Reason alone*. Nevertheless, through Schleiermacher and Ritschl, Kantianism was to

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prove the guiding principle in the religious thought of the succeeding century, Hegelianism being a temporary if powerful interruption. That theology can be founded upon the exercise of speculative reason is a view which few today, other than professed Thomists, would be willing to sustain. But to a more detailed survey of Kant's position we shall return in a moment.

These ideas, although, as we already have pointed out, not entirely unanticipated by Reformation thinking, for the most part transcended the issues by which Christendom had previously been divided. They emerged as a consequence of man's deepening sense of his dependence upon the conditions of his historical existence and growing assurance that his destiny, wherever else it might in the end be achieved, must first be fulfilled upon the historical plane.

II

Religious thought, for the purposes of the present work, should be taken to mean, in the main, thought about religion. The attitude of detachment which makes this kind of approach possible is indeed a mark of modernity. The question is not, initially, whether this or that set of religious beliefs is true or false but the nature and function of religion as an expression of the human consciousness; although in lands where the traditional culture is Christian this must mean, mainly if not exclusively, Christianity. The nineteenth century was thus able, as earlier centuries were not, to view religion in general and Christianity in particular as a subject for historical investigation and critical reflexion. Hence the development within it of such studies as the history of religions, comparative religion and the philosophy of religion. Any attempt to rethink or revalue Christianity is bound therefore to presuppose a phenomenological inquiry. In other words, a religious philosophy, and more specifically a Christian philosophy, could not in the prevailing intellectual climate simply take its basic beliefs, its 'revealed' data, for granted: it first would have to employ critical thought upon them, studying their historical origin and evolution, noting the external influences which have moulded their forms and analysing the psychological and social needs to which they responded. Only on the basis of such pursuits could theological reconstruction be fruitfully tried. Hence also, however, the tentative, apologetic and sometimes negative tone of much nineteenth-century theologizing.

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The grounds of belief were shifting and the type of edifice once erected upon them could no longer serve.

The majority of those who contributed most valuably to the religious thinking of the age were themselves Christian, critical though they might be of the inherited orthodoxy. But even those who were not Christian were as a rule deeply concerned with the intellectual and moral problems which Christianity raises. A signal example of this is Feuerbach. He is commonly regarded as an arch-atheist, but the appropriateness of the term depends on the meaning infused into it. His aim, he declared—and of his intense sincerity there can be no question—was 'to make God real and human'. If his work seemed destructive it was, he claimed, only in relation to the unhuman, not the human, elements in religion. The truth that God exists is not to be doubted; but he is a man's own hidden but assured existence, 'the subjectivity of subjects, the personality of persons'. Where, then, Feuerbach's view differs from theism is in its assertion that man himself is the true object of belief and that the idea of a deity has to be humanized before it can properly become the focus of devotion and worship. 'It is not I but religion that worships man, although theology denies it; it is religion itself that says: God is man, man is God.' In translating theology into anthropology Feuerbach's intention is not to destroy religion or dissolve the religious sentiment but rather to revalue and re-establish both by identifying the religious object for what it truly is. Much the same also applies to Matthew Arnold in this country. The Bible, Arnold objected, has been misread. The language of the Pauline letters, for instance, is a literary language, not a technical, but the theologians have used it as though it were scientific. Even more fundamentally, men handle the word of God 'as if it stood for a perfectly definite and ascertained idea, from which we might, without more ado, extract propositions and draw inferences, just as we should from any other definite and ascertained idea'. But can it bear such treatment? The truth is that as used by those for whom it has the vividest meaning it is by no means a term of science or exact knowledge, but one of 'poetry and eloquence, a term thrown out, so to speak, at a not fully grasped object of the speaker's consciousness'. Men mean different things by it as their consciousness differs.

The attitude of both these writers is significant of the spirit of their times. Each from his different background approaches the religious problem with a concern amounting to reverence. Both seek to per-

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petuate the values of religion by disengaging them from their familiar but false setting, and each discerns in the life of man himself their true ground and object.

The point of view stated with such force and clarity by Feuerbach and Arnold was, however, if in modified guise, increasingly that of liberal theologians. Inevitably the question came to be asked: What is religious dogma? Historical study was of course a principal aid in reaching an answer, in showing how in fact religious beliefs had developed and been formalized. But historical criticism also made it plain that the Scriptures could no more be used as a storehouse of text-materials for the erection of self-consistent doctrinal systems. Theology, like other realms of human thought, belonged to the relativities of time, and no statement of truth could be absolute. The experience behind it might remain in essence the same from one age to another but its expression was bound to change, or, if it did not change, to become obsolete. For doctrine is experience interpreted according to the intellectual norms and standards of the day. The insistence of reason doubtless made the interpretation requisite; clarification and formal definition proved necessary from the exigencies of both teaching and controversy; but the structuralizing of faith, however little it was realized to be so at the time, and whatever weight of traditional authority it might acquire, had no quality of ultimate permanence, and alike in fact and in principle theological doctrine was felt to be open to revision, although opinion might widely differ as to the needful extent of it since general agreement on what constitutes the 'essence' of Christianity has never been reached. Thus the understanding of doctrine varied not simply from denomination to denomination but from individual to individual. Yet what cannot fail to impress the student of this period is the steady growth therein of the conviction that the old teachings could no longer be affirmed in the old way. Some sort of accommodation and compromise was imperative, as even the conservative were obliged to admit.

To return, however, to Kant. The place in modern thought of the author of the two great *Critiques* is one of peculiar ambivalence. In some respects he looks forward to a new age, in others he is the last and most important representative of an earlier one. Neglect this Janus-like quality in him and one fails to weigh his significance adequately. Thus in his treatment of the problem of knowledge he transcends the old dogmatism and rationalism, yet of human experience in its historical

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dimension he is unappreciative and his conception of reason is of that of the isolated individual. How, therefore, to interpret Kant has ever presented difficulty, for he is not always self-consistent and his thought seems again and again to point beyond itself to further ranges of speculative possibility. But the very fact of its ultimate lack of systematic unity has meant, as often is the way with such thinkers, that it has continued to exercise a vitalizing influence. The manner in which Kant deals with a problem always merits close attention, the breadth and sanity of his viewpoint never but inspire confidence even when the particular conclusions reached appear unacceptable. His many-sidedness was to make of him, despite the abstraction and aridity of his style, a power from which the mind of the ensuing century seemed to have little wish to free itself.

Within the sphere of theology it is Kant's philosophical principles in general rather than his own specifically theological writing that have proved fertile. His treatise on *Religion within the limits of Reason alone*, a work relatively seldom read, is characteristic of the era that closed with his own death in 1804 more than of that which had dawned, but five years earlier, with the *Discourses* of Schleiermacher. It is of interest as illustrating Kant's own ideas and methods rather than for any light it sheds upon the real issues of the religious problem. Where it is of value is in indicating the possibility and need of distinguishing between the essential and the non-essential in religion. The touchstone he applies is the moral consciousness: whatever fails to satisfy this, no matter how insistent its claim to be regarded as divine revelation, cannot be true or important. The substance of religion, through and through, is ethical. 'Everything outside of a good life by which man supposes he can make himself well-pleasing to God is superstition.' The mark of the religious consciousness is that it looks on duties as divine commands. Nevertheless, for all the truth which this moral austerity in Kant's thinking permanently underlines, his sympathy with the religious impulse was narrow and unimaginative. He saw religion as little other than a kind of external complement to morality, and one which, even on his own principles, might be shown to be unnecessary. To introduce God as a means of assuring us that virtue and happiness are finally coincident is a device whose artificiality is evident the moment we turn aside to consider how in fact religion arises. No doubt Kant would have replied that he here is treating of the logic of the reason and not the psychology of the religious consciousness, but the fault lies in the actual intention more than in the omission, and what he gives us is morality,

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not religion. To the demands of the former he was ever vividly awake; to the appeal of the latter he remained curiously insensitive.

Kant's main contribution to religious thought was in the field of epistemology, and in particular through his determination of the limits of scientific knowledge. There is, he held, no 'external' world which merely imposes itself upon the mind. Experience of space and time is made possible by the synthetic unity of self-consciousness, which through its several 'categories' has a constitutive activity of its own. To suppose that mind can be explained in terms of what, as we know it, is itself dependent on mind, is thus a blatant *petitio principii*. Scientific method, for its own purposes, is entirely valid, but such validity does not extend beyond those purposes. The world cannot be detached from the self, which is the indispensable condition of all knowledge, and to argue that reality is no more than a causal mechanism is to be beguiled by an abstraction. All that science can do is to describe the relations between phenomena, but why phenomena are as they are and whither they tend is not for it to try to answer: teleology lies outside its sphere. The scientist justifiably sets aside what he shows methodologically to be of no concern to him, but it does not follow that what for him can only be an irrelevancy is of no significance in a total view of man. Indeed, later nineteenth-century thinking—in Mach, Poincaré and others—was to contend that recognition of the proper limits of science is bound to undermine the pretensions of naturalism. On the other hand the theologians, among them notably Ritschl and Auguste Sabatier, whilst conceding that teleology has no true place in the understanding of nature, insist upon it as a necessary factor in the interpretation of history. Man, that is, not only subsists in time, he perforce realizes himself only under its conditions. History is the unfolding of his destiny. Hence the symbolical function of the idea of the Kingdom of God, in pointing to the 'end' which history is inwardly directed to achieve. Whereas, then, mere nature is to be represented as a realm simply of 'fact', history is to be seen as one of 'value'. At what point the two realms are to be conceptually united this post-Kantian type of thought is prepared on the whole to leave unstated.

Thus inevitably we come back to Kant's fundamental distinction between the theoretical and practical reason, and so between knowledge and faith. Much has been made of the 'critical' aspect of his philosophy, but important though this is it is subordinate to his aim of establishing the place and rights of the practical reason and through it of human