

RELIGION WITHOUT CHRIST

THE period during which the scientific attitude of mind was linked with materialism is past: in every field of study, physics, botany, astronomy, psychology, the foremost experts have reached the conclusion that the neat mechanism of a previous generation is no longer tenable. It takes time, of course, for these conclusions to become known; but the result is that the scientific mind no longer finds religion intolerable. On the contrary, religion is seen as a necessity: as something which is demanded by the very limitations of science itself. This has, of course, been the consistent assertion of the Christian Church; but it would certainly be wrong to suppose that the change of attitude in an important part of the scientific world means that there is any kind of movement back to traditional religious beliefs. There is, indeed, a movement towards religion; but traditional Christianity is distinguished from other religions by all that is meant by the words 'supernatural' and 'revealed'; and neither of these two words commends itself, it would seem, to the scientist. What actually seems to be taking place is an attempt to get behind religious formulations to something upon which those formulations depend: no need is felt for creeds and dogmas; religion is something individual, an attitude of mind, a response of the personality.

One place in which this attitude can be studied is in the writings of the distinguished surgeon, Mr. Kenneth Walker, whose new book¹ carries his thought a stage further along the lines begun in *Diagnosis of Man* and continued in *The Circle of Life*.

There are several reasons why Mr. Walker's books are worth studying. The first is that, as a doctor, he has much to say that only the experience of a medical man can provide; but more than that, he has read widely and writes with great beauty and precision; and he is professedly doing it for those who are not themselves scientists. Throughout the series, of which, it is to be hoped, this is not the last, he has mercilessly exposed the collapse of materialism: in every field he shows the defences of that position being overrun. With great wisdom and persuasive force he argues that the nature of man and his mind take him beyond the material, beyond even the limitations of this life, and place him before something which he cannot express. But Mr. Walker gives that something no name.

¹ *Meaning and Purpose*, by Kenneth Walker. (Jonathan Cape; 7s. 6d.).

He is, indeed, committed to an orthodox, a somewhat naive, idealist philosophy; and it is against this background that he argues—not always consistently, as is inevitable. But happily his conclusions do not depend upon his philosophy, but upon a body of evidence which he has presented in a way that is ideal for the non-medical and non-scientific reader: he enables such a one to grasp the contemporary situation in those worlds; and in the course of his investigation he says so much that is worth hearing that it cannot be summarized here.

So far, then, Mr. Walker is on the side of the Christian Church. But only so far. In the course of his chapter on *The Religious Account of Reality*, he says:—

'An orthodox Christian will point out that there is an absence in the account of all those ingredients which are vital to religion and that the emotion which has been described might have been felt by anyone whether he were a believer or not. This criticism is valid if by religion is meant the acceptance of certain doctrines, but is not valid if by that word is meant the conviction of the existence of a spiritual reality behind all appearances and the recognition of an urgent necessity to live to the utmost of our ability in harmony with it. It is in this latter sense that the word 'religion' is used in this book (p. 104).

An orthodox Christian could point out to Mr. Walker that he would cease to be such if he denied what Mr. Walker means by religion; one can accept all that and still hold the necessity for belief in dogma—in revelation. But let us hear Mr. Walker further:

As a result of its insistence on the sanctity of its ancient formulations institutional religion has been on the defensive for the last two hundred years . . . in my opinion it is not so much development that is necessary but a rediscovery of the inner truths of religion. Many of the spiritual truths of religion are given in the form of parables, myths, symbols and rituals, for by such means and by such means only can knowledge of a higher order be rendered intelligible to the ordinary man. . . . Originally all the rites and rituals of the Christian Church had a profound significance for those who used them, but as religions become old and decay the inner meaning of the rituals and symbols is lost and only their external form is retained. It is this shifting of attention from the inner meaning to the outward form which has been one of the chief causes of the Church's conflict with science (pp. 108-9).

It seems, therefore, that it is not so much the teaching of the Church that is wrong, but the way Christians apprehend, or rather

fail to apprehend, the inner meaning of what they profess. And one has to admit that this criticism is uncomfortably pointed. A Catholic would at once say that the 'shifting of attention from the inner meaning to the outward form' has never been countenanced by the Church; and that in fact the doctrine of sacramental grace itself excludes such a shift. It remains true that to-day worship is far too much a matter of assistance and too little of spiritual awareness. Take the example of the Mass—the centre of Catholic life, as the liturgical movement has pointed out till we are almost tired of hearing it. The perfunctory gestures of many a priest give small hint to the onlooker that here we have that very Sacrifice of which the whole history of sacrifice is the forerunner²; yet the smallest 'rubric' of the Mass is full of deep meaning. How have we come to lose it? Mr. Walker is not the only one to remind us of our treasures:

In the God-hero the Godhead itself labours because of its imperfect and suffering creation; it takes upon itself the state of suffering, and by this sacrificial act accomplishes the *opus magnum*, the *athlon* of healing and of the conquest of death. The human being can actually do nothing decisive in this matter; he looks to his Redeemer full of faith and confidence, and tries in his way, by a fitting moral attitude, at least to put no obstacles in the way of the Saviour's work of redemption.

We would have to be satisfied with this bare fact were it not for the existence of the Church. But the institution of the Church means nothing less than a constantly active continuation of the life of Christ and its sacrificial function. Christ's sacrifice, the accomplishment of salvation, constantly repeats itself in the *officium divinum*, or, as the Benedictines would say, in the *opus divinum* (sic), while still remaining the unique sacrifice that was performed by Christ himself as a temporal fact. Outside the time order it is constantly performed anew. This *opus supernaturale* is presented in the sacrificial Mass. To a certain extent the priest presents the mystic act in the ritual, but the really active force is Christ who sacrifices himself constantly and everywhere. His sacrificial death had its place in the temporal order, and yet is an extratemporal event, as the holy Ambrosius formulates it: *umbra in lege, imago in evangelio, veritas in caelestibus*.

Those are the words, not of any Catholic writer, but of C. G. Jung³; and he, indeed, is an example of precisely this change of

² See in this connexion *The Christian Sacrifice*, by E. Masure, esp. Book I.

³ *The Integration of the Personality* (London, 1940), p. 234.

scientific heart of which there is question here : the contrast between his *Psychology and Religion* (1938) and the work of Freud a decade earlier is very instructive : Freud called his book on religion *The Future of an Illusion*. But no more than Mr. Walker has Prof. Jung much use for the dogmas of religion as such : he will pay them many tributes as the repositories of psychological wisdom ; but he is careful to distinguish that from any 'metaphysical validity.' It would not, perhaps, be very difficult to show that these passages are precisely those where the psychology of Jung is least consistent with itself ; just as, in the case of Mr. Walker, one feels that he brings us to the very threshold of revealed religion and then walks off, assuring us that there is nothing worth our while inside. But we cannot leave things there : we are confronted with an attitude towards religion which not only contemplates Christ, Lao-Tsu and the Buddha with an impartial eye, but regards the teachings of Christ as totally unaffected in their truth even if Christ himself never taught them, or even if he never lived. Mr. Walker, to be sure, does not go so far as this ; but there are others who do, and Mr. Walker does not call himself a Christian. To believe in Christ does not commit one to the denial of wisdom in Lao-Tsu and the Buddha ; but it does commit one to the assertion that whatever wisdom they taught, they derived from the Eternal Wisdom who *is* Christ. It follows, if that be true, that a Christian is guilty of no arrogant egoism if he maintains that he has precisely the vital contribution to make to the thought of Mr. Walker ; but it is quite another matter to convince him. And the importance of Mr. Walker is that he is by no means alone in his trend of thought ; and he is likely to be joined by more and more fellow-scientists, and others who have seen through materialism and are seeking religion.

We have the answer, because we have the Faith. Why does not Mr. Walker see our faith, and be convinced by it ? Is not the answer, or part of it, this : that we have lost touch with something in our religion, with the result that when we come under the scrutiny of the scientist he sees, not Jesus Christ, but ourselves ? The scientist is trained to observe ; and we need not think that we shall elude that searching, detached, and utterly impartial eye. We know indeed that salvation is to be had in one Name only ; and we know that that salvation penetrates to whatever heights of awareness or depths of unconsciousness there may be. But it is not enough to know ; we must also be. And we shall not be until those great rhythms and images with which the Scriptures are filled from Genesis to the Apocalypse are living and experienced realities within us : until our own lives are the representation of the pattern of life,

death and rebirth, which is the language of the liturgy and the sacraments. Instead of that, what Mr. Walker sees is the 'shifting of attention from the inner meaning to the outward form'; and dare we say that he is wrong? That he should point out to us what he sees ought to make us grateful to him; and if it is obvious to a Christian reader that the whole trend of Mr. Walker's researches and desires is the revelation of God in Christ, it will do him no harm to reflect that it is his own drab 'spirituality' which prevents Mr. Walker from seeing it.

Luke Turner, O.P.



CONTROL OF LIFE. By Halliday Sutherland, M.D. (Edin.). (Burns, Oates; 10s. 6d.).

The main conclusion is the need for guts, not to risk death, but to live. And by guts is meant guts. Though primmer, the words of official reports are now to the same effect. With its present state of reproduction, says Sir William Beveridge, the British race cannot continue. Patriotism will not warm to the prospect of an elderly nation: the cause of world peace will not be advanced if this war proves to be the last gesture of a once vigorous people: while as for individual happiness, a neurosis is poor exchange for a hearty act of contrition.

This timely and documented enquiry is into the possible causes of our petering out: a defective mental attitude, an exhaustion of the germ plasm, a weakening of it from unfavourable environment. It is conducted in a fresh and spanking spirit. The author is aware of the ironic warning that people must be careful lest they discover the thing for which they are looking. The birth rate has declined with Christian belief. Yet theology is not used as a substitute for the other sciences, for such subjects as roller milled flour, pasteurized milk, and family allowances are discussed in proper terms.

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