

How to Make Religion Universal

By PROF. G. C. WORKMAN, Ph.D.

SINCE man is a religious animal, the proposal to consider how to make religion universal may to some, perhaps, sound strange. If he is a religious animal, is he not naturally religious? In a sense, of course, one must answer, yes. Man is naturally religious, incurably religious, as has often been said; and most men are by nature deeply religious, there is reason to believe.

Then, if man is naturally religious, is religion not universal now? In another sense one must answer, yes, again. The religious instinct in men is universal, and, though it may be dormant in the individual, it cannot be eradicated from the race. It is because religion is natural to men, and in that sense universal, that the lowest known tribes have some religious ideas and customs, and that the lowest discovered tribes have also had them. While that, however, is significantly the case, such ideas and customs are and have been, for the most part, very crude.

Man is an intelligent animal, and a certain measure of knowledge is universal; but his mind must be cultivated, if knowledge is to become systematized. Man is also a moral animal, and a certain measure of morality is universal; but his conscience must be enlightened, if morality is to become robust. Man is likewise a religious animal, and a certain degree of religion is universal; but his spirit must be disciplined, if religion is to become refined.

SO it is no more strange to consider how to make religion universal than to consider how to make knowledge or morality universal. The real question is how to make pure religion, or practical piety, the possession of all men, by giving them an adequate conception of the Deity and by getting them to be obedient to his will. In other words, the subject of this inquiry is how to secure to religion, which will always have a place in human thought, its proper and appropriate place in human life.

Before that is done it seems expedient to explain what practical piety is. What are the essential elements? According to the prophet Micah, we have noticed, there are three, namely, doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly; that is, morality, humanity, and humility. But, according to the apostle Peter, there are in reality only two. These are fearing God and working righteousness, morality and humanity being expressed by him in the one word righteousness, which, strictly speaking, includes them both.

Practical piety consists in reverence and righteousness, or spirituality and probity. These two elements are very simple, but they are all-embracing, for they imply right sentiments and actions towards the Creator, together with right sentiments and actions towards his creatures. A truly pious person is inwardly spiritual and outwardly fruitful—fruitful in kind feelings and good deeds. These characteristics prove his piety to be genuine. One who has them knows what pure religion means, and one who has them not knows little or nothing of its meaning. A man who deals unfairly with his fellows, therefore, or denies them equitable treatment is not a truly pious man; for piety is useless, not to say meaningless, when it does not make men righteous both in heart and in act. Religious feeling without righteous dealings is not religion, but religiosity. It is merely pious sentimentality.

THE explanation given makes it plain that all who follow their natural instinct quickened by the Spirit of Truth, doing the best and being the best of which they are capable, are genuinely religious; nay, all who believe that reality rests on a spiritual foundation, and are good because of that belief, living consistently in harmony with their convictions, are genuinely religious, too, whether they realize the fact or not.

From what has just been stated, it appears that there are multitudes of men outside the churches who know what genuine religion is, for there are multitudes whose names are not registered in a church roll who are reverent and righteous because of a conviction of God and goodness. Quite frequently one hears it said of some person in the community that he is a good man, but not very religious. The present writer is persuaded that large numbers of people are more religious than they claim to be, and have more genuine piety than they are supposed to have. He is also of opinion that, through non-participation in public worship, many a man has either unchurched himself or allowed himself to be unchurched.

Because pure religion presupposes spirituality and fruitfulness in the sense explained, no person can be genuinely religious by and for himself. A person may be religious by himself for a while, if forced to live apart or compelled by circumstances to dwell alone, but not otherwise for any length of time, because religion has a manward side, and requires association to develop it. Hence it cannot be fully developed by those who withdraw themselves from the world and spend their days in retirement, nor by those who, like the ancient Culdees, adopt a solitary service in an isolated cell as the highest expression of piety. Solitary piety is spurious.

BEING primarily a life, religion is meant for society, not for solitude. All true religionists maintain that there is no such thing as an independent spiritual life. If such a life were possible, it would be powerless to mould society. Spiritual life cannot be separated from business nor politics, nor from any legitimate form of human activity; and any attempt at separation tends not simply to sterility, but to spiritual death. For that reason, most thoughtful people have come to see that religion must take account of the organic nature of society and pay attention to social problems of every kind; and the wiser among them are teaching that it must seek to enact better laws, to create better conditions, and to secure better homes.

How to bring religion to bear upon the lives of men, not of individuals merely, but of communities and nations, is now engaging the best minds in all parts of Christendom. In what way is this to be accomplished? Only a few paragraphs can be devoted to an answer in an article of this length.

FIRST, it must be done by the process of education. That is preliminary to everything that pertains to human progress. We must teach those who are untaught and bring them under proper discipline. But education in religion should begin with training in morality, because the latter is fundamental to the former, and both should be commenced in childhood. While each child has its own peculiar propensities, all normal children are instinctively religious, not innately bad, and most of them are not immoral at the outset. Their little lapses in conduct are owing largely, if not wholly, to ignorance; and they do wrong before they know they are doing wrong. Serious misdemeanors are often owing to the same cause, namely, want of knowledge touching the moral quality of actions. There seems good reason to believe that, as a rule, wrongdoers become vicious or criminal from lack of moral training rather than from choice. They do not realize the enormity of their offence till after they have committed it. More and better instruction should be given in morality to young people, and children should be not only taught to discriminate between right and wrong, but also trained to do right because it is right; for it is only by habitually doing right because it is right that one develops a righteous character. Then, as soon as old enough, they should be trained to relate their actions, all their actions, to the will of the Supreme Being. In this way they will become religious by becoming reverent in mind and righteous in practice, and righteous in practice because reverent in mind.

NEXT, we must bring religion to bear upon the lives of men by the use of moral suasion; that is, by persuading those who are indifferent to become earnest, and those who are unspiritual to become devout. All moral people are interested in religion; and, while there is a tendency to-day to disregard some of its claims, few persons of intelligence are utterly irreligious. We must show men that religion is a reasonable thing, and that it is rational to be religious. The naturalness of the instinct vindicates its rationality. We must show them also that it is profitable to practise morality in obedience to the divine will, by always acting in accordance with a spiritually enlightened conscience. We must show them further that religion affords a great incentive to morality, as well as a great aid in subduing native propensities. In each of these ways, we may not only get those who neglect religion to recognize its reasonableness and appreciate its value, but also get those who are not actively religious to realize what they lose by their inactivity.

THEN, religion must be brought to bear upon the lives of men by means of example. While there should be more moral training and more personal

effort, that which is most needed is practical piety on the part of all who are professedly religious. It is concrete religion, or piety expressed in character and conduct, that society requires. Much as education and moral suasion may accomplish, and they can do a great deal, neither can accomplish so much as example, because neither is so subtle or so constant in its operation. All persons, therefore, who regard religion as a rational thing, all who believe it helps a man to develop his character and keep his life right, all who think it incites him to seek the highest and to do his best should combine to spread practical piety over the country and throughout the world, first, by living in harmony with the Something not ourselves that makes for righteousness, and afterwards by leading others so to live. And all who are religious at heart should bear in mind that men become more spiritual and more useful by avowing their convictions, and thus proclaiming their devotion to the soul of the universe.

THUS religion will become universal as a life, not as an ism; and its genuineness will be proved by right living, not by right theologizing. The result desired will not be attained by the organized agency known as the Church, because she cannot do the whole of this work alone; she must have the assistance of all who are interested in the well-being of society and the uplifting of humanity. Hence all good people should co-operate with the Deity for the realizing of self and the rendering of service, each one feeling, if not actually saying, The world is my parish, to be reverent and righteous my religion. *For, in the last analysis, religion is personal devotion to God which leads to practical service for man, or communion with reality which results in benefit to humanity.*

Every one of them should do something for those who are ignorant of its meaning or neglectful of its claims. Combined effort is particularly needed to awaken dormant impulses and to stimulate impulses that are partially aroused. Were it allowed to occupy its proper place in human thought, religion would soon assume its proper place in human conduct. Then all who believe in God, and are reverent on that account, would embody their belief, or would strive to embody it, in a righteous life.

British and Canadian Workmen

2904a St. Hubert,

Montreal, Que., March 16, 1912.

To the Editor, CANADIAN COURIER:

Dear Sir,—It is with great interest I read the article in the CANADIAN COURIER entitled, "British and Canadian Workmen," by W. A. Craick. While he has dealt very cleverly with some of his facts, others are absolutely wrong. For instance, he claims that 30 per cent. of the people in Birmingham live in three or five rooms. I would like his authority for this. Again, he takes us back eleven years. Now surely he knows that great improvements have taken place in Birmingham, and I claim that the people in Birmingham are as well housed as in any city here in Canada. The working man has a six-roomed house (Balsall Heath), or any other locality around Birmingham, for \$6 a month clear, no taxes.

Again, I would like to correct the writer as regards what he terms the "Place underneath the stairs." Perhaps he is not aware that the place he speaks of as a room without light or ventilation is merely provided for the storing of coal and wood and is not intended for a room at all.

I also take the liberty of correcting the writer about the three-storied buildings. From my knowledge of Birmingham, I claim that the majority of the workmen's houses are six-roomed, three rooms on the ground floor and three rooms upstairs, with yard (concreted) at the rear.

Then why did the writer omit to quote the prices of clothing—suits, boots, shirts—which are very important, also the quality of the articles, as compared with those in Hamilton? In his price-list I notice eggs, 24c. a dozen. If the writer were in Birmingham at this time of the year, he would be able to buy eggs 16 or 18 for 25 cents (bar the strike.) He does not mention the prices of lots of other things which the people need and use. Again, Birmingham is not situated in so favourable a position as Hamilton for produce and fruits.

In conclusion, I may say that the writer failed in his endeavour to place the true picture of Birmingham and the workman's home. It must have been a while since he visited Birmingham. Taking the death-rate as he states—Birmingham 19.8, Hamilton 13, from 1896 to 1905, it reflects credit to Birmingham's sanitary conditions, for then Birmingham had nine times more people than Hamilton.

JAMES SMITH.