

CHRISTIANITY VS. MODERN CULTURE.

PROFESSOR BOUSSET'S views on the essence of religion are thus epitomized by the Digest:

"Modern culture is worldly. It is marked by a decided self-consciousness and a feeling of strength and a joy in life. It is positive and aggressive and keenly feels its own importance and value. Its typical representatives are such characters as Goethe and Bismarck. The former has made it clear that modern culture, while it involves depth of feeling and calls into activity the higher powers of life, is rooted in the interests and concerns of this world. Bismarck, too, though a model of modern manhood, was entirely concerned in the affairs of this earth. The dominant ideals of our age are reflected in such phrases as "the duty of self-preservation," "self-assertion," "the struggle for the control of the world." Everywhere we find a strenuous life, a pushing forward, a struggle for existence, a contest of the classes.

"Over against these ideals Christianity in its traditional form stands out in decided contrast. Christianity is at heart a religion of salvation, and is controlled by the idea of a redemption. It proceeds from the standpoint that the whole human race has been corrupted from Adam onward; that it is sunken in the darkness of sin. It centres around the two ideas of sin and grace, and came into existence to meet the universal longing for salvation.

"It is clear that these two forces represent *opposite* tendencies of thought. To insist upon the principles of traditional Christianity is to rob modern culture of its very life; it opposes a pessimism to the optimism of modern thought. And yet a reconciliation between the two is not absolutely impossible. It can take place, however, only as the result of a modification of the current view of Christianity. A new conception of religion must make itself felt, and this change can be

readily effected. It must center around the person of Jesus and must abandon its dogmatic system. In the person and in the preaching of Christ, as an historical phenomenon, we have the basis for an understanding between Christianity and the culture of our day. Jesus himself never accepted the total corruption of man as the basis of his preaching. Rather it was an ideal of moral perfection that he held [R3444 : page 312] up to his hearers – of life in God and activity according to his will. Such we find to be the kernel of the Gospel proclamation. Deliverance from sin and forgiveness of sin were indeed emphasized in his preaching; but his dominant thought was that of struggle toward an ideal moral life. This is the idea that must take possession of modern Christianity, if it is to be reconciled with modern culture and civilization and to win for itself the educated classes. Not as a dogmatic system, but as a moral power, based on the powerful personality of Jesus, must Christianity be proclaimed to the thinking people of our times.

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Thus is illustrated the desire of many to unite the Church and the World. They desire to retain some faith in Christ and some hold upon him, but at any cost must "win the educated classes," and must drop every feature of the doctrines of Christ that would interfere with "modern culture." Union, numbers, honor of men are prized above Truth: and the latter is sacrificed – almost to the death – for the former, though not without pangs of regret.

It is of the divine ordering that matters are thus: "The Lord would judge his people." He would apply to them the very tests which he declared during his ministry, saying – "My word shall judge [test] you in the last day" [in the dawning of the new Millennial Day.] "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon;" "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "If ye were of the world the world would love his own, but now ye are not of the world even as I am not of the world:

therefore the world hateth you." "If any man would be my disciple let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

As in the Jewish "harvest" "there was a division of the people concerning him," so it must be in this Gospel age "harvest." As in that testing time only a remnant were found to be "Israelites indeed in whom was no guile," so it will be found here – the great masses of professed followers of Christ are insincere; they love self and the world and its things more than they love God and his spiritual favors.

But is not this a serious charge? – that the masses are insincere. Yes, it is serious, but it is also true. They show their "guile" by their willingness to sacrifice the Truth for almost anything – any mess of [R3445 : page 312] pottage. However, "the Lord knoweth them that are his," and will keep his own who "love not the world," who love the Lord himself supremely, who love the Truth, whose consecration is sincere. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in the day when I come to make up my jewels."

Note, too, how love of the error is willing to compromise the Truth, and really blinds itself to it to have its own way. In the above Prof. Bousset says, "Jesus himself never accepted the total corruption of man." We presume this means that Jesus never taught the Adamic fall and the consequent depravity of the entire race. We reply, that he surely did teach that all are so undone that the divine sentence rests upon all as unworthy of everlasting life, hence as all "lost." Hark to his words: "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was *lost*." And again he indicates that all are under the ban of death, saying, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." "The Son of man came...to serve, and to give his life a RANSOM [a corresponding price] FOR ALL." "I am come that they might have life." "I am the resurrection and the life – no man cometh unto the Father but by me." "Without me ye can do nothing." If these Scriptures do not teach that all men were lost, helpless, undone

without the great sacrifice for sins which our Lord offered, pray then what do they teach?

Let us, dear friends, lose no opportunity for serving the Truth to the brethren, even to the extent of laying down our lives for them and it; but let us not compromise with the world nor with error to gain numbers. Let us rather be co-workers with the Lord, and knowing that now is the "harvest" time let us expect the very separations which we see taking place. We could not frustrate the Lord's plans if we would, but we could do injury to our own interests by disloyalty to him, his Word and his brethren.

