

RELIGION PRIVATE
AND PUBLIC

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Quinta Press
Weston Rhyn
2023

Quinta Press

Meadow View, Weston Rhyn, Oswestry, Shropshire, England,
SY10 7RN

Visit our web-site: quintapress.com

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Taken from 'Religion, Private and Public.' *London Quarterly Review*
131 (January 1919): 19–32.

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IT takes a very great deal to make men believe in the reality and cost of moral Redemption, to wean them from a supreme faith in their own reconstructions, and teach them to rest these on a supreme faith in God's new creation of the moral soul. It takes much of the real insight which religion tends to lose to believe soundly that redemption is a more real, urgent, fertile, and permanent thing than reconstruction. Not to see and hold that is to cherish the seed of war, which is man's self-confidence, and self-idolatry, and self-disintegration. The first interest of history is the moral; and the moral is the real. The redemption of the moral soul is the first reconstruction of the world for value and effect. The strife for it is the *nisus* of the world's last moral reality, labouring to the top in the convulsions of the new creation, and travailing with its latent glory. We need deliverance from the demonic element in society, progress, and culture, more than from its misfortune, weakness, poverty, crudity, or vulgarity—Devilry is more deadly than vulgarity. It is not deliverance from our weakness we need most, but from an evil power exploiting our weakness. What ails us most is not the lack of power but the non-moral, the anti-moral, power we obey. It is the Satans, human or other. The evil is not in wrong systems so much as in wrong souls. It is not in systems, whether of belief or of society, but in the souls that work them, or the demonic egoists that the weak souls serve.

We certainly need new systems, and much ability is working at them. But still more we need new hearts, in a way that few realize. We can make new systems, but God alone can make the soul anew, and His Church alone b His secret for it. Civics will not do it, nor social work

—nothing less than the kingdom of God. It is regeneration we need more than revision, more than reform, more than culture. We need to be re-written and not just re-edited. We need a new creation of the conscience from its cultured egoism, a new moral relation of dependence on God (private and public), a new sense of the Father royal in His holiness and righteousness, a new and personal faith in His moral Passion and historic kingship. The average Christianity does not realize the kingship of God, but only His patronage. But the kingdom of God can never be set up on earth except by men in whose hearts is set up the kingship of God, which takes the instinct and the religion of egoism very effectually in hand. Christendom, if it is not to be at heart as pagan as Junkerdom, must unlearn the habit of exploiting God for its progress, its efficiency, or its other instinctive passions and pieties. It must wait on God, and not make God wait on it. It must worship and serve Him as life's chief end. It must repent, it must change the direction of its mind and its theology, as the first condition of the ideal redemption. And repentance is not decent regret nor a manner of conventional modesty. The new life of reality is not complacency, nor is it aspiration; it is the passion and homage of the forgiven. When it is thorough it is worship by those to whom the kingdom comes as the creative forgiveness of God. And it has its national form in a new public righteousness as well as its personal form in affection.

‘It is not the case that any considerable number are longing for religion, and unable to find a form of Christianity to satisfy their craving. Those who feel the longing almost invariably find a spiritual home in one of the organized religions. What there is to be found is a deep hunger for a better and happier world. And the misery of the war has made this both keener and more widespread. But there is little desire for God in it. There is little interest in, or care for, the unseen world.

‘And the irritation that is felt against religion is very largely due to the fact that religion puts God and the unseen world in the foreground, and not the happiness of men in this life. What they are aiming at is something that will ensure the future happiness of the world, not something that will ensure present communion with God and the priority to everything of the kingdom of God.’

It is its demand for real and penitent contact with God that is the chief obstacle to the kingdom of God, especially in public affairs. For without national conversion and penitent reform we should not have a Christian nation, were the mass of its population converted next year. We should not have yet the reversal of our national egoism.

In a certain sense we need the conversion of the good—not into spiritual security, but into the kingship of God over every part of life. Everything Christ did was for the sake of the kingdom of God in history and eternity. Our salvation is our part and lot in that conversion of the race, both in its units and its kingdoms. It is our religious type that tells immediately on affairs; and we need a regeneration of our religious type by a new grasp of the belief which makes the type, a grasp which construes every item from the kingdom as the creative centre. It is not the spiritualizing of our personal religion alone that is chiefly required, nor the mysticizing of faith, nor ‘the deepening of the spiritual life’; it is the moralizing of religion, and especially of public and corporate religion. It is the moralizing of the revelation which makes religion. We need a new interpretation of grace and of belief in terms of the kingdom of God, which dominated Christ in every word, action, and purpose, and indeed made Him what He was, but which did not dominate the Church in its theological evolution. Religion is just as real as the reality of its creative revelation makes it. And in order to acquire a new grasp of religious reality w’e need a new interpretation of the revelation which creates religion—not a new psychology

of our faith, but a new theology of the revelation that makes faith. We need a new interpretation, from the kingdom's point of view, of Bible, Gospel, Church, and Saviour. We need a new construction of evangelical religion, a new insight of what is meant by the grace of a holy God in an historic kingdom of Church and State. We do not duly meet the holiness of God by our idolatry of the saintly. I have spoken of the demonic element now broken out in human affairs. Is that just to be met by what is usually meant as the Holy Ghost? I take pleasure in quoting here a passage from an excellent article in the *Interpreter* for July, 1918, by Rev. W. F. Blount, B.D.

Have we made Enough of the element of vehemence, the almost 'daemonic' element, in Jesus, which so struck those who saw and heard Him? Mr. G. K. Chesterton found in the Jesus of the New Testament 'an extraordinary being, with lips of thunder and acts of lurid decision, flinging down tables, casting out devils, passing with the wild secrecy of the wind from mountain isolation to a sort of dreadful demagogy; a being who often acted like an angry god—and always like a god. . . . Tho' diction used by Christ is quite curiously gigantesque; it is full of camels leaping through needles, and mountains hurled into the sea. Morally it is equally terrific; he called himself a sword of slaughter, and told men to buy swords if they sold their coats for them. That he used other even wilder words on the side of non-resistance greatly increases the mystery; but it also, if anything, rather increases the violence' (*Orthodoxy*, p. 269). This is written about the same Person as the One whom Mr. Wells calls 'drooping,' 'moribund,' 'a saint of non-resistance,' to whom he donies the possession of courage, whom he proposes to 'pity.' Mr. Chesterton's picture shows immeasurably the subtler understanding of Christ; but have we seen it, or helped others to see Christ's life, as a flaming, furious energy of redemptive love? The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. He came at Pontecost as fire and wind, fire the cleansing, wind the bracing, both the great purifiers, but both also the great disturbers. He began His work by ⁴ creating a scene, and those who partook of Him were called the men who 'turned the world upside down.' But is that the Holy Spirit of our Whitsun hymns, of 'Our Blest Redeemer,' or of 'Whom God of old came down from heaven'? He seems somehow in those hymns to be altogether tamer, and more insinuating.

The fires that rushed on Sinai down
 In sudden torrents dread,
 Now gently light, a glorious crown,
 On every sainted head.'

It is a picturesque antithesis. But I confess to a very strong doubt whether the attribute of 'gentleness' is not the very last that the Christian company at Pontecost would have accepted as descriptive of their experience of the Spirit's descent.

For look at it in this way. When such a war is possible in Christendom, it certainly means the corruption of man's heart. But it means something else. For that evil was taken into account in the Christian revelation; and yet the revelation which was to deal with it has failed to do so. Why this ineffectiveness?

Does it not mean some great perversion imported into God's gospel itself from man's heart? Does it not mean some great error in the apprehension of God's revelation, i.e. in our faith itself, our religion? The patient has infected the doctor. Is there not some corruption in the very cure of corruption? Is there not some unconscious error of the gravest kind in Christianity? I do not mean the error in Rome, as some will promptly think, but something subtler and less canvassed—in the faith which saved from Rome.

We have a parallel complaint from the students of literature. They complain that the brilliant galaxy of genius in the Victorian age has not had a due effect on the nation, and has not been in living *rapport* with it. They say the amazing volume of mental, imaginative, and moral energy has reacted but little on public realities, that it has been the ornament of the nation rather than its organ, that it has been a culture rather than a power, that it conjoined brilliance and inefficiency, and has left us unequal to the total situation of the world, moral and spiritual, 'with so much wisdom and so little power of employing it.'

It is not my place to answer the literary question. But it might be asked whether much the same might not be said about our religion, with its inner wealth and its outward futility. Does it construe its creed or its society, or even its Saviour from this dynamic centre in the kingdom of God? Does it not far too widely share the Roman idea that the Church *is* the kingdom of God? Does it not therefore tend to seek the interest of the Church instead of the conversion of the world? Does it seek first the kingdom

of God and its righteousness? Does it find its soul by losing its soul's egoism there? Does it not seek a national connexion rather than a national conversion—or, if a conversion, then a conversion to itself, or to some frame of piety, instead of to the kingdom of God? Has it taught the nation that its work was a vital part of its worship, or its commerce a Board of Trade in the kingdom of God?

Have we been taught that the greatest work the soul can do, private or natkmal, is to worship God, to hallow His Name, and to do so not on special occasions only, nor in secluded buildings, nor in the rapt, mystic feeling of individuals, nor in conditions aesthetic, but in the moral trend and conduct of great affairs? Have we been taught, as the apostles of a kingdom of God should teach us, to make worship great action and action great worship—as the two are united in the Cross, which is real revelation only as it sets up the kingdom of God for good and all, both in the soul and in society? That is the type of religion we need to generate. And to that end we must restate, perhaps even recast, much of our theology, especially our amateur and popular theology, which creates the religious type.

And, among other things, must we not enlarge and hallow our Gospel of a kind Fatherhood to Christ's true Gospel of the kingship of a Father whose love is divine only because it is holy? Our start must be the Father's Sovereignty.

Here there, are two errors to be undone. First we have to replace the moral holiness into the love of God, lest our new kindness oust the eternal righteousness. And, second, we must lose the idea that God is there chiefly to wait on man's aggrandisement and progress; and we must regain the idea, which gives dignity both to Calvinism and Jesuitism, that man is there to wait on God's kingdom, power, and glory.

First, I say, we must grasp again the holiness of God's love as the divine thing in it and the mighty. There is pedantic talk, which to some seems impressive, of the need

'to re-think God.' When it comes to thinking God the devilry of culture is much ahead of us. What we need is power to recover in Christ not the thought of God, nor even His love, *per se* (which might be helpless at last), but His holy power to bring His love to pass among the nations. And that will never be done by amateurs of Jesus who joy in girding at theologies of an atoning Christ. The Atonement is the power and action of God for the salvation of His own holy name in heaven, and therewith for the establishment of His righteous kingdom on earth. It is the moralizing centre for love's redemption. Holiness is more than saintliness.

And, second, in consequence of the hallowing of God's name we must change our centre of gravity. We must practically own, and it must become the note and type of our religion, that men and nations are not there to give effect to their own genius, but to serve the kingdom of God. They are not there for self-realization, with God as a tutelar in aid, but they are there to realize the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and to sacrifice national life if need be, for that kingdom, as we sacrifice individual life for the nation. We are all there not to exploit God but to glorify Him, as the only final way to enjoy Him for ever.

We need to exalt at Bible sources the idea of Fatherhood, which the poets and romancers have done something to make common and slack. The New Testament keeps uppermost the perennial note of authority in the patriarchal idea. For Christ the Father is the centre of moral authority at least as much as of kind affection. In the Lord's Prayer that is so. It is all in the opening key of a Father in heaven and His hallowed Kingship. It all unfolds the opening petition on the lines of a Kingdom and not a family. The hallowing of love comes before the enjoyment of it, which eludes those that live for nothing else. Love is for Christ a worship before it is a sympathy. He did not Himself ask for love, but faith—sure that living faith in

Him must wear the complexion of loving kindness. The love He asked from Peter at the end was not personal affection sublimated, it was the moral love of the much forgiven, it was faith's love. That is the divine kind of love, that is the love of the Kingdom. Its foundation is the moral foundation of the forgiveness and the new heart. It does not mean merely love romantic or domestic. The kingliness of the love, the grace of it, the miracle of it (not the instinctive naturalness of it) was the first thing with Christ and the last—even as for Paul, on the forefront of Romans, the gospel was the revelation of the righteousness of God before all else (Rom. i. 17). When we say that the one form of love distinctively divine is forgiving love and the love of the forgiven, we are really saying in other words that justification by faith is the article of a standing or falling Church, in proportion as the Church is concerned with moral reality, moral redemption, and the kingdom of God. For the purposes of practical religion justification is forgiveness, and the revelation of it is the revelation of the last reality in an atoning forgiveness. And revelation, in this most pointed and positive sense of it, is the setting up of the kingdom of God; it is not a matter of mere manifestation, nor of mere impression. It is action, it is in the nature of a new creation, a new and final reality, which does not come and go but abides for ever.

Christ's God is the King of the regenerate conscience more than of natural affection transferred. There is indeed no sweeter word than loving kindness; but the loving kindness of Christ is not the kindness of a brother, but of the Holy One of God. The mightiest, and the divinest, and the most miraculous thing in God's love is its holiness, and the atoning way in which His love meets it. And the mightiest tiling on earth is the kingdom of this holy God, and His righteousness, which is more than all peoples. The recent war was not only not for the dominance of a nation, nor was it even for the safety of civilization. It is the whole

kingdom of God in the history of all the civilizations that has been at stake, through the Teutonic repudiation of a moral control over a Nation and State powerful enough to discard it. And that is the same holy kingship of God as forgives the world and redeems. Compared with that Act all the cosmic majesties and terrors, all historic convulsions, are but the outskirts of His ways (Job xxvi. 14). It is the might and miracle of the Holy One's love of the unholy. It is love at moral issue always with sin. Such is the love at the root of the kingdom of God and its righteousness for the world.

To realize this thoroughly would alter the ruling type of religion, where love means too often an easy impunity and exemption. It would fortify and exalt that type. Our idea of Fatherhood has been too much drawn from the home and too little from the Cross; and therefore it has been softened too far. God has become the kind Providence of the genial life instead of the holy Lord of the righteous Kingdom. We go for our God too little to history and too much to the family. The kind father's little girl (and God never made anything sweeter than a little girl) becomes more of a revelation to him than his Holy Father's unspared Son; and it is held to be almost an outrage when he is told that his Church has claims on him which determine his home, and may not allow him to remove and live in a better set. The Christ of the heart becomes the Christ of the story (which is bent to it) instead of the Christ of the story becoming the Christ of the heart (which is reared to it). Hence religion becomes too mobile for affairs, too subjective, unreal, impotent—just as in orthodoxy it became too intellectual, too rational. It becomes in both cases dismoralized; so that, while we want reconciliation, we want it detached from its moral foundation in atonement, and reduced to a mere making up. And it becomes too much individualized. It becomes a salvation by private bargain or mystic light, and not by a share in the salvation of a whole world and in the recovery of a moral universe. We are

asked to think of the Cross as the classic case of self-sacrifice, and not the crucial offering to a holy God. We think of religion in terms of private rather than public life, though it was upon a national issue that Christ died, and it was a nation's crime that slew Him for a world. Hence our Christianity has been more of a success on the private than on the public scale. It regulates personal conduct and sympathy, but not national. There is much private piety in Germany and no national righteousness. Hence also the moral effect of a great public and ecumenical calamity like the war is disappointing. We fail to respond to it as one of the saving historic judgements in the dramatic and tragic course of a kingdom of God founded upon a Cross. We dissociate it from the conscience of the world and of eternity. Therefore, also, we lose out of religion the great note of moral sovereignty, of righteousness, of nations in a solemn league and covenant. We can speak of many a great work in religion, but we do not speak of it with the great note. Or when we think of majesty we think of it in the aesthetic way of seemly reverence and not the moral way of searching worship.

But the great note comes from the great belief, as the real hold is our hold on the last moral foundations of things. Is that the power of our creed? Are we as much concerned about its moral reality as about its canonical continuity? How are we to connect the forms of our belief with the last realities of active things? It is a problem that the individual religionist treats with disdain as academic and intellectualist; but it is really the supreme question for a society or a nation. And we are fumbling at social or national religion with a small key that only fits the lock of our private safe. We are interested only in what lends itself to the uses of local pulpits and does not extend to the control of national destiny.

The great beliefs are not intellectualist. They come from the last depths of will, heart, and history. They are the self-

exposition of the immanent and royal Redeemer. They are the lineaments of gospel books which enthrone a latent King of history. A Church, like the kingdom it serves, cannot rest on sentiment alone but on certainty. And sentiment is easy and certainty is hard. And so our religion belongs to our weakness, not to our strength, and to our leisure and not our energetic hours, to our preference instead of our obedience. Care less for those things that interest or delight you and cost you nothing; and care more for those things that tax you, but set you on eternal rock.

Private or individual conduct must be largely guided by sentiment, but it is not so with the conduct of societies. It is the nature of our creed that creates the public type of religion; and it is the type of religion that affects society and public life, and does so in a way largely subconscious and even posthumous. By which latter word I mean that it is the creed and type of the religion of a past generation that reforms the ethics of the average mind to-day (though that is more true of political than of social affairs). It is the nature of Germany's creed and God that has made it the curse of the world. It has sacrificed moral regeneration to godless culture, and the new creation of a world to the grandiose expansion of a race. It needs a great creed to make a nation great.

To maintain the great note is more than to carry on a 'great work.' It is the poverty, the stridency, or the huskiness of our type of active religion that is the source of the Church's lack of public influence, and therefore of its atonic malaise at the present awful juncture. The gospel has the word for the hour as the Church has not. Our great theology does not come out in our general type of faith, which does not strike the note meet for a great nation or crisis. We talk the language of local congregations, and we do them good. And one would not for a moment discourage the pastor. But where is the apostle, where the prophet, where the word of the Church which is a fear to

politicians and a conscience to kings? We have made the Cross a raid shelter instead of a world's crisis, cure, and crown. Our note, with all its greatness, is not the note of a world crisis in the world conscience, as the Cross of our redemption is. It suggests a war shrine, pretty and pious. Or it is the note of a process of ordered thought, in which the redemption is but an episode or a tangle in a vast movement of the general reason. It is static not dynamic. It has the note of reflexion but not of tragedy, not of power. It is the work of able thinkers who have never been shaken over the mouth of the pit and scarcely saved. Our note is not deep enough because it is not moral enough. It is donnish and dispassionate. It does not reflect the saving wrath of God. It consoles more than kindles, and interests more than it awes.

Before we can effectually launch out into the deep of new seas and new worlds, the conscience of the race must be readjusted at the Cross to the *summum bonum* of the kingdom of God. We must revise belief and action by penetrating anew Christ's historic revelation, His historic foundation, of the kingdom of God, with its prime and public righteousness dominating all. The Jesus of history is not just a figure into whose outline we may press the most vivid, fine, and homely humanities of modern religion. He is One in whom we discern the gift of God which creates and commands all these pieties and amenities, and forms the crisis of the great moral powers whose action makes history. Those fundamental realities were gathered up, as earth's central fires gather to a volcanic head, into a nation selected by God to be trustee of Ilis Kingdom, the collective prophet of the moral world, and the protagonist of the conscience of the Holy. It was not the cause of the proletariat, that broke Christ's heart, but a nation's treason to a holy God. It was the great refusal of Ilis beloved Israel as the grand falsity of the moral world where also His own victory was that world's last fidelity and last reality. From that recreant

nation these historic realities were gathered up into Christ. And from Christ they were concentrated into His death and resurrection. His resurrection *by the spirit of holiness* (Rom. i. 4) meant a new moral world in its wake, and not only a new religion. It was the beginning and source of the world's regeneration. That was the real outpouring of the Spirit, in which the world is not illuminated but bom anew (1 Pet. i. 3). The exalted Christ takes for Paul the place the kingdom of God took for Jesus. He is the concentrated principle of the kingdom of the world's moral redemption. To return to Him and His moral charge and His moral crisis for it is the only permanent and thorough method for reconstructing either the institutions of society or the institutes of theology. The moral principle of reconstruction is regeneration, not into safety but into the Kingdom of God.

I fear that the state of the religious mind, so trivialized and demoralized, is such that much of what I have said from the heart of God's righteousness in Christ will seem but a preacher's extravagance, or an academic discussion about a moral philosophy of history. Such was Israel's damnatory verdict on Christ, who said that the wickedness of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom was a venial thing compared with the moral stupidity of the decent religion of Israel in Capernaum and Chorazm.

But let me say again that each single soul is saved only by its response to that same act of holy righteousness which founded the Kingdom, created a Church, exalted the nations, and recovered a world. It is historic faith I have been preaching, and preaching on something else than the conventicle scale or the patriotic. It is not philosophy. It is the soul of the religion of the world's conscience, and the power of the action of the conscience of God. It is powers I am handling, not themes—principalities and power ruling from the heart of all things. I am not lecturing, and not orating, but preaching in print—preaching neither to intellect nor sentiment, but from God's conscience to man's,

from man's destiny to his history. It is the word of the evangelical conscience, the conscience not just enlightened but redeemed and morally new made from the throne, that makes everything new. I am preaching the holy conscience of the love in God to the slack conscience of Christian love. I have been trying to-penetrate the Cross that with it I might perhaps penetrate the moral soul. It is not easy to harmonize private religion and public, I know, but it must be done at last. And how finely Augustine has done it in words like these:

‘Lord, when I look on my own life it seems Thou hast led me so carefully, so tenderly, that Thou canst have attended to no one else. But, when I see how wonderfully Thou hast led the world, and art leading it, I am amazed that Thou hast had time to attend to such as I.’

P. T. FORSYTH.