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The Reorientation of Theology.

A REPLY.

THE effect of the psychology of war is not confined to combatants. War touches every citizen of belligerent countries, and every department of human activity and thought is influenced by its incidence. Theology cannot claim to be exempt, and as it deals with the future and the viewless things—the dealing of God with man and the relation between the Creator and His creatures, when the soul of man is distraught with anxiety and his emotions are moved as they have never before been moved—we may expect his thought to be newly orientated if at times incoherent. Mr. J. K. Mozley is a thinker from whom I have learned much. He is the modern man in his quick sensitiveness and prompt response to the tendencies of his environment. He wishes to give true weight to every factor in a complex situation, and he is essentially modern in his belief that the experiences of the moment will have abiding consequences, and “what works” successfully in abnormal circumstances has a permanent pragmatic value for all time. He is hopeful; as all true Christians must be hopeful, of the future. He believes in the victory of the faith that must overcome the world, and he is anxious that nothing should be done to weaken faith in the supernatural in the accomplishment of its great purpose.

He attributes the decadence of Germany to its lack of grasp of fundamental religious truth. The pamphlet he quotes is striking testimony to this lapse from faith. I do not question the fact, but I can, if required, quote from many prominent British leaders of religion statements that we can only describe as picturesque exaggerations of the facts of British Christianity that can be used in Germany as effectively against us as the passage he quotes is used by him against Germany. He gives us a summary of the Christian dogmas that is not in accord with the summary contained in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. Salvation is not mentioned in his summary. The Sacraments are made the means of blessing and enrichment, yet no mention of them is made in the Historic Creeds, and apparently the Holy Ghost has as His chief function blessing through the sacraments and enrichment through supernatural

grace. I bemoan the departure of Protestant Germany from Christianity, but I confess that in a good deal of the theology that was current before the war I find echoes and more than echoes of the neology that was acceptable in Germany as a substitute for Christian dogma.

Mr. Mozley is entirely right when he says the war is enabling us to see the truth and power of the doctrine of the Atonement. May I be permitted to say that Mr. Mozley in his volume on this central doctrine has conferred a great benefit on the searcher after truth. He has helped many to understand the undying love that led the Son of God to die for them, and has braced their faith and strengthened their devotion. But when he parallels Christ's obedience with the obedience of our brave and gallant dead to the call of country—where does he land us? Does he not see that this applies equally to every man who willingly obeys the call, whether he be German, Turk, Bulgar or Englishman? I have neither wish nor right to anticipate the verdict that will be pronounced by God on those who die in battle. But I do know that the theology of "Jim Bludso" has, as far as I can see, no solid foundation in revelation. I am content to leave these men in the hands of our loving heavenly Father, but as an ambassador for Christ I have no authority to proclaim salvation by death in battle.

On the ecclesiastical question Mr. Mozley looks forward to a revival of Invocation of Saints and Adoration of the Reserved Sacrament as outcomes of the war and the mingling of Chaplains of men of all types and classes in the face of the foe. He exhorts us not to consider that the sixteenth century has said the last word on the subject. I for one prefer the judgment of the twentieth century to the opinion of the sixteenth century on the interpretation of theological formulæ, but I confess that I prefer the voice of the first century to that of any subsequent age. I find nothing in the New Testament to support the invocation of saints and nothing to warrant the adoration of the Sacrament. My ingenuity is insufficient to discover even a proof text wrested from its context to maintain their consonance with the faith revealed by our Blessed Lord. Mr. Mozley pleads the pragmatic point of view and the comfort and help afforded. Here again he limits himself to the passing experiences of the battle period. Let him in his pragmatic spirit see what they have effected in countries like Spain and South

America. If he fixes his eyes there he will find sufficient evidence to enable him to reject even the pragmatic advisability of their introduction into this country. "Abusus non tollit usum" is a very healthy motto, but its converse "usus non tollit abusum" may be utilized as a boomerang against the man who employs it.

Although convinced that the law of the Church of England is against the practices that Mr. Mozley wishes to see regulated, and that the spirit of obedience to the law is especially binding upon the Clergy of a State Established Church, I have never based opposition to them on these grounds. After all, truth counts for something. Honesty means more than a little in everyday life. Truth alone will survive the test of time, and those of us who are anxious to see the Church of England cleansed from error are as keen as any can be to have it defended by God and made the greatest power and influence for righteousness in the land. We do our utmost to proclaim truth, and unfortunately the proclamation of truth demands the antagonizing of error based on, as we believe, fundamental misrepresentations of the teaching of our Lord and the Apostles. We cannot help insisting upon the inevitable effect of error installed in our public worship. For us truth is no Protogorean rule of lead used to meet the needs of pragmatic utilitarianism. It is eternal, and loyalty to God is the ground of our attachment to the law that we believe to be in accord with the mind of God as revealed in the pages of His Word. Mere legalism has no influence as the determining test of truth. "Lex summa, summa injuria" is still true, but the spirit as well as the letter of the law of the Church has something to say on practices that can only be introduced in violation of what Christ has taught and what our Church condemns.

I place no weight on the eccentricities of individuals who believe they can re-write history and rob symbols of their historic meaning. "One swallow does not make a summer," and the eloquence of a solitary Nonconformist divine or the pronouncement of a Colonial Bishop cannot be described as a proof of a tendency. In all ages we have had men who, while holding firmly by their main position, find themselves attracted by a certain number of points that they consider separable accidents, whereas they are really the differentiae between their whole position and that held by the men whose teaching they cannot accept. The future is not with sacerdotal Christi-

anity. This has been tried and proved wanting. It is not with Interdenominationalism in certain of its present-day phases. It lies with the Kikuyu spirit at its best—the realization of a deep hidden and recognized unity in Christ—the possession of a common hope and the love of a Saviour Who redeems, the participation in the Holy Spirit Who sanctifies and the worship of the Father Who is our Creator. Freedom, not mechanical transmission of grace and sacramental blessing, is the first-century conception of the dealing of God with men through the Lord Jesus Christ, and we must return to that conception, and to that practice, if the Church of Christ is to be what its Founder intended it to be. One more familiar to Mr. Mozley than he is to me has said, “Let me record it as my painful humbling experience, that, in my dealing with error I have felt myself continually obliged to take it to the light of the ideal of Christianity, that which shines from actual Christianity being too feeble for my needs.” To that ideal the reorientation of theology will have to go, and it must prove itself in accord with it, if it is to have any permanent influence in the life of the Church.

One word as to Modernism—the goal to which many aspire and few understand. It is an attempt to adapt the Gospel to the philosophical or scientific mould of the day. If our religion were a mere subjective creation to meet the cravings of human nature, then reconstruction demands that all that is not in perfect agreement with current thought must be rejected, and we must create new ideals and frame a new theology for every succeeding development of higher thought. New theologies are only Christian when they approximate the historic revelation of the Incarnate Son of God. We cannot reject all we know about His life and teaching in favour of a more modern exposition that claims to satisfy the soul and still remain Christian. Truth is for us truth, and in the revelation of Christ truth and love are so closely intertwined that we can only love the Christ if we believe Him to be the living Truth. If all we have received from the New Testament has to be reconceived so as to be misrepresented as an unintelligible interpretation of the documents on any common-sense basis, then all I can say is that the plain man who retains his common sense and honesty will say, “I cannot call myself a Christian if I reject all Christ is supposed to have taught and done in favour of what modernists think He ought to have taught and done. I therefore, in my simplicity,

prefer to be an agnostic, as you have no right to claim to use the title Christian when you teach what you teach."

The reorientation of theology can only be effected by its setting its compass with the North on Calvary. When we see there the Son of God dying for our sins, and the benefits of His death and passion are appropriated by a lively faith, we are on the right track. We do not require any other Saviour—we do not need a new theology to set us on the path to union with God. All will find its proper place if our thought be Christocentric, and the ecclesiastical problem be subordinated to the one test, "Is what we declare and practise in accord with the revelation of Christ the Lord?"

T. J. PULVERTAFT.

