

aims at building up character, and who seeks the welfare of individuals, families, cities, and states. Failure in an engineering enterprise means either ignorance of, or inattention to, some law, some force, or the nature of some material. So in social work the want of social welfare means either ignorance of, or disobedience to, some moral or economic law or force. Moral and social failures do not happen "by chance." They frequently arise through our underestimating the strength of some opposing force. The many disappointments in our social work arise from our underestimating the force of ingrained habit, whether of thought or conduct, from our forgetting what an immense expenditure of mental and moral energy is required to effect any real and permanent progress. We sometimes see, as the result of excitement, an immense apparent moral improvement (as in sickness from the use of stimulants or palliatives), but the effects soon wear off, and the social, or the moral, or the religious state, as the physical one, relapses to the old level, or, more probably, sinks still lower. Not every one that saith unto Me Lord, Lord, but he that doeth, that constantly obeyeth the Will, the Divine Law, of the Heavenly Father, the great Divine Law-giver, and which Will he has made every effort to learn and to understand, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.



### Conversion and Modern Needs.

BY THE REV. A. R. WHATELY, D.D.

**I**N the CHURCHMAN of July, 1906, I put forward a defence of the doctrine of conversion in the light of modern thought. In this article I pass from the theoretical side of the question, leaving it, even as such, with much unsaid that might be said, and pass to its practical issues in the face of modern needs. Let us reserve our main thesis and work up to it. Let us ask, What sort of religion does our age require? And then it may

be possible to show that such a religion would find its focus at that supreme point of convergence of all the elements of our personality, that initial and fundamental self-surrender which we call conversion.

Perhaps never in modern times was spiritual religion more sorely needed than now as a basis of morality. Old rules and sanctions are being widely discarded; accepted canons of the moral law itself are beginning to appear arbitrary and obsolete. The "non-moral" man is with us, and the man who provides his own moral code. The secularist, whose "religion is to do good," still lives on his moral capital. He has no lever to raise the ungodly. At best he can call righteous, not sinners to repentance. Social ideals are offered us, but they presuppose, and cannot create, those high motives that are necessary for their realization. The individual who is to pursue them must pursue them under the influence of an ideal and a law which is inward, spiritual, personal to himself. He must love his fellow-men, and social ideals can only guide the workings of that love; they cannot for ever keep warm the cold and sluggish heart; though, by their appeal to the imagination and by the stimulus of hope, they may do so for a time. We need to be told, not merely *how* we should do good, but *why* we should do good. We need an ideal that does not unnaturally stifle our personal cravings or yet compromise with them, but turns them into the right channel; which realizes that supreme paradox of the Gospel which Luther proclaimed upon the housetops—that highest and regal freedom which issues in the humblest and most devoted service of all men for Christ's sake.

We need assuredly (and this is a mere commonplace) a religious revival to pour life into the vast inert mass of indifference, to capture the wild and wayward forces that stir throughout the social body, to provide an ideal that not only appeals to men's goodness, but retains them, and makes them good.

Our age is witnessing a tremendous collapse of temporary structures, old systems, conventional props, traditions once

blindly accepted. The decent veneer of church-going irreligion is being rubbed off. The Christian Sabbath is slighted openly by thousands and thousands who, thirty years ago, would have escaped the reproach of "Sabbath-breaking" by a purely external observance.

We are not so shocked at things of this sort as we used to be. Not, I mean, at the external side of it all, because we feel that, after all, the essence of this outward apostasy was only too abundantly present in the respectable externalism which it has disturbed. And yet undoubtedly there is much real apostasy. We must face the fact of a tremendous invasion of Materialism; an undermining of belief which, however unenlightened, smug, and self-complacent, was at least a groundwork, a starting-point, for the inner work of the Spirit.

The philosophy of Materialism affords no basis for social renewal. It misses both the true individualism and the true collectivism; for Materialism is essentially atomistic. The individual person, as it interprets him, is a self-contained, exclusive unit. The deepest social bonds, however, are spiritual, and the spiritual is, of course, in this teaching, unreal as such: all is explained in terms of a mere interaction of chance and necessity. Thus, the individual is on the deepest basis unsocial. Yet in being unsocial he is not even truly individual.<sup>1</sup> For freedom, personality, world-conquest, self-realization, these again are spiritual conceptions, and have no meaning for Materialism.

This tendency of thought and feeling—for its spirit is far more widely spread than the actual creed—points on the one hand to selfishness and egoism, and on the other to a materialistic Socialism. It can make nothing of true individuality, the spiritual and ethical personality for which self-interest and the service of God and man are one; and therefore its individualism must mean either a loose aggregate of jarring atoms, or a solid mass crushed together from without. I am using extreme language, but once more let me say that I am speaking only of a tendency which happily is greatly counteracted by various

<sup>1</sup> This is on the lines of Eucken's criticism of Materialism.

higher tendencies. It is important to try to isolate for examination that peculiar virus which permeates the thoughts and ideals of men, if we are to appreciate that true secret of life which is the key at once to personal regeneration and to social renewal.

We are thrown back on first principles. Authority will never re-establish its hold merely as such. External authority must mean in future, not a book claiming our acceptance primarily *as* a book, antecedently to the self-evidence of its essential contents; not a Church in which God Himself is mediated to the individual; not historical facts as resting on historical evidence; but the self-imposed authority of a Gospel which, when once accepted and understood, points outward again to historical events, a Divine society, and an objective standard of truth. The crying need is to bring men face to face with first principles—the true first principles. Now, first principles are self-evident when they are approached from the proper angle, when the proper faculties are aroused to apprehend them. They are the data upon which we built up our view of life. Materialism seems on the surface to offer the true data, for it appeals to experience, to a concrete world that presses us on every side, and starts from the immediate testimony of our senses. It might be shown, if this were the occasion, that there is no true immediacy in these data, and that materialism, instead of clinging to the concrete, is abstract in the highest degree. Readers of Dr. Illingworth's works—to mention but the one name—need not be detained with further remarks on this last point.

Now, the Gospel offers the true starting-point: it lays the true basis for life and knowledge. It appeals to the experience of the individual. And by experience is not meant feelings. If the Gospel be true—and this article, of course, is addressed to those who believe it—then the object it presents to us can be as truly perceived and grasped as the material objects around us. There is no room for deception, as Dr. Forsyth<sup>1</sup> has

<sup>1</sup> *Hibberl Journal*, April, 1908. Article, "The Essential Thing in Christian Experience."

recently urged, when the innermost man is conscious of a transforming and recreating presence on the very ground of his being. We can disbelieve—in the abstract, at least—our bodily senses, if we are Pyrrhonists and our philosophy bids us to do so ; but we cannot disbelieve our sense of Christ, because Christ takes possession of our philosophy as well.

But, after all, we are not dealing with philosophies, but with the ordinary man, who, however, is governed by a philosophy, good or bad, little as he may reflect upon the presuppositions of his life and thought. The cry "Back to Christ," in a far deeper sense than is generally meant by the phrase, is a true cry for to-day. And it is in conversion essentially that a man gets back to Christ. What he needs—what he craves for in his deepest self—is to make a radical fresh start. It is not enough to try to help him to sort out the good from the bad in his heart and life, the true from the false in his beliefs, to train this good tendency, to starve that bad habit, to base his conduct upon useful rules and sound principles. He needs to live upon a new plane : he needs to be lifted, with all he has and is, into a new sphere ; to be recreated from the centre outward ; to be overcome and engrossed by a transcendent experience, on which, in which, and for which, he can live through Time and Eternity. Principles, as such, however noble, are abstract. Earthly friendships are limited in scope and depth. Christ alone can be his all and in all. And this means conversion. It means that he can gather up his all in a supreme act of self-surrender. There is nothing needed except an understanding of the issue and genuine earnestness and faith.

Such a self-surrender involves the recognition of a central principle of sinfulness, in, though not of, the very nature of the man. It is only through the consciousness—implicit at least—of personal redemption, which presupposes such sinfulness, that the full and true act of self-surrender can be made.

But even apart from the question of sin and repentance, it is very difficult to understand how anyone who believes in this radical and personal relation of Christ to the human soul can

fail to see how the doctrine of conversion follows by an absolute logical necessity. There is no need to repeat the qualifications in my former article. Conversion, as a matter of fact, is often not a marked crisis, even in the case of adults who have once been careless. But the essence of the doctrine is this: that, where the situation is really understood, there is a definite step—psychologically as well as spiritually real—by which the soul can and ought to change its innermost attitude to God, and through God to life and the world; and with this, an answering movement on the side of God.

It is wonderful, amid all the scepticism and coldness around us, to note the spell which the true preaching of such a Christ as this exercises over the audience; if only we are free from all that exegetical artificiality, arbitrary "typology," and crude exposition of the Atonement, which so blunt the edge of the message. Here we are on ground where we need not even appeal to the authority of the Bible. It is an invitation to "Come and see." The note of conviction in the preacher, the atmosphere of a life lived upon the basis of the reality that he proclaims, is a sufficient *primâ facie* proof till men have tried for themselves.

"Oh, could I tell, ye surely would believe it!  
Oh, could I only say what I have seen!  
How should I tell, or how can ye receive it,  
How, till He bringeth you where I have been?"

We must arouse the consciousness of a need; and to feel the reality of a need of Christ is to feel the reality of Christ, for the need is the exact correlative of the supply. There is nothing outside religious experience that affords a parallel to this situation. The need we feel is just precisely the need of what Christ is; and nothing else, by the very nature of the case, by the very definition of the need—if we could define it—can supply it at all. And a real fundamental need, with no object existing, or that ever has existed, which could meet it, could not possibly be. In the case of our lower requirements, supply may not always be forthcoming; but the object of this

deepest spiritual need is the deepest spiritual reality, and therefore ever-living, ever-present, ever-responsive.

As Christ came into the world, so He comes into the heart of the individual. It is a new beginning, a new creation. Here is the soul's point of direct contact with the Alpha and Omega, the first principle, of his own life and of all life. It is just a point at first—it need be no more—but it is the nucleus of a new knowledge and a new life. At the moment of that contact the man turns his back upon all his past, upon all his opinions, all his expectations, all those perplexing traditions of his education which so long he has clung to and yet suspected; and the transaction is between him and God alone. No theology except such as this new experience draws into itself, and so vindicates, need enter the sanctuary. The whole "scheme of redemption," the very heart and essence of our despised creeds, is compressed and focussed in that point of light, till it spreads and illumines heaven and earth. And as that light spreads he will be able to take up again much that he has for the time let go. He will often be able to distinguish the imperfect form from the substance, the accidental from the essential. And we who believe that the orthodox Christian tradition and the claims of corporate Christian life are involved in the logic of the Gospel, should have no fear of a bold appeal to the witness of the inner man.

We must appeal to experience, not to sentiment, not to feeling, not to the experience men have, but to that which they may seek and possess if their sense of need is aroused. And thus man's extremity will prove God's opportunity. Alienated from churches and formulas, many may find God, who forty years ago would have lived on contented with a hollow outward conformity. It is well for men sometimes when God takes away all to which they have trusted, even the means of grace, till nothing is left—but Himself.

I have spoken of the spiritual emancipation of the individual in respect of knowledge and assurance, but it means also the setting free of great forces for the renewal of our social life.

Christianity alone solves that antithesis of self-interest and social solidarity which for the materialist limit each other : solves it, not by self-sacrifice (which, as some forget, is only a means, and not an end), but by the love which finds its joy in the joy and welfare of others ; even as Christ “for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross.”

Now, the type of Christianity which lays the deepest basis for unselfishness is that which recognizes conversion and its twin doctrine, assurance. The most fundamental unselfishness is that which rests, not upon a suppressed, but upon a liberated, selfhood—“a heart at leisure from itself to soothe and sympathize.”

The truest service of mankind springs not merely from impulses, but also from a deliberate self-consecration to the highest ideal that we know ; and if that ideal is indeed personal, creative, the source of all life, it will be a perennial fount of high motives and good impulses. The supreme problem, as all evangelic Christianity recognizes, is the finding and accepting of that ideal—in other words, conversion to God. Conversion may result from very mixed motives ; the highest element may be quite subordinate. But that only means that Christ came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance ; He does not presuppose in us that which He came to give.

Now self-surrender, in the deepest sense, must be Godward before it can be manward. Service of man is spread out, and divided up into particular occasions and acts. God alone can raise it to a higher plane, and can make self-surrender a real transition, and not merely a “good resolution.” Now, conversion implies that God’s grace is not merely co-operating, empirical, occasional, answering to each separate upward motion of the human soul, but that it is also fundamental, creative, initial ; bearing the same relation to His assisting grace as the human act of self-surrender bears to the particular acts of self-denial and service in which it unfolds itself. Those who think that Baptism or Confirmation precludes the necessity of conversion entirely miss the point of the question. They commit



the fallacy of *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος*, or illicit transition from one plane of thought to another. I remember Canon Body pointing out that the benefits of Baptism—great and splendid as he believed them to be—do not, as a matter of fact, include a surrender of the will. And as to the utter meaninglessness of any playing off of Confirmation against conversion, that need hardly be exposed here.

When once we grasp the truth that God starts us with not only pardon but the gift of a new will, and that the will of man is first of all his attitude towards God and towards life as a whole, then, not till then, do we know what conversion means. Antinomianism is utterly excluded. Service and freedom, self-culture and altruism, obedience and faith, realize their inner unity, so that each implies and involves the other.

It may yet be necessary to start a campaign—as Canon Cleworth once said—for the re-conversion of England. The thin end of the wedge of secularism may very soon be successfully driven into our elementary educational system. To see how lightly this issue is contemplated by many Nonconformists and Churchmen alike is, to me at least, peculiarly bewildering and painful. But even if the day should come when it will be a legal obligation on those who have the training of the child's mind and character to withhold from Christ's little ones the knowledge that He died for them and loves them, yet still it may be that, in the all-wise providence of God, the very parching of the green pastures may lead us to feel our dependence on the rain from heaven; and that the Gospel may come with the greater force and power in its attack upon heathen darkness than upon indifferent and hardened hearts. So the loss, though terrible to contemplate, may not be a clear loss. Man's extremity, to quote the familiar saying, may prove God's opportunity.

After all, our very belief in conversion should itself give us the key to a believing optimism, as we look upon the religious condition of our country. For it means that ultimate issues are not merely the residual effects of tendencies within the earthly

sphere, but that God acts by intervention, re-creation, personal approach. And He who transforms the individual, often in a concentrated crisis, from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan into Himself, can so breathe upon the sin-slain multitudes that they shall stand up an exceeding great army.



### Some Disadvantages of Establishment.

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A RECENT writer in this magazine<sup>1</sup> has set forth several advantages of Establishment. Some of his contentions would seem to contradict the actual experiences of other countries within and without the British Empire, which know nothing, except by hearsay, of an Established Church. But, nevertheless, there are a good many persons of large and generous mind, who are firmly convinced that an Established Church of the kind we possess in England has advantages, not a few of which would be lost by what is known as Disestablishment. They point to the fact that the Established Church has greater dignity and comprehensiveness than it would be likely to possess were the Church to be separated from the State. The Established Church encourages moderation and caution, and tends to render piety less particularistic and fanatical than we find it where the Church is separated from the general life of the nation. Religious people have much to learn from ordinary men and women, and an Establishment insures, although it may be in a rough, unscientific way, that their voice shall be heard. The appointment of Bishops and other important clergymen by the Crown, upon the advice of the Prime Minister, gives results which are more satisfactory than could be expected were their appointment to be in the hands of a purely ecclesiastical body.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. F. H. L. Millard, "Some Advantages of Establishment," April, 1910.