

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN

Modern Religious Pedagogy and the Lutheran Principle of Worship.

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The social theology of the present time is both insidious and vicious. Having its origin in the subjectivism of Schleiermacher and in the present-worldliness of Ritschl, it has pretty thoroughly permeated the world of religious thought in our days. The religion of feeling has found a great many advocates, and the so-called worship program in the Sunday-school and in other institutions of a similar kind has found some strong advocates in many religious educators. It is time that we analyze the situation very carefully in order that we may realize along just what lines the danger is approaching and how we may best meet the present difficulties.

The theologians of Modernism and with them most of the modern religious educators have a conception of religion which is largely based upon evolutionistic ideas. Galloway, in his *Philosophy of Religion*, has the following to say: "In every form of religion man seeks to establish a helpful relationship between himself and higher powers. The impulse to form this relationship and to secure satisfaction through it proceeded from a felt need; and this need must have been latent in human nature, only requiring stimuli from the environment to quicken it to utterance." (p. 57.) There is still some possibility of constructing the thoughts of this sentence in harmony with the revealed truth. The same may be said of the definition given by Wilm, in his book *The Problem of Religion*, in which he states: "I should define religion as an emotion based upon a conviction that events are being overruled in view of a supreme and lasting good and an attitude of cooperation with the Power in the universe making for this good." (p. 29.) Both of these views are theistic, and Dr. Wilm is ready to define religion briefly as theistic optimism. Taking another discussion at random, namely,

Wright's book *A Student's Philosophy of Religion*, we find the following definition: "Religion is the endeavor to secure the conservation of socially recognized values through specific occasions that are believed to evoke some agency different from the ordinary *ego* of the individual or from other merely human beings, and that imply a feeling of dependence upon this agency." (p. 47.) Here we likewise have a definition which presupposes theism, while its form is evidently influenced by Hoeffding's discussions.

But a book which gives us the modern views of religion, and, to some extent, the modern views of worship, in a connected form, is *The Philosophy of Religion* by D. Miall Edwards, of the Congregational College at Brecon, Wales. After discussing the problem and scope of a philosophy of religion, the author presents his views on the origin of religion in the light of anthropology. Of the view which traces religion back to a special definite revelation he says that it is crudely unpsychological. His last sentence in this paragraph is: "The theory of evolution has led us to conceive of primitive man as utterly incapable of receiving and retaining the highly developed ideas which primitive revelation was supposed to connect to him." (p. 31f.) Being entirely under the influence of the theory of evolution, the writer then proceeds to show how religion and worship must have evolved. The animistic theory of E. B. Tylor, which attributes a kind of soul to the phenomena of nature, does not seem adequate to our author. The ghost-theory of Herbert Spencer, which finds the origin of religion in the worship of ancestors appearing in the form of ghosts, likewise seems inadequate to this student. For the same reason he dismisses totemism as the simplest and most primitive religion. He finally proposes the notion of the pre-animistic religion, with its conception of mana. According to this theory religion grew out of a sense of awe in the presence of a diffused, undefinable, mysterious power or powers not regarded as personal. According to this author and others who have followed a similar line of thought, religion then developed through animism, fetishism, totemism, polytheism, and monolatry to monotheism. According to the notion held by many men who adhere to these theories, every human being in some way lives through the same stages of this development or evolution, and therefore such development must be taken into account in any program of religious education.

Let us confine ourselves almost entirely to the notion of modern worship connected with this evolutionistic notion of re-

ligion. In a recent book by Vogt, entitled *Modern Worship*, he speaks first of all of religion as celebration. The essential nature and power of religious experience is said to be enjoyment. And connected with this enjoyment there is a feeling of awe as in the presence of an all-powerful being. To this author worship offers no fixed content of its own. The abiding form of a man's celebration is to be filled with the new content of his good thoughts and good deeds. All objective forms of worship are to be reduced to a minimum, so that Professor Buckham's three elements of worship are to be brought out, namely, the direct individual experience of truth, the culture of the soul by contemplation, and the dedication of self in love. Vogt would enlarge this program by including a total of seven elements in his pattern of worship: vision, humility, vitality, recollection, illumination, dedication, and peace. To these elements all liturgical forms are to be subjected. Every person is to be permitted to bring out his feeling for the Supreme Being in his own subjective way. It is not surprising that the author says: "From the point of view of spiritual continuity and wealth it would seem to be far more desirable for the followers of Mahatma Gandhi to remain inside the ancient frame of the Hindu faiths than to come into formal fellowship with Christianity. . . . For my own part I should prefer to enter a church enriched by certain symbols of Christianity and containing also symbolic reminders of other faiths to entering a building barren of historic acknowledgment of any kind. . . . In parish churches with sufficient strength to erect buildings of large scale there is opportunity for a chapel of all faiths." (p. 144f.) This is the logical result of the theory of evolution as applied to religion and to worship.

But this idea is not only contained in theoretical discussions of the idea of worship. It is found in books which deal directly with the practical side of religious education. In a recent book by Edna Dean Baker, entitled *The Worship of the Little Child*, we have a typical discussion of modern views of worship growing out of a naturalistic conception of religion. The basic thought of the book is evident: Man is a religious animal. On one of the first pages of the book we have the following paragraph: "The impulse to worship is native, not acquired. The prehistoric savage kneels before the mighty oak and offers it homage. The Indian seeks a lonely mountain and, silent, immovable, watching the panorama of sunrise and sunset, of light and darkness, worships the Great Mystery. The shepherds on the hills of Judea see a strong light

and hear the songs of an angelic choir; seeking the stable in Bethlehem, they find there a Babe and, falling down upon their knees, they worship Him. The little child stops spell-bound with the wonder of a robin's song or a cricket's chirp and spontaneously adores the Wonder-maker." (p. 14.)

This wonder of the untaught savage and of the little child is supposed to lead him and it to worship. For if upon investigation the mysterious aspect of the object or the phenomena remain, or if upon first presentation that aspect is strange, the child is filled with a feeling that men call wonder. It is only a step, so the author says, from wonder to worship; for the answer to the riddle of life is God.

It is on the basis of this feeling that the author intends to build up a program of worship. And it is in keeping with the theories of religion and with the notion of worship as an expression of awe and wonder that modern religious educators want to build up a program of worship without considering the demands of the Word of God. For this reason we find in a book entitled *The Kingdom of Love*, by Blanche Carrier, the following study of worship: "Why do we love God? . . . God is great and powerful. God loves and cares for us. God is all-wise and perfect. . . . How do we feel about such a God? What does it make us want to do? We bow in wonder and awe before Him. We love Him very deeply. We look up to Him. . . . When we talk to God, what will we pray about? We thank Him for His power, care, and gifts. We ask for His care. We ask for strength and wisdom to know and to do the right. . . . When we feel this wonder and love, when we need to know what is right, when we sit and think quietly about God or talk with Him, it is called worship." (p. 152.)

It is on this account, with this notion of religion and worship in mind, that all modern books for classes in religion contain special sections entitled "Worship Service." A part of the lesson hour is devoted to having the children think about God and His attributes. Thus the responses of the children are directed into little forms of grateful expressions, as, for example: "Thank you, God, for the flowers. I thank you, God, for the robin. Thank you, God, for the little new leaves. Thank you, God, for the sunshine. Thank you, God, for the green grass. Thank you for the pussy-willows. Thank you for the warm rain," etc. This is supposed to be the highest achievement in the worship program in school and Sunday-school.

To one who is not imbued with evolutionism and with modern

naturalistic pedagogy the mistake is clear from the outset. We know that natural religion is the remnant of the original knowledge of God left in the heart of man after the Fall, by which he acknowledges the existence of a Supreme Being, stands in awe of Him, and enters into the relation of worship to Him. But this religion is not to find its development in its own way. The Bible states that men, on the basis of this last remnant of the knowledge of God, are to seek after God, if haply they might find Him as He has revealed Himself in the Word of Truth. No child in any school or Sunday-school may simply be asked to give expression to its natural feeling of awe and wonder in the presence of the supernatural. The Lord tells the woman of Samaria, in John 4: "God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Only those can truly worship God who have entered into spiritual fellowship with Him. And there is only one way of establishing this fellowship, namely, that made possible through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. It is only through Him that men truly have access to the Father. For that reason every program of worship and every worship service must be based upon the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. When we speak to little children of God the Creator, God the Father, God in His various attributes, we must do so for the purpose of having them realize the full scope of the fatherhood of God in Christ. They must learn at once to approach the heavenly Father in and through the Redeemer. They must know the significance of the formula "through Jesus Christ." The naturalistic pedagogy, expressed in its form of worship, will preserve and develop the idea of a work religion. But true worship is a reflection of, and a reaction to, the Spirit of God revealed in Holy Scriptures. The sacramental part of worship must ever precede the sacrificial. The worship of a Christian must be based upon knowledge, not upon feeling. While we do not insist upon specific forms of prayers, especially when a Christian is speaking directly to his heavenly Father, we always keep in mind the background of the worship taught in Scriptures. For that reason the prayers which are taught our Lutheran children from Luther's Small Catechism and from the writings of other men who had the spirit of prayer in unusual measure make for a sound pedagogy, and we ought by all means to abide by the forms which have been transmitted to us by the teachers of our Church and shun all modern ideas which are based upon evolution and a false conception of religion.