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TESTS OF A UNIVERSAL RELIGION.

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In this paper the term "Religion" is used to signify that body of doctrine or belief which secures and maintains peaceful relations between man and his God,—between the human and the divine for both time and eternity. The term "Universal Religion" implies that such body of doctrine or belief must be able to answer the deepest needs of the soul and to satisfy the loftiest religious aspirations of all mankind. The inquiry proceeds, therefore, from conditions that are common to all the race.

It is universally agreed that man is a creature possessed of powers of intellect, sensibilities and volition in both a degree and of a kind that separate him from all other created beings; that in the exercise of these powers he finds himself involved with his fellow beings in relations that are limited and determined by duty, obligation and accountability. These relations require moral standards, moral laws to maintain them and moral rewards and penalties to justify the moral laws, for any law, or laws, without reward or penalty is only good advice.

Such laws must be authoritative in their source, just in their relations and operations and certain in their results. A moral order can not be maintained in a world of chance, nor under a government of caprice, nor among a hierarchy of contending rivals. Morals, as well as Science, demand that the Law of Cause and Effect be unchanging and eternal. "Everything that exists or every thing that happens, exists or happens as a necessary consequence of a previous state of things. If a state of things is repeated in every detail, it must lead to exactly the same consequences." This is called the Law of Causality. It can not be proved, but it must be believed for it

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forces itself upon us and can not be denied. If we could believe for a moment that the same complete combination of causes could have a definite number of different consequences, then, in Science no observation or experiment could be worth while and in Morals no pious desire, no self-sacrificing service, could be justified. Were men to hold as practical faith, that the results which attend their efforts depend upon whether Jupiter is awake or Neptune asleep; or upon whether Diana is bending her bow for battle or sulking and pouting because Juno has boxed her ears, then what we call Science would be but luck and moral standards and moral consequences would depend upon the caprice of the changing and ever fitful gods.

But man's moral nature and moral relations make his a moral world that demands a moral order sustained and directed by a moral law. That requires a moral ruler possessing intelligence and will whose law must be the expression of his character and purpose. In authority such ruler must be supreme, for authority not supreme is no authority. In character he must be holy, and in his relations with his subjects he must be just, or else he would not be moral and would, therefore, be unqualified for the rulership of a moral world. Further; he must be benevolent, for the moral order has for its purpose the highest welfare of its subjects and inevitably works toward that end. But authority, holiness, justice and benevolence are not principles of action or methods of procedure; they are attributes of intelligence and volition, and presuppose personality and without personality have no existence. To cover every possible contingency of relationship and conduct it is not too much to say that such attributes must be infinite; to be just they must be unchanging, and to meet the needs of man, real or prospective, they must be eternal.

The moral rule of man's moral world, thus invested with authority, holiness, justice and benevolence; maintaining with his subjects relations, infinite in scope, un-

changing in form and eternal in duration, stands forth as man's supreme God, unrivaled, living, infinite and eternal and becomes the first test in a universal religion.

Man is a Spiritual Being. He has a soul. He is conscious of a life that can not be explained by the functions of his physical nature. He has a conscience. He fears and hopes. He thinks and reasons. He loves, hates and is capable of moral discrimination and moral resolution. He inevitably believes in some sort of an unseen world, whence proceed forces that operate upon his life; peopled with unseen intelligences,—ghosts, spirits, ogres or angels, devils or deities, with which he is in some strange way inevitably related. This belief is world-wide. History shows that as he rises in the scale of intelligence he also rises in his appreciation of such attributes and qualities as he thinks his divinity ought to possess and which ought to be found in some supreme spiritual being. If we may take Greek philosophy as an example, we can all agree that it came to its high-water mark in Plato. His philosophy was not only highly intellectual, it was also profoundly religious. His religious faith, was, of itself alone, enough to make him distinguished for all time. Of what he wrote, enough remains to show very clearly that he was a seeker after God. His notions of what the God, unknown to him, ought to be are of the highest order. He goes so far as to catch what seems, to us, to be a foregleam of the Bible doctrine of the Trinity, as when he speaks of the God as "*to on*," the Cause of all things, "*ho logos*," the Reason and Ruler of all things, and "*psuche kosmou*," the Soul of all things. He taught that true knowledge does not lie in the senses nor in what the senses report, but that the world of realities is the world of ideas and that the highest idea of all is that of goodness the ultimate of which is the god, or the Christian's God. But Plato was conscious of the limitations of the human intellect. He was a seeker after God but knew not how to find Him. And of all that ever blent religion

and philosophy in their search after God no greater than Plato has appeared. But in that search he failed. His great soul grew weary of its own aspirations and he puts into the lips of Socrates the words, born of his own helplessness, "*We will wait for one, either the god or one sent from the god who shall teach us our religious duties and who will take away the darkness from our eyes.*"

If such is the conclusion to which the wisest of the pagan philosophers is forced to come, it must be admitted that the second test of a Universal Religion lies in the fact that it must be a Revelation, duly validated as being divine in its origin and spiritual in its relations to the spiritual man.

Man is a Sinful Being. Man's sense of short-coming and lack of conformity to divine claims are felt in different degrees according to the grade of his moral light. However refined or degraded his religion may be that light has never been entirely wanting. From the light of nature or of experience he may find a better path than that in which he is willing to walk. Memory and hope, the presence of evil and the fears of the future have made sacrificial substitution and priestly interposition universal. Man wants escape from the consequences of his misdeeds. For such escape many expedients are proposed, as the dreamless sleep of Nirvana, the absorption of personality in the great All, justification from our sins by good works, and so on. But while such expedients may be accepted by the millions of our benighted race, they neither justify the soul from sin nor give it peace. The ground of justification can never be established on the side of the offender; it must come from the one against whom the offense is committed. But how can this be brought about? That is the question of all religions. God is holy and man is a sinner. The conception of divine holiness and the consciousness of sin proceed *pari passu* in every soul. Can a holy God be reconciled to an unholy man? Can a just God regard rebellion against

His moral government as though it had never occurred? If sin denies His rights, disregards His interests, assails His government, insults His majesty and claims the sinner's heart as its only home this side the pit of perdition, can God, as a God of justice, pass it over as a trifle or be bought off by any expedient of the transgressor? Grant that such procedure were possible, the ethical heart of man would not accept such an adjustment nor render homage to such a God. Man demands justice. The real man is an honest man. He wants his debts paid though the obligation bring him to want. Forgiveness of sin in accord with justice is the rock on which all the philosophies and religions devised of men have wrecked from the beginning of time. What man needs, therefore, is one that can meet the moral indemnity of his nature and condition for him. That one must be other than himself. Other than himself there is no one but God. God, therefore, must arrange the reconciliation. If in justice, then God must Himself meet the consequences of His violated law and become the sufferer. On that condition only can justice be maintained while mercy is extended to all who may accept it.

Reconciliation through the sacrificial sufferings of God becomes, therefore, another test of any religion that can satisfy the ethical sense of the human soul.

Man Is an Immortal Being. He thinks he was not made to die. Universally he believes in a hereafter. His universal desire is not only to escape the consequence of his misdeeds in this and in the life beyond, but also that he may reach his heaven. Whatever that may be, the Happy Hunting Grounds, Nirvana, Paradise or the New Jerusalem, he wants to find the way thither. As migratory birds, feel, at the first touch of autumn, that instinct which impels them to seek lands of sunshine and flowers, so devout souls in all ages have felt that there are realities in the world unseen other than what their religions declared. Cicero, the pagan, is an example, who in the

hour of his death was comforted with the thought that he would soon be in the congenial company of his friends who had preceded him to the unseen shore. The religion that satisfies the soul's questions about the unknown future must be a religion that pierces the gloom with a light that shines this way from the other world, and one that bridges the gulf that lies between man's last hope in this life and its blessed realization in the life to come,—a religion that gives assurance that personal consciousness lives on in spiritual relations undisturbed by the transition of physical death. Who can bring such a light or bridge that gulf except one who is able to prove his power over death and to give assurance that a deathless life is available for all that will receive it?

A Universal Religion finds another test in that it must be a Religion of assurance and for that reason a Religion of spiritual experience.

If the foregoing argument be correct it is clear that Science offers no ground on which such a religion can be constructed; evolution does not promise it and man, in his present limitations is incompetent to invent or contrive it. Is there, then, a religion that can meet the tests considered? Does the man live who experiences such a religion or whose soul is sustained by its promises? Then, he is the man who has what all the world needs, for which universal man is waiting and without which he is forever lost. He is the man, who by every sentiment of humanity, if by no other, is under obligation to make known his discovery, his faith and his hopes to all his fellow beings.