ARE WE THROUGH WITH RELIGIOUS FAITH?

E. ALBERT COOK, PH.D.
Howard University, Washington, D.C.

The question which Professor Cook raises may seem to be purely rhetorical, but whoever looks upon religious faith as touching the whole range of human affairs will not so regard it. A diagnosis of the spiritual health of the country shows the intense conflict now going on between reliance upon force and reliance upon love. In order to have confidence in the teaching of Jesus one needs to have confidence in the sanity of his outlook upon life and the validity of his experience of being one with the Father. Unless we can feel that love is more than a sign of weakness we are not likely to hold to the Christian faith. Is not one aspect of the confession of our loyalty to Jesus a confession of deep religious faith in the God whom he reveals?

Who Raised the Question?

Are we through with religious faith? To some, this question may seem absurd; to others, a little startling; but to many, it is a very serious question today. Pilate raised the question when he asked, “What is truth?” for if there is a question whether we can gain truth, there is a question whether we can have faith or not, for faith is concerned with truth. Job raised the question, some centuries before Pilate, when he exclaimed: “Oh, that I knew where I might find him!” For religious faith is largely concerned with the way to find God, and if we do not know the way to God that means that we are through with religious faith, or have not yet attained to it. Hume raised the question when he said: “Our experience consists only of our sensations and resulting ideas, and we can never get outside of our experience,” for men had thought that they could go from their experience up to the highest heaven and find God there running the universe. If they were mistaken, we must ask whether there is any way at all of getting from our sensations to God—or whether Hume was perhaps himself mistaken. Kant raised the question when he showed the futility of the traditional “proofs” for the existence of God; for if we cannot know that there is a God, the question arises as to what sense there is in believing that there is. Spinoza raised the question when he maintained that more than one person had a hand in writing the Pentateuch, for Jews and Christians had for many centuries rested their religious faith on an “infallible” tradition, a part of which was the doctrine that the first five books of the Old Testament were written entirely and exclusively by the man Moses. If, now, an error in this tradition should be admitted, its infallibility was gone, and where then should one rest his faith? Strauss raised it when he showed how religious legends arose and asserted that the Gospels contain a mixture of history and myth or legend. For the great
doctrines of Christianity depended, or were supposed to depend, for their credibility, on the historical accuracy of every word in the Gospels. If history is here mingled with legend or myth, is not a grave shadow thrown upon all Christian faith? For who shall distinguish accurately where the one begins and the other leaves off? Spencer undertook to answer the question, "Are we through with religious faith?" in the affirmative, as he was generally understood, when he with great plausibility affirmed, "The reality behind Nature is utterly inscrutable." For if we cannot know that God created the heavens and the earth, or what God is like (if we call the original creative power by that name), then surely religious faith will have little left to say. But in later years Spencer raised the question again when he acknowledged that consciousness cannot be explained in terms of matter and motion, for his world of science consisted of nothing but matter and motion, and if there was something else in existence, then indeed he had failed in his heroic attempt to reconcile science and religion by reducing religion to a gigantic question mark. And finally the question is being raised today for the average man in this country by empty pews and full automobiles on Sunday morning—for what need remains for faith in God if you are rich enough to own your own touring car, and what profit in droning prayers in a stuffy church when you might be enjoying the fresh breezes and green trees in the country? And the question is being raised in Europe by empty hearth-chairs and full trenches of nations calling upon the same God to help them conquer each other. For the question echoes in the reverberations of the great guns, "If the kings and peasants and theologians of one-half of Europe are uttering vain prayers to a hostile God, how shall anyone know to which side God is favorable; and if he is indeed favorable to one side and opposed to the other, why does he allow the people he loves to die in anguish by tens of thousands, and raise no hand to relieve them—or are the sneers of the faithless that "Papa God is neutral" justified? I did not raise this question, "Are we through with religious faith?" but I should like to help you in finding an answer to it.

Why Was the Question Raised?

This question has been raised in a thousand forms, of which we have given a few random illustrations. Why should it have been raised at all? Sugar is a more or less prominent fact in our experience, and yet no one raises the question "Are we through with sugar?" The multiplication table expresses beliefs common to almost all of us, and yet the abolition of the wearisome creed that \( 2 \times 2 = 4 \) is never seriously discussed unless by small, tired school children. Religious faith is both a fact of experience and a form of belief held still by many. Why then should the question of its permanence be raised? The answer will be twofold, corresponding to the illustrations. There is no practical doubt about the goodness of sugar. Sugar is good, and therefore we shall continue to use it. But in the minds of many it is an open question whether religious faith is good or not. There is not the slightest doubt but that religious faith has had a great influence upon life.
in the past—has been one of the great determining forces of history. There is equal certainty that its influence has often been evil rather than good. We could hardly mention or imagine a form of vice or crime which has not at one time or another been enjoined upon its devotees by some form of religious faith—murder, theft, prostitution, drunkenness, lying, treachery, treason, torture of every horrible kind—every imaginable superstition and abomination! One of the most earnest Christians I know today verily believes that he doeth God service when he denounces those who disagree with him in religious faith as thieves and hypocrites, and any learning that seems to come to a conclusion different from his as "impudent and pretentious ignorance." Suppose this man's faith is correct; then doubtless he is justified in such words, for they flow from his faith. But if his faith is quite correct we cannot think that it is quite good, for it makes him unjust and foolish in his treatment of others. In any case, religious faith is a costly thing. It costs in time and money and energy and sacrifice of all sorts—it costs in brain and in blood. Even if it should be found that it has resulted in more good than evil in the past, the question remains whether we have not reached a point where we can get on better without it. The first question then is: "Is religious faith—any religious faith—good—worth the price it costs humanity?" If not, then surely the sooner we are through with it the better.

Again, there is practically no doubt about the truth of the multiplication table, and there is serious doubt about the truth of any popular religious faith of the past or present. If we should become convinced that any given mathematical formula were false, we should be through with it. So any given religious faith becomes impossible for one who is led to believe that it lacks truth. Of course if we were absolutely convinced that some particular form of religious faith were true, we could not avoid holding it, good or bad. But when we consider that even people who claim and seem to possess such absolute certainty hold contradictory opinions, so that their certainty must be illusory, since contradictories cannot both be true, the question is reopened for us. Our main question, then, becomes two questions: Is there any religious faith which can be so confirmed that we may be assured of its truth and thus be able to hold it? and: Is there any religious faith which will give us a great good that we can obtain in no other way, so that it will pay us to bother with it?

What Is the Good of Religion?

There is a great deal of confusion in the popular mind as to the nature of religion, and particularly as to the nature of the good that religion does or should offer. In order to prepare the way for a presentation of the good offered by the best form of religious faith, it may be helpful to consider some partial failures of religion in the past, either to offer that which was most needed or to "deliver the goods" which it promised to the faithful.

Bread-and-Butter Religions

All of the earliest forms of religion might be called "bread-and-butter re-
ligions.” The needs most apparent in primitive human life are for food, health, and outward prosperity, and religion has always promised to meet the greatest needs of men, particularly those needs for which men found their own efforts insufficient. To take a most familiar example, we remember that the principal promises made by God to Abraham were that he should have innumerable descendants and that the land of Palestine should be their possession. Jacob’s bargain with Jehovah at Bethel was that if he would prosper him, he would give a tenth of all the property which he acquired to Jehovah. Long life, many children, fruitful harvests, flocks and herds were the great blessings which the Hebrews desired from Jehovah, and when a man attained these things it was assumed that he was a good man suitably rewarded by his God. Even in the New Testament we are told that Jesus promised his disciples many times as many relatives, houses, and lands in this life, as a reward for all that they should sacrifice on his account, besides the eternal life of the future.

In the development of these religions and of society with them, two difficulties always arose. First, no religion has ever been able to guarantee to every faithful adherent health and prosperity. The Book of Job is the classic presentation of this difficulty. Job was a “perfect and an upright man,” one who “feared God and eschewed evil,” and yet God permitted terrible calamities to befall him and a loathsome disease to come upon him. And whether or not the story of the restoration of Job’s health and prosperity belongs to the original book or was, as many think, added later, we know that there have been faithful adherents of all forms of religion from whom outward prosperity departed, never to return. And further, as civilization has advanced, men have found that their outward prosperity and even their health came ever more within their own control, so that now we have probably reached the opposite extreme and mistakenly fancy that religion has no effect upon either. Christian Science, and “New Thought” in its religious or quasi-religious forms, are modern reactions from this extreme, to which the scientific view of the world has tended to bring our generation.

But the important matter has been that men have discovered—a few of them at least—that bread and butter do not supply the chief needs of life. A man may have fair bodily health, and bread and butter in abundance, and jelly and syrup and all kinds of good things to eat with his bread, and yet be quite miserable; and, on the other hand, he may live for many years in poverty and suffering, and at the same time be radiantly happy. In brief, then, bread-and-butter religion has never been perfectly true; that is, able to keep its promises in all cases, and it does not do for us what a religion is required to do—meet our greatest needs.

Heaven-Promising Religions

A deeper form of religion than that which offers food and clothes to the worshiper is that which offers him some sort of a heaven. It may, like early Buddhism, look upon all ordinary forms of human life as containing much more suffering than happiness, and therefore offer a passionless state or Nirvana into
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which one may flee and escape from suffering even while the body still lives, and a condition of blessed annihilation after the body decays. Or it may look upon this life as a wilderness of woe, a state of exile, or at best of probation, from which at death the faithful pilgrim may go to his eternal home of bliss. Mahayana Buddhism, e.g., in China and Japan, and Mohammedanism and Christianity everywhere and always have made this promise of the future paradise of delight a prominent article of faith. Of these heaven-promising religions, again, we must make two criticisms. In the first place they fail to do justice to the actual good of this mortal life, and, much more, to its possibilities of good. The only consistent and practical denial of the good of this life is suicide. Doubtless many have been prevented from this step by religious prohibitions which asserted future punishment for such action, but it is not impossible that even such religious principles should be interpreted as the expression of the instinct to live, and the general consciousness of the value of life with all its pain. And on the other hand, in cases where the rules of religion cannot be said to be effective, it is significant that suicide is rare where there is the greatest amount of hard labor and physical suffering, but common among classes of greater wealth, health, and leisure. In spite of the fearful suffering which the world is now enduring on account of the war, we may say that it is probable that many in recent years have overestimated the relative proportion of pain to pleasure in human and sub-human life. In his *The Social Basis of Religion* Patten has called attention to the great change in outward conditions of the common people in Europe and America—conditions which have come within the recent decades, and are still rapidly developing in a favorable direction, and to the consequent change of view of and interest in religion. There is apparently no good reason why the life of the vast majority of the human race should not be made outwardly attractive within a comparatively short space of time. The desire for heaven as a place of relief from present distress seems certain to become rapidly less and less.

In the second place, we are just at the present day skeptical about religion's promises for the future. They may be true and valid—or they may not be true—who shall tell us? With the understanding that religion's promises of heaven may have come more from human desires than from supernatural revelations which can still be satisfactorily demonstrated to be true, these promises have come under the shadow of doubt. Since we have accepted the Copernican view of the earth's location and movements in space, the thought of the heaven "up above the sky" has lost all definite significance of locality, since "up" may be in any direction, and no reason is apparent for regarding one as more probable than another. No new proofs of the validity of the old promises of heaven have yet been found which satisfactorily take their place. Of the heaven-promising religions, then, both the goodness and the truth are in doubt.

**Religions Which Save from Hell**

Another form of religion, commonly although not always united with the
kind which promises heaven, has been that which offered deliverance from hell, as the punishment due at the close of this life for the sins committed in it. This was one of the most common forms in which Christianity was presented up to a generation ago, and it still survives among great multitudes today. Mohammedanism, which derived many of its doctrines from corrupt forms of Christianity, makes even more definite and horrible its threats of purgatory or hell for sinner or infidel. Many who found this life fairly interesting and attractive as it was, or at least as it might have been had not religion hedged it about with too many prohibitions—in fear of the wrath to come—turned to religion for salvation, hoping thus not only to be spared endless torture but to attain to a more or less undesirable eternity of bliss. For the traditional conception, taken literally, of an eternity of hymn-singing has not always appealed strongly to men, even if the surroundings were to be of pearl, crystal, and gold. Here again two principal faults appear. We have come to understand that sin and its punishment cannot be any more completely separated than disease and the pain which accompanies it. And we hold that, after all, the destruction caused by the disease is a greater evil than the temporary pains which are generally the symptoms and accompaniments of its activity. The greater problem, then, is how to get rid of the disease—sin—and we strongly incline to the faith that if we can get rid of sin, its penalties will also disappear. We find it much more difficult than our fathers did to believe that a just and loving God would torture a man forever and ever, either for some unmentioned error in his faith or for some sin or sins committed within the brief span of mortal life and in conditions of great temptation. Our theories of divine criminology, like those of our human criminology, are changing. We are abandoning the idea that the chief responsibility of the law to the law-breaker is to see that he gets a quid pro quo for each of his transgressions. Justice has fulfilled its duty to the sinner as well as to society, we are inclined to think, when and only when it has protected society and reformed the wrong-doer and reinstated him as a useful member of society. These and other considerations lead us to question both the goodness and the truth of the religion which offers deliverance from hell.

Let no one imagine that in the brief outline we have given above of the promises of historical forms of religion we have done or intended to do them full justice. It might well be questioned whether we have really touched the principal value of these forms of religion in thus calling attention to what their adherents have commonly regarded as their main advantages. We have noticed some of their most prominent and popular characteristics, but not their deepest meaning. We have intended, by the exhibition of these features of religion, to show why the question is raised today, "Are we through with religious faith?" in order that we might then see more clearly the greater and permanent elements of religion, and the characteristics which must belong to the ideal religion—the religion of the future. It will not be primarily the religion of
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The True Office of Religion to Raise Life to Its Highest Power

The office of religion is to raise life to its highest power—the earthly, mortal life, in the first place and most certainly, and probably also the future life, continuing this earthly life. Successful religion will help a man—all men—to make the most of life, intensify life, multiply the value of life, fill life full—fulfil life. Finally it should be for them “a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” If religion can do this for men, and nothing else can, then we are not through with it and never shall be. Have we any religion which will do this? Have we any religion which has done this? No, apparently not, in any universal way. We are inclined to think that the higher forms of Christianity are better than any other historical forms of religion. But of Christianity we must say that in only a few cases can we be confident that it has raised the life of the individual to the highest power, that it has at least partially failed for the larger masses of men, and has not thus far been successful enough, even with its adherents, to convince the multitudes who know them and live with them, of its value, much less to win the world. We may well hold that the fault was not in Christianity but in men’s imperfect understanding and application of it. But the situation is for us the same—the popular forms of religion, even of Christianity, have not been fully successful.

To give “plans and specifications” of the ideal religion would be the work of years rather than of minutes, and indeed it would be impossible for any man or number of men to make them complete a priori; but I should like to try to sketch a kind of “front elevation” of the religion which would, if it could be realized, accomplish the task we have seen to be that set by the nature of religion and the needs of humanity.

Making Persons Out of Animals

The first task of religion is to make persons or individuals out of animals of the genus homo. The new-born child is a little animal with a few, possibly a few score, of instincts, latent or active. McDougall names seven primary instincts: flight, repulsion, curiosity, pugnacity, self-abasement, self-assertion, and the parental instinct. To these others add sociability, acquisition, rhythm and beauty, sexual instincts, climbing, hunting, the dramatic instinct. The child obeys first one instinct and then another. He has no will of his own. Whatever instinct or combination of instincts happens to be aroused controls him or becomes his will for the time being. Now he loves, now he hates, now he flees in terror, now he fights fiercely, now he feels himself superior to all others, now he is abject in submission to others. As he grows older, intercourse with other people and the conditions and needs of the daily life establish a superficial order in this chaos, and the memories of the pleasures or pains, the good or the evil experienced while under the control of one set of impulses, will modify his action when they recur, and add to or diminish the
force of others. These experiences of satisfactions and dissatisfactions will tend to the formation of habits, and the possibility of gaining good things will in time be narrowed down to a few main interests, and the strife between the contrary impulses will become all the fiercer. He is divided—not an individual, no longer a multitude of unrelated instincts in one body—he is a few contrary but powerful parties struggling for exclusive control of the one body and spirit. There is only one way of coming to peace, to strength, to a real will, and a real personality, and that is by reorganizing life in view of one aim or one principle, offering loyalty to one end or one person and thus acquiring a conscience and becoming a man. Some purpose in life must be found which will either empower certain instincts and suppress the others or else, if indeed there be such a meaning, find the one meaning of all the instincts and then turn the power of them all in the one direction, and with the full force of life become a single, compact, concentrated mind, heart, and will—an individual.

This work of unifying the personality, which gives happiness, peace, and power, is, as we have said, the first task of religion. It is the closing of the fingers to make the fist, or the choosing of the tones to make the chord. Any force which accomplishes this is to that extent religious, although not necessarily connected with familiar and organized religion. And we all know instances of people in whose lives this result has been brought about—some Moses or Isaiah, Paul or Luther, who, when their warring desires found their unity in religious faith, became superhuman in the impact of their personalities upon history. Conviction of sin, repentance, conversion, regeneration, and sanctification are familiar names for elements in this process of bringing the diverse impulses of a life together into one strong will. And we all know the multitude for whom life becomes more and more a failure as old age approaches, because the struggle between the various incompatible ambitions and desires made the satisfaction of any one of them impossible.

Making a Community Out of Individuals

The second task of religion is to unite the many individuals into one society—smaller groups of comrades, one larger group of allies. It is evident that the instinct of sociability could never be perfectly satisfied without such union, and even if there were no such instinct, men have to live together, for good or ill, and so far as they are reasonable they must try to live together for good. The state is the outward form or one of the outward forms which have been established to enable or compel men to live together with mutual profit, but its efforts become largely successful only as the invisible but stronger bonds of good-will and intelligence are established between its members. No state of any importance has been able to exist without that inner unity of its members which was determined by religion. All ancient kings ruled "by divine right," and they generally claimed to be direct descendants of the gods. Doubtless the worship of the Roman emperors as gods was established in the effort to give some religious unity to the heterogeneous mass
of nations out of which the empire was composed. The decay of Greece and the fall of Rome quickly followed the spread of religious skepticism. The unity of Japan and the lack of unity of China today may largely be explained by differences in their religion. Japan is the gift of the gods from whom its rulers are descended. Its history and its people are then in a great sense divine. Bushido, the "way of the warrior," is the system of religious ethics which demands of everyone complete and absolute loyalty to the land and its ruler. In China the national religion is centered in the worship of Heaven and Earth, conducted by the ruler, and in which the common people have no part or responsibility. The emperor is chosen by Heaven. If he be a bad emperor, he thereby forfeits his right to the throne, and anyone is justified in rebelling against him and deposing him. There is no provision in the Chinese religion for a president. The religious interest of the empire—or republic—doubtless furnished an apparently sufficient reason for the late president, Yuan Shi Kai, to assume the position of emperor in the worship of Heaven and Earth, conducted by the ruler, and one of the motives for desiring to accept the title of emperor. The proper worship of the common people is of their ancestors, but besides that there is a great amount of illicit worship of local gods and spirits, good and bad. There is then little in the religion of China to give national unity at any time, and almost nothing that serves for the present situation, for which tradition offers no precedent.

Many of us think that the terrible events of the present are hastening the coming of the Federation of the World, the Parliament of Man; that eyes now looking upon the anarchy of Europe shall not be finally closed until the fruitful harvests of a permanent peace are ripening in the fields that have been fertilized by rivers of blood. But if that shall be, although a hastening motive should be the dread of war, and the knowledge that no nation can by means of it gain as much as it will lose, the underlying foundation will be a great religious belief in the brotherhood of man.

Making a Universe Out of Man and Nature

Man is a part of nature. In the early days, men looked at the animals about them and thought them men in other forms. They looked at the sun and stars, the trees and fountains, they listened to the thunder and felt the wind, and to all they attributed human spirits. Then followed a period of sophistication, in which men felt their difference from and to some extent their superiority to all these things.

Who knoweth the soul of the man that goeth upward,
And the soul of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?

Thou hast made him [man] a little lower than God
And crowned him with glory and honor.
Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands,
Thou hast set all things under his feet;
All sheep and oxen, yea and the beasts of the field,
The fowl of the air and the fish of the sea,
And whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.
Now again the original attitude is returning, but in reversed form. Evolution has humbled the pride of man. In him we find but a developed animal, superior to other animals, doubtless, in some ways, but inferior, certainly, in other ways, yet largely subject to the same laws, and tracing his ancestry back to the same parents—bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. And those parents, finally, as in the old mythologies, are the Heaven and the Earth. And still man is man, and as he cannot deny his mind and heart in order to assimilate himself to a heaven that is nought but vibrating ether and an earth that is merely matter in motion, he is bound again, like the primitive men, to think of a heaven-father and perhaps an earth-mother.

Man doth usurp all space
Stares thee in rock, bush, river, in the face.
Never yet thine eyes behold a tree;
'Tis no sea thou seest in the sea,
'Tis but a disguised humanity.
To avoid thy fellow, vain thy plan;
All that interests a man is man.

—Henry Sutton

Willy-nilly, man is a part of Nature. Nature surrounds him, dogs his every step, hears his every laugh or sigh, feeds him, clothes him, rewards him, punishes him, smiles upon him, threatens him, and finally takes him to sleep in her embrace. On what terms shall he live with Nature? for he must live with her, on good terms or evil! Some men are trying to live with Nature as with a great, mysterious, terrible machine, which will finally crush out their lives. But whether this relation be the true one or not, it is not a natural one if the history of man and his relations with Nature be any indication of what natural relations between them are. The mechanistic view of Nature has been extremely useful for certain purposes, but it satisfies no philosopher today. Psychology seems to contradict it, and it is the mortal enemy of religion. If the one survives, the other must perish. And so we have to say that the third task of religion is to unite man and Nature in the bonds of a personal affection; that man’s life is not raised to its highest power until he is no longer a stranger in the great palace of the universe, but has become the guest and friend of its maker and owner and feels himself in league with the trees and stones, the winds and waves, the summer and the snow.

Summary of Religion’s Tasks and Tests

The religion which will thus make a person out of an assembly of stubborn, headstrong instincts, a brotherhood out of a billion and a half of germinating and imperfect persons, and a family out of humanity and the rest of the universe must be at the same time simple enough to be grasped and practiced by the unlearned and so reasonable as to meet the needs of the highest intellect and the severest science. It must be suited to the temperaments of the oriental and occidental, the phlegmatic and the impulsive, the philosopher, the artist, and the business man. It must embody the principles which will solve all the great difficulties of mankind, racial, social, industrial, political. For although we commonly think of these difficulties as
ultimately ethical problems, yet ethical maxims, if they are ever to have any logical justification or permanent value, must be based on some religious principle and find their power of enforcement in religion.

[To be concluded]

THE CONTRIBUTION OF CHURCH HISTORY TO MINISTERIAL EFFICIENCY

JOHN FREDERICK VICHERT, D.D.
Dean of the Theological Seminary, Colgate University, Hamilton, New York

We are beginning to see that church history is one phase of universal history, and universal history is a phase of social living. To understand the church we therefore need to understand the people who composed it, the institutions in the midst of which it lived, and which it somewhat approved. So to understand the past is a training in the understanding of the present. It is one thing to let conditions affect life unconsciously and quite another so intelligently to organize our church life that when it is given its true perspective it shall be seen not only to construct a future, but genetically to connect that future with a past. The minister’s task is certainly not alien to such an undertaking.

What may the church with reason expect of the seminary graduate whom it calls to its pastorate? To answer that question is to describe the task of the theological seminary. Surely the church may justly require that he who becomes its minister shall be able to lead it wisely and so to marshal its forces that the church shall be getting done the things it ought to do for the good of men and the glory of God.

The great business of the church is religion: its task that of promoting religion in the lives of individuals and of making it effective in all human relationships. In a word, the church prays “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is done in heaven,” and it works to achieve a perfect answer to that prayer. That is the path along which the church must go. That is the undertaking to which it must address itself.

Here, as elsewhere, leadership is essential to success. To the minister the church looks for leadership. If he fails at that point, the church fails; and its high enterprise is delayed by his incompetence. If, however, he proves wise and tactful, capable of inspiring and directing the forces at his command, the church will go grandly on, advancing from strength to strength, and fulfilling nobly its mission.

To the theological seminary falls the task of training the men for whom the church has need. It is in the strictest sense of the term a professional school,