

R E L I G I O N

W. E. Hocking in "Human Nature and Its Re-Making", pp. 351 - 356.

Religion Per Se. As art becomes secular and declares independence, and as law becomes civil and increasingly chary of the remnants of priestly jurisdiction, religion is left with the sphere of the supernatural as its special province. It deals with what is behind, beyond, beneath, and within the world; standing in contrast with all that is apparent, finite, and controllable by systematic thought.

When the divine element, formerly fused with science as sacred lore, with law as sacred custom and precept, and with art as sacred rite, song, and story, is thus set forth in its separate character, it seems a strangely empty essence, a mystery, a mere nothing, -- for which, nevertheless, the most extravagant claims are made. When an attempt is made to describe or deal with it, it is necessary to fall back on fragments of thought, command, and symbol, and yet to deny that these contain what is intrinsically uncontainable in such vessels.

With better understanding it becomes known that these words of contrast, "behind, beyond," etc., indicate the relation of a life to its manifestations; as the life of an animal might be said to be behind its behavior the invisible and elusive source of its manifestations. The divine is empty as the self apart from its 'experience' is empty. The domain of religion in fact is a divine self, a Spirit which is as Subject to all finite things, persons, and arts as Object, and presumably to much else that these categories do not include. The significance of religion comes from the assumption that all the forces of the world are drawn together in foci which we call personalities or spirits; and these ultimately into one. It would be possible to deal with the whole of force, the Supreme Power, as religion proposes to deal with it only if this immense reality had its simple center, its I-am and I-will. In religion the will of man seeks union with the simple center of power which is 'beyond' and 'within' the world as the will of the world.

The extravagant claim of religion has been that union with God is itself a good, and indeed, the supreme and sufficient satisfaction of the will. But even if we can catch some hint of the metaphysical mystery of the religious domain, this claim is a new mystery. It is not obvious that union with anything is a supreme good, unless union means an alliance with the power therein vested. But religion has set itself in opposition to all other goods; it has turned its back upon the world in which the power of the gods themselves is manifested. It has renounced the world; and it has testified to the literalness of its intention by the most thorough asceticism. In its separation from art and from society, religion appears as the hostile critic of both, competing with them for the centering of human affections. Despite all this some human beings have found in religion, as others have found in art, a career animated by a passion able to displace all others.....

.....As for society and the State, it is the death of every institution ~~when~~ it begins to regard itself as self-sufficient or worthy of devotion in its own right. The only State that has a chance to survive upon this planet is the State that knows that its power is not in itself, nor its right. If the Sabbath was made for man, so is the State. And the only obedience that can serve any State well is the obedience of men who are servants of a Greater. If religion taught men how to be independent of the State, in an age when the State was everything, it might well appear anti-political; and yet from the spoils of this rebellion it has generated the modern State, the State of free individuals, which is a far greater thing. The Roman type of State has lost its life in trying to assert it, as such States always will -- but the State lives -- the State that has learned to subordinate its sovereign I-will to the will of God, which under certain conditions may be discerned in the will of the people.

For let us not mistake the meaning of liberalism and democracy; they do not mean that atomic individuals and their inherent rights are to be put above the

community and its welfare. It is to the God-fearing individual and no other that the State must defer. And conversely, democracy without religion is neither a true nor a secure principle of social structure.

We thus recognize that religion, just in so far as it understands its own business, must insist on its contrast with all social goods, must have its asceticism and other-worldliness, can never come in the guise of a social code. Those who accuse Christianity, for example, of having no social code, may be bearing indirect witness to the fact that it knows the proper work of religion per se. Religion has no choice but to place the child in man, the total unexpressed self, above the institution; and to provide for that self a kingdom not of this world. For, after all, this Child is the strongest thing in the world, and no human interest can be strong or even safe which does not first do it reverence. The sacred law already perceived that the weak in man must control society. Religion cast loose from the law singles out this divine spark as that upon which every human value depends for its life.