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The Prospect for Christianity.

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That the world is at present passing through a most critical period is a matter of such common observation that one almost shrinks from uttering the fact once more, as from a trite repetition that has been stated *ad nauseam*. The crisis is remarkable because it is not a partial one, affecting only certain portions of the earth, particular peoples, or special pursuits, but it is total, involving all nations and all activities of men. The remotest parts of the world are feeling its effects, and even in secluded hamlets it forms the topic of conversation. To account for this phenomenon it is not sufficient to point to our widely extended and very effective system of communication, which has wiped out distances, and figures time in minutes and seconds instead of months and days as formerly. For these conditions have prevailed for a considerable length of time before the present unrest, without producing critical situations like the present one. It is not the mere fact that people nowadays learn quickly what is happening anywhere, but the nature of what is happening, that affects them so powerfully. Neither does the late World War explain the general feeling of unsettlement that pervades the peoples. The more that gigantic struggle is being studied, the more evident it becomes that the unprecedented conflict is not the cause of the existing crisis, but only a feature of it. The very size of the bloody undertaking, the manner in which it was conducted, but, above all, the fact that after its nominal termination there is no relaxation, but a very palpable increase of the taut relations between all parts of the world, suggests the thought that in the late war a cause or causes, a power or powers of evil have merely *begun* to operate, and the full extent of their working and the exact quality of their aim is still to be revealed. The crisis is only seemingly a political one, nations flying at each other's

throats or changing their form of government; nor is it essentially an industrial one, brought on by the immemorial opposition between capital and labor with more or less selfish motives on either side; nor is it wholly a social one, representing an effort to abolish the old class distinctions or to create a new fourth estate. There is a strong undercurrent of religion, or rather antireligion, in every phase of the modern upheaval. There is a clamor for new ethics. Demands spoken in a whisper a generation ago are proclaimed from the housetops and sometimes shrieked forth in strident voice. The esthetic formulas which provided the regimen for the literature and arts of our fathers are being scrapped. Modern music, painting, sculpture, the drama, engage in such stupefying exhibitions as to cause the gentleman or lady raised according to the standards of a passing generation to inquire whether there is still anything sacred to the modern mind. We are told that we are witnessing the sunset of the culture of the Occident.

Not very long ago the apocalyptic term of Armageddon was a stock-phrase of speakers and writers when they referred to what was going on in Europe. Now a discussion is being started regarding what we shall do "in the event of the new Armageddon now freely predicted by statesmen." It is likely that very many who use this term in our day do not employ it in its Biblical sense, of which they are probably ignorant. But all who speak advisedly when they introduce this term to indicate the nature of the impending catastrophe make religion the basis and essence of the crisis that is upon us. For Armageddon in Rev. 16, 16 is the scene of the final clashing of the Church of Jesus Christ with the forces of antichrist.¹⁾

1) Since no geographical specification is intended in the text, the old etymological explanation of Cornelius a Lapide still deserves consideration. He translates Armageddon by "the artifice of the congregation," that is, the stratagem of driving opposing forces together, and says: "God, as it were, by an artifice will unite those kings with Antichrist, so as to destroy all in one day." The "gathering together" by the sixth angel, which is mentioned in this text, lends force to this view. But we quarrel with no one who adheres to the view that the reference is to Megiddo and what happened there according to Judg. 5, 19; 2 Kings 23, 29; 2 Chron. 35, 20—24. (Cp. Zech. 12, 10. 11.) For Megiddo then represents the place where the antichristian kings assemble for battle against Christ and His Church, and indicates that the fate of the antichristian kings will be the same as that of the Canaanites formerly at Megiddo. Only the other event that transpired at Megiddo, when King Josiah was defeated by the Egyptians, creates a difficulty. Hofmann (*Schriftbeweis* II, 2, p. 639) overcomes the

The old atheism that frankly ruled out the existence of God has made tremendous strides during the last century. The seeds sown by French Naturalism, English Deism, German Rationalism of the extreme sort, Russian Nihilism, international Evolutionism, etc., have ripened into a frightful harvest of infidelity. The godless have very likely been in the majority for many hundreds of years, but we have no record of the godless mind exercising so dominant an influence on every form of public and private life in former ages as it does in our age. The stamp of the present generation is not only atheistic, but antitheistic. We have with us to-day militant atheism. Atheism has quit the defensive and taken the offensive. Its denial of the existence of God involves, as a natural corollary, the denial of the divine revelation in the Holy Scriptures of Christianity. Aversion to the Bible is a growing evil even in church circles, spite of the numerous efforts at intensifying Bible-study which we witness. To a very large extent this aversion to the Book is traceable directly to the teaching of men presumably engaged in the service of Christianity and working under the aegis of the Christian Church. Wherever this teaching does not create aversion, it produces distrust of the Scriptures. The leading doctrines of Christianity, the divine origin, or inspiration, of the very words of the Bible, the universal and total depravity of the human race in consequence of original sin, the incarnation of the Son of God and His sacrificial life and death for the expiation of the sins of the world, the bondage of the human will in regard to spiritual matters, have been thrown into the discard by a great number of modern exponents of Christianity. Even the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body have been questioned. But the bitterest and most concerted attacks have been made within the Christian Church of to-day upon the cardinal doctrine of Christianity, that of justification by grace through faith in the forgiveness of sin, proclaimed, offered, and conveyed to penitent sinners by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A great part of modern Christendom admits neither repentance nor saving faith in its Scriptural meaning. The achievements of the Reformation in its heroic struggle with Rome have been thrown aside as worthless, and Protestants have had to suffer themselves to be reminded by

difficulty by assuming that the battle in Rev. 16 is of varying fortune: "In the beginning of the war the experience of the saints shall be that of the Israelites at Megiddo, but finally the enemies shall be trodden down in the Valley of Jehoshaphat."

Romanists that their teaching no longer warrants their calling themselves Protestants, as it is nothing but Romanism.

Philosophy has always rubbed elbows with Christian theology and claimed preeminence over it. It has obtained that fully in the academic circles of our day, both in the domain of metaphysical inquiry and in that of empirical research. Accordingly, the pantheistic and materialistic views of the Divine Being on which modern philosophy has settled color modern theology. And so it happens that at the same time that a writer like H. G. Wells considers himself justified in his belief that "the new thought is taking a course that will lead it far away from the moorings of Omnipotence," leading theological journals in our country have been seriously discussing the question whether God must not be regarded as finite rather than infinite, and the *Princeton Theological Review* (October, 1922) enters the lists in defense of the belief that God is almighty. "The tendencies of modern thinking," says the writer, "are unfavorable to a full-orbed theism. . . . Evolution, for example, has taken the place of special creation or even of creation altogether; idealism has done away with the material world and with the necessity for its Creator; pluralism has assigned to God only the place of *Primus inter pares* in the society of intelligent spirits; the metaphysical attributes have been discarded as beyond mortal ken and as having no value for religion; God is no longer worshiped as Creator, but as father; democracy would do away with a heavenly King as well as with earthly kings, the divine power has been limited in the interests of human freedom or even of self-communicating divine love, while, to cap the climax, the poignant experiences of the greatest war in history have made acute in thousands of minds the old dilemma proposed by the problem of suffering: Is God lacking in love or limited in power?" (p. 562.)

All eyes are just now turned towards the Mohammedans: Western and Northern Europe, with the rest of the civilized world, are watching evolutions in the Near and the Far East with unconcealed alarm, even with dread, while Russia is manifesting delight and is filled with hopefulness at the sight of them. There is a distinct religious element also in the stirring of the Moslem world which the Christian missions in those countries are beginning to realize. Aurelio Palmieri, the director of the Slavic Section of the "*Instituto per l'Europa Orientale*," expresses the conviction in *Politica* (Rome) that this stirring means an impending "revolt of Islam against Christianity, of oppressed Asia against her oppres-

sors, of the disinherited peoples of Asia against England, France, the United States, and Japan." For the Mohammedans regard Christian missions as part of the scheme of exploitation that "Christian" nations are working upon them. Bolshevist Russia, bankrupt in every sense and fighting for its very existence, is not only dreaming of the uprising of the proletariat all over the world, but is planning particularly to hitch Moslem fanaticism to its social-political schemes. One of its writers, Zinoviev, says: "Our revolution will triumph only when we unite ourselves with the 800,000,000 Asiatics, and when the African continent also shall join us." Palmieri thinks that the conquest of Constantinople forms no part of the present Russian program. In the latent conflict between the Russian and the English, the latter have gained the upper hand on the Bosphorus, but the Russians hope to recoup themselves on the banks of the Tigris and the Ganges. The re-awakening of Asia is to begin in the Near East; Persia and Anatolia will enkindle the flames of revolt of Islam against Christianity.

The fierce racial jealousies that are tearing humanity asunder by their unparalleled and unblushing selfishness are shot through with religious instincts and aspirations; with this difference, that, while nominal Christendom is greatly divided within itself, Islam presents a solid and aggressive front.

In the midst of this surging tide stands silently the Roman Church, plainly the greatest beneficiary, among representatives of religion, of the present upheaval. Skilled in every art of diplomacy, she has seemingly succeeded in making herself looked up to as the one appreciable element of stability and solidity in these times. She has received unusual homage in recent years. Her claims of authority are treated with unmistakable respect in the public press, the utterances of her leaders as oracular, and her interests as sacrosanct. She has managed to strike incredible political bargains, for example, with German Socialists and with anticlerical France. She is vigorously pushing her propaganda in every Protestant country, and into Greek Catholic and Greek Oriental territory. Her blatant exposé of the decay and collapse of Protestantism was reprinted with an air of nonchalance in *Politiken* of Copenhagen and in *Amerika* of St. Louis. There is no telling how soon in the growing antagonism she will merge her power with that of other antichristian forces. An alliance between Pope and Turk would not be an event unheard of among Christians.

Among Protestants chiefly a movement has been started for the federation, possibly for the amalgamation, of the churches of Christ, but it is hampered partly by denominational aspirations to hegemony on the part of such denominations as exhibit greater power than the rest either by their numbers or by the wealth and social eminence of their members; partly by the trend to abolish "creeds," and to treat every utterance of a believing conviction in a thetical statement or creedal formula as a divisive measure. The effect of the movement on theological teaching, preaching, and the indoctrination of youth is seen in the lack of distinctness, the evident desire to speak in generalities, which are practically studied ambiguities, to avoid clashes between truth and error, and to create a neutral zone, sufficiently large and capable of being enlarged, for the accommodation of all sorts of "believers." Hand in hand with this there goes in modern practical Christianity and church-life a perfervid advocacy of "social service," which creates a host of novel means of grace, regulates the outward conduct of men with mighty zest, and recklessly mingles that which is God's with that which is Caesar's. There is nothing safe from this zeal; having neutralized the divine covenant of grace, it will not permit any human covenant to stand in its way, and will change the face of Christianity as completely as Rome has done.

The present age is also witnessing a remarkable accession of power to deistic secret societies, especially the Freemasons, and their activity has lately been extended with disastrous effect into the domain of primary education. While it disavows any intention to curtail religious liberty, it creates conditions under which the full exercise of that liberty becomes very precarious. Whether it intends to do so or not, it is actually playing into the hands of the forces hostile to Christianity.

The prospect for Christianity, in a human view, is not cheering. The stand which its confessors must take over against the spreading unbelief becomes increasingly difficult as time wears on, and their religious work, always arduous by its very nature, is turning into a tug of war that taxes every ounce of their spiritual strength. Though no *auto da fes* are taking place, consistent Bible Christians — Lutherans before others — have been made to feel the power of religious intolerance and suffered persecution in a twentieth-century form. Are we not passing through "the beginning of sorrows" that presages the return of the Lord? Matt. 24, 8. If we think so, we are not alone in our view. "The conviction is

deepening that society cannot save itself by its own efforts, and the utterances of statesmen, economists, educators, and business men show their belief that at any rate a civilization founded on selfishness is doomed to destruction. If society cannot save itself, it can only be saved from outside itself, whether deliverance is to come without observation through new accessions of divine grace and power, or according to the hope quickened now as at the dawn of the Christian era in many hearts, by the advent of a supernatural Deliverer." 2)

In the divine view which Scripture opens up, the prospect becomes bright. Into His panoramic description of the final tribulation the Lord has woven His promise of the shortening of these days for the elect's sake, Matt. 24, 22, as a matter that has been "resolved upon in the counsels of the divine compassion (Mark 13, 20)." Meyer. In view of the massing of the antichristian forces against the Church, the Lord's assurance in Matt. 16, 18 is intended for the stabilizing of the faith of churchmen. Luther's study on the *Sheblimini* in Ps. 110, 1; Matt. 22, 44; Acts 2, 34 is a most opportune study in these days.³⁾ Still more significant is the view which is suggested in Luke 21, 27. 28: not pessimism, but buoyant optimism is to seize the disciples as they watch the feverish activities of the enemies of the Lord, who work like men knowing that they have but a short time left them to do their work. These days of infidelity should be made to ring with the testimonies of Christian hope, and the aggression of the legions of antichrist must serve only to quicken and intensify every activity of the forces of Christ. For these latter, too, have but a short time, and they have been taught that their Master, when He comes, expects to find them "so doing." Matt. 24, 46.
