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ASPECTS OF PRAGMATISM

IN RELATION TO

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

A Thesis presented to the
Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary

in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Divinity

by

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Concordia Seminary,
April 15, 1939

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INTRODUCTION

The pragmatism of Dewey and James is doubtless responsible to a large degree for the general tendency in modern theology of subordinating Scripture to the ends of practical life, and of accepting as true only those of its doctrines which can be translated into tangible consequences contributory to the welfare of society or the individual. Believing that theology in the past has been concerned too much with the mere "intellectual interrelations of certain concepts,"^{1.} churchmen are today advocating a greater emphasis on the "functioning of the religious consciousness."^{2.} This movement has aroused a wide-spread aversion to doctrine and a passion for "religious living." "Deeds, not creeds," is its watchword.

There has been a current supposition that science and religion are diametrically opposed to one another, and that, since the man of today is extremely scientific, the temper of our times is out of alignment with the old Bible theology. The major premise of this argument, however, is untrue if one takes it to mean that science when applied to religion will tear down its foundations, because real science has never been at variance with the truth of Scripture teaching. If the major premise of the above syllogism is not thus construed, then the conclusion does not follow, because in that event the middle term is ambiguously

1. Strong, Anna L., Some Religious Aspects of Pragmatism, Amer. Jl. o. Theology, Vol. 12, p. 232

2. Ibid.

used. Science is opposed to theology only when it is substituted for Scripture as the basis of divine knowledge; not when it is applied to Scripture to corroborate, coordinate, and systematize divine revelation. ^hWile by its method of finding truth it can never discover the knowledge one must have for his salvation, real science in its own field has never come into conflict with religion.

Nevertheless, the presumption to the contrary has proved to be a crux for many theologians. Panic stricken, they have searched for a bridge to span the "gap" between science and religion. This sounded the cue for pragmatism to make her debut in the field of theology.¹ She offered herself as the answer to the demands of modern man's "conflicting" empiricist and religious proclivities. She promised to end once and for all "the old antithesis between reason and faith."² because she professed to be an "empirical philosophy" that was religious enough, and a "religious philosophy" that was empirical enough.³ She is perhaps best defined in Funk & Wagnalls' New Standard Dictionary (1921, unabridged):

"A philosophical method and its corresponding doctrine, which holds that the practical effects, or way that they 'work', are the sole available criteria for the truth of

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1. "Pragmatism was first introduced into philosophy by Charles Peirce in 1878." In 1898 William James "brought it forward again and made a special application of it to religion. By that date the time seemed ripe for its reception." Cf. James, Wm., Pragmatism, p. 46 - 47.
 2. Strong, Anna L., Op. cit., p. 232
 3. James, Wm., Pragmatism, p. 15

human cognitions and the value of human, moral, and religious ideals; the metaphysical theory that reality is for man what he makes it to be in the service of so-called practical ends."

Knowing as we do that the Bible is God's revealed truth, and that pragmatism is at its best nothing more than a philosophical method which attempts to establish truth by applying to every theory the test of its functioning in actual practise, - being cognizant of this, it would be putting the theory above the law if we were to attempt to measure the validity of pragmatism in its religious aspects by subjecting Scripture to it and applying the test of workability. Rather, because we know that Scripture is the inerrant and infallible norm of truth, in order to establish the reliability of pragmatism, we must observe whether or not, and if not completely, to what extent, pragmatism will uphold the truth of Scripture. That we may not be unjustly accused of petitio principii, let it be remembered that in applying pragmatism to Christian theology our object is to test the validity of the former, and not the truth of the latter, which is simply the synthesis of Scripture teaching.

PRAGMATISM IN ITS APPLICATIONS TO THE CONCEPT OF THEOLOGY

The discrepancies which will ever increasingly spring up between the two as we proceed with our application of pragmatism to Christian theology find their roots in the diverse and conflicting approaches which pragmatism and Bible theology respectively have toward all problems in both the physical and psychical universes.

THE BASIC DISCREPANCY

Christian theology has from its very beginnings followed an a-prioristic way of thinking. Unlike philosophical rationalism,^{1.} however, which is also a-prioristic, it has always taken its material from divine revelation. Regarding Scripture as containing the only and universal truth, Christian theology has developed the Bible teachings into a system of doctrines. With Scripture as his basis, just as the rationalist philosopher with his universally accepted major premise, the Christian theologian has logically produced his dogmatical system. From these doctrines he again logically educes practical applications for concrete situations in the faith and lives of individuals. The method which the Christian theologian uses in his deductions is exactly the same as that used by the rational-

1. The reader will please note that whenever the term rationalism is used on this and the following pages it has the meaning of philosophical rationalism, which is about the equivalent of deductive reasoning from a-prioristic truth; not of religious rationalism, which places reason above spiritual revelation.

istic philosopher when he derives new truths from his axioms. Like the rationalist the Christian theologian has always been devoted to eternal principles, to wholes, to universals, and to the unity of things. "Thy word is truth,"¹ says the Christian. The truth of which the Bible speaks is absolute.

Just as Plato and all the other rationalistic philosophers with their views of the concept and of ideas and of the function of knowledge are absolutistic; so, and much more, is Christian theology absolutistic. It holds that the universe was created for man by an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God; that this God is concerned about His universe and preserves it; that this God will finally bring the universe to its inevitable and foreordained termination. Everything that happens, that has happened, and that will happen is in accordance with the predetermined counsels of God. In this God all creatures live and move and have their being.² Christian theology stands for a fixed order of things, a definite, unalterable plan. It is deterministic, but not fatalistic. In the fullest philosophical sense of the term it is absolutistic.

Because pragmatism is "the attitude of looking away from first things, principles, categories, supposed necessities, and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, and facts,"³ it is the very opposite of

1. John 17, 17

2. Acts 17, 28

3. James, Wm., Quot. by Theo. Graebner in Concordia Cyclopaedia under pragmatism

a-priorism; and it has risen in protest to absolutism. And pragmatists miss no opportunities to voice their protests and objections. James charges the absolutistic and rationalistic thinkers with living on "a level of abstraction so high that they can never even try to come down."¹ He speaks of the "serpent of rationalism," which cannot come into "contact with the concrete parts of life."² "The absolute mind," says James, "the mind that makes our universe by thinking it, ^{might} for ought they (the absolutists) show us to the contrary, have made any one of a million other universes just as well as this. You can deduce no single actual particular from the thought of it. It is incompatible with any state of things whatsoever being true here below."³ James describes the absolutist as one for whom "the many exist only as objects for his thought - exist in his dream, as it were; and as he knows them, they have one purpose, form one system, tell one tale for him!"⁴ Dewey objects to intellectualism and absolutism on the grounds that

"thought has been too much of a quest for certainty; so much, in fact, that the attempt to preserve values from chance and change in some absolute ~~God~~ God or Eternal reason has resulted in artificial and static schemes and, above all, in distracting attention from the practical and pressing task of improving the conditions of human life."⁵

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1. James, Op.cit., p. 19
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid., p. 145
 5. Brightmann, E. S., The Problem of God, p. 53 - 54

Pragmatism is pluralistic, and pluralism, says Beckwith, can never "come to terms with any sort of an absolute."¹

Since between pragmatism and absolutism "a great gulf is fixed,"² pragmatism, quite naturally, is inimical to and subversive of Christian theology. James asserts that "the theistic God is almost as sterile a principle" as philosophical absolutism. "You have to go to the world which he has created," says James,

"to get any inkling of his actual character: he is the kind of God that has once for all made that kind of a world. The God of the theistic writers lives on as purely abstract heights as does the absolute. Absolutism has a certain sweep and dash about it, while the usual theism is more insipid, but both are equally remote and vacuous."³

Those who "believe in the absolute, as the All-Knower is termed, usually say that they do so for coercive reasons, which clear thinkers cannot evade." None of these reasons, James opines, are sound. "I must therefore treat the notion of an All-Knower simply as an hypothesis," he says.⁴

Though pragmatists strain every effort to discredit Christian theology inasmuch as it is a-prioristic and absolutistic, James believes that the absolutistic hypothesis has a definite meaning and works out religiously in a certain sense: "As an hypothesis trying to make itself probable on analogical grounds, the absolute is entitled to a patient hearing."⁵ The pragmatist justified absolutism

1. Beckwith, The Idea of God, p. 244

2. Ibid., p. 242

3. James, Pragmatism, p. 19 - 20

4. James, Op. cit., p. 146

5. James, Wm., A Pluralistic Universe, p. 292 - 293

and rationalism on the grounds that they supply him with and "inconsistently mystical variety of satisfaction in off hours."¹ He feels that it is very comforting and composing at times to believe that the universe has a definite plan and is watched over by an all-powerful and friendly Being, but that it is "a trifle presumptuous to make too many affirmations about the absolute."² He treats the notion of an All-Knower simply as an hypothesis, "exactly on a par logically with the pluralist notion that there is no point of view, no focus of information extant, from which the entire content of the universe is visible at once."³ "There is something a little ghastly," says James, "in the satisfaction with which a pure but unreal system will fill a rationalist mind."⁴ In close consistency with this attitude toward a-priorism and absolutism pragmatists demand a theology which can be interpreted in terms of functional psychology.

PRAGMATISM INTERPRETS THEOLOGY IN TERMS OF
FUNCTIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Pragmatism insists that theology must become more "scientific" and "historical." Scientific in the sense that theology must be tested by the touchstone of workability

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1. Strong, Anna Louise, Some Religious Aspects of Pragmatism, American Jl. of Theology, Vol. 12, p. 231
 2. Patrick, Introduction to Philosophy, p. 229
 3. James, Pragmatism, p. 146
 4. Ibid., p. 23

and of capability of satisfying the various religious necessities of individuals and society. Historical in the sense that theology must develop, must evolve from a lower to a higher form, just as society and the individual to whom it is applied must develop. "Scientific theology" and "historical theology" are most intimate bedfellows. Theology cannot be "scientific" unless it is "historical", or "historical" unless it is "scientific." Though the two cannot be altogether separately discussed, it will be expedient to attempt first a study of pragmatism's concept of theology as being historical before examining the scientific concept of theology which the proponents of pragmatism entertain.

What the pragmatist means when he says that theology must become more historical is that religion must recognize and justify the idea of gradual and continuous modifications of doctrines.

"It does not mean that these doctrines are inherently false, illusory, or useless. Heretofore doctrinal changes have gone on either unconsciously, and therefore in a random way, or they have been opposed by the established habits of thought known as orthodoxy, often in blind prejudice and with tragic results. If, on the other hand, changes in theology were understood to be the marks of growing religious life and real aid in such growth, theology would come to take its place among the sciences."¹

The thought and spirit of every age take on a different

1. Ames, E. S., Theology From the Standpoint of Functional Psychology, Am. Jl. o. Theology, Vol. 10, p. 231

form, and pragmatism's object is to modify and reconstruct theology so as to accommodate it to the prevailing conditions of the times. To justify their emendations in the doctrines of the Bible they attempt to show that such changes in the Christian religion have continuously occurred from the beginning of time to the present day. "In a world of growing realities," says Anna Louise Strong,

"New values must arise and must modify the old values...and the religion which accommodates itself to these new values will change along with them...Such a phenomenon is indeed a very common one, for who will say that any of the great religions of the world are the same now as when they were founded?"².

Pragmatism views theology from the standpoint of functional psychology, and functional psychology is entirely evolutionary. It has been brought into the domain of theology by the pragmatists for the purpose of explaining scientifically the development of theology from its "rudimentary" beginnings to its present "more perfected form."

Since pragmatism finds authority "progressively in the experiences of believers rather than definitely in church or Bible,"² the pragmatist's methods of determining and establishing religious truths are "scientific." "Workable hypotheses" are the underlying principles with which pragmatism operates in the field of theology.

The pragmatists look upon the mind as being nothing more than an instrument to be used in satisfying the

1. Strong, Op. cit., p. 233 - 234

2. Conger, G. P., A Course in Philosophy, p. 457

needs of our natures. James asserts that "our various ways of feeling and thinking" have developed to their present state as a result of our use of them in "shaping our reactions on the outer world."¹ Hence the pragmatist argues that the fundamental characteristic of the organism is activity which must result in progress.

Dr. Ames employs his observations in the behavior of a child to illustrate the organism's natural use of experience to meet the needs of its existence and to progress. The first experience which a child has, says Ames, comes as the result of some impulsive movement. This expression of the child's energy produces a number of sense impressions which the child receives through its eyes, ears, muscles, etc. Soon the movements of the child are no longer merely spontaneous, but are modified by the previous impressions which it has received. This constitutes the first step in the child's mental development. In very much the same way this development continues throughout the life of man. The human organism is constantly experiencing diverse reactions of various behavior, and it is constantly eliminating those actions, the repercussions of which are undesirable, and retaining those acts which result in desirable and useful consequences.

The pragmatist attaches great importance to this view of experimental activity, also in theology. "This explanation," says Dr. Ames,

1. James, Psychology, Briefer Course, p. 4

"of the different phases of consciousness with reference to the concrete life-conditions which call them forth, and with reference to their service in the ultimate control of those conditions is extended over the whole scope of mental life...The 'truth' of science and of metaphysics (religion) is tested at last by the success with which they aid the life-process. Every hypothesis of science stands ready at any moment to submit to actual tests, and every system of philosophy in the last resort is judged by the results which follow from it."¹

Pragmatism demands that every doctrine of Scripture must stand the tests of scientific investigation before it will accept it as true, but as a matter of fact, pragmatism itself is built on a number of unproved theories, one of which is this theory which Dr. Ames proposes of the development of the organism on the basis of functional psychology.

Another such hypothesis which pragmatists accept as a fact is the theory of naturalism. Science, when used as the pragmatists operate with it in the field of theology, can ultimately lead to nothing but naturalism. It can admit of nothing that is done above and beyond natural law. Nothing could be more antagonistic than this to the Christian faith. Yet pragmatists feel that by introducing "science" into theology they have made a great contribution to Christianity. "Theology," Ames continues,

"has labored under the assumption of infallible elements or sources, and therefore, at certain points, has felt compelled to raise the red flag against any critical in-

1. Ames, Op. Cit., p. 220

quiry. Nothing more characteristically indicates the difference between theology and science than the way in which the one has feared, and the other has favored, free investigation. The psychology of religion bids fair to point the way to a less pretentious, but really greater, service to religion than theology has ever before been able to perform. Working in the spirit and with the methods of modern science, recognizing the tentative nature of its principles, and setting itself patiently but bravely to practical experiments, religion may yet hope to enter upon more secure and substantial progress.¹

This functional view of the pragmatist accounts for his idea of religious evolution. This explains his idea that whatever "works" as a religion for a person, that, and that alone must be his theology. This is what lies at the bottom of pragmatism's opposition to absolutistic Christian theology. By its demands for a religious system of truth which is not derived from divine revelation pragmatism attempts to make of theology a science like other sciences, in spite of the fact that theology deals almost exclusively with supersensible realities, and involves affirmations which are hardly susceptible of empirical testing and verification. What pragmatism's success has been - rather, failure - in attempting to develop a theology on the basis of the methods of mental action used in scientific investigation will become apparent in later pages of this work.

The pragmatist, we have seen, does not want a religion which is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

1. Ames, Op. cit., p. 232

because such a religion would leave no room for the progress which a "scientific" theology demands. The pragmatist insists that religion must be constantly changing not only in time, but in every individual application. He has a pluralistic concept of theology, which one cannot fully understand until he has had an acquaintanceship with the role which instrumentalism plays in "pragmatic theology."

PRAGMATISM HAS A PLURALISTIC CONCEPT
OF THEOLOGY

The pragmatist can conceive of nothing as being true unless it can be put to some use. "The pragmatists tell us that thought and intelligence are instrumental; they are instruments for environmental control; they enable an organism to deal with a new and perplexing situation."¹ Mind has absolutely no existence for the pragmatist unless it can be used as an instrument for some biological purpose. "Thought is thus a tool or instrument that is always invoked to meet a particular crisis or problem resulting from a concrete situation. Thought therefore does not aim at truth in general. Its business is to discover, in concrete circumstances, the best means to the realization of some practical end that life demands."² Dewey calls his pragmatism "instrumentalism, from the fact that thinking, as he regards it, is always an instrument for the accom-

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- philosophy*
1. Patrick, Introduction to Theology, p. 302
 2. Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th ed., Vol. 18, under pragmatism.

plishment of some practical end or of making a deliberate choice between conflicting ends."¹ Utility is at the bottom of all pragmatic thinking.

Just so in theology, the pragmatist cannot conceive of anything as being true unless it can be used for his own or someone else's benefit. The idea of God, for instance, is true for the pragmatist only insofar as it can be used for beneficial practical consequences. In fact, pragmatism would have the reality and existence of theology itself become dependent upon whether or not anyone can make use of it. James holds that religion is real because it can be used. He believes, however, that it has only an emotional and spiritual use; not as scientific use, but something like Vivekananda's use of the Atman in Hinduism.

Since the pragmatist can accept Christian theological tenets only insofar as they are useful to him, and since the needs of individuals are as various as the individuals themselves, therefore, in conformity with his principles, he can have no uniform conception of religion, just as he cannot have a complete conception of anything else. For him truth is only relative or personal. Religion, he believes, differs and ought to differ according to the temperaments and moods of individuals. "In the literature of the subject," says James,²

1. Conger, Course in Philosophy, p. 157

2. Pragmatism, p. 152 ff.

"sadness and gladness have each been emphasized in turn. The ancient saying that the first maker of the gods was fear receives voluminous corroboration from every age of religious history; but none the less does religious history show the part which joy has evermore tended to play. Sometimes the joy has been primary; sometimes secondary, being the gladness of deliverance from fear. This latter state of things, being the more complex, is also the more complete; and as we proceed, I think we shall have abundant reason for refusing to leave out either the sadness or the gladness, if we look at religion with the breadth of view which it demands. Stated in the completest possible terms, a man's religion involves both moods of contraction and moods of expansion of his being. But the quantitative mixture and order of these moods vary so much from one age of the world, from one system of thought, and from one individual to another, that you may insist either on the dread and submission, or on the peace and the freedom as the essence of the matter, and still remain materially within the limits of the truth. The constitutionally sombre and the constitutionally sanguine onlooker are bound to emphasize opposite aspects of what lies before their eyes."¹

William James has devoted an entire book to the subject of The Varieties of Religious Experience. The underlying object of this book seems to be to show the needs of a flexible religion, sufficiently pliable to meet the "almost innumerable diverse religious requirements" of individuals. James seems to be of the opinion that the requirements of various men for a religion vary so tremendously that religion must be capable of taking on almost any form. The different forms in which James would have his "religion" appear are so diverse in character that the only feature which they have in common is their name, and it is

1. James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 75

doubtful whether even the term "religion" can be used broadly enough to include all of them.

In his book James begins the treatment of his subject by stating that the very fact that the "would-be definitions" of religion are so many and so different from one another is enough to prove that

"the word 'religion' cannot stand for any single principle or essence, but is rather a collective name...There is religious fear, religious love, religious awe, religious joy, and so forth. But religious love is only man's natural emotion of love directed to a religious object; religious fear is only the ordinary fear of commerce, so to speak, the common quaking of the human breast, in so far as the notion of divine retribution may arouse it; religious awe is the same organic thrill which we feel in a forest at twilight, or in a mountain gorge; only this time it comes over us at the thought of our supernatural relations; and similarly of all the various sentiments which may be called into play in the lives of religious persons. As concrete states of mind, made up of a feeling plus a specific sort of object, religious emotions of course are psychic entities distinguishable from other concrete emotions; but there is no ground for assuming a simple abstract 'religious emotion' to exist as a distinct elementary mental affection by itself, present in every religious experience without exception."¹

In spite of his aversion to definitions James defines theology as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."² This leaves the pragmatist's conception of religion so broad and vague that one can attach to it any meaning that he wishes and contort it to fit the whims

1. James, Op. Cit., p. 27 - 28

2. Ibid., p. 31

and fancies of anyone.

THE PLACE TO WHICH PRAGMATISM RELEGATES
CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Pragmatism, then, as we have seen, is a reaction to the rationalistic and absolutistic concepts and determinative methods of truth. It spurns the notion that truth is a-prioristic. Everything is theoretical and hypothetical until it has proved its own existence as truth by a demonstration of its practical utility. "A theory is demonstrated (pragmatically) in the only possible way when it is shown that it will 'work'...It is only in the light of these results that a conception has meaning...Apart from its practical consequences, a conception is an abstraction."¹ In view of this it is apparent that the pragmatist can have little respect for Bible theology, because the latter embraces "the knowledge and acceptance of the doctrines of divine revelation, and the aptitude to exhibit and substantiate such doctrines in themselves and in their proper relation to each other."²

Though pragmatists object to being looked upon as opposed to Christian theology³ and pretend to be its best friends, they necessarily must be regarded as its greatest

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1. Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. 22, under "pragmatism"
 2. Grabner, A. L., Doctrinal Theology, p. 1
 3. Concordia Cyclopedia, under "pragmatism": "It does not intend to prejudice any one against theology, although, as a matter of fact, discrepancies and collisions are bound to result."

enemies. They try to tear down theology's foundations, because Christian theology is built on the a-prioristic truth of Scripture and pragmatism substitutes for a-prioristic truth the test of workability. They change the end and aim of Christian theology from an earthly to a heavenly one, because practical results which alone can determine truth for the pragmatist can be perceived only in a sensible world. On the basis of functional psychology pragmatism distorts the unchangeable history of Christian theology to a story of gradual evolution. It takes away from Bible theology its absolute certainty and makes of it a hit-or-miss affair. It attempts to destroy theology's absolute reality and make of it an instrumental will-o-the-whisp. It reduces Christian theology with its eternally unalterable principles and applications to a science which is in a constant state of flux. In short, it takes theology out of the supersensible, spiritual world to which it belongs and brings it into the physical, sensible universe. Its outer shell the pragmatist has let remain, but the pulp is no longer a theology in the true sense of the term; it is rather a science very much similar to psychology.

While it is true that there is a great deal in the history of mankind and in the experiences of individuals which goes to confirm the truth of divine revelation, "the fact is, an idea may be true even though no practical application has been made of it." It is incorrect to say, as pragmatists do, that truth has no existence until it is

worked out in life. "Truth is waiting to be discerned and applied." Truth never dies. "We do not manufacture the truth," we merely find truth and hold to it.¹ If it were true, as the pragmatists maintain, that the only criterion for the truth of anything is that it serve a useful, beneficial purpose, then a little boy, for example, who against the express command of his mother went swimming would be telling his mother the truth if he would assure her that he hadn't been near the water, because by deceiving his mother he would spare her the disappointment of having been disobeyed and he would perhaps be sparing himself a sound spanking.

"Christian experience," says Horberg, "can never serve as a basis for the validity of Christianity. The reality of God, i. e., the truth of the revelation has for its counterpart faith, not experience. And Christian faith, although it organically expresses itself in Christian experience, does not rest upon experience."² Since pragmatism "judges theology entirely from the standpoint of its value in life"³, it is impossible for its adherents properly to evaluate theology. Pragmatism with its test of practicability has no business in the supersensible field to which theology belongs.

Christian theologians have in the past appeared to

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1. King, Wm. P., Right and Wrong, p. 187
 2. Horberg, Varieties of Christian Experience, p. 8
 3. Concordia Cyclopaedia, under "pragmatism"

be slower in bringing forth arguments to discredit their enemies than the enemies have been in voicing their objections and protests to Christian theology. This has seemed to be the situation particularly in the case of pragmatism versus Christian theology. But such a condition only appears to exist. As a matter of fact, theology has been fully as active in the combat as pragmatism. While pragmatists have been ranting about the out-datedness and bigotry of the old Bible theology Christian theologians have simply let Scripture speak for itself. Perhaps this is why they have appeared to be less active.

It is only fair that if pragmatism be permitted to use the test of workability, which is its means of determining and establishing truth, in its arguments against Christian theology, - it is only fair that Christian theology be permitted to use, with equal justification and forcefulness, Scripture, its source and norm of truth, to discredit pragmatism. But this has not been the popular opinion. Though pragmatism has not been expected to use Scripture in its arguments against Christian theology, Christian theology has been expected to attack pragmatism on the basis of pragmatism's own principles of truth. This is highly unjust.

Our purpose in placing Christian theology in relation to pragmatism is, as we have already mentioned, not to test the validity of the former, but to show the inadequacy of the latter in spiritual matters. Christian the-

ology has never needed vindication, and pragmatism can no more endanger the status of Christian theology than could other philosophical systems of the past. "When science has exhausted its ways and means and is silent, when philosophy is incoherent and confused, when art is depressed by ugliness in the world, prophetic religion still has a forward-looking message of hope, reproof, assurance, and certainty."¹

Though it is hardly fair to expect theology to attack pragmatism on the basis of the latter's own views of truth and existence, Christian theology is certainly not unable to do so. What pragmatism's accomplishments have been in the field of theology - or rather what its failure have been, as we have already seen and will more fully observe in the pages which follow - these are pragmatism's most austere indictors.

1. Stolz, The Psychology of Religious Living, p. 74 19

PRAGMATISM'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE CATEGORIES OF THEOLOGY

"The vexed question as to the place and authority of the dogmas of past ages in the modern religious consciousness"¹ has been of no little concern to the proponents of pragmatic philosophy. That the solutions to this question are as many and various as the individual pragmatists themselves who offer them, substantiates the truth of the pragmatic claim that "interest, attention, selection, purpose, bias, desire, emotion, satisfaction, etc., color and control all our cognitive processes."² This is incriminating evidence that all pragmatic thinking is preponderantly wishful. There are, however, certain doctrines on the treatment of the fundamental points of which pragmatists are quite universally agreed. These must serve us as the specimens to be used in observing the affect which pragmatism must have on the categories of Christian theology.

"Thought," says a devotee of James, "and the products of thought are to be interpreted, and hence are valid only, with reference to certain crises or tensions that arise in action."³ The same pragmatist illustrates his point in the following statement: "The concepts of a chemist are true because they enable him to control his reactions, but he has

1. Irving King, The Pragmatic Interpretation of the Christian Dogma, in The Monist, Vol. 15., p. 252.

2. Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th ed., Vol. 18, p. 413, ff.

3. King, Irving, Op. cit., p. 251

not the least right to assume that he has therefore in them an account of the ultimate nature of matter."¹ "It is almost a universal tendency," he concludes, "to take... statements that give us definite control under specific conditions and to generalize them into dicta about absolute existence."² One of our reasons for "developing practical beliefs into dogmas," then, according to this pragmatist, is "our tendency to generalize our practical concepts into statements of ultimate reality."³ Pragmatists are accused to using the following argument to discredit the use of doctrine in Christian theology:

"The teachings of Jesus do not appear in a systematic form, but in terms of life and social relations. It requires laborious research and reconstruction to formulate them into scientific statements. Neither do the apostles present the Gospel in a theology, although doubtless they come nearer to it than Jesus does, and that is why theology took its point of departure from them rather than from Christ. But still, even with them, while the theological material is more accessible, there is no systematic arrangement nor attempt at true philosophical explanation. They wrote for specific practical purposes, and always massed their teachings so as to bear upon the end in view...The New Testament is a book of religious truth, not of theological science; and it is content to state this truth in its practical aspects, upon the sole authority of Jesus Christ, and not because its philosophical foundations have been worked out and approved."⁴

As a matter of fact, however, Jesus' teaching consists largely of doctrine. While it is true that His doctrines

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1. Ibid., p. 251
 2. Ibid., p. 251
 3. Ibid., p. 253
 4. Ibid., p. 252 - 253

are not arranged in exactly the same order as that in which they stand in a textbook of dogmatic theology, one cannot conclude from this that they ought not to be so arranged. Religious controversies, religious education, and many other vital needs have demanded that the teachings of the Bible be systematized.

Nevertheless, pragmatists ask the question: Is such a generalization legitimate? Does it make Scripture proof of more practical significance? Does it mean that the needs of men have changed and that the practical needs "which called forth the teachings of Scripture" are no longer in existence today? Their attempts to "solve" these problems have forced the pragmatists into a position which is in diametric opposition to the doctrines of Christian theology. How great the variance is between pragmatism and the doctrines of Christian theology becomes apparent in an analysis of the former's attitude toward the doctrine of God.

ITS ATTITUDE TOWARD THEOLOGY PROPER

All pragmatists believe in a god. It would be out of alignment with their philosophy not to do so, because it is more profitable for concrete life to believe than to disbelieve. "Let us suppose," says James in his attempt to justify his belief in a god,

"that all arguments for the existence of God, while not disproved, can be exactly counter-balanced by arguments against the existence of God. Let us suppose that we have a 50 - 50 ar-

gument; not a 51 - 49 argument, but an argument which, so far as we can see, will remain permanently 50 - 50. Then we have to decide between the two alternatives - for to refuse to believe is itself a decision. Since we have to decide anyway, in this living, forced, momentous opinion of religion, we run the risk of being duped anyway; and it is better to be duped through hope than duped through fear. Hence it is better to believe than not to believe."¹.

James phrases the pragmatic arguments for believing in a god in terms of emotional pragmatism, "that God must exist because belief is more satisfying than unbelief or because His existence is or can be willed."² "We can study God," he says, "only by studying his creation. But we can enjoy our God, if we have one, in advance of all that labor. I myself believe that the evidence for God lies primarily in inner personal experiences."³ In his Varieties of Religious Experience James records actual cases of where men have experienced the presence of God.⁴ To experience a thing is for the pragmatist to believe it. Even a pragmatist can derive a belief in God from his experience. In this one respect, at least, pragmatism is in complete harmony with Scripture. Our contemplation of nature certainly affords experiences which constitute conclusive evidence of God's existence. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork."⁵ The pragmatist, then, is not an unbeliever in the strict sense of the term.

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1. James, Wm., quoted by Conger, A Course in Philosophy, p. 451
 2. Ibid.
 3. James, Pragmatism, p. 109
 4. p. 66 - 72
 5. Ps. 19, 1 - 3

But since his belief in a god is based solely on the testimonies of practical experience, the object of his belief cannot be the same as that of a Christian's, because such a conviction of God's existence can be bestowed upon men only by the Holy Ghost through the means of grace.^{1.}

Though all pragmatists believe in a god, the deity in whom they believe is not the God of the Bible. James believes that God is nature, "the ideal tendency of things."^{2.} But he does not by any means insist that his god is the only one, or demand that other men acknowledge the god in whom he believes. The term "divine", he says, must be used "very broadly, as denoting any object that is godlike, whether it be a concrete deity or not."^{3.} So broad is James' view of God, in fact, that only for the reason that it

1. Pragmatism does not share in the views of Christian theology with regard to the Holy Ghost or the inspiration of the Bible. What pragmatism has to say about the third person of the Holy Trinity will be discussed on one of the following pages. - Pragmatism cannot, of course, accept the Christian doctrine of inspiration, because the truth of Scripture is the very thing which it has set out to investigate. "The individual who finds in the Scripture a key that interprets his ethical life," says Irving King (Op. cit., p. 260), "asks for no other proof that they are inspired. But the so-called logical proofs of inspiration views convince anyone, because when such proofs are offered it is evidence that inspiration is now taken as a fact out of connection with the actual unfolding of experience." Pragmatists "find authority progressively in the experiences of believers rather than definitely in church or Bible."

2. James, Wm., A Pluralistic Universe, p. 124

3. James, Wm., Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 34

might lead to "inconvenience" in a theological discussion does he refuse to accept the atheist's "No-God" as a genuine deity, because "the more fervent opponents of Christian doctrine," he says, "have often enough shown a temper which, psychologically considered, is indistinguishable from religious zeal."¹ John Dewey, who represents the more humanistic phases of pragmatism, which holds that we ought to believe in man rather than in God and that the chief end of man is to glorify man, is of the conviction that "God is simply the unity of the ideal purposes which arouse in us desire and action."² Ames accepts the embodiment of "social values" as his god.³

From the views of these men, and of others whose gods are not worth the time it takes to mention, it is clear that the pragmatist will accept most anything as god, as long as it will serve the purpose of a god, the only requirement being that this deity will satisfy the needs which one has for a god. The pragmatist doesn't even have objections "to the realizing of abstractions (as gods), so long as you get about among particulars with their aid and they actually carry you somewhere."⁴ As long as his belief in a god will render him profitable service in concrete life, that god in which he believes will exist for the pragmatist. Hence the expression: It doesn't matter so

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1. James, Wm., The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 35
 2. Stolz, The Psychology of Religious Living, p. 75
 3. Graebner, God and the Cosmos, p. 16
 4. James, Pragmatism, p. 72

much what you believe, just as long as you do believe. The believing itself means more for the pragmatist than the object of his belief. "Pragmatism," therefore,

"is willing to take anything, to follow either logic or the senses and to count the humblest and most personal experiences. She will count mystical experiences if they have practical consequences. She will take a God who lives in the very dirt of private fact - if that should seem a likely place to find him. Her only test of probable truth is what works best in the way of leading us, what fits every part of life best and combines with the collectivity of experience's demands, nothing being omitted. If theological ideas should do this, if the notion of God, in particular, should prove to do it, how could pragmatism possibly deny God's existence?"¹.

Though every pragmatist believes in some sort of God, pragmatists as a whole do not believe in the God of the Bible. God, as defined in Christian theology, is "the one indivisible, immutable, infinite spirit, who is life, intelligence, wisdom, will, holiness, justice, truth, goodness, and power, one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."².

Pragmatists brand such a definition as this a "pretentious sham." "'Deus est Eius, a se, extra et supra omne genus, necessarium, unum, infinite perfectum, simplex, immutabile, immensum, aeternum, intelligens,' etc.- wherein," asks James, "is such a definition really instructive? It means less than nothing in its pompous robe of adjectives."³.

1. James, *W.*, Pragmatism, p. 80

2. Grashner, A. L., Doctrinal Theology, p. 16

3. James, *Op. Cit.*, p. 121 - 122

James, through his mental colorations of panpsychism, cannot see God as the Absolute One which the Bible describes Him as being. He, together with his disciples of today, demands a God who can be analyzed by psychological, pathological, and psychical research methods, who can be experienced. Only by the investigation of data determinable by the senses can scientific knowledge be obtained. But the God of the Bible cannot be put into a test tube. He cannot be analyzed by the means of scientific research which are applicable only to ~~physio-~~ ^{physis-}chemical and and psycho-physical phenomena. "God is not the datum of scientific research."^{3.}

"God is a spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."^{4.} Only believers, who by faith

how saving knowledge of
are united with Christ, have the spirit by which one can fully know God. Even if it were possible by pragmatic methods to derive a full knowledge of God, "a deity scientifically discoverable, analyzable, and verifiable would not be the object of religious veneration."^{5.} That God is transcendent to our experiences and lives as an absolute Being in the realm of the suprasensible is the point which pragmatists cannot consistently concede. Here pragmatism must choose a path which is directly the opposite to that of Christian theology. It must maintain with James that "the only way to escape from the paradoxes and perplexities that a consistently thought-out monistic universe suffers

1. Stolz, The Psychology of Religious Living, p. 71

2. John 4, 24

3. Stolz, Op. cit., p. 71

from...is to be frankly pluralistic and assume that the superhuman consciousness, however vast it may be, has itself an external environment, and consequently is finite."¹ It is forced to regard God as an unknown someone very much similar to the unknown quantity X in mathematics, which derives its reality only from its effects but otherwise does not exist. It is compelled to restrict itself to a purely utilitarian view of God, to regard God simply as something to be used, "sometimes as meat purveyor, sometimes as moral support, sometimes as friend, sometimes as an object of love,"² but never as Him who before the mountains were brought forth, or the earth and the world were formed, even from everlasting to everlasting, is God.³ His refusal to accept God as a real essence necessitates the pragmatist's rejection also of the attributes of God.

Scripture describes God as being "immutable, inasmuch as in His essence there never has been, nor ever will be, nor ever can be, any increase or decrease, any development or evolution, any improvement or deterioration, or any change of whatever kind."⁴ Such a changeless God is something quite inconceivable to the pragmatist. James and H. G. Wells here unite in advocating the conception of God as "finite, developing, struggling, suffering, sharing with

1. Beckwith, The Idea of God, p. 244

2. Leuba, Studies in the Psychology of Religious Phenomena, Am. Jl. o. Psychology, Vol. 7, p. 346 - 349

3. Ps. 90, 2

4. Graebner, A. L., Op. cit., p. 24

man his defeats and victories, identified with the ideal tendencies of the world, having a history, and aims not less real than those of man."¹ James ventures to say that "whatever sort of a being God may be, we know today that He is nevermore that mere external inventor of 'contrivances' intended to make manifest his 'glory' in which our great grandfathers took such satisfaction." "Today," he furthermore avers, "a deity who should require bloody sacrifices to placate him would be too sanguinary to be taken seriously." The pragmatist imagines that society's and the individual's needs and uses of a god are constantly changing from age to age and that whatever god one may have must change with them. James would have us believe that the reason why the "primitive" Old Testament religion was acceptable at "the time when it flourished", and the only reason, is that "the deity to whom the prophets, seers, and devotees who founded the particular cult bore witness was worth something to them personally. They could use him."² Because he opines that our hopes, our ideals, our problems, and our needs are so vitally different from those of the people who long ago believed in such a God, James alleges that such a deity must be incredible to us. Dr. Ames devotes a large portion of his essay on Theology from the Standpoint of Functional Psychology to a demonstration of how the early tribal religion of the Semites

1. Beckwith, The Idea of God, p. 244

2. James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, 329

"developed" through a number of stages to the status which pragmatism assigns to it now. The following is an excerpt from this essay:

"The growth of the idea of God reflects also the development of the social organization. Each tribe or social group had its own gods, expressing, and in turn strengthening, certain characteristic phases of its life. As the tribes enlarged and took on new activities, the deities evidenced corresponding growth. On the other hand, if a tribe was exterminated, or lost its identity, its god reverted to the lower condition of demons, whose chief characteristic was that they were without worshippers. The success of a particular group in conquest meant the subjugation of the conquered gods, and finally their extinction. Yahweh was originally the god of a single semitic tribe. He gained power and significance with the leadership and conquest which his subjects were able to accomplish, so that in the end, with the organization of the nation, the ancient name of the deity was retained for the God of the whole people. This correspondence between the stage of social development and the nature of the gods is still further illustrated by the significant fact that, when the mother was the head of the family, the deities were goddesses. Later, when the father became the recognized head of the family, the deity became masculine, and took on the attributes and characteristics of paternal authority. Among the Hebrews, to whom has been ascribed an ethical monotheism derived in a unique, supernatural way, the development of monotheism was coincident with and apparently dependent upon, the rise of the monarchy. The coalescence of smaller social groups into larger unities was reflected in the fusion of the gods themselves, until, in the attainment of the kingdom, centering in the person of the king, the basis was laid for the idea of one God, which obviously was closely fashioned, though in heroic proportions, upon the model afforded by the earthly monarch. The heavenly king, like the earthly, gradually developed a court with angelic messengers and numerous cohorts ready at command to execute the sovereign will. Another stage was reached for the Hebrews during the exile. That great strain upon their social institutions and the enforced removal of many people from Jehovah's land magnified their sense of his distance from them and emphasized the idea of his transcendence. To the sensitive

minds of the great prophets the contact with other peoples gave rise also to the conception of Jehovah as the God of all nations, though this idea was evidently born of patriotism and hope rather than of actual political supremacy. This feeling of the greatness and the transcendence of Jehovah, in connection with their national distress, resulted with the Hebrews, as it has with other peoples, in the need of mediation and in the hope of a savior. Their Messiah, under the stress of national humiliation, took the form of a suffering servant. It is an impressive fact that the two typical Jewish conceptions of the redemptive work of Jehovah were counterparts of the two contrasted periods of the national life. One was projected from the background of the golden age of the monarchy under King David. As he put to silence his enemies and established a glorious kingdom, so God would some day, by another mighty one, deliver his people and make them supreme. The other view of divine deliverance was an expression of the humbled and chastened national spirit in the period of oppression and exile. Humility and suffering innocence were its central elements. In the end, when his life was completed, the character and work of Jesus conformed best to the latter type, while his own experience and powerful personality added vividness and strength to the ethical, social conception of God as a loving Father...

"In a democracy the chief concern with reference to the leader or ruler is not his lineage or inheritance but his own personality and efficiency. His will is not arbitrary, but justifies itself in experience, and is held to the standard of law and consistency. The citizens feel themselves one with their leader. They share in the exercise of sovereignty, and in its responsibilities and dignity. The inmost reality and significance of the state is found in the individual citizens. They are mutually dependent, interrelated, and conditioned. In such a society the old conception of a transcendent God is out of place, just as much as the idea of an autocratic, arbitrary monarch. The great awakening of the masses of men in all nations to self-government through the exercise of intelligent self-control; the emancipation of slaves; the elevation of women; the humane care of the dependent, defective, and criminal members of society; the great constructive organizations of labor; efforts toward the purification of politics; popular education; various world's

congresses for the promotion of science, art, and religion - all these are the expressions of a growing social consciousness, stronger, more enlightened, and more determined than mankind has ever before experienced, and they are also the causes and the justification of the conception of the immanence of God."¹.

In his refusal to attribute immutability to God the pragmatist postulates that God is not infinite. If God must change, as pragmatism would have Him, together with the other changes in the universe, then He is finite at least in this sense that He is under compulsion. Pragmatists are conscious of the fact that their philosophy demands a finite God. They take their theory of evolution and their theory of the nature of human consciousness as the bases for their conception of God as finite. "Our whole experience," says Brightman, "is that of a world changing and evolving in time...Any view of God which elevates Him entirely above time and process reduces Him to an eternal stagn stagn - a standing present - pays tribute to His excellence without relating His being to the actual facts. The only God worth believing in, however, in the light of the evidence, is a God in living relation to the facts of cosmic and human history."². Pragmatists demand that "God's actions must be limited."³. "We need a temporalistic rather than a purely eternalistic view of God,"⁴ they say. Their God must be "one who works, one to whom the passage of time

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1. Ames, Theology and Functional Psychology, Am. Jl. o. Theology, Vol. 10, p. 225 - 228.
 2. Brightman, The Problem of God, p. 129
 3. Beekwith, The Idea of God, p. 216
 4. Brightman, Op. cit., p. 129

means something; to whom the events of a progressive creative evolution are significant; for whom change is profoundly important - such changes as occur in human character, as well as those more sublime changes in his revelation of himself to man in the course of history."¹ Beckwith attempts to show that there are "necessities to which even God must submit...He has, for example, no arbitrary power in respect to evil and pain, to change the past, or to be unjust."²

Pragmatism ascribes to God limitations which have their origin in the world as well as those which are internal. This is evinced by its opinion that "God strives and suffers; it may be that even if he is ultimately successful he is for the time being and in part defeated, sharing with us in our sorrow and struggle, our repentance and victory."³ James and Bergson agree that if this is a progressive universe, and if theology in particular is evolutionistic, then God is limited by the temporal structure of His experience and is finite. Though James is not quite as fervent in attempting to rob God of His infinity as some of his later adherents are, he can find nothing in his pragmatically derived theological data which can justify the conviction that God is infinite. He says: "in the interests of intellectual clearness, I felt bound to say

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1. Brightman, Op. Cit., p. 129
 2. Beckwith, Op. cit., p. 216
 3. Ibid., p. 217 - 218

that religious experience...cannot be cited as unequivocally supporting the infinitist belief."¹ Ultimately, however, this statement is tantamount to a flat denial of the attribute in question, because pragmatism, as we have already seen in many instances, regards that which experience cannot verify as non-existent.

If God is finite in the sense in which pragmatists conceive Him to be, if He is limited by His own creation, then He most assuredly could not be regarded by them as omnipotent. The pragmatist reasons thus: God's will must be hindered by obstacles such as "space and time, the inertia and intractableness of matter, the frailty and resistance of human and perhaps of infra-human wills."² If it were not so, then God would not be loving and kind, but a sort of sadist; because He would then become responsible for the pains and cruelties of life which we all experience. If He were almighty, then He would have the ability to make life completely happy, and His failure to exercise His power to that end would cost Him His attributes of love, mercy, goodness, and benevolence. Hence pragmatists are very intollerant toward the omnipotence which Christian theologians ascribe to God and protest that "the metaphysical monster which they offer to our worship is an absolutely worthless invention of the scholarly mind."³

Similarly, the pragmatist's unhappy experiences in

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1. James, Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 525
 2. Beckwith, Op. cit., p. 217
 3. James, Op. cit., p. 447

life compel him to believe that God's knowledge must be limited or that He must not be as good and kind as the Bible describes Him. He believes that God must be ignorant of the misfortunes which lie in wait for us around the corner of the future; otherwise He would prevent them from besetting us. Underlying his philosophy is also the idea that man has a free will, and he concludes that this freedom is an actual limitation of the foreknowledge of God.^{1.}

H. G. Wells and Samuel Butler "both alike subject him (God) to definite limitations in knowledge and power and perhaps in goodness."^{2.} The only way in which pragmatists can speak of God as being omniscient, omnipotent, etc. is by ascribing to Him all the knowledge, power, etc. that there is in the physical universe.

In general, pragmatism rules out practically all of the attributes which Christian theology ascribes to God. Pragmatists object that these attributes put God on too high a level, on a level so high that they cannot even have a real conception of Him. Such a God, they believe, would have no cash value for everyday life. They want a God who lives in the very midst of common life and who is not transcendent to their experiences. The God of the Bible, they believe in effect, cannot satisfy their need for a deity.

"Take God's aseity, for example," says James, "or his necessariness; his immateriality; his 'simplicity' or superiority to the kind of inner variety and succession which we

1. Brightman, Op.cit., p. 132 - 133

2. Beckwith, Op. cit., p. 218

find in finite beings, his indivisibility, and lack of the inner distinctions of being and activity, substance and accident, potentiality and actuality, and the rest; his repudiation of inclusion in a genus; his actualized infinity; his 'personality', apart from the moral qualities which it may comport; his relations to evil being permissive and not positive; his self-sufficiency, self love, and absolute felicity in himself:- candidly speaking, how do such qualities as these make any definite connection with our life?"¹ This view, as we shall see, gives impetus to the ever widening breach between pragmatic philosophy and Christian theology.

The "vexed question" as to the place and authority of the Scriptural doctrine of the Holy Trinity has also been "solved" by pragmatism. Scripture teaches that "in the one Godhead there are three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, indissolubly one, in the same divine essence, and equal in power and divine glory and majesty."² Pragmatists ask the question: "Does the dogma of the Trinity...have any claim from this point of view (modern religious consciousness) to be a valid statement of the being of God?"³ "The doctrine of the Trinity," says Irving King, "does not appear as a dogma in the New Testament, for primitive Christianity was concerned with the concrete problems of life...It is true the idea of the

1. James, Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 445
2. Gruebner, A. L., Doctrinal Theology, p. 16
3. Irving King, Op. cit., p. 252

Trinity was present, but purely as a practical concept. It had developed in the centuries immediately preceding the Christian era under the influence of Greek thought. It grew out of the notion that God could not act directly upon the world, but only through certain intermediaries, as angels, his word, his spirit, etc."¹ "Every thinker," he states on another occasion, "must feel that the reality of God is far greater than can be crystalized in any such relation of son, spirit, and father. Such concepts are simply ways of making his infinitude come into working contact with our life."² To pragmatists the concept of the Trinity appears purely as an anthropomorphic device constructed for the purpose of attempting to make the Supreme Being more intelligible. That the pragmatist in theology rules out the possibility of three distinct persons existing in one divine essence is not surprising to one who understands the processes of pragmatic thinking.

Pragmatists do not even regard the persons of the Trinity as representing a real essence, but as existing only in the minds of those who choose to believe that they exist. The Holy Spirit is looked upon as simply a working concept in harmony with the current notion of God. Pragmatists try to demonstrate this by pointing out that "wherever the Spirit is mentioned it is with reference to just such practical problems or crises within experience,

1. Ibid., p. 254

2. Ibid., p. 255

problems that demand some sort of explanation."¹ The Virgin Mary's immaculate conception, for example, is out of conformity with the common order of experience and therefore presents a problem to the pragmatist which he believes can be explained only by such a device as the Holy Spirit. Pragmatists have attempted to reduce the third person of the Holy Trinity to a mere instrument for the use of men. The Spirit was used, they believe, to explain the difference between the baptism of Jesus and that of John. He was used by Christ when about to depart, for the purpose of comforting the disciples. Christ promised them that the Holy Spirit would take His place. In like manner, the pragmatists insist, we can use the Holy Spirit for the achievement of palpable results. Outside of these functions in the realm of practical experience the pragmatist does not even relinquish to the Holy Spirit a place as a legitimate concept of the mind.

The Son of God is treated in much the same manner. His only significance to the pragmatist is a functional one. "He is significant to us primarily," they assert, "because He is conceived as the mediator of certain definite experiences...With the modern Christian the significance of Christ is certainly as an interpreter of God."² Pragmatists flatly deny Christ's resurrection. "This conviction (that Christ rose from the dead)," says Irving King, "can as little be proved by any ghost-like appearances of Christ after his death as it can

1. King, Op. cit., p. 254

2. Ibid., p. 255

death as it can be refuted by their absence."¹ This denial of Christ's resurrection is based on their presupposition that Christ is not really God, but merely a human being. The same writer clinches his argument with the statement: "If such appearances counted for anything they would be as important in the case of any other man of whom they have been asserted."² Pragmatists in no uncertain terms brand the virgin birth of Christ and the second advent as purely fictitious."³ All of the doctrines of Scripture with regard to the person, nature, and work of Christ they regard as meaningless, because they can see no practical purpose in believing them. Whether or not Christ becomes

1. King, Op. cit., p. 257

2. King, Op. cit., p. 259 - 260: "There is no question but that the expectation of this (the second advent of Christ) ~~had~~ had a very important place in the thought of New Testament times. It is an excellent illustration of the evolution of a belief...The church of today, obliged to admit that the early church was mistaken in the peculiar form in which it held to this belief, holds it now in a modified form. But in a sense the early church was not in error. This belief in the second coming of Christ was a part of a more general attitude toward the world and human conduct, and as such it served to mediate a definite practical attitude which was then significant. When this approximate context disappeared the belief was left stranded and in the eyes of later ages it was manifestly a mistaken one as far as ontological fulfilment went. But the conviction that it stood for an ontological reality has led each generation to reconstruct the belief on a basis that at least offered a possibility of fulfilment. What is true of this belief is true of all others referred to above, except in this one its falsity when taken out of its context was so self-evident that it had to be reconstructed if it were to continue to be believed. Of the other dogmas it was not so evident that they were meaningless when thus isolated, and hence they were more easily adhered to in unreconstructed form."

functionally real in pragmatism's order of the salvation of the world, and if He does, to what extent, will appear in the following survey of pragmatism's attitude toward soteriology.

PRAGMATISM'S ATTITUDE TOWARD SOTERIOLOGY

Soteriology is defined in Christian theology as "the doctrine of Holy Scripture concerning the application of the merits of Christ to the individual sinner, whereby the sinner is led to the actual possession and enjoyment of the blessings which Christ has procured for all mankind."¹ It is clear that in order to have a complete picture of the pragmatist's concept of salvation, one must understand his views on the doctrine of sin. If he believes that there is no sin, then, of course, he will regard salvation as being unnecessary. Even if the pragmatist admits that all men are sinners, he still does not have to hold that the salvation of which the Bible speaks is necessary, because he can still have the opinion that man has the ability to save himself. It will be expedient, therefore, to observe first under the category of soteriology what pragmatism's attitude is toward the Scriptural doctrines concerning sin.

Based on Rom. 3, 23; Luke 11, 13; Job. 14, 4, and many other unmistakably pertinent passages, Christian theology teaches that all men are sinners. Sinners in as much as they are born in sin and have digressed from the rule of the divine law, I John 3, 4; Rom. 14, 23. This concept of

1. Graebner, A. L., Op. cit., p. 154

sin embraces every transgression of thought as well as the expression of the thought in word and deed. The pragmatist does not accept this Scriptural definition of sin. Since he holds that absolute truth does not exist, and since every general definition is for him merely the description of an illusion, a pragmatist can see sin only in the form of its concrete expression. For him sin has existence only inasmuch as it shows itself in its affect upon society or the individual in the form of palpable consequences.

Fragmatists do not deny the existence of sin. Wm. James has often voiced his belief in the universality of sin in individuals. In one instance he says: "With most of us the sense of our present wrongness is a far more distinct piece of our consciousness than the imagination of any positive ideal we can aim at."¹ A pragmatist looks at the repercussions of a man's actions to determine whether they are right or wrong. Does your conduct have a degrading affect on your outward personality? Is it detrimental to bodily health? Does it demoralize the invisible and spiritual part of your personality? Does it give dominance to your lower nature? Does it work within you self-condemnation? Does it lower your self respect? These are the questions which the pragmatist asks when he searches for sin. Because all of these questions must at some time be answered in the affirmative by all individuals, the pragmatist

1. The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 209

must agree in a general way with the verdict: "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no not one," Ps. 14, 3.

That Christ Himself used the pragmatic test of right and wrong when He said: "by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7, 20) is a statement often made by pragmatists. But it is not true. Christ applied this test to a restricted class of men for the sole purpose of establishing the genuineness of a prophet. Though this same test, if applied to all men, would prove to be efficient in determining their general sinfulness, it is significant that Christ did not suggest its use here or in any other part of Scripture for that purpose. This principle, when used for determining sinfulness, is inadequate in its failure and inability to show that not only in his conduct, but in his thought and desire as well, man is a sinner. It is true that if he consistently applies his determinative tests the pragmatist is forced to concede that some thoughts are also sinful, because man has thoughts that ostensibly tear down his self-respect, that are not conducive to his good health, and which may lead to self-condemnation. If, for example, a man continually commits mental masturbation by leering at immodest women, the affect will inevitably be a weakening of his character. The pragmatist must also acknowledge that thoughts which lead to wrong acts of conduct are sinful. While sinful thoughts in most cases do show outward detrimental effects, the

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pragmatist does not allow, as Scripture does, that sins of thought need not necessarily produce perceptible destructive effects. Some sins may be followed only by spiritual punishments, which the pragmatist would be unable to perceive. If he is unable to perceive the punishment, he is unable to observe the sin.

Moreover, if the essence of sin is the production of undesirable results, the evaluation of an act as a sin or a virtue becomes a very arbitrary procedure, because man is capable of performing an act the immediate effect of which is unquestionably detrimental, but the immediate harmful result of which may ultimately produce some good in the individual or his fellow men which overshadows its preceding undesirable consequences. To the pragmatist time and other factors play a very definite role in the discernment of the sinfulness of an act. To show the prominence of the time factor, - the pragmatist must examine an act with a view to the length of duration of its beneficial or detrimental consequences. If the immediate evil effect of an act is short lived, and the good effect which follows thereupon is of longer duration, then the act is not sinful. The pragmatist's classification of an act as sinful or virtuous depends very much upon the viewpoint of the individual who examines it. Hence wishful thinking plays a very dominant role in the life and conduct of a pragmatist.

Besides its arbitrary nature and its inability to

establish as sinful all departures from the rule of the divine law, the pragmatic test for sin is completely inadequate in the case of a Christian. Christians, though constantly committing sin, receive continuous and immediate forgiveness and hence their sinful acts are not punished. While it is true that unhappy consequences are often permitted to follow the sin which a Christian commits, that consequence is not inevitable as it would be in the case of an unbeliever.

It is noteworthy that the pragmatist regards sin as something which necessarily results in evil effects. In the extent to which it is able to establish an act as sinful, the pragmatic principle of retribution is in perfect harmony with the Scripture teaching that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Gal. 6, 7. The pragmatist says, "If your food agrees with you and is conducive to your health, then you may be assured that you are eating the right food."¹ If, on the other hand, your food disagrees with you, your eating becomes a sin. Any breach of God's law is punished, whether these laws be mental, moral, or physical. The wages of sin is most certainly death, says the pragmatist. A college professor, who is not a pragmatist, vividly portrays the pragmatic truth of this in the following message which he delivered to his students:² "Stop being dilettante in your sins. Come

1. King, M. P., Right and Wrong, p. 178

2. Ibid., p. 186

on now, sin! Really sin: SIN - gloriously, determinedly, undiscourageably! And, before very long, you will find yourself in a box six feet long by two feet wide by two feet high." Without question pragmatism, as far as it can go, upholds the Scriptural teaching that sin is punished. Anyone who evaluates an act in the light of its workability or non-workability can determine for practical purposes which acts are wrong and which are right.

The pragmatist, however, to be consistent, is compelled to go so far as to say that the immediate cause of everything which brings unhappiness and evil upon society or the individual must be sin. While in a sense this is true, in the sense in which the pragmatist takes it, it is contrary to Scripture, which teaches that Christians experience sorrows and crosses the imposition of which is an act of mercy on the part of God done for the purpose of strengthening and edifying them. A pragmatist would have to say that the eighteen men upon whom the tower of Siloam fell (Luke 13, 4) were necessarily punished for sin, and that certainly the greatness of their punishment postulates the greatness of their sin. Christ nineteen centuries ago rebuked the pragmatist for this illogical and unscriptural conclusion. That sin is always followed by what appears to be a punishment does not make it necessary for the "punishment" to have been preceded and brought on by sin.

Another objectionable feature of the pragmatic

test when applied to the teaching of retribution lies in its inability to account for the spiritual punishment of sin, such as spiritual blindness and eternal damnation. Though this pass of punishment lies outside the realm of physical phenomena, the fear of spiritual punishment brings very definite detrimental effects upon all those who come under the condemnation of sin. Such fear is shown by parents sacrificing their own children, men walking for miles in shoes spiked with hard nails, and by all the other accounts of self-inflicted torture which fill the pages of history. While a pragmatist in a sense is correct in viewing these acts as punishments for sin, he fails to see that intrinsically they are the expression of the human soul's vain attempt to escape the spiritual punishment which it knows that it deserves.

In conformity with Scripture the pragmatist concedes that "that which is wrong does not fit in with the order of things."¹ It is true that the world was originally created without sin. Sin is an artificial growth which has since crept in. The pragmatist reasons: "In a world which the devil made, evil and error would fit in and would be natural for that kind of world."² If sinfulness were the natural order, then a liar, for example, could not be successful, because a liar can "practise his inglorious trade only in a world which is on the whole

1. King, Wm. P., Op. cit., p. 180

2. Ibid., p. 80

truthful."¹ If genuine money were not the established order, then there would be no such thing as successful counterfeiting.

But though pragmatism can observe that sin is an unnatural development, it cannot observe where it originated. As little as it can know when sin first came into the world, so little is it able to determine its origin in the individual. Since the act itself, or the punishment which postulates the act, must be detected in an individual before he can be classed as a sinner, there is no definite time in a man's life to which the pragmatist can point and say: Here man becomes a sinner. The time of sin's origin in man is as variable as are individuals. It is difficult for a pragmatist to find sin in a baby, because the child is not yet able to give expression to its sinfulness. The impossibility of seeing the outward marks of sin in a small child have led many to believe that children are born perfect and sinless, that "heaven lies about us in our infancy; but, "shades of the prison-house close upon the growing boy."² The denial of original sin is in agreement with pragmatism and common sense, but it militates against the truth of Scripture.

In general, then, pragmatism though hopelessly unable to perceive the "roots" of sin, is able in a small

1. King, Wm. P., *Op. Cit.*, p. 182

2. Wordsworth, Wm., Ode on the Intimations of Immortality

degree to observe its fruits. Pragmatism can have no absolute moral standards. Its decisions in the field of morality are entirely subject to wishful thinking. Scripture, on the other hand has very precisely defined moral standards. Though these standards are too high to be reached, yet they serve for Christians as ideals for which to aspire and to strive, as criteria on the basis of which they can judge their conduct, and as curbs to check the more violent breaches of morality. These Biblical standards of right and wrong have no functional value for the pragmatist, because ultimately he must see that they lead him only to self-condemnation and despair. For a Christian, however, they serve the infinitely important purpose of showing him his need of a savior.

Christian theology teaches that man, because he is totally corrupt and sinful, is unable to avert the divine punishment which he deserves. Therefore he is in desperate need of a savior. This Savior was provided in the person of Jesus Christ, who vicariously obeyed the moral laws which men are themselves unable to fulfill. Its claim is that "the chief benefit of Christ's vicarious obedience is the perfect righteousness obtained by Christ for all mankind, the acquisition of which God accepted as a reconciliation of the world to Himself, imputing to mankind the merit of the Mediator...and inasmuch as faith is the actual acceptance of this imputation announced in the Gospel,...it is justifying faith, and God in His judgement graciously and

for Christ's sake holds and pronounces the believer actually and by personal application fully absolved from all guilt and punishment while in the state of faith."¹ The distinctive feature of the salvation which Christian theology proposes is that man plays no active part in it. He can do nothing to merit salvation. He cannot even by his own powers accept it when it is offered to him. This is the feature of Christian theology which is most objectionable to pragmatism.

Pragmatism cannot have much respect for a plan of salvation which leaves the accomplishments of men entirely out of the picture. Pragmatists are basically humanistic and hence also autoteteric in their religion. They insist that man has a free-will in all things and demand for man the opportunity of exercising his free-will. Though the pragmatist's free-will "has nothing to do with this contemptible right to punish which has made such a noise in past discussions of the subject,"² it is just as inimical to and subversive of the Scriptural doctrine of salvation by grace through faith as is that concept of free-will which makes it possible for a person to merit salvation on the basis of his good conduct.

Pragmatic thinking is really at the bottom of the modern "moral atonement theory." The idea of a suffering savior is entirely too "bloody" and "gruesome" a thing for the pragmatist. Moreover, it is outside the pale of his experience that God should permit an innocent person to

1. Graebner, A.L., Op. cit., p. 189. / 2. James, Pragmatism, p. 118

suffer for guilty men and in consideration of this impute the righteousness of the innocent sufferer to the guilty ones. If God is love, pragmatists reason, why should He require such a tremendous sacrifice for sin? This objection is based on their minimization of sin and its guilt and on their denial of the deity of Christ. If sin is nothing more than an obstacle or setback in the individual's or society's march of progress, if it is caused by conditions beyond man's control and without his volition, as pragmatists would have it, then it is easy to believe that God cannot justly demand satisfaction for it. If sin is as hateful to God as the Bible and the uncalloused conscience describe it as being, then it is not difficult to see that God's justice requires a tremendous sacrifice. If Christ was a mere man, a Christian hero, then it would seem impossible that a loving God should require His death for the sins of other men. But if Christ is the Son of God, as He claims to be, then God Himself is making the sacrifice and Christ's suffering and death is an expression of His love.

Even if he could square the Christian doctrine of salvation with his experience, the pragmatist would still be unable to see the cash value of Christ's vicarious satisfaction, because his concept of salvation is diametrically different from that of the Christian theologian. Pragmatists trace the origin of the concept of Christ as the suffering savior to the time when Israel was under the stress of national humiliation. This concept, they believe, is out-

moded today. The religion of the Bible, it is alleged, "stressing celestial prospects and counseling submission to the iniquities of the existing social system, makes a direct, immediate, and urgent solicitude and struggle for the objectives of social idealism, if not actually impossible, at least immeasurably difficult."¹ The salvation which from a pragmatic viewpoint the world needs, which it can use most profitably, takes on the form of a dynamic democracy.

Pragmatists pretend not to be squeamish about the definition which one gives to the term "salvation." "You may interpret the word 'salvation' in any way you like," says James, "and make it as diffuse and distributive, as climacteric and integral a phenomenon as you please."² As a matter of fact, however, pragmatists are very intolerant toward the Christian concept of salvation. A salvation which primarily looks forward to an after-life, to an eternity of heavenly bliss, is too far removed from the world of reality to deserve their serious consideration. On the other hand it is true that, with the exception of the Christian view of it, pragmatists will accept most any definition of "salvation." They have no definite concept of it which they can call their own. The meanings which they attach to the term are so vague as to make impossible a discussion of their views on it. The only point in connection with their idea of salvation which is somewhat clearly defined and on which

1. Stolz, The Psychology of Religious Living, p. 74
2. James, Pragmatism, p. 286

all pragmatists seem to agree is that salvation must have a large amount of uncertainty attached to it.

Pragmatists regard the salvation of the world - salvation perhaps in a social, economical, and cultural sense - as simply a possibility. They claim to be neither optimistic nor pessimistic, but melioristic. What they mean by "possibility" is that "some of the conditions of the world's deliverance do actually exist"¹. and that "there is nothing extant capable of preventing the possible thing."². One of the extant conditions of the world's salvation, says James, are the ideals which we cherish and are willing to live and work for. "Every such ideal realized," he says, "will be one moment in the world's salvation."³. These ideals, James believes, finally express themselves in action, and these acts which our ideals produce finally create "not the whole world's salvation, of course, but just so much of this as itself covers the world's extent."⁴. The pragmatist seems, therefore, to regard salvation as something which must grow, which man themselves must gradually produce. Pragmatists enjoy referring to Christian theologians as "soft minded," because their view of salvation seems to them to leave no opportunity for adventure or danger. The pragmatist takes great pride in his view of the "salvation of

1. James, Pragmatism, p. 284

2. Ibid., p. 283

3. Ibid., p. 286

4. Ibid., p. 287

5. Ibid., p. 291

the world" as being uncertain. He calls himself "tough-minded." He believes that "there is a healthy-minded buoyancy in most of us which such a universe would exactly fit."¹ On the other hand, he insists that his theory of "possible salvation" is not too uncertain to be tenable. "Suppose," he says, "that the world's author put the case to you before creation, saying: 'I am going to make a world not certain to be saved, a world the perfection of which shall be conditional merely, the condition being that each several agent does its own level best. I offer you the chance of taking part in such a world. Its safety, you see, is unwarranted. It is a real adventure, with real danger, yet it may win through. It is a social scheme of co-operative work genuinely to be done. Will you join the procession? Will you trust yourself and trust the other agents enough to face the risk?'"² Pragmatists like to visualize themselves as standing before Almighty God and answering a bold "yes" to this question. Christian theologians, however, are willing to be called "softies" in preference to being uncertain about their salvation. Without thrusting his head across the block, one could venture to say that the pragmatist himself when faced with some of life's grimmest realities, such as death, would be very happy to exchange his proud name for a very small amount of Christian

1. James, Pragmatism, p. 291

2. Ibid.

Certainty.

Even from a strictly pragmatic viewpoint, the theology which pragmatism advocates is almost useless for satisfying the really crying needs and demands of life. It cannot, as pragmatism attempts to do, drug its victims with so great a feeling of their own worth and goodness as to render them entirely insensible to the torments of guilt and retribution. It cannot calm the restlessness of this age and remove its uncertainty, because the theology of pragmatism itself is one of "adventure" and "possibility." At a time when the world seems like a whispering gallery filled with the echoes of many souls crying that life has failed them this "modern religion" which pragmatism proposes can accomplish nothing by merely saying: "Buck up! Take courage in yourself. Life is an intriguing adventure. Better things may be in store for you." Even if it were certain that better things are coming, it requires more than the promise of a more perfect social order to comfort an incurable invalid or a life-long prisoner. When life really gets him into a corner - and even a pragmatist will admit that such situations are of frequent occurrence - so that he must look for help outside of himself, to whom shall a pragmatist go? Will prayer, which for him is simply a "relief of tensions and inhibitions, a freshening of energies, a sense of freedom and forgiveness, an inspiration, a new socialization of purposes - in short a re-

organization of personality"¹. - will such a prayer be worth the energy needed to express it? Will the pragmatists' "unity of the ideal purposes" offer any help?

Ultimately pragmatism's "theology" is based on man; not on God. As man's need for religion increases, however, the usefulness of pragmatism's religion decreases. When death presents itself and compels the pragmatist to face the issue of eternity, all that he as a pragmatist can say is: "I never thought of that." Like an ostrich the pragmatist sticks his head into the sand and refuses to view the life after death. "because it is too far removed from the realities of concrete life." And even if the chief end of religion were only the earthly welfare of man, it is doubtful whether pragmatism's "theology" could make any substantial contributions to "the more abundant life," because a better earthly life is so greatly dependent upon the view which one has of the life to come. It will never, for example, lift the standards of morality as high as Christian theology has: striving to do good for the hope of reward or for the fear of punishment has never been able to produce the genuine morality which is motivated by Christian gratitude. Pragmatism's theology falls under the verdict of pragmatism itself - it doesn't work.

Our object, however, has chiefly been not to disqualify pragmatism's investigations in the field of theology from the viewpoint of pragmatism itself, but to place prag-

1. Conger, G. P., A Course in Philosophy, p. 438

mistic theology in relation to Christian theology in order to see if the former bears out the truth of the latter. The most dangerous feature of pragmatism is its insidiousness. It works under the ambush of Christian theology. It cloaks itself with Scriptural terminology and professes to be the Christian theologian's best friend. This explains largely why it has made such tremendous inroads into the theology of many protestant denominations. It begins very humbly by asking first only sober consideration. Once it has been given this it asks for tolleration. Then it asks for equal recognition. And finally it demands of Christian theology total submission. For a Christian theologian, therefore, it is not without profit to subject pragmatism to a very careful and critical analysis; to unmask it, as it were, so as to enable him to judge it at its real face value.

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