CURRENT OPINION

Salvation in Modern Terms

In the American Journal of Theology for January, Professor Cross studies "The Modern Trend in Soteriology." The religion of every man is just his way of seeking salvation, so that a theological system is an intellectual explanation of the motive of the religious life. Whenever the religious life is enriched by new steps forward taken by scientific observation and social or economic study, there appears a new form of soteriology. To be saved is to go from a lower to a higher and better life. Although it seems clear that in soteriology the end which we call salvation is fundamental while the means of attaining it ought to have less importance it is a fact that in the history of theological controversy the latter have assumed the first place. The Protestant Reformation released a powerful current of spiritual energy that had been dammed back by mediaevalism. The material universe was being investigated, the old cosmology was destroyed, and with the new came the necessity of reconstructing the representation of salvation. The Protestant vindication of the prerogative of the human mind is found in leading non-Protestant thinkers like Descartes and Spinoza. Although many of the arguments brought forth were misleading, in the main, the plea for the dignity of the human intellect was creative and made impossible for a later age to dissociate the process of salvation from the normal activities of the mind. This position has been rather strengthened by the obliteration of the old boundaries between the natural and the revealed. A growing mass of intelligent people refuse to give their adherence to any theory of human betterment whether individual or social that ignores or challenges the order of the cosmos. The modern attitude condemns therefore both mediaeval Catholicism and Calvinism with their pessimism.

Christianity is seen to be a faith in our divine sonship that rouses the conviction that all things are ours, fills us with an eagerness to make ourselves at home in the universe, and to place its treasures at the feet of every man. . . . The Christian salvation is more than the rescue of so many people from a state of sinfulness or misery. It is a historical momentum moving down from Christ through the generations and in increasing volume perpetuating itself normally in the life of the present.

The modern conception of atonement is therefore not that of satisfaction by a penal substitution of the innocent for the guilty but a vital participation of Christ to the life of humanity, whereby a redemptive energy of a wonderful kind streams into the life of men and brings them to the potentialities of their being. The idea of the Church of the Living God, a communion in which each believer gives himself to the whole and all give themselves to each, embodies the purpose of salvation of God who works all things together for good to them that love him and whose method it is to make of those who are being saved a vital part of the body of Christ, the Church.

Life and Consciousness

In the Hibbert Journal for January, Professor D. N. Paton writes on "A Physiologist's View of Life and Mind." The discovery that atoms of matter are not the stable units that they were supposed to be has not only changed our conception of matter and energy but has far-reaching consequences in the domain of biology itself. Do living things behave in a manner so different from non-living things that we are forced to conclude that there is between them a fundamental difference? There
seems to be a remarkable analogy between the growth of a crystal and that of a very simple form of life like yeast: but when the crystal is oxidized, some latent energy is lost to the substance, while in the case of yeast some of the energy so liberated is used to build non-living matter into living matter. The power of growth of these simple organisms is wonderful. It has been calculated that a single paramoecium, a small infusorian visible only under the microscope, would, under favorable conditions of food supply, in one year form a mass of protoplasm the size of the earth. The great and profound mystery is not, however, the difference between living and non-living things, but the nature of the difference between creatures without and those with a consciousness. Consciousness is not an essential of living matter, it is an epi-phenomenon linked with the appearance of a higher and more complex form of life.

Incarnation and Redemption

Cold metaphysical speculation is often led astray but "it is the heart which makes a theologian." This applies particularly to the Incarnation. So long as Jesus is viewed from a cold metaphysical standpoint, says Dr. Shaw in his article on "The Ethical Import of the Incarnation" (Methodist Review, March–April, 1915), his coming into the world solves nothing; it is only another of the riddles of life. But the Logos of St. John moves with living force in the deep and vital currents of human life and of human activity, while now the Logos of Philo is thought of only as a lifeless and forgotten speculation. The motive of the incarnation is the redemption of man. It does not bring a subterfuge to be accepted in the place of a righteous life, but it opens the way to that life. For a Christian the Way is Christ, a Person, not a code of legal requirements or a system of philosophical ethics. The Incarnation brings about social regeneration by a concrete representation of divine Fatherhood united to universal brotherhood. To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

A Miracle in the Making

In the Reformed Church Review for January, 1915, Mr. Theodore F. Herman writes on "The Church and the Social Order." There are three great miracles which challenge our faith: the creation of man, the gift of Christ, the birth of a redeemed humanity; these events are miracles because they are signs of the existence, the power, and the presence of God in the universe. And the greatest of them is the last, which is still unrealized. The world is still full of greed, intemperance, and licentiousness. Professor Ferrero, the great authority in Roman history, declares that the progress of mankind in nineteen centuries has been scarcely appreciable. The social problem is as old as Moses but now it has found a voice, and since the sixteenth century there has been one revolt after the other, in religion, in philosophy, and in politics. We are now in the midst of the last of these great revolts, in which the common man asserts his common rights in our complex industrial and social life. Socialism is the religion of masses today and is either indifferent or hostile to the church. The church ought to show clearly that she has a social message: Jesus Christ was more than a social reformer, and yet he shared the social passion of the Hebrew prophets. This gospel contained the germs of a social order founded upon love, service, and equality, and not, as was the existing order, founded upon force, exploitation, and inequality. The social creed set forth in 1912 by the Federal Council of the churches of Christ in America ought to be more widely known. The church indeed has never repudiated the gospel of Jesus and the social creed which is the substance of the message of the Kingdom of God, but, as a
matter of fact, the gospel of Jesus was so
divine that no past age has been able or
prepared either to apprehend or to express
its heights and depths. There is now in
the church a tremendous social awakening
and we may hope to see the third miracle
come to pass—a redeemed humanity.

**Miracles, Law, and Will**

In the *Constructive Quarterly* for March,
1914, Dr. C. Stange writes on “Natural
Law and Belief in Miracle.” Modern
natural science and modern historical
science make it difficult to believe in
miracles, but it is noticeable that quite
generally the attitude toward the miraculous
is accepted as a criterion of an acknowledg-
ment of Christianity and that the elimina-
tion of miracle must be fatal to the existence
of Christian belief. If it is impossible to
think of Christianity without miracle, the
question remains whether the contradiction
between miracle and the modern point of
view is insoluble. The current conception
of miracle is that it is a violation of natural
law. This is a false definition of miracle.
But we know that natural laws, in a certain
sense, are only hypotheses of the human
mind for the knowledge of phenomena.
The modern scientists allow generally that
we must be ready at any time to face a
revision of these laws, but the idea of cause
remains necessary to the study of natural
science. The belief in miracle arose at a
time when the conception of natural law
was unknown, and therefore in the first
instance a miracle was not considered as a
violation of a non-existing natural law. The
miracle of creation comes to our conscious-
ness just when we experience in it the idea
of order. By calling the world a creation
of God we mean that the fact of the world’s
existence appears as the free act of a reason-
ing will; so that generally we determine the
relation of God to the world, not through
the conception of cause, but through the
conception of will. In the human will we
distinguish technical rules of its action from
the proper content of the will without bring-
ing contradiction between the two; in the
same manner there is no opposition between
the saving activity or special providence
of God and his creative action.

**Sin and Death**

In the *Expositor* of February, 1915, Dr.
A. Van Hoonacker writes on “The Connexion
of Death with Sin according to Genesis
ii–iii.” It is quite clear that the author of
that story believed that man in his state of
blissful innocence was destined never to die,
but not because he was immortal by nature.
Safeguard against death was prepared for
man by God by means of a medicine from
the tree of life which would have continually
checked and averted the natural agencies
which make for death. Through sin, man
did lose this privilege and his fate became
that of every creature that grows and
breathes. And this was truly the fulfilment
of the divine warning in Genesis 2, 17: “On
the day that thou eatest of it, thou shalt
die!”

**The Last Days of a World**

To most of us eschatological speculations
do not appeal very much because so many
eccentric sects rode them to death, but, as
Mr. Kelly remarks in his article on “Eschato-
logical Interpretations and War” (*Church
Quarterly Review*, January, 1915), these
ideas were of paramount importance in
Christian life in other times. For more
than a hundred years after the death of
Paul, belief in the early return of Jesus was
all but universal. The evolutionary theory
has been fatal to this millenarianism. Mr.
Kelly thinks that in the eschatological dis-
course of Jesus (Matt., chap. 24; Luke,
chap. 21) “the end of the world” does not
mean the end of the physical universe, but
is symbolical and means the existent order
of things, society. We ourselves speak of a
world of fashion, of business, or of a classical
world, a mediaeval world, a nineteenth-century world. In the crises of history there is a great mystery. Was Jerusalem in the wrong against Babylon or against Rome? Was the Roman Empire in the wrong against the Barbarian invaders or the Byzantine Empire against the Moham medans? All these were victories of wanton aggressors when right did not avail against might. This is because righteousness is a question of truth, but immediate victory is not to truth but to faith: the Crusaders had a true faith but so much arrogant self-confidence that they did not take the trouble to learn the very elements of their fighting business. If this war is the beginning of the long end of all European civilization the faithful will go through the troublous times to come just as the church stood while the Roman Empire crumbled down. There is no reason why the Christian ideal of a new heaven and of a new earth may not be nearer to us than we think.

The Doukhobors

Although it is commonly said that it is the nature of Protestantism to divide itself ad infinitum in a multitude of sects, Mr. Aurelio Palmieri says in the Harvard Theological Review for January, 1915, that orthodox Russia is of all European countries the most prolific in religious sects. Mr. Palmieri studies one of these sects in his article on "The Russian Doukhobors and Their Religious Teaching." Russian Christianity is above all ritualistic and external. Among the rationalistic sects the best known is that of the Doukhobors, or "Champions of the Spirit." Their teaching is closely allied to that of the Quakers. In 1894, under the influence of Tolstoi's book The Kingdom of God Is within You, they refused to render military service. They had to undergo persecution at the hands of the Russian government, which finally allowed them to emigrate to Cyprus and Canada, where they now number about eight thousand. For the Doukhobors the Bible, with the exception of the Gospel of John, is the Book of the Dead, superseded by a so-called "Living Book," which is oral tradition. They believe that God is eternal and that individual men are distinct elements of divinity. Jesus was a man whose life as told in the Gospels is the type of ours. He is the eternal gospel living in men's hearts. Human souls existed before the creation of the world. Death is only a change of state. Therefore the dead are not to be mourned or prayed for. Sacraments and churches and priesthood are useless. The Doukhobors meet in bare halls where each man recites in turn a kind of psalm from memory.

Romanism and Mexican Politics

Mr. I. C. Enriquez, who signs himself "A Mexican Catholic," has published a pamphlet entitled "The Religious Question in Mexico," wherein he maintains that the Mexican constitutionalists are not the enemies of the church except in so far as it tries to influence politics. The Roman church in Mexico is composed of wealthy Spanish dignitaries who have no consideration for the poor native clergy and who do not desire to see the masses educated and uplifted. These high dignitaries have always favored the enemies of national and economic progress: the Mexican people who otherwise are not anti-religious cannot love those high church dignitaries who "have always upheld the benighted forces of Mexico."