

Modern views of the world and Christianity

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Revue internationale de théologie = Internationale theologische Zeitschrift = International theological review**

Band (Jahr): **12 (1904)**

Heft 45

PDF erstellt am: **30.06.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-403587>

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MODERN VIEWS OF THE WORLD AND CHRISTIANITY.

During the last few years a considerable number of new views of the world have inundated the Christian Territory and threatened to sap the foundations of Christianity and the Christian Church. To these modern views no earnest Christian can remain indifferent, we must take a stand against them and ask: what do they offer us and what would they take from us? A clear, reasonable view of the world, resting on a solid basis belongs undoubtedly to the armour of a Christian. And as, in every country, now a days, they seek to improve and perfect the arms of the troops, even so must the soldier of the Lord Jesus also adapt his armour or weapons to the progress of the times and by the assiduous exercise of his arms tend towards perfection in the religious domain. But, as at bottom the principle of our arms has remained the same, notwithstanding all the improvements, likewise the principle of the Christian view of the world will remain the same in spite of all progress and discoveries, the only change it can undergo, being that of the form of its expression.

The consciousness that our arms are sure and efficient is a source of great moral strength to us in the fight. All modern weapons do not answer to the calls made upon them. In like manner the modern view of the world exhibits many weak points. The compensations which it offers are altogether inadequate. Its insufficiency is clearly proved by its failure to apprehend the needs of mind and soul.

D. F. Strauss, the predecessor of "Modern thinkers" frankly acknowledged, that no benefit accrues to anyone by mere negation—on the contrary—many lose their rest and peace by assuming this attitude. For, as he himself says: "The abolition of faith in providence is indeed one of the most palpable losses connected with the renouncement of the Christian faith. One has the feeling of being put in the immense machine of the world, unarmed and helpless, never sure, that one will not be seized and torn to pieces by a wheel unexpectedly set in motion. That feeling of being exposed to the greatest danger is at first a terrible one indeed." To counterbalance this Strauss proffers us *Art*, which, with its softening influences, lulls us into forgetfulness of the hard reality. In his book on faith, old and new, he sketches the history of art, praising the heroes of music and poetry and specially commending the bright Greek view of life as a healing balsam for the soul. Similar voices are still heard in our days. But it is evident, that a large income and good health are the first conditions for a bright view of life. What is to be done, if misery and illness crop up, if life is enveloped in darkness, if the heart is wounded—in such a case no bright view of life is possible, in God alone can we find real help and comfort. In any rate one can spend only a short time in that realm of fictitious perfection, it is a fair dream, followed by the awakening, which brings us back to the stern reality. Further it will not do to replace Christianity by art, because this substitute, which is sometimes recommended to help us to forget the misery of life, is in proportion accessible to but few.

Not every body possesses a natural gift and intelligence for art. How shall a deaf man be edified at a concert, a blind man by a picture? Moreover a great many people have not the means to procure the enjoyments of art. How shall the poor man, who certainly has also the right to rise above the misery of his life, enjoy art? It must be further observed, that in our days modern rather than classical art is advocated as a substitute for the christian religion. But what is modern art? In music very often a weaving of artificial dissonances, which is neither understood nor appreciated by the general public, and against which no other than the German Emperor protested at a musical festival in Frankfort last summer. In lite-

rature, art is often confined to trivialness, descriptions of misery and of vice. In sculpture and painting art represents fantastic and depressive scenes, which only appeal to a small body of connoisseurs. Thus modern art, which delights to depict the misery of that world from which we would like to escape, is not able to replace Christianity. Art, in a word, cannot do that, although we highly appreciate it in its place, and should not like to have to do without it in our Churches and Services; still we do not attend divine worship for the sake of art. What we seek in the house of God is inward peace, the strengthening of the faith, that there is a God in heaven and that this God has thoughts of peace toward his children, and that the darkest paths of men finally lead to light, that the imperfection of this world will one day be followed by perfection and that the guilt will be forgiven by the mercy of the heavenly Father in Jesus Christ. A grand, a world-overcoming optimism is contained in this faith, not a gloomy spirit, viewing everything black, a hope, a confidence which cannot be troubled in any way, not even by modern views of the world, however fascinating they may be.

In the place of the christian faith others wish to put *Science* and say: knowledge must be our religion! Education gives us full liberty! That is correct if by that we mean that the training of the will gives us power over it, but it is incorrect to assert, that knowledge makes us independent of inner and outer compulsion. The strange conclusions to which some of the adherents of the so-called scientific view of the world arrive may be proved by the following:—Some time ago one of the "Scientists" proposed quite seriously in a well known German Periodical, that large telescopes should be placed in the public Squares in order to give the people an opportunity of contemplating the course of the five moons of Jupiter. The perpetual regularity of their movement was supposed to impart consolation, the bright clearness of the stars to soften the hearts, and so mankind in general would become better and more patient! If this hypothesis were correct, the inhabitants of our prisons and penitentiaries, who from their cells cannot see anything but the sky, would become in a short time the best and most noble-minded men, if one were to place telescopes in their cells! But as it is not very likely that the Go-

vernment will transform the houses of correction into something like observatories, it might be advisable to console the penitent prisoners and to warn the impenitent ones in the good old way with the word of God, which has never yet failed.

Another man of science is said to have made the discovery that different colours have a different effect upon the mind. According to his view one ought to leave a sorrowful person for a certain time in a red room, an angry one in a blue room, a discouraged one in a green room, etc. But those experiments are hardly necessary, because the christian faith and the holy Scripture meet all the spiritual needs of men fully. Science without religion cannot satisfy the immortal soul. It offers no peace to the heart. What is the use of our being able to explain to a sick man his disease scientifically, if we have no remedy with which to cure him?

It is nevertheless remarkable to observe how everybody needs a religion. The same people, who refuse to acknowledge the Almighty God, do not hesitate to worship idols. How often have so-called learned men—not real savants—made science their idol, so that they paid it a deep, mystic reverence, that they performed miracles of science before an audience, which still desires to see signs and wonders, that they worshipped before an antidiluvian tooth of a mammoth or before a docile chimpanzee, as if it were an impenetrable enigma of holy nature! What do the people really gain, if religion is replaced by science? Little or nothing. Science is put before their eyes as a veiled and venerable picture, the boldest hypothesis becomes a dogma, a false science appears as an authority and claims, like the Pope, absolute submission.

And what do we really know? Certainly a great many things, more than in former times. Wonderful discoveries have been made in the last decades, which are of the greatest importance to mankind. But what do we know about the deepest and highest question, upon whose answer the peace of our inward life depends? Hardly more than in olden times. He who is not convinced of the insufficiency of our knowledge is a little-minded man indeed, even if his name be well-known. The word of St. Paul is still true: "We know in part".

By affirming that science cannot replace religion, I do not speak against science. I in no way undervalue it, on the contrary, I esteem it highly; I do not ask that it be subjected to the church; if science were confined to the narrow scholastic sense of the middle ages, it would be a loss both to science and to the church.

We theologians also belong to the scientific body and we will not allow in our dominion the scientific method to be touched. Science must be free in its dominion, entirely free and independant. But it ought not to go beyond the limits of its territory. And if anybody declares, that he has searched through heaven and earth and found no God, that he has examined every part of the human body and not discovered any soul—no objection is to be made to such an assertion.

Neither God nor the soul belongs to the things which can be scientifically searched out. But it would be totally wrong and unscientific to declare: because I have seen no God, there exists none. Has any medical man ever seen internal pain? Is it not the effect only which we can ascertain? Has any physicist fitted out with the very best instruments ever succeeded in perceiving the hypothetical medium called "æther", which is supposed to be far more subtle than ordinary matter, and which—as it is assumed—pervades alike the most vacuous spaces and the interior of all bodies, whether solid, liquid, or gaseous? Without the assumption of this medium the propagation of light could not be explained scientifically. Has a human eye ever seen the electric current? Can the best and most experienced electrician tell us by looking at a telegraphic wire, whether an electric current is running through it or not? Yet although no man has ever seen electricity, nobody has the slightest doubt that it really exists, because we can perceive its action. Even so we perceive the manifestation of God everywhere, although we do not see God himself. That many things are concealed from our eyes, which undoubtedly exist, is taught by the photographic plate. A great many stars, which the human eye is not able to see even with the most perfect instruments, are perceived and fixed by the photographic plate, and it was only through the means of photography that the astronomers were able to study those distant celestial bodies. Therefore it would

be foolish to say: what is not seen with our eyes, does not exist. It is foolish to raise the objection: there is no room for a heavenly or spiritual world in this earthly world. There is really room enough for it. We leave science its full liberty, but we cannot allow it to encroach on other territory.

J. KUNZ.

(To be continued.)
