

THE RELIGION
OF THE
ADOLESCENT

AN ADDRESS

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BY

MARGARET DRUMMOND, M.A.

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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION,
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IT is generally recognized that adolescence is a time of unrest, a time of impatience of all authority, a time of isolation and often of unhappiness. It seems strange that the adolescent who is so nearly the adult should seem more remote, more incomprehensible than at any earlier stage. Why has he lost the frankness of infancy, the independence of childhood? Why has he become so sensitive to criticism? Why does he see and resent reproof where no reproof was meant? Why is he so inconstant, so contradictory? Why is he so full of energy one day, so slack the next? Why are his loudest professions often simply an indication that his behaviour will bely them?

The reason of all this may be expressed in a very homely way. The adolescent is half-baked. He is beginning to realize the deep-rooted and distinctively human need to be a person. But he is not a person.

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There is no harmony within himself. To make a Self is the task of a life time, and he is just beginning to realize it. He finds within himself all sorts of tendencies, of desires, of ambitions, the outcome of which he cannot well foresee. He tries on characters as the rest of us try on clothes, and he is not always prompt to recognize a misfit.

Turbulent or anti-social conduct often springs directly out of mental conflict. Sometimes it acts as a distraction from an unbearable idea. Stealing, for example, which is a not uncommon phenomenon of adolescence and is often the cause of much sorrow and bewilderment to those concerned, may be simply the expression of internal unrest, and may cease entirely when the conflict is resolved. Such pathological tendencies are frequently felt as compulsions, and their perpetrator is helplessly dismayed and distressed at his own conduct.

The most common source of mental conflict is undoubtedly a wrong attitude towards the sexual life which now inevitably claims much of the youth's attention. A great deal of unhappiness would be saved if we could all take up a simple and reverent attitude towards the basal facts of life.

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Practically all intelligent children, when very young, desire to know whence and how they themselves came to be. Their questions are too often met with lying answers or are repressed in such a way that the child's curiosity is increased, while at the same time he recognizes that there is no use attempting to gratify it openly. A sense of guilt thus begins to be associated with this whole region of thought. A good deal of information may be more or less surreptitiously picked up from other children, or by listening to the veiled talk of grown-up people. Many definitely wrong ideas are thus acquired. In later childhood these episodes are largely forgotten. But when the onset of puberty forces the subject to the front once more, then emotional reaction is determined by the childish experiences which are now beyond the ken of conscious memory. It is at such times that the adolescent badly needs a friend who can attract his confidence, correct his false ideas, and, above all, release him from the irrational emotions which are clouding his life and hindering his progress.

Modern psychology is showing more and more clearly every day that the difficulties

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and maladjustments of adolescence spring directly from the difficulties and maladjustments of childhood. The turbulent spirit, which so often characterizes the adolescent, represents not his first, but his second fight for freedom. Worst of all in childhood, reduced to apparent docility and willing obedience, the youth unconsciously cherishes within himself a resistance to all authority which breaks forth with irresistible strength as he sees himself passing out of the age of tutelage. The measure of this force is the measure of the external control which has hitherto held his footsteps to the strait and narrow path. When we give up repressive discipline, when we educate children in self-control, when we train for freedom by giving freedom—so far, at least, as freedom is consistent with the rights of others, then many of the difficulties of adolescence as an educational problem will disappear.

But we are still far from such a happy state of things. Those who can look back into their early childhood and find that the social forces that played upon their developing personality were always those of sweet reasonableness and even-handed justice are

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fortunate exceptions. Even yet we know too little of the complex and ever-changing nature of any concrete child to be sure that with the best intentions we can treat that child with fairness and sympathy. When trouble arises in adolescence the probability is strong that its explanation is to be sought in previous misunderstanding and injustice.

Almost always there has been too much direction, too little trust. The consequence of this is that there has developed what it is convenient to call an authority-complex; the effect of which is that if you command the youth to do even what he himself wants to do, he cannot do it; he must do something that will show his independence. This attitude certainly seems unreasonable. In order to sympathize with it we must force ourselves to realize that it arises not out of the present trifling occurrence, but out of countless conflicts in the past, most of which have been forgotten, but all of which have left their mark. Emerson's wise maxim, *Respect thy child; be not too much his parent*, is too little understood and acted on.

In many respects the psychology of the adolescent is strikingly like the psychology of the very young child. In adolescence we

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seem to have come round full circle upon infancy again—only, of course, upon a higher plane. In adolescence we have a second birth: a passage from the encircling support and restraint of the family to the wider freedom of the great society. As in infancy, there is adjustment to an altered environment, and from this fact alone difficulties are bound to arise. As in infancy, fundamental questions are often raised, and the youth seems to have no more reverence for established beliefs than has the little child. He wishes to probe everything, and he cannot now be silenced or put off as in former years. As in infancy, the self-assertive instinct manifests itself with overmastering force; the youth becomes argumentative, officious, self-willed. If the parents resort to repressive measures, he may resort to dissimulation and other forms of deceit—in this again resembling the little child.

Again in the range of his thoughts the adolescent seems to return to the profound interests of childhood. The boy and girl are engrossed in practical affairs. Their school, their games, their various activities fill their minds. There is not an age of

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speculation. But the adolescent, like the little child, is a seeker. Both concern themselves not only with the Here, but with the Hereafter, with the Whence and the Why and the Whither. The more sustained powers of thought of the adolescent carry him on to a deep concern about theological doctrine. The strange psychological phenomenon termed conversion takes place most frequently in the years between thirteen and twenty. Brockman, in a study of the moral and religious life of nearly two hundred and fifty Preparatory School Students found that seventeen was the age of greatest responsiveness to religious ideas.

At times this interest expresses itself in scepticism or even avowed atheism. We must, however, divest ourselves of any feeling that the form of the interest is of great importance. The thing that matters is that the interest is there. All questions should be welcome. None should be rebuked or regarded as irreverent. The Youth should be encouraged to probe all things, to hold fast to that which is good.

When early religious education has been of a dogmatic nature the questions and doubts of the intellect give rise often to

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intense pain and hatred of self. Sometimes no word of the inward struggle is spoken, and a merely outward conformity does violence to the personality. Much of the trouble is due to the fact that the religious ideas and beliefs have been cast in a childish mould, and are obviously inconsistent with the youth's increased knowledge of the Universe. Many adults found that their faith was sorely tried or even plucked from them by the devastation of the war. This was a sign that their faith was still on the childish plane, and the heart searching which ought to take place at adolescence had been neglected.

To the child God is a man exceeding powerful; and this conception is often accompanied by quite definite imagery. Even after the imagery is rejected as inappropriate, yet its effects remain, and, more often than we know, an insurmountable difficulty for the developing thought may be created by a specific childhood experience or method of interpretation.

Not every one who has gone through the experience described by Captain Graham in the following lines manages to shake himself quite free from its effects.

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“Childhood ! When grown-up folks averred
That ev’ry cross or selfish word
By Providence was overheard
 In fashion quite uncanny.
I grudged the needless pains he took
To enter in his Judgment Book
The fact that I was rude to cook
 Or disobeyed my Nanny.
(If I forgot my prayers, I *think*
He underlined it in red ink.)
'Twas then I learned that Powers Divine
Inflict a punishment condign
On wilful urchins who decline
 To go to bed at seven ;
That he who spoils a brand new frock,
Who enters rooms, and doesn’t knock,
Or dares to touch the nursery clock,
 Can never go to Heaven.
(I shudder still at what becomes
Of little boys who suck their thumbs.)”

We are perhaps becoming more sensible in the nature of the religious instruction we give the child. We are perhaps beginning to realize more clearly his modes of thinking and the inevitable consequences of his ignorance and lack of experience. Yet progress of this kind is slow, involving as it does an imaginative reconstruction of the child’s point of view; and even to-day there are many children of whom Captain Graham’s lines would be only too true.

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When in adolescence the absurdity of these concrete interpretations of doctrine is realized, then there may be a rebound from the whole subject and a scientific materialism may take the place of a theistic materialism. Nevertheless the emotional experience of the child is not lost. It may indurate and embitter a later scepticism. It may lend passion to the support of some great or little cause. It may lie dead and quiescent for years, and then cleaving its way through the deposits of later life it may bring about a middle-aged conversion or a death-bed repentance. Few people escape altogether from the shackles of their own childhood.

Of the concrete imagery in which the imaginative child so often embodies spiritual instruction, I may quote one more example.

John Fiske says: "I remember distinctly the conception which I had formed when five years of age. I imagined a narrow office just over the zenith, with a tall, standing-desk running lengthwise, upon which lay several open ledgers bound in coarse leather. There was no roof over this office, and the walls rose scarcely five feet from the floor, so that a person standing

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at the desk could look out upon the whole world. There were two persons at the desk, and one of them—a tall, slender man, of aquiline features, wearing spectacles, with a pen in his hand and another behind his ear—was God. To my infant mind this picture was not grotesque, but ineffably solemn, and the fact that all my words and acts were thus written down, to confront me at the day of judgment, seemed naturally a matter of grave concern.”¹

With advancing years the child discards his concrete imagery, yet his thought often remains bound by its implications. God is more or less explicitly regarded as the artificer and director, as a Creator apart from and outside of his creation. Our conceptions are evidently limited and determined by the intellectual level we have reached or are capable of reaching; many a man on attaining manhood continues to think as a child, to understand as a child. “Mother, is God a kind of fairy?” asked a little boy; and many an adult has experienced disappointment, bewilderment, and even wrath, because this is the conception

¹ *The Idea of God as affected by Modern Knowledge.*
Quoted by Stanley Hall, *Adolescence*, vol. ii, p. 315.

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which he has unconsciously formed and unconsciously retained.

It is in order that childish things may be put aside that perfectly free discussion must be encouraged in classes for adolescents. We must recognize that the discord, the questionings, the dogmatism, the narrowness of outlook are phases in the struggle of the soul towards harmony and consistency. If religion is to be vital in life, it must permeate every part of life. Hence each individual must be encouraged to bring all his desires, all his ambitions, all his interests into contact with his religion.

At the same time we must beware of letting it be taken for granted that all truth can be expressed in words. One of the difficulties in dealing with the clever youth is that he has a pathetic belief in words, and in the power of his own intellect to understand those words. He has not yet learned that there are many things which we can understand in their fullness only in so far as we have ourselves experienced them. The ignorance of the old man often springs from a much profounder knowledge than the certainty of the young man. It was Newton, one of the world's greatest scientists,

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who thought of himself as a little child picking up pebbles on the shore of an uncharted sea.

In the case of the more thoughtful of our young people difficulties often arise because they have been deeply impressed by the achievements of science and by the determinism of science. What they have been taught of God, of his relationship to Christ, of His Immanence in His creation, of Omnipotence, of Omniscience, of human immortality seems to them irreconcilable with scientific truth. It is not a rare thing for the sensuous frame of youth to be "racked with pangs that conquer trust," not seldom do those dark moods come upon him when he sees

"Time, a maniac scattering dust,
And Life, a Fury slinging flame."

The religion of his childhood is slipping from him, and there seems nothing to take its place.

Not the least part of his trouble is that he dares confide in no one. One of the subtlest temptations to which the spirit of man is exposed is the temptation to believe that

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individual experiences are unique: the youth's conviction that no one has ever before endured such mental torture as is his portion increases his misery, but yet gratifies his egoism. Such a youth as I have in mind is usually of acute intellect, but he is very ignorant of himself, and very ignorant of others.

“My sins,” says Bunyan, “did so offend the Lord that even in my childhood He did scare and affright me with fearful dreams, and did terrify me with dreadful visions.”

The sense of sin which weighs down the adolescent of the present day sometimes finds expression in words not so very different. He sees nothing absurd in the lack of all sense of proportion which the words imply.

That doubt should be regarded as sinful is an attitude which is really a survival from a more primitive form of society than our own. Tolerance of doubt or of unorthodox belief is a virtue which never appears until society has attained a certain measure of stability, and until the general intellectual level is fairly high. Yet it might well seem obvious that truth shines out only the more clearly, the more it is questioned, and certainly in classes for adolescents to look

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askance upon any question whatever is a fatal policy.

When, as in the case referred to above, the trouble arises from the conflict between Religion and Science, we must go down to first principles: we must show that science itself springs from faith, from an unconquerable determination that the behaviour of the Universe must harmonize with the reason of man. To the young people brought up in our own communion this particular difficulty should not be so shattering, so subversive of all hope and trust as it often is in the case of those brought up in the tenets of a rigid orthodoxy. The Unitarian heritage is a very precious one. It enables our children to take their stand among those fortunate souls to whom Montefiore refers when he says:

“To those who believe that God is the Source of truth as well as of goodness there can be no truth which is *not* Divine, there can be no falsehood which *is* Divine. There can be no opposition between Science and Religion, for Science must be a part of Religion. Whatever laws of Nature Science ascertains and proves are also the Laws of God. If any doctrine of religion is in con-

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flict with an ascertained law of Science, that doctrine cannot be true; therefore it cannot be religious. It is no longer religious to believe it; it is, on the contrary, irreligious, for God is true and the source of truth. If the statements in the sacred books of any religion are in antagonism with the proved doctrines of Science, those statements are erroneous: held in good faith till Science had shown their error, they can no longer be held in good faith when Science has proved them false.”

The faith on which Science is founded has been amply justified. Not a day passes which does not bring fresh evidence of the understanding man has gained of this wondrous and infinitely complicated universe. Man now does what was once regarded as the prerogative of Deity alone. He lays down channels for the waters that they may run therein; he makes the winds his ministers and rides on the wings of the storm; he makes the lightning his messenger and fearless he listens to the voice of the thunder.

Magnificent indeed is Man's accomplishment. Yet it leaves him poor. For the intellect which has been thus satisfied is

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after all only a part of man's nature. Faith which has carried us so far must carry us farther still; it must claim and work to the fulfilment of the claim that the ultimate interpretation of the mystery of being shall accord with man's nature as a whole: that

“ There shall never be one lost good. What was, shall live as before :

The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound :

What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more :

On the earth the broken arcs: in the heaven, a perfect round.”

I have said the open discussion of doubts when doubts are present is to be encouraged. But we must recognize that discussion may be raised and continued not because of desire to arrive at truth, but as a means of escape from unwelcome or dreaded duties. There are youths who view life with apprehension, who struggle away from reality, who in a maze of words seek refuge from tasks which they vaguely feel may demand more of them than they are willing to give.

These young disputants are often people of very considerable ability. The self-distrust from which they suffer is not justified, but it is often very real, though so

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well disguised that it is far from obvious to the superficial observer. The best thing that can be done for them is to induce them to undertake responsibility for some practical matter within the region of their special ability or interest. It should not be difficult to arrange this, as, generally speaking, work with adolescents should be organized on club lines, as many members of the class as possible having definite duties in connection with the conduct of the class.

Unless thought is free, the soul of many a youth will beat against the bars. But in many respects it may truly be said that it is the emotional development of the adolescent that concerns us even more than his intellectual development. It is the wisdom of the heart that we covet for him no less than the wisdom of the head. "No heart is pure that is not passionate; no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic," writes the author of *Ecce Homo*. The period of adolescence, the period at the opening of independent life, the period when love is seeking sustenance, the period when the larger consciousness of the race and of the claims of the future begins to stir within the mind, is pre-eminently the period when

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there may be kindled a flaming zeal for some noble cause, an intense longing to serve in the army of the sons of God.

Now of all the arts devised by man the two which appeal most directly to the emotions are music and the drama. These arts belong pre-eminently to the age of adolescence. With great actors the first success tends to occur between the ages of sixteen and twenty. It is well known that exceptional musical talent makes itself manifest at a very early age; in nearly all recorded cases it is clearly recognized before the age of sixteen. Love of music often rises to a passion as children enter their teens, and according to one investigator culminates at about the age of fifteen. The socializing force of both these arts is well known, and they should naturally play a much greater part in the religious education of the adolescent than has been for many years the custom in this country. We should not allow these loves of youth to be prostituted to ignoble ends; we should use them as cement for creating a complex unity out of isolated individuals; by their potent aid we should purify the emotions and lift up the soul.

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Love of Nature. An intense love of nature often characterizes the adolescent. Proof of this is to be found all through our literature. The true spirit of adolescence breathes in Wordsworth's well-known lines:

"The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye."

At the age of fourteen Barbellion wrote in his Journal that the study of nature "is a pastime of sheer delight, with naught but beautiful dreams and lovely thoughts, where we are urged forward by the fact that we are in God's world which He made for us to be our comfort in time of trouble. . . . Language cannot express the joy and happy forgetfulness during a ramble in the country. I do not mean that all the ins and outs and exact knowledge of a naturalist are necessary to produce such delight, but merely the common objects—Sun, Thrush, Grasshopper, Primrose, and Dew."

It is a sad thing that close contact with

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nature is impossible for so many of our city boys and girls. Strangers in this world must they be who have never felt the wind on the heath or heard the voice of thunder mid the mountains.

In this matter the plight of the girls is worse than that of the boys. The boy has much more independence—much more time at his own disposal. Custom, household duties and domestic ties bid the girl repress the spring-fret in her blood, and turn a deaf ear to the call of the wild. Yet how is it possible for the child who has known only the city street to understand the words. “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help” ? or how can the child whose only stream is the turbid gutter, realize the sentiment of him who sang, “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God” ?

I think it is Wordsworth who somewhere speaks of “the impressive discipline of fear.” But the fear he has in mind is not the fear of the petty tyrant or the blustering bully. Such fear can never do anything but harm to the sensitive soul of the child. It is the fear we experience when we measure ourselves against the might and majesty of

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nature. It is the fear which is an element in awe, the fear which is never far from us when we feel ourselves in the presence of the sublime.

Nature and solitude call forth in man the distinctively religious emotions. Especially is this the case with the adolescent whose being attunes itself to nature's every mood. Just as in the history of the race, religion has drawn much of its vitality from nature worship, so in the individual, as we see in the extract quoted from Barbellion, the love of nature is inextricably intertwined with the love of God.

Now in all that I have said so far I have made no attempt to give any definition of Religion. It might be the part of prudence not to attempt to rectify this omission; for the definition of such a word is admittedly difficult, and perhaps no definition that has yet been thought of will satisfy every one.

Tylor in his *Primitive Culture* says that the minimum meaning of the term is a belief in spiritual beings. Matthew Arnold in *Literature and Dogma* says: "Religion, if we follow the intention of human thought and human language in the use of the word, is ethics heightened, enkindled, and lit up with

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feeling; the passage from morality to religion is made when to morality is applied emotion."

The writer of the epistle of James gives us a third view in his beautiful words: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Here the emphasis is neither upon belief nor upon emotion but upon works, a view stressed also by Latimer when he says, "For religion, pure religion, I say, standeth not in wearing of a monk's cowl, but in righteousness, justice and well doing."

Our conception of religion would probably include all the ideas embodied in the sentences I have just quoted. Religion implies to us a certain belief, a belief in the existence of a spiritual being or beings distinct from man, or, if we admit as some of us do that an atheist may be a truly religious man, at least a belief in spiritual values, a belief in the triumph of good over evil; this belief is not merely an intellectual conviction, it is held with emotion, it is a living sentient part of our deepest self, and finally it expresses itself in our lives, overflows into

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our lives in deeds of kindness and love for others.

The religion of the adolescent is different. It does not express itself in works. Not always is Tylor's minimum present. Doubt and even avowed disbelief often characterize the adolescent. But there is interest. There is emotion. To the adolescent the question whether there is or is not a God is a question of profound importance. To such a one there often comes a share of the experience of the mystic—an experience more convincing than any amount of argument, a direct awareness of the presence of God, a knowledge that is no more to be questioned than the knowledge we have of the presence of any of our human friends.

The account of one such experience taken from a recently published book I will quote:

“A greater Faith seemed to me the remedy for all the world's evils, a faith that saw right through Death and grasped at a substance beyond. Good and Evil, I felt, were originally companions, and had been too long sundered by misunderstanding. But how to explain my conviction passed my comprehension. I was full of increasing certainty that Something which we call God

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and personate to ourselves in the likeness of a Father, was abroad in the world, very much alive—at times almost tangible—and that this Being was guiding us with infinite forethought and patience, and could be aided in His work by human will. I began to be aware at times that He makes constant use of common everyday things and events as the vehicles of His meaning, talking to us, if we will only watch, and believe, at every moment of our lives, through the mouths of ordinary men and women, or in chance paragraphs in the daily newspapers, or by the actions of animals, or in the colour or motion or light of Nature. By this time, amid the clamour of war and the nervous stress and worry of a waiting life back of the front, I was well embarked in the great voyage of humanity in quest of its Father. So sure was I of His interested and constant presence that sometimes I addressed my verses to Him as if He were an earthly Father, writing alone in my room when the house was dark and quiet. . . .

“One night, full of this bright thought of the Father, I fell into a curious sort of trance. I heard the clock strike one, followed immediately, or so it seemed to me, by the

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stroke of two, and I found that what seemed to me a second had been an hour of time in which I had lain rigid in my bed, my clenched hands stretched taut above my head, my eyes closed, my mind ablaze with a light which it was utterly unable to recall.”¹

This inability to recall or describe is not uncommon. Here is another example. (Age not given.)

“Once when B. Joseph was buried in these meditations, he stood at night at the window of the sacristy, and gazed at the rising moon and stars. And a great longing seized him that he might see creation as it is in the eyes of God; so he said to the Creator: ‘Oh dear Lord, Thou Creator of all things, although so long as I remain here in Babylon, I can only see Thee dimly through a glass, yet wilt Thou give me such a knowledge of Thy creation, by which I may know and love Thee better.’ And as he stood there praying, he was suddenly raised above himself in such a wonderful manner that he could not afterwards account for it, and the Lord revealed to him the whole beauty and glory of the firmament and of every created thing, so that his longing was

¹ *Original Companions*, by I. W. Hutchison.

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fully satisfied. But afterwards, when he came to himself, the Prior could get nothing more out of him than that he had received such unspeakable rapture from his perfect knowledge of the creation, that it was beyond human understanding."¹

We are not concerned at present with the question of how far the mystic experience reveals objective truth, how far it is to be regarded as evidence of the existence and activity of God. It seems usually to come with an overwhelming sense of reality, which carries absolute conviction to the percipient. The content of the vision, if, as is sometimes the case, the revelation takes the form of a vision, corresponds with the belief or training of the seer. Thus the experience of a Catholic accords with Catholic teaching. St. Ignatius, for example, saw how the "Second and Third Person were in the Father." "My mind," he says, "is so vividly enlightened, that long courses of study; so it seemed to me, could not have taught me as much . . . I believed that I had almost nothing more to learn on the subject of the Most Blessed

¹ *Graces of Interior Prayer*, Father Poulain. Quoted from Arthur Hill, *Religion and Modern Psychology*.

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Trinity.”¹ This is not the way in which the experience comes to the Unitarian. Yet he also has his moments of ecstatic vision. Listen, for example, to this passage from James Russell Lowell:

“I had a revelation last Friday evening. I was at Mary’s, and happening to say something of the presence of spirits (of whom, I said, I was often dimly aware), Mr. Putman entered into an argument with me in spiritual matters. As I was speaking, the whole system rose up before me like a vague Destiny looming from the abyss. I never before so clearly felt the spirit of God in me and around me. The whole room seemed to me full of God. The air seemed to waver to and fro with the presence of Something, I know not what.

“I cannot tell you what this revelation was. I have not yet studied it enough. But I shall perfect it one day, and then you shall hear it and acknowledge its grandeur. It embraces all other systems.”²

The mystical experience is not limited, of course, to the period of adolescence. The famous mystics have often continued throughout life to have periods of ecstasy

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 110.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 112.

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when they are withdrawn from this world. But probably the phenomenon is far more common at adolescence, far more widely spread than at any other time of life. It must be taken account of in any attempt to portray the religion of the adolescent. And we must not omit to mark the fact that if we take the practical view of religion, if we take it that true religion is to visit the fatherless and the widowed in their affliction, that is to love and serve our fellow men, then the mystic's behaviour is often not religious but definitely irreligious.

An extraordinary example of the inhumanity which may arise out of the mystical ideal of religion is provided us by the blessed Angela of Foligno, who tells us:

“In that time and by God's will there died my mother, who was a great hindrance unto me in following the way of God; my husband died likewise, and in a short time there also died all my children. And because I had commenced to follow the aforesaid Way and had prayed God that He would rid me of them, I had great consolation of their deaths, albeit I did also feel some grief.”

With this before us we can scarcely wonder that the adolescent whose thoughts

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are turned from earthly things often shows himself blind to the duties which seem to us to lie nearest to him.

Need of Central Purpose. When matters go so far as in the cases referred to, specially adapted help is necessary. But as a general rule we may safely take for granted that the character of every adolescent is in need of the integration which is brought about by whole-hearted devotion to a great ideal. Each one has grown up with a multitude of interests, a multitude of desires which are to a considerable extent incompatible with one another. Unless he can subdue all to the service of some central purpose, he will forever feel himself thwarted, unsatisfied, at war with himself.

Such a central purpose must obviously be one which can be embraced by all. Your achievement of it must not in any way hinder mine. It must be of such a nature that each member of society should by working towards it, help on its attainment by others.

Now, so far as I know there is only one ideal which fulfils this condition. It may be expressed as "the brotherhood of man"; or in the words "Thou shalt love the Lord

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thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself."

The great exemplar is of course Christ; and to the adolescent the life of Christ (when rightly taught) makes a tremendous appeal. The burden and the mystery of all this unintelligible world is just beginning to become heavy upon him, and the sacrifice of self seems a small thing in comparison with the redemption of humanity.

The danger point here is that anything the youth *can* do seems petty in comparison with what he would do. And the possibility of finding satisfaction in the world of imagination instead of the world of actuality must by no means be forgotten.

Once more then we have to emphasize the importance of work and responsibility. Youth craves opportunity for service, and it is one of the most important functions of the church to provide this opportunity. The work must be adapted to the worker, and must be by him identified with himself. It must not be forced on him by external authority. And it is of great importance that it should be carried on successfully. The support which comes from the approval

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of others is necessary to the adolescent. However bold a front he may put on, he has as yet little strength within himself.

Finally in planning our work with adolescents we must not forget that the social tendencies which are so strong at this age demand satisfaction. They express themselves spontaneously in the formation of gangs and cliques. The success of the Boy Scout and the Girl Guide movement is largely due to the scope given to these tendencies. No one who deals with youth can afford to disregard them.

“The congregating temper that pervades
Our unripe years, not wasted, should be taught
To minister to works of high attempt—
Works which the enthusiast would perform with
love.”

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