

## *Editorial*

In periods of drastic social change, religions also change. An established religious tradition, which may have given clear meaning in a previous state of society, may at a later date become inadequate to make sense. At that time, the traditional religion comes under strong criticism, both from within and from without, by men we sometimes call prophets or reformers. The more radical the changes, the more it seems as though the older religion were about to fade away, and the death of its gods may be proclaimed along with the forthcoming demise of the establishment.

But history thus far bears witness to the phoenix-like rise of a reformed religion out of the ashes of the old. The central treasure or heart message remains, although cleansed of some of its impurities.

In such times of transition, many reformers become overstimulated with the need for change and are tempted to throw out the precious baby with the dirty water of its bath. The extreme reforms in Christendom, such as communism, have indeed been so tempted. But, as Erik Erikson notes in his *Young Man Luther, a Study in Psychoanalysis and History*, healthy life for individuals and societies of individuals is "a most complex achievement." "Only in ill health does one realize the intricacy of the body; and only in a crisis, individual or historical, does it become obvious what a sensitive combination of interrelated factors the human personality is—a combination of capacities created in the distant past and of opportunities divined in the present; a combination of totally unconscious preconditions developed in individual growth and of social conditions created and recreated in the precarious interplay of generations."

It is dangerous to make oversimplifications on the basis of new fragments of knowledge as to what really are the conditions of life. Before we smash up the traditional models of human destiny on the basis of some superficial discrepancies with new information, we should look at them again and again with great care and make further efforts to understand them so that we may more clearly distinguish the baby from the dirt. Evolutionary theory has made quite clear that all life builds

on the existing establishment of previous life. In the various species and phyla there seem to be no cases of advancement by discarding completely the old patterns and starting from scratch to produce a higher pattern of life. The same rule seems to apply very largely in human social and psychological development. To the extent this is true, then the more thorough the destruction of the present underlying pattern of life, the more likely is the death of that whole system of life.

Yet reform is required. How do we destroy or get rid of only the dirt and leave the baby alive? Religious reformation to a higher form, like all reformations of biological and cultural structures, requires a delicate balance between conservation of what is vital—which, like the iceberg's bulk, is much larger than meets the unsophisticated eye—and some relatively small and carefully selected additions.

Yes, reform is demanded. In the long history of life on earth, the changes of the environing circumstances require new adaptations of the living system. Thus, changes in the conditions of human society require reformed religious interpretations. The greater the changes, the greater the reform. And the twentieth century marks the period of the greatest changes in the circumstances of human life in many millennia.

In the present as well as in the past, the process of reform relies on the revelations of new vision that are given to men from sources of which they at best are only partially aware. Some think of such a source as the "Zeitgeist" of the historical crisis, others as the "unconscious," and others as "God." The twentieth-century crisis, however, arises in a period when in some fields the new revelations and inventions are more and more informed at a conscious level by the newer and more powerful models or pictures of man and the world produced by the sciences. The question of *Zygon* is how far we can go in reforming our religious ideas by new visions in the light of these scientific models.

In this issue we present seven more papers wrestling with this problem, all dealing primarily with the Judeo-Christian tradition. They are quite variable, representing views of two theologians, two philosophers, and three scientists. While they all argue for some already existing correspondence or some further capacity for integration between the Judeo-Christian tradition and the sciences, they do so in very different ways. Different readers will undoubtedly find different points for exultation or criticism. But most should find some new, surprising, and even exciting perspectives of the landscape as we attempt to climb a mountain above and ahead of the plain of the establishment to see where the historical caravan of religion might find a pass through the barrier ridges raised in its path by the expansion of knowledge of the

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sciences and of other religions. To some, perhaps, it may become more apparent that there is the possibility of the ascent of the wagon train to a higher and richer plateau beyond the present barriers, or that the barriers are not really so formidable as they have appeared. At the same time, most of us will find from perusing these papers that it is either dangerous or spurious to move on the basis of oversimplified views of either religion or science.

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