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*WHAT I BELIEVE.**

BY HUGH O. PENTECOST.

I have entitled this address "What I Believe" because I wish it to have no savor of dogmatism. I do not say that the positions I shall take are true. I merely say that with my present knowledge they seem to me to be true. You will accept them only for what they are worth. This address is my creed in regard to a few important particulars at the present time. A year ago it would not have been the same. A year hence it may not be the same. I indulge myself in the liberty of changing my creed as often as I think the truth requires it. My creed, however, is worth nothing to you, except as it may assist you in the formulation of your own. A creed is a dangerous thing unless one thinks it out and formulates it for one's self. I do not, therefore, hold that what I am about to say is what it would be well for you to believe, unless you think it out for yourself. I merely announce it as what I believe, to be taken by you only for what it is worth to you.

*The character of this address is to be explained by its being the last of a nine months' series.

First, then—

I believe there is no God.

This is rather an indefinite article of belief, for almost every one attaches a different meaning to the word God. I will try, however, to make my meaning as clear as possible. I believe there is no Supreme Person who created and sustains all that is independently of it, and who is in personal relations to human beings, hearing and answering prayer. I believe thus for the reason that no such being has been scientifically discovered, and for the reason that all the facts known to science appear to disprove the existence of such a being. It seems to be clear that the universe never was created and that sequences in the movements of matter are never affected by prayer. It also seems to be clear that the existence of such a being as I have described is an intellectual absurdity. If he exists, we are bound to hold that he is infinite, but an infinite being excludes the possibility of the existence of anything but himself. The existence, therefore, of a clod of dirt or a human personality in the same universe with an infinite person is an intellectual absurdity. We are bound, then, to believe either that we ourselves do not exist or that the orthodox God does not. I presume that no one capable of consecutive thought believes in the existence of an infinite person apart from and independent of the universe.

It is the fashion, however, among some persons to define the word God so as to attempt to escape this difficulty. They do not separate God from the universe, but identify him with all that is, asserting that God is the intelligence, will, purpose, life, or what not of the universe. This is a decided begging of the question. It is the inventing of an arbitrary definition of the word God, but the existence of this strange being who has no separate identity, who is nothing and nobody in

particular, and everything and everybody in general, who can do nothing for himself nor any one else, who is both helpless and useless, who sees without eyes, hears without ears, speaks without vocal organs, feels without nerves, and thinks without a brain, who is conscious with nothing outside of himself to be conscious of, who is invisible and yet always in sight, nowhere and yet everywhere, imponderable and yet solid, unknowable and yet well-known, incapable of definition and yet understood, who is, in short, the exact opposite of what he is, can nevertheless be scientifically denied, on the ground that he, or it, also is intellectually impossible, or, at the very least, incapable of proof.

I may, therefore, say that I believe the existence of God, no matter how the word is defined, can either be disproved or not proved, or else that the word God means nothing that is not covered by the word universe, and is, therefore, not only a useless word, but one which confuses the mind by reason of its long association with injurious superstitions, and, for this reason, should not be used by persons who do not believe in the old fashioned, imaginary, man-like God.

I am not an Agnostic. I am not satisfied to say that I do not know whether there is a God or not. I hold that we know that there is no God just as positively as we know that other things do not exist which can be scientifically disproved, or which can by no possibility be scientifically proved. There is no possible way of our knowing anything except scientifically and in that way God cannot be discovered, nay, his existence can be disproved, not absolutely but as completely as any assumption can be disproved.

I do not claim that we know the secret of the processes of the universe, but we do know, relatively, that the word God as commonly, and for the most part exceptionally, employed, does not correspond to any fact

or facts. Moreover such expressions as "laws of nature," "cause and effect," "force," and the like, in their strict meaning, do not correspond to the known facts of the universe. So far as we know there are no "laws of nature," no "causes," no "effects," and no "force." There are certain phenomena which we call matter and motion. Beyond this we know, and, for the present, can know nothing. Nor is it conceivable that man will ever discover anything but matter in motion.

Concerning the universe, then, this is my creed: I believe in matter in motion. I know, as well as I can know anything, that matter exists and that it is in motion. Beyond this I know nothing, and choose to have no positive beliefs. And in this particular no one knows any more than I do, but many persons more intelligent than I am have beliefs, which, while they are sincere, are, after all, only beliefs.

This statement is made in the full consciousness of my insignificance in the scientific and metaphysical world, but despite that insignificance, until I find someone who can demonstrate the existence of something besides matter in motion I shall probably not change it.

It follows from what has been said that—

I believe there are no Devil, no demons, no angels, no conscious personal existence after death, no such places or conditions as heaven or hell, and that the Bible, like all other books, is a purely human production.

My religious creed may be sufficiently complete by adding that—

I believe the Church is an entirely imaginary institution.

The word church, except as applied to a building, is intended to mean something which does not exist. Certain priests or other clergymen, together, sometimes, with certain laymen, and after the manner of the politicians—that is, with much caucusing, and pipe-laying, and wirepulling—do certain things intended

to affect the beliefs and actions of the people at large. If it were generally understood that what these religious politicians do is merely the action of certain individuals like ourselves, it would have very little effect on the people at large. But it is given out that what these religious politicians do is the action of the Church, and the Church is supposed to be a something-or-other established by God and surcharged with the Holy Ghost, whatever that may be. This supposition powerfully appeals to men's superstitious instincts, and they bow with reverence before and often abjectly submit to the Church, when they would care little or nothing, perhaps, for the opinions or behests of a number of mere human individuals. But the Church has no veritable existence. It exists only in the imagination. It is merely a word adroitly used for the purpose of bringing people into subjection who would not submit to a number of individuals like themselves, who choose to call themselves Fathers, or Reverends, or Bishops, or Popes, and who dress themselves in more or less outlandish garments.

It is a fact that these two words, God and Church, which stand for two purely imaginary existences, have more influence over the thought and conduct of men than any other power in the world, except one other similar word, of which I shall speak presently. And it is plain to me that if all people could understand that these words mean nothing, that there is no God and no Church, a load of ignorance and superstition would be lifted off human brains, which would enable human beings to be happier than they are now.

As to my political creed—

I believe there is no State.

The State, like God and the Church, is a wholly imaginary thing. It is merely an idea. When Louis XIV said, "The State—I am the State" he, accidentally, no

doubt, and certainly very unwisely, blurted out the truth. There are certain politicians in every country who get their living by ruling the people. They are the State. But if this were generally understood they would have no power, and so the idea of the State was invented to appeal to the superstition called patriotism, and so profoundly has this superstition imbedded itself in human brains that under the spell of it men will pay, and fight, and die at the call of their rulers who would otherwise do neither, and when one of our neighbors puts on a uniform and assumes a title he ceases to be merely a mortal man, but becomes surrounded with a halo which transforms his thefts, his brutalities, his killings into shining virtues.

Religious superstition is injurious enough, but this political superstition is worse. We are getting over our religious superstitions to some extent, but the political superstition has hardly begun to decay. Among my acquaintances, personal and by reputation, I know of thousands who are free from all taint of religious superstitions, but even among these there is hardly one who does not believe in the State. Multitudes have cast off their allegiance to the Church, and can no longer be mesmerized by stained glass windows, or priestly gowns, or burning tapers, or holy books, but these same multitudes can have their reason dethroned by the sound of a national hymn, or the sight of a national flag, and are ready to uncover their heads in the presence of certain persons who represent the great political myth. And yet if these persons would but dare to hunt for the State as carefully as they hunted for God and the Church they would find it equally hard to discover.

I have said this political superstition is more injurious than religious superstitions. It is so because it takes bread and butter away from the many and gives

wealth to the few. Let me explain what I mean.

One reason why so many people are poor is because they cannot get at the earth, from which all wealth comes. They cannot get at the earth because what of it is not already in use is exclusively held under paper titles which would not be respected for a moment, if it were not that they are under the seal of the mythical State. Any sane person must know that no one need ever be in want if all persons who so wished were at liberty to apply their labor to land not already in use, and yet nothing but a myth stands between the half-starved millions and the plenty which the land would yield. Adam and Eve, it is said, were shut out of Paradise by an angel. The struggling, seething, hungry millions of the world are kept off the teeming earth by a mere ghost, a fairy, a thing of the imagination—the State, which does not exist.

Another reason why people are poor, and it is quite as important as the one just given, is because there is not money enough in circulation. And why is there so little money? Simply because the people have been made to believe that nothing is money but metal or paper which has on it the stamp of the State. Anything might serve the purposes of money which one man could get another to take in exchange for goods, but the deluded people are made to believe that nothing is money unless the great political ghost has breathed into it something which it did not before possess. I know of no better illustration of this than one which I have used before. Here are a bit of bread and cup of wine—nothing more. A priest mumbles over them. What are they now? The body and blood of Christ, before which the whole congregation bow. Here is a bit of metal worth seventy-five cents, or a hundred bits worth about ten cents, or a bit of paper worth no more than a wooden toothpick. They are

stamped with certain characters by certain politicians. What are they now? Dollars. Transformed by the touch of a spook. If people could exchange their goods by using any medium they pleased, and get at vacant land, there would not be a pauper, a burglar, a prostitute, or a millionaire in the world. Why do they not do these things? They are afraid of the State, a thing which exists only in the imagination.

Why do certain men and women live under the same roof in misery who would be happier apart, and others live under different roofs in misery who would be happier together? Because people believe that the State can make one woman virtuous and another unchaste when both do precisely the same thing.

There is not a misery growing out of the social relations of human beings that cannot be traced into connection with the belief in the three great myths, God, the Church, and the State, and of this baleful trinity the last is the most injurious, because belief in it is the strongest, and its unhappy sequences are the most practical and direct.

I believe these three myths will have to be exploded, as other minor myths have been, before men and women will enjoy a very large measure of happiness. I am aware that many persons cannot understand how we could get on without the State, but there are also many persons who cannot understand how some of us get on without God and the Church, but we do, and are much happier without them. I suppose it seems difficult for a blind man to understand how he could walk about the streets without a cane. But he could thus get about a great deal better if his eyes were so that he could see.

Now let us consider—

How are people to escape from the thralldom of God, the Church, and the State, and thus become wealthy,

and free, and happy? Do you suppose they can do it by some scheme of politics or political economy, or by overthrowing one form of Government only to set up another? Do you suppose the ills of society can ever be cured by merely organizing the laborers against the capitalists, while nine tenths of the laborers are believers in the myths which alone give the capitalists their power? I tell you no. The only strikes and boycotts that will ever help the laborers will be to strike against the priests and boycott the politicians who are behind the monopolists. Do you suppose that the new political party, the People's Party, will ever set the people free, when every session of the convention that gave that party birth was opened with prayer to one of the great injurious myths, and every member of that party is ready to cater to another of the great injurious myths, and swear devotion to the last and greatest of the three? I tell you no. One political party is very much like, and in the end is no better than, another. Do you suppose that Henry George's proposed Single-tax would cure the complicated disease of civilization? I tell you no. Part of the social disease is taxation, and, therefore, it cannot be cured by taxation, unless, indeed, the hair of the dog will cure his bite. Do you suppose that Socialism or Nationalism will remedy the ills of life? I tell you no. The Socialism or Nationalism that we now have is part of the trouble that we consciously or unconsciously wish to escape. Do you suppose that bloody revolution can do any happy thing for us? I tell you no. What would it do? Only what it always has done. It would turn out one set of tyrants and turn in another and possibly more dreadful set, leaving the people as superstitious as it found them.

Mark you. The people are suffering from nothing but their own bad ideas. Their sufferings will only be over when they get over their bad ideas. Their re-

ligious ideas have saddled them with a priestly aristocracy who prey upon them and ride on their backs. Their political ideas have saddled them with an office-holding and rent-taking, interest-taking, profit-taking aristocracy who skin them alive, starve, imprison, and kill them. Their moral ideas have saddled them with a Pharisaic aristocracy who turn them into hypocrites or cover them with odium. Hence we have a world in which the shrewd, the avaricious, and the unctuous are on top, and the industrious, the honest, the frank, the generous, the unconventional are at the bottom, fleeced, trampled upon, discouraged, and too often despairing.

The only way in which this can ever be changed is by the slow growth of right ideas. The world is ruled by ideas, not by armies. It is as it is because the people think as they do. It will only change as ideas change, and ideas change slowly. A cocoa nut is not as difficult to pierce with a pin as the average human skull with an idea. The more correct the idea the more difficult it is to get it into the average human brain. A man will believe a hundred lies sooner than one truth. This is why the priest and the politician have such a walk over. But right ideas do finally get themselves accepted, and in this fact is the hope of the world. Evolution is slow but it is sure. There is no use in being impatient. Little by little, line upon line, and precept upon precept, the people are learning the truth. Reformers are helping a little, but more than all else the very injuries tend to abolish themselves. God is so silent and so useless that by and by the people will conclude that if he ever lived he is now dead. The Church is so shameless and corrupt that it is doing more than all the Infidels against it to abolish itself. The State is so bold in its support of the moneyed class against the poor, so rotten in its

methods, so bloody-handed, that Anarchists need do nothing but stand by and see it fall by its own weight. Meantime the best that we can do is to be as free as possible from all superstitions, and live as much as possible as if there were no God, no Church, and no State, trying to be as happy as possible, by which I mean as useful as possible, under the circumstances.

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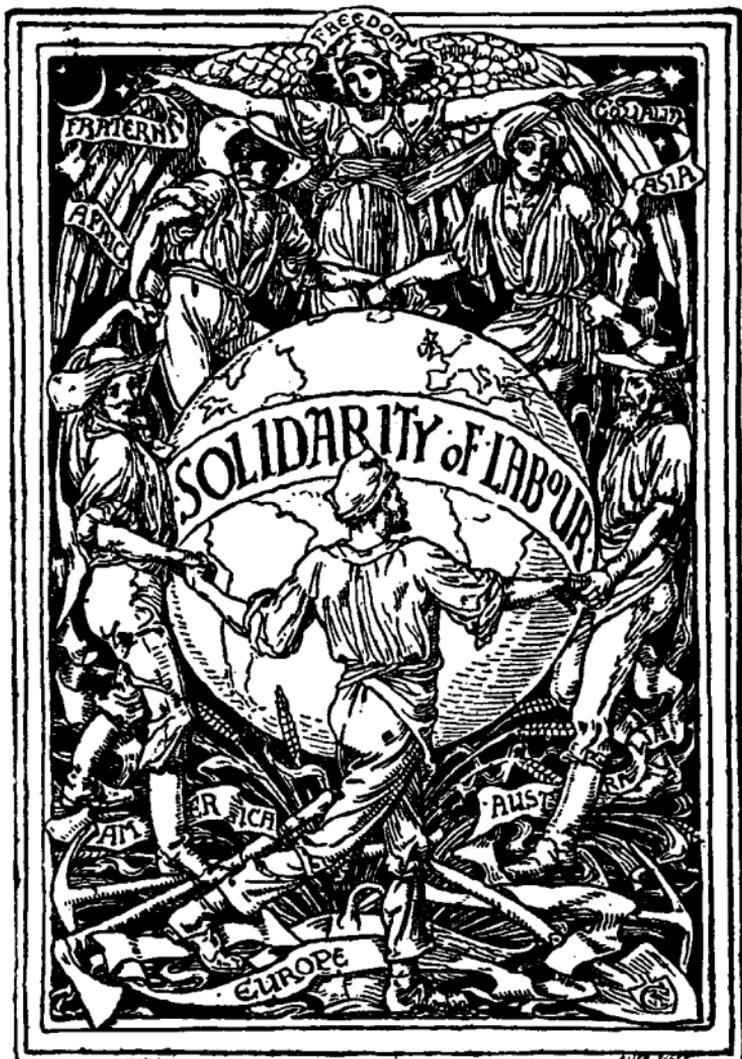
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