

Behold: A Man

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We have a strange way of turning things upside down, and making ourselves believe that the institutions which man has made are the institutions that have made him. Into what-so-ever part of society one may dip, he will find always what man has done in the past is held as a club over him to make him submit to non-creative imitation. Man in the past has learned that to him a certain interpretation of life seems good. Behold another man comes along with different experience and thinks differently, and he is an anathema. One generation makes a constitution and the next says that it is the foundation upon which all society rests. Creeds are formed, and belief in them is declared to be the only way of salvation. But after all has been said and done along this line of conformity making efforts, along comes the free spirit of man, and declares that the truth of these affirmations of finality are doubtful, nay more than doubtful, they are positively and dangerously false. Thus, it happens that the pursuit of doubt, deep and fundamental doubt is in reality the pathway to truth and life and the infinite. Just at the present time all the religious organizations of the Christian world are torn between conflicting demands of old-time ideas and modern ideas. There are murmurings of schisms and splits, church unity, and irrepressible conflicts. In the background of all this is the failure to distinguish between the essential faith of man that interpreted its convictions in thought forms and the thought forms themselves. Old creeds or dogmas were once vital, because they expressed the full and unreserved conviction of the men. They are no longer vital because they do not express anything except the past. They are not part the vitality of today. The institutions which still hold them exist, not because of them, but in spite of them. Old religious doctrines, like the miracles, belief in the resurrection, belief in the divine conception

and miraculous birth were once vital expressions of deep rooted convictions. But today they are held apologetically, and the institutions that hold them are able to carry them in our times simply on the momentum of the past. They are dead baggage today, upon which the institutions pay excess rates of spiritual vitality for the sake of carrying them. Another illustration of the same fact is seen in some of the old rules of discipline which were once vital, and adhered to, but now become obsolete except as matter for closet disputation. Dancing, card playing; and going to the theatre were once tabooed in many religious organizations, and the grounds for same more or less just at the time. But these matters of discipline are not enforced simply because they have no vital meaning today. In precisely the same way the dogmatics which still haunt the attics of ecclesiastical houses are no longer vital, no longer belong to the vigorous thought, no longer express the purposes of our times.

What is the meaning of all this? Simply as you trace these forms, dogmas, doctrines, and cults back to their source, you will always find them the product of the mind of man reflecting upon his experiences, and knowledge. Back of literature, back of the church, back of the state, back of creeds, back of art is the mind of man. All these are the product of his handiwork directed by his teeming, dreaming faith-filled mind, in which the divine life flows and forever creates.

What, then, is to be done in such times as ours when the questioning, doubting, evolving spirit of man has developed so that the old forms which man once made no longer satisfy his hungry spirit? Simply this, leave the shores of things, of creeds, of constitutions, of dogmas and traditions and put out into the deeper water where the fresh creative mind of man is working, out where there are new thoughts, new hopes, where men are casting behind them all conformity and are acquainting themselves at first hand with the Deity. Why spend our time and energy in bolstering up obsolete thought, obsolete dogma? It is of no avail. The time often comes and it has come now, when we must let the dead past bury its dead. From the elemental facts of life as we find them, inclusive facts of human life human experience we must build anew upon the foundations which modern life has

laid. Whatever there may be in the old that is worthwhile will be preserved, by virtue of its own worth. The conservation of historical forms is not the same thing as the maintaining the continuity of history. The continuity of history takes care of itself. The value and the worth of living is measured directly by its allegiance to the future, in which it sees the realization of the values of life resulting from the efforts of its indomitable will. God is much more the unborn future than he is the sealed past. What is shall become what ought to be, since life is life.