

Culture and Religion

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Matthew Arnold was a deeply religious man; his training as a child insured that, but in his essay, "Culture and Anarchy," shallow reading might lead to the false assumption that he had little faith in religion. More intensive study, however, makes his underlying faith apparent. True, he found fault with religious organizations which were so self-satisfied because they preached the subduing of animalities that they lost sight of the goal of real religion, a way of life striving for the brotherhood of man.

He compares religion with culture, saying that both religion (not religious organizations), and culture seek the same achievement. He first advances the argument that culture is the study of perfection; then he states that religion is man's noblest effort made to date in the attempt to reach perfection. Thus he shows the basic similarity between culture and religion.

In seeking perfection one must know of what it consists, and then, Arnold states, make it prevail. He draws a corollary between the conditions in which culture and religion exist; that they are both internal conditions as distinguished from our animality. Mr. Arnold quotes, "The kingdom of God is within you," then he points out that culture, through its attempts in the fields of perfection, art science, poetry, philosophy, history and religion reaches the same conclusion — the conclusion that growth and perfection are achieved within

the heart of humanity.

He lists another similarity by showing that neither culture nor true religion is ever satisfied with the degree of perfection it has attained thus far. With both there is a continuous expansion and growth in power, wisdom and beauty; there is not a satisfaction in "having and resting," but in growing and becoming."

As his last point of comparison between culture and religion, he says that the obligation of both is identical. His preface to this conclusion asserts that perfection cannot be attained while the individual remains isolated because men are all part of a large scheme. As a part of this great whole, one member cannot be indifferent to the rest. If we follow any form of isolationism we lose sight of the idea of culture and religion, that a perfect welfare is achieved only by a general expansion. To show the real obligation of culture and religion he quotes Bishop Wilson, who said "to promote the kingdom of God is to increase and hasten one's own happiness."

Yes, Matthew Arnold's conclusion is to make perfection prevail, "to promote the kingdom of God." How then can we assume, though he had the insight to see the imperfections of some religious organizations, that he was not a devout man? Obviously we cannot. He was keenly interested in knowing the truth, seeking sweetness and light or beauty and intelligence, and making the "kingdom of God" a reality.