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Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Hallowell, John H. on his religion r04a03-19-000-0108 **Contents** Image 1 Index <u>About</u>

DANIEL F. HARKINS

JOHN H. HALLOWELL

T HAS sometimes been said that there is no such thing as an intellectual conversion to Christianity. Yet as I look back upon my own "conversion" it appears, at least at first, to have been largely motivated by intellectual considerations. I hesitate to use the word conversion to describe my own experience, for my return to Christianity was marked by no dramatic incidents and, as I am coming more and more to recognize, the process of conversion is a matter at least of a lifetime. There is no precise time, moreover, to which I can point and say, "At that time I was converted." My return to Christianity was the result of a long maturing conviction that Christianity explained the meaning of life

better than any rival religion or philosophy. I was baptized in the Church of the New Jerusalem, the Church to which my parents belonged and which was founded upon the teachings of Emmanuel Swedenborg. I attended Sunday School there until I was of high school age, when I lost interest. My father was not a regular churchage, when host interest my latter was not a regular church-goer but he was a man of strong religious faith. Both his faith in the ultimate goodness and sovereignty of God and that of my grandmother made a strong impression upon me as a child. Although confined to her room by physical in-firmities, my grandmother never complained of her lot but waited with patient screnity for the death that would release her from the vicissitudes of old age. The Bible was her con-stant companion and although she never forced it upon me, she frequently talked to me of the faith which it inspired. It was in the 1930's that I went away to college (Harvard) and like many college students then and now I drifted further

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and further away from Christianity. I had long since ceased going to church with any regularity and since few of my friends in college ever went to church I did not go either. The intellectual atmosphere in the classrooms was exciting and, as I felt then, liberating. As my intellectual horizons widened and as I became more and more sophisticated, I became more and more impatient with religion in any form. Impatient, perhaps, is not quite the right word, for the truth of the mat-ter is that I gave very little attention to it. And since religion,

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ter is that I gave very little attention to it. And since religion, for the most part, was ignored in the classroom, I had no occasion to think seriously about it. I gathered from my history courses that the Middle Ages were notable principally for the prevalence of superstition and intolerance. The Church was mentioned as figuring provident in political intrinsic at an obtained by the superstition of t prominently in political intrigues, as an obstinate barrier to intellectual enlightenment, and as a stronghold of hypocrisy. My own reading of history had led me to similar conclusions and the classroom only served to confirm with greater intel-lectual authority conclusions which I had arrived at independently. From my psychology courses I acquired a completely new vocabulary that enabled me to explain my own and my friends' behavior with an ingenuity and seem-ing profundity that was the mark of an "educated" man. I could at last put away my childish beliefs and face up with the language of the most sophisticated of my contempo-raries to the "realities" of human existence. I learned that raries to the "realities" of human existence. I learned that man was simply a complex animal organism and that the observation of the behavior of rats in a maze was contribut-ing important new knowledge about the behavior of man. From the history of philosophy I acquired a general skepti-cism about the possibility of knowing the truth about any-thing. My professor in this course was a genial skeptic whose intellectual gymnastics were a joy to observe. The first

Names:

Hallowell, John H. Harkins, Daniel F.

Types:

booklet

Swedenborg, Emmanuel

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half hour he would do his utmost to defend the position of the philosopher under consideration and the second half hour would be devoted to an equally brilliant demolition. Each lecture would close with slightly perceptible raised eyebrows and a smile of intellectual triumph. The course started with Plato (who impressed me greatly), skipped, of course, the backward Middle Ages, to confront us with the redoubtable Descartes, and continued to what was presumably the most enlightened of all philosophical systems— American pragmatism. But my genial professor, a true skeptic to the last, closed the course, as he began it, with a quizzical skill, I also came away with a sense of the intellectual futility of seeking answers to the most basic questions.

It was not until my senior year when I encountered the equally brilliant but more constructive mind of Professor Alfred North Whitehead that the philosophical quest for ruth appeared once again as a valid and exciting pursuit. As I listened to him lecture in the benign manner that was so characteristic of the man, I cannot say that I understood a great deal of what he was saying, but I had the impression that I was listening to philosophical discourse in the manner in which Plato had carried it on with the students in his academy. Here was a genuine quest for truth that shunned intellectual pyrotechnics in patient submission to the ultimate mystery that lies behind all questions and all answers. Where one professor had closed his course on a note of intellectual triumph after demolishing every philosophical system attempted by man, Professor Whitehead left us not with a sense of futility but with a sense of awe. It was also towards the end of my college career that I

first came to appreciate the contribution which the Middle Ages had made to Western political theory and institutions. JOHN H. HALLOWELL

I was concentrating then on the study of government, and through lectures and contacts with Professors Elliott, Holcombe, and Mcllwain I was brought to a new appreciation of the importance of the Middle Ages for the development of Western political institutions. Under their guidance I developed a strong intellectual interest in the relationship between ethics and politics, an interest I have pursued ever since. But I was a long way from Christianity and organized religion. I knew something about the political philosophy of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas but I knew little or nothing about their theology and cared less.

nothing about their theology and cared ress. Like many of my contemporaries and some of my professors I had reached the conclusion that Christianity was a childish myth and that no intellectually respectable adult could possibly subscribe to its doctrines. Except for the writings of Swedenborg, however, I had never read any Christian theology, although I was familiar with the writings of many critics of Christianity. I knew nothing about orthodox Christianity except a few Bible stories I had learned in Sunday School, and these had no relevance to anything that I had studied in college or to the studies I wanted to pursue afterwards.

Four years of graduate study in the field of political science left me little time or inclination to think about religion. I was busy preparing for a professional career as a college teacher and all my intellectual energies were absorbed in technical studies. But the existence of Fascism in Italy and of National Socialism in Germany did trouble the liberal conscience with which I had emerged from college. For, like most of my contemporaries in the 1930's, I was a liberal ready to crusade for every liberal cause and impatient to bring about the social utopia that would right the wrongs

Names:

Elliott, Professor Hallowell, John H.

Types:

booklet

Holcombe, Prof. McIIwain, Prof. Whitehead, Alfred North

Canterbury Pilgrims

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About

20 MODERN CANTERBURY PILGRIMS that temporarily plagued the world. But tyranny, once only a word encountered in history books, was rapidly becoming a reality in Russia, Germany, and Italy. What could explain the decline of liberalism and the rise

of totalitarian dictatorships? Why was liberalism everywhere on the defensive? It was easy to say that Russia, Germany, and Italy never had any liberalism to decline or that the rise of tyranny in these countries was simply a reflection of the peculiar national characteristics of the people or of their history, but these answers did not satisfy me. I had spent a year in Germany and the people did not seem to me to be essentially more brutal than Americans. Indeed, many of them seemed to be as much victims of the Nazi system as propagators of it. I discovered, too, that Germany had had a liberal tradition which if less vigorous and politically successful than the liberal tradition in Great Britain and the United States was still in the same orbit. How was it possible for prominent German professors, judges, lawyers, and civil servants, who before 1933 were professed liberals, to accept, and in some cases even to acclaim, a despotism that repudiated everything for which liberalism stood? In an effort to answer that question I decided to write my doctoral dissertation on the decline of liberalism in Germany. I reached the conclusion that the forces which produced the Nazi dictatorship in Germany were not peculiar to Germany but that the same forces, in varying degrees, were present in every other nation of the Western world. The intellectual and spiritual crisis, I concluded, out of which totalitarianism emerged was a crisis peculiar not alone to Germany but to Western civilization.¹

¹ The Decline of Liberalism as an Ideology: With Particular Reference to erman Politicu-Legal Thought (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945).

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While I was writing the dissertation I "happened" one Sunday to attend a church service in the Princeton University Chapel. The speaker was Reinhold Niebuhr. I had not been to a church service for years and I had come out of cur-osity to hear the man who some of my friends said was an unusual preacher. He was, indeed. He discussed with great profundity and intellectual clarity problems that I had en-countered in writing about the decline of liberalism. Indeed, he seemed to have a greater grasp of the reasons for the decline of liberalism than I had. If these insights were the product of his Christianity, then Christianity was certainly relevant to what I was attempting to do. I cannot say that I immediately appropriated them as my own, but I did begin to think about Christianity in a serious way. In the course of the next few years I began for the first

time in my adulthood to read what Christians had to say about the meaning and relevance of Christianity. Somehow it had never occurred to me before to consult those persons who presumably know better what Christianity is than its who presumative row better what Constantly is than as critics. I had erroneously assumed that they would gloss over the difficulties of faith and dispense the same kind of sac-charine-sweet piety that had characterized much of the "religious" reading I had encountered in my youth. That Christianity embraced a robust faith with a formidable intellectual heritage came to me, I must confess, as a surprise. That one can remain so ignorant of such a heritage must be attributed in part to an educational system that had relegated theology many decades ago to the confines of "divinity" schools. But whatever the reason, I have had to discover theology for myself and it has proven to be the most fruiful of all my studies. It would be difficult to list here all the books that I read during this period, but among contemporary writers those who have exerted the strongest influence

Names:

Hallowell, John H.

Niebuhr, Reinhold

Types:

booklet

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upon my thinking have been C. S. Lewis, A. E. Taylor, Reinhold Niebuhr, Etienne Gilson, Emil Brunner, Jacques Maritain, and William Temple. From my reading of them I have been encouraged to turn back to the Christian classics themselves, to the writings of St. Augustine, St. Clement of Alexandria, St. Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Richard Hooker, and others. From them I have gone back to reading the Bible with a new interest and a new understanding. Much that I read was confusing and upsetting (and still is) but more and more I was convinced that Christianity, despite the paradoxes one encountered and despite the lack of agreement among the authorities, revealed the truth about life as I had encountered it nowhere else.

The lack of agreement among the authorities was disturbing, but it seemed to be more a lack of agreement as to the precise intellectual formulae in which the Christian doctrines could be expressed than a lack of agreement as to the Christian story itself. Either the Christian story as told in the Bible was a gigantic deception or it was the truth, either Christ was what He said He was and what His followers believed Him to be or He was a liar. His disciples were either in-credibly naïve or dishonest, and the evidence did not sug-gest that they were either. On the contrary, they were frequently skeptical, and when Christ lay in agony upon the Cross they deserted Him. This was not the kind of behavior one expected to find among men who were attempting to create a myth. Nor did their acts of martyrdom afterwards, acts which were to be repeated by countless disciples century after century, suggest the actions of deluded men. The weight of probable evidence seemed more and more to be on the side of the truth of Christianity. I cannot say at what precise time faith in Christ as the Son of God and Redeemer of man was given me, but I do know that it was a long maJOHN H. HALLOWELL

turing conviction. It is not yet a conviction that cannot be assailed by doubts nor is it a faith without intellectual difficultics, but it is a faith that illumines my mind and sustains my spirit as no other faith has ever done.

I was first attracted to Christianity once I was shown that it was intellectually relevant to the problems with which I was professionally concerned. The relevance which Christianity has for the understanding of politics I have tried to explain in other places. Suffice it to say here that the Christian understanding of man, particularly the Christian under-standing of man's fallen state, enables us to avoid both the unrealistic expectations of idealism and the despair of cynicism. It explains the political crisis of our times better than either liberalism or Marxism since it understands better than either the dimensions of evil and the true nature of man's self-estrangement. It illumines the crisis in which we find ourselves by focusing our attention on the ever-present judgment of God, and gives a meaning to suffering that otherwise would be intolerable. Either history is, as Christianity claims, a drama of salvation or it is a very unfunny joke. I prefer to think that it is the former. It was not long before I came to recognize that the faith

which served so well to widen and deepen my understanding of the times in which I lived had also something significant to say to me personally. The Christian doctrine of original sin, which served so much better than the liberal's equation of evil with ignorance or the Marxist's equation of evil with surplus value to explain why society was constantly threatened with disintegration, also served to explain many of my own inner conflicts. I had only to examine myself honestly to find proof for the doctrine I had once dismissed as absurd and morbid. The psychological vocabulary which I had

Names:

Brunner, Emil Calvin, Gilson, Etienne Hallowell, John H.

Types:

booklet

Hooker, Richard Lewis, C. S. Luther, Maritain, Jacques Niebuhr, Reinhold St. Augustine, St. Clement, St. Thomas Aquinas, Taylor, A. E. Temple, William

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acquired in college, though not totally worthless, had proven to be more a vocabulary than a description of reality. It was useful for labeling purposes, but the labels never quite described the reality and too often served only to obscure the root of the trouble. And in any case the feeling of frustration was not to be eased by labeling even when the label was appropriate. Feelings of anger, envy, hatred, and jealousy were constantly frustrating my better intentions and I was at war with myself. Indeed the root of the trouble was, as St. Paul once said, that I was doing the evil I would not and not doing the good that I would. For such trouble I needed the kind of help that was beyond my own power, indeed, beyond the power of any man to provide.

These considerations in addition to the responsibilities of marriage and children did much to mature my faith and to suggest that I should affiliate myself with a Church. The necessity for a definite decision came when I was forced to decide what I wanted for my children. And that inevitably involved deciding what I wanted for myself. I took my problems to the local rector of our Episcopal Church and after attending at his suggestion church services for a year both my wife and I asked to be confirmed by the Bishop.

problems to the local rector of our Episcopal Church and after attending at his suggestion church services for a year both my wife and I asked to be confirmed by the Bishop. But why the Episcopal Church? Having become convinced of the truth of Christianity I wanted to affiliate myself with a Church that preserved the orthodox teachings of Christianity, a Church where I could worship God (with sincerify) and where I could find the help that I needed. I could not return to the Church of my childhood since its teachings still seemed to me to be eccentric, where the "revelations" of Swedenborg seemed to obscure the revelation of Christ, and its sectarian exclusiveness cut it off from the main stem of the Christian tradition.

Luther,

Plato,

JOHN H. HALLOWELL 25 Of the theological reading I had done I was least attracted by the writings of Luther. They reflect an anti-intellectual bias that seems to me to do less than justice to the wisdom that has been acquired outside the Christian community. Ever since I first encountered the writings of Plato I have been impressed by the wisdom which they contain and I was delighted when I discovered that Christianity confirmed and supplemented many of his insights. But the appreciation of that wisdom which one finds among many, if not all, of the early Church fathers is not only lacking in Luther's writings but is replaced by outright hostility. A man who could write that "reason is directly opposed to faith" and that "in believers it should be killed and buried" did not speak a language that I could understand. I found Calvin's pressure and any in the notion that man's nature is so depraved that it cannot be healed even by the grace of God.

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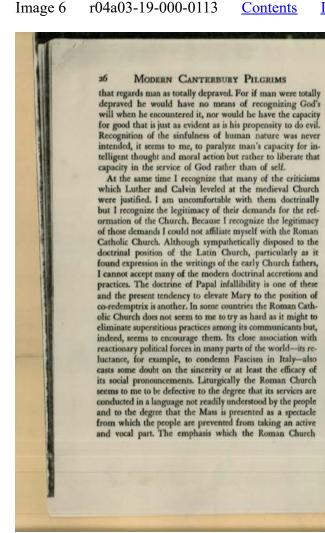
The classical Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone seems to me to be a one-sided emphasis. The idea that God merely imputes to us the righteousness of the Son, that man is utterly vile and can do nothing whatsoever to merit eternal life, does not seem to me to embrace the whole Christian message. The idea that the grace of God saves a man without transforming him seems to me to make nonsense of the idea of salvation. For what is salvation if it does not issue in a new life? With Hoxie Neale Fairchild "I prefer the more rational and inspiring view that Christian belief and Christian living, inseparably concomitant, actually remake man into a being acceptable to God."⁸ While I recognize that the image of God in man has been defaced by sin, I cannot subscribe to that particular form of Christian belief

⁸ Hoxie N. Fairchild, Toward Belief (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1935), p. 120.

Fairchild, Hoxie Neale

Types:

booklet



JOHN H. HALLOWELL. 27 places upon indulgences impresses me as presumptuous and excessively mechanical.

Where could I find a Church that preserved the Catholic tradition without the defects of Roman Catholicism? My attention was first directed to the Episcopal Church by my reading of Hoxie Neale Fairchild's *Toward Belief*. I do not remember how the book came into my hands but I am grateful that it did. His argument persuaded me that this was the Church for which I had been seeking, and experience has since confirmed it. For it seems to me that I have found in the doctrines and practices of the Anglican Communion the Catholic Church reformed.

Based upon the Bible, reason, and tradition, the doctrinal position of the Anglican Church avoids both the intellectual obscurantism of "fundamentalism" and the doctrinal laxity of "liberalism." Although it insists upon no official doctrinal interpretation it clearly affirms the Christian Faith as expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. It does not, like some Churches, hedge or equivocate on its doctrinal position, but neither does it insist that its communicants accept any particular philosophical formulation of its beliefs as official. Unlike that form of Protestantism which regards the Bible as the sole source of truth and unlike Roman Catholicism which makes the authority of the Church and ultimately that of the Pope supreme, the Anglican Church accepts three sources of authority—reason, Scripture, and tradition—which, in the words of Richard Hooker, all alike emanate from God, "each in certain matters blending and co-operating." The Anglican Church grants to all believers the free use of critical thought and speech. Because it believes that Christ is the living embodiment of the Truth, that He is the Word of

Names:

Calvin,

Types:

booklet

Fairchild, Hoxie Neale Hallowell, John H. Luther, Image 7 r04a03-19-000-0114 Contents Index About

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God made flesh, it welcomes and seeks the truth from whatever source derived and wherever it may be found. It does not look upon reason as an enemy of faith but as an ally. It does not look upon secular learning with suspicion but welcomes whatever contribution such learning can make to a genuine knowledge of reality. If it opposes the presumption of Papal and Churchly infallibility it also opposes the gnostic pretensions of that kind of Puritanism which claimed precise knowledge of God's purposes and had no difficulty in singling out God's elect on earth.⁸ It regards the Church not as a home for saints but as a haven for sinners.

The Anglican Church makes no claim to infallibility, but in a spirit of humility freely acknowledges its liability to error. That spirit is reflected in a collect which is found in the Book of Common Prayer and one which is frequently used in its services:

O Gracious Father, we humbly beseech thee for thy holy Catholic Church; that thou wouldest be pleased to fill it with all truth, in all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, establish it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it....

Although it rejects any claim to infallibility the Anglican Church does claim to be a legitimate branch of the Holy

⁴It is unavailing, Richard Hooker has said, to present Scriptural truth to unbelievers without showing them any reason why they should accept it and "even to currelves it neetedra cuttons and explication how the testimony of the Spirit may be discerned, by what means it may be known; lest mea think that the Spirit of God odo it saidy those things which the spirit of error suggestest . . . Wherefore albeit the Spirit lead us into all ruth and direct us in all goodness, yet because these workings of the Spirit to us are to privy and exercit we therefore stand on a plainer ground, when we gather by reason from the quality of things bisived or done, that the Spirit of God hath direct us in allow, thas if we settle cancelves to bisive or to do any particular thing, as being moved thereto by the Spirit."

JOHN H. HALLOWELL

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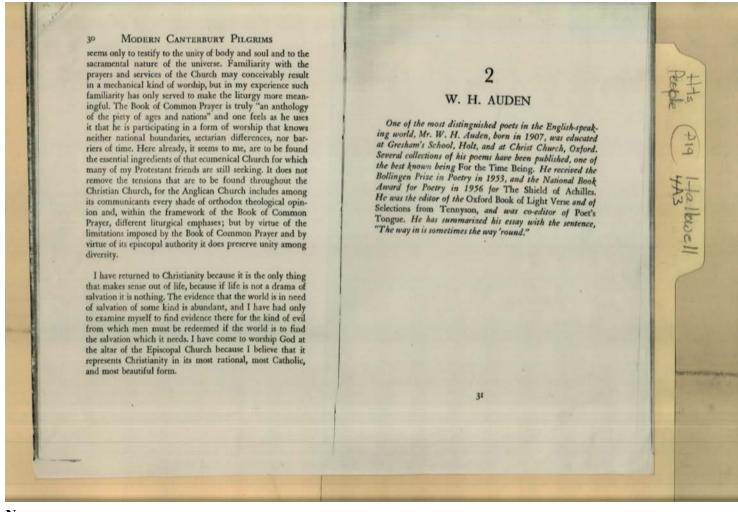
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Catholic and Apostolic Church and, though subject to human error, to be a divinely instituted channel of grace. It claims historical continuity with the primitive Church. It has maintained the apostolic succession and ordained its priesthood by the laying on of hands, upholding the historic threefold ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons. It believes that God's grace is mediated to man principally through the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, and it regards participation in Holy Communion as the distinctively Christian mode of worship. Although it rejects the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, it believes that God is actually present in the sacraments and that through the sacramental life of the Church the communicant may be infused with a power that is not his own to help him to become a new creature worthy of participation in God's eternal kingdom. The sacramental nature of the Anglican Church is what distinguishes it from many Protestant denominations and this, in my experience, is its most attractive characteristic. At the risk of sounding smug, which is far from my intention, I cannot adequately explain what the Episcopal Church has meant to me without saying that through its sacraments and its liturgy I have been brought closer to the reality of God than through any other religious experience of my life.

In part I attribute this to the sacramental nature of the Church and in part to the liturgy preserved in the Book of Common Prayer. Critics of the Anglican Church sometimes refer disparagingly to its liturgy on the grounds that it is a kind of aestheticism. That beauty should be allied with truth and goodness does not seem strange to me for, indeed, it is part of the ancient wisdom that these three should be found together. That material things should be used to testify to the glory of God, that the senses of man and his body should pay homage no less than his soul to the greatness of God,

Types: booklet

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Names:

Auden, W. H.

Types:

booklet

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Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection

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