

[1973. In *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*. Carl F.H. Henry, ed. Washington D.C.: Canon Press.]

**JAMES, WILLIAM.** See also *Pragmatism*. William James (1842-1910) popularized Pragmatism. Ideas are said to be plans for action; they become true insofar as the action is successful.

Huxley and Clifford insisted that believing anything without scientific evidence is the depth of immorality. James replied that in practical matters scientists violate this principle every day. The scientific viewpoint itself is accepted without conclusive evidence.

Furthermore, faith often makes fact. If I refuse to unbend until you have furnished me scientific evidence that you like me, you never will. But if I have faith that you like me, you will reciprocate.

Pragmatism is thus an ally of religion. Suppose God asked, Do you want to take part in a world capable of being saved only if every man does his level best, or do you prefer non-existence?

James is quick to answer: If you are healthy-minded, normally constituted, and not a coward or a morbid Buddhist, you will find such a universe exactly to your liking. Faith in a finite God and faith in your fellow man will greatly reduce the danger. And, says James, "this pluralistic and moralistic religion... is as good a religious synthesis as you are likely to find."

But, we ask, since some men have not done their level best, would it not be better to side with the forces of evil? They may seem to have a better chance of winning; and if they do, their view presumable will be the truth.

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