

RELIGION: ITS MODERN NEEDS
AND PROBLEMS . . . No. 21

**CHRISTIAN
EXPERIENCE**

BY
G. RANDALL JONES
M.A., B.Sc., B.D.

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RELIGION : ITS MODERN NEEDS AND PROBLEMS

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Each writer is responsible for the views expressed in his contribution to the series. No attempt has been made to limit freedom in the effort to impose an artificial uniformity. Yet a certain unity of outlook does make itself evident, and this is all the more valuable because unforced.

RAYMOND V. HOLT

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Among the primitive Israelites "conscience" was dominated by a feeling of group consciousness, and the sense of personal responsibility only emerged later. The doctrine of original guilt is based on the feeling of group consciousness, and this feeling still sways the thought of many people who reject the theological doctrine. Christianity combines the sense of corporate responsibility with the sense of individual responsibility, and arouses the individual conscience at the same time as it arouses the social conscience.

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We may judge man by what he is or by what he may become. Both standards of judgment have a place in the teaching of Jesus. In the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius, Augustine placed the emphasis on what man is, whilst Pelagius placed the emphasis on what man might become. What is needed is a synthesis of the rival theologies of Augustine and Pelagius. We reach such a synthesis when we have a clear view of our possibilities and our actualities. According to Christian tradition and experience, the vision of our possibilities is set before us in the life and work of Jesus.

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Was Jesus the ideal man? The alleged flaws in his character and teaching, most of which turn out to be purely intellectual limitations, must be considered in the light of the total impression made on the mind by a reading of all his recorded words and works. The impression we receive is of one who lived in unbroken communion with God, and this consciousness of unbroken communion with God is the positive element in the doctrine of the sinlessness of Jesus. In Jesus the "thought of God" was expressed to such a degree of significance that we cannot imagine a more adequate expression of it. He is therefore the ideal man. We accept him as our ideal man, in a practical way, by striving to carry out his supreme commandment to love one another.

We cannot explain the change which took place in the minds of the first disciples soon after the Crucifixion without assuming that the conviction reached them that their Master was alive. This conviction was a subjective experience, but we have a right to believe that there was some objective reality behind it. The discrepancies in the narratives of the Resurrection do not affect the fundamental point that a message reached the first disciples, and we are entitled to believe that it was a true message, though the precise form in which it was apprehended may have been inadequate. The subjective experience which alone can explain the origin of the Christian Church as a missionary institution can itself be explained by nothing short of the proposition that it was an experience of reality. What Jesus took with him into "the other life" was not his earthly body, but all the "values" which constituted his personal identity.

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An abstract truth is an aspect of truth abstracted from the context or setting which gives it vitality. A living truth is truth in its proper setting, and is something to be lived rather than something to be believed. To believe in Jesus, in a living way, means to live in fellowship with him; and such fellowship is achieved through surrender to his spiritual influence. Jesus makes his influence felt in the world to-day through

the "body" which is his Church. The experience of Christians in Church fellowship is usually interpreted to mean that Christ is really present with them. Neither this nor any other interpretation of experience can be proved to be true, but it can be accepted on grounds of probability, and it is not contradicted by the religious experience of the devotees of the other great religions of the world. Faith in the Living Christ means living and acting in harmony with the belief that God is using Christ as His messenger to those who feel the challenge of the Spirit of Christ.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

CHAPTER I

WHAT ARE "THE FACTS"?

"Sit down before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abysses nature leads, or you shall learn nothing."

T. H. HUXLEY.

"The ultimate realities are not given us by the senses, nor weighed and measured in our laboratories. Reality lies behind, in the unseen."

SIR OLIVER LODGE.

IN the year 1854 the principle of religious liberty achieved a notable triumph when the University of Oxford ceased to limit its advantages to those who could sign the Thirty-nine Articles. About the time when this happened, a little group of distinguished people were discussing the question, "Who will dominate the future?" Professor T. H. Huxley was one of the group, and his contribution to the discussion may be summed up in the declaration, "The men who will dominate the future will be those who stick to the facts." There is a growing disposition nowadays to agree with this verdict. Facts are more important than theories. But what are "facts"?

The dictionary defines "a fact" as "anything that comes to pass." When Huxley spoke of "sticking to the facts," it is probable that he was thinking of the facts of physical science. There are more facts in the world than those with which physical science deals. Listen to a great violinist

giving a recital. What are the "facts" about the recital? In terms of physical science, what is "coming to pass" is that horsehair is scraping on catgut and setting up sound waves in the air. But most people would agree that "sound waves produced by horsehair scraping on catgut" does not exhaust all that "comes to pass" when the violinist gives his recital.

The feeling of exaltation which overwhelms the music-lovers as they listen to the violinist is something that "comes to pass" just as surely as a precipitate "comes to pass" when a chemist pours the appropriate reagent into his test tube. The "changed lives" which have been produced as a direct result of many "varieties of religious experience" have actually "come to pass"—they are "facts" with which we must reckon. Theology is simply the attempt to explain the "how and why" of one class of facts, just as Chemistry and Physics and Psychology are attempts to explain the "how and why" of other classes of facts.

Endless mischief is caused by the confusion of fact with theory. That a rose is red is a fact of experience. Physics comes along to explain the "how and why" of the rose's redness, and does so by talking about light rays of a certain wave-length propagated through a substance called ether and producing the sensation of sight when they impinge on the retina of the eye. The explanation is interesting, but it is not necessary to be a physicist in order to enjoy red roses. Nor is it necessary to have a theory of the Atonement in order to appreciate the fact which the theory tries to explain.

This does not mean that explanations are unimportant. But it does mean that they are not of *primary* importance. What is of primary importance is the fact behind the explanation. If this simple proposition be accepted, tremendous consequences will follow. In matters of religion it will no longer be possible to set up a traditional Church or a sacred Book as a final authority. Our final authority will be the

authority which produced the Book and gave birth to the Church—the authority of religious experience. We must get back to the "facts" which lie behind all the "theories."

Dean Matthews has stated the issue very clearly. He writes: "What authority for the modern theologian resides in the Scripture? Not the authority of an infallible oracle, but that which resides in religious experience itself. . . . The modern mind, with its training in the method of science, is prepared for a new beginning in theology, and can have no reasonable objection to our procedure if we start from the facts of religious experience and attempt to understand them." (*God in Christian Thought and Experience*, pp. 114, 116.)

It is possible to say, and some people do say, that the so-called "facts" of religious experience are not "facts" at all, but only "fancies." Thus Dr. David Forsyth, in his presidential address to the Section of Psychiatry at the Royal Society of Medicine in 1934, as reported in *The Times*, asserted that "all processes of thinking were of two kinds—pleasure thinking and reality thinking." He went on to suggest that science depended on reality thinking, whilst religion depended on pleasure thinking. He declared that "pleasure thinking excluded the world of reality," and that psycho-analysis had severed the very roots of religious faith "by showing that it belonged to the unreal and the fantastical." Put bluntly, this amounts to saying that science deals with facts and religion deals with fancies.

In view of this challenge, those who would base a philosophy of life on "the facts of religious experience" must show that their so-called "facts" have a place in the realm of reality. What do we mean by "reality"? Some little while ago, a group of thoughtful people interested in international affairs tried to organise a debate on the subject: "That the League of Nations is an aspiration rather than a reality." It will be noted that the way in which the subject

was worded drew a clear-cut line between "aspirations" and "realities." That "aspirations" were "unrealities" was regarded as obvious.

But have we any right to assume that aspirations are unrealities? They are intangible, of course, but they may be every whit as real as the things which can be seen and heard and handled. Love, joy, peace, hope—all these are intangible, yet they are very real. We do not merely fancy that they exist. When we love anyone, or hate anyone, we do not see the love or the hate. We may abstain from giving any outward expression to the emotion that fills us; we may suppress it. Suppose we do suppress it; suppose there is nothing external to indicate that we are possessed by a certain emotion. Yet the emotion is there. It is not manifested in any way, but we are conscious of its existence, and we would stake everything on the proposition that it is a real thing functioning in a real world.

Anything of which we are conscious—the emotion which drives us to write a certain letter, no less than the pen and ink and paper which we use in the writing of it—does thereby certainly exist. We cannot draw a line between the aspiration and the reality, as if "the thing hoped for" remained unreal until the moment when it succeeded in getting itself embodied in some material form. The realm of reality includes the aspiration as well as its embodiment.

It is fatal to suppose that the only real things are those which can be seen, heard, tasted, touched, or otherwise made known to us through the apparatus of the physical senses. The ideal is also part of the real. Instead of distinguishing between aspirations and realities, we ought to distinguish between aspirations and actualities. A thing may be real before it becomes actual; and the League of Nations was real as an idea in men's minds long before it became actual as an organisation with headquarters in Geneva.

In opposition to the tendency to distinguish between the aspiration and the reality, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews comes forward with the bold declaration that "faith is the *substance* of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen." It is unfortunate that the term "faith" has become a theological term which is rarely used in connection with other matters. In consequence, its true meaning has been obscured. Faith is no strange and peculiar power supernaturally connected with religious observances. It is a positive principle by which we live from day to day. It is the principle on which we act when we trust our physical senses, and continue to trust them, though they sometimes deceive us.

"Appearances are deceptive," says the proverb; but we stake everything on the enormous probability that the appearance will afford a fair indication of the underlying reality. The scientific investigator, no less than the casual observer, relies on appearances; though the appearances considered by the scientific investigator cover a wider range than those open to the casual observer. "Men were deceivers ever," says Shakespeare; but we continue to trust our fellow-men, staking everything on the enormous probability that they are trustworthy. If, before venturing on any enterprise, we waited till we were absolutely certain that the enterprise would be successful, we should never get anywhere or do anything.

Absolute certainty can never be ours. In all the affairs of daily life we have to act on probability. There is no certainty that to-morrow's sun will rise for us, or for anybody else, but we act as if it were going to rise. The principle which leads us to trust the probabilities, and act upon them, is faith. In the last analysis, what is called religious faith is of the same nature. It is a trusting of probabilities—a venture beyond the realm of the material into the realm of the unseen. Religious faith deals with the spiritual senses

just as ordinary everyday faith deals with the physical senses—affirming their essential trustworthiness, and accepting the evidence obtained through them.

To take a simple comparison, consider the physical sense which we commonly regard as the most reliable—the sense of touch. It is touch which, perhaps more than any other sense, convinces us of the reality of the material world. What we see with the physical eye may be an optical illusion, a mirage, a mere picture painted on the retina of the eye. But what we touch and handle is solid, substantial, reliable, real. Doubting Thomas, not prepared to trust the evidence of his eyes, wanted to touch: "Except I put my finger into the print of the nails, I will not believe."

Now, what is religious faith? It may be defined as a faculty within us which operates in the spiritual realm, doing in that realm what the sense of touch does in the material realm. Faith enables us to apprehend unseen things, to "feel" their body and substance, and to be assured of their essential reality. Faith reaches out beyond the material world, grapples with the intangible, and forces it into consistency. Common sense tells us that "the things which are seen are temporal." Faith affirms that "the things which are not seen are eternal."

Everything in the material Universe may be regarded from three different points of view—the physical, the humanistic, and the theistic. For example, take a primrose. The particular branch of physical science which deals with primroses is botany, but botany cannot explain all that needs to be explained about a primrose. For the primrose is capable of arousing high thoughts and noble aspirations in the human breast; it can bring hope and consolation to weary souls lying on beds of pain; it figures in art and literature and song and story.

Therefore, when the botanist has said all that he can say, the humanist comes along to tell us about "a primrose by

a river's brim," and to show us how the simple flower can stir the hearts and souls of men. These stirrings of human hearts are as real as the stamens and pistils of flowers; they are "facts" with which we must reckon, just as we must reckon with the facts of seed-time and growth and harvest.

But even the humanist cannot exhaust all the truth which a primrose can convey. When he has said his last word, the man of spiritual genius takes up the tale, telling us to see in the primrose a witness to the Divine Providence that governs the world. The beauty showered upon the primrose is evidence of a Power behind the primrose which will shower blessings on us. So says the man of spiritual insight, and the buoyant confidence which he derives from his contemplation of the primrose is "a fact of experience" no less real than the "facts" investigated by the botanist.

Let it be granted that the men who will dominate the future will be those who stick to the facts. But they must have regard to all the facts; and among the facts which have to be considered are the facts of religious experience. Theology, no less than physical science, investigates the nature of reality; it attempts to explain one order of "facts," just as physical science attempts to explain another order of "facts." The explanations, though not primary, are important. We cannot deal with "mere facts," because we cannot deal with them without thinking about them, and the very act of thinking about them involves interpretation of some kind. Our task is to make our interpretations as adequate and as accurate as possible. To do this we must be willing to "sit down before fact as a little child," yielding up all preconceived notions, and striving to learn all that experience can teach us.

CHAPTER II

THE USE AND MISUSE OF TRADITION

“The ignorant start questions which have been already answered thousands of years ago by the wise.”

GOETHE.

“Those only should utter the sacred name of Progress whose souls possess intelligence enough to comprehend the past and whose hearts possess sufficient poetic religion to reverence its greatness.”

MAZZINI.

WHEN we start with the facts of religious experience, the first “fact” with which we have to reckon is that religious experience takes many forms. Therefore, if we are to stick to the facts, we must not limit ourselves to the experience of any individual or group of individuals. The interpretation of the facts of religious experience in all ages and in all races is the task of modern theology. Different races have inherited different traditions. The value of tradition is that it enables us to profit by the experiences of other people.

To learn everything by first-hand experience would prove too costly. If we see a man sinking in a bog, we conclude that the ground on which he was walking is unsafe. We do not insist on bringing the matter to a personal test by walking into the bog ourselves. Throughout life we depend largely on the experiences of other people, most of whom played their parts on earth long before we appeared on the scene. The captain of the ocean liner avoids shipwreck by relying on his charts, and his charts represent the codified experience of countless mariners who sailed the seas before him. He would be a quaint mariner who would only learn his trade through personal experience of shipwreck.

Tradition is the wisdom accumulated by experience through many generations, and handed down by speech or writing. It is the priceless heritage which enables us to profit by what our ancestors learned, without going through the long and costly process of “trial and error” whereby they learned it. Individual experience ought always to be considered in its relation to the experience of the whole race. To ignore tradition, and make one’s own personal experience a pivot round which all things must revolve, would lead to anarchy.

Towards the close of the seventeenth century, a man whom we will call John Smith (though that was not his real name) founded a Nonconformist Church in a Midland town. The Trust Deed of the Church premises, as drawn up by John Smith, contained the clause: “No person or persons shall at any time hereafter be admitted to these premises, or permitted to perform any religious worship therein, but such as shall from time to time concur, agree, and be of the same persuasion and judgment in respect of doctrine, discipline, and worship as the said John Smith, of —, in the county of —.”

John Smith was a very worthy man, and he had passed through a vital spiritual experience which had revolutionised his whole life. He interpreted his experience, and was well within his rights in doing so. But he tried to make his interpretation a standard by which the religion of other people, in all future ages, was to be judged; and here he went beyond his rights. To interpret one’s own religious experience for oneself is to formulate a doctrine; to seek to impose the interpretation on others, with threat of penalties for disbelief, is to lay down a dogma. Doctrine is necessary; dogma is dangerous.

The value of tradition is that it provides us with a set of doctrines to guide us in our efforts to interpret our experience. The danger of tradition is that it may be used—or, rather, misused—as an armoury of dogmatic weapons

to crush the spirit of free inquiry. A modern scientist acknowledges with gratitude the great work done by the pioneers of science—Newton, Dalton, Priestley, and others. He regards himself as one who is carrying on the traditions of the pioneers. But no modern scientist would consent to be bound by what Priestley believed about the constitution of matter, or by what Newton taught concerning the Law of Gravitation. Neither can the modern theologian be bound by what John Smith believed about “doctrine, discipline, and worship,” or by what the Fathers at Nicæa taught concerning the constitution of the Godhead.

It is when we are least bound by what the Fathers at Nicæa taught that we are able to profit most by their teaching. They have handed on to us a tradition, and it is our business to make the best possible use of this tradition. We make the best possible use of it when we see in it a series of hints, warning us against pitfalls and dangers, and pointing the way to more adequate interpretations of the facts of experience. Initiative is a fine thing. We cannot get anywhere without it. But the initiative which is sound and sane and safe is the initiative that preserves a firm continuity with tradition.

On the voyage of life it is difficult to say who is the more foolish—the traditionist who uses tradition as an anchor chaining him to the past, or the iconoclast who takes the ballast of tradition out of the boat and heaves it overboard. On the whole, perhaps, the latter is the more foolish. For when a man makes an anchor of tradition, his boat carries him nowhere. But when he takes the ballast of tradition out of the boat and throws it overboard, the chances are that his boat will carry him to the bottom of the sea. Most people, though by no means all people, would agree that it is better to be a live traditionist than a drowned iconoclast.

It is well to recognise that tradition is composed of the concentrated experience of the human race, and much that

enters into its composition has been made holy by the faith and sweat and blood of the pioneers of olden time. A right view of tradition enables us to use it, and not to abuse it.

What is the difference between a man and an ant? It is the difference between having a tradition and not having a tradition. Ants have no tradition. They have to begin every generation at the point where the previous generation started. Instinct enables them to deal with the old and familiar situations with which their ancestors dealt; but if a new situation arises, they are lost. They cannot transmit their experience, except by the long evolutionary process which consists in the acquiring of a new instinct. Therefore it is only with extreme slowness, if at all, that they can adapt themselves to the changing needs of a changing world.

It follows that tradition, which some of our so-called “advanced” thinkers appear to regard as the foe of progress, is really the very thing that makes progress possible. Unlike the ants, we are able to adapt ourselves rapidly to new conditions just because we do not have to start every generation afresh. We have the accumulated wisdom of the ages to guide us, and we can begin every generation a little further along the road, at the point where our fathers laid down their tasks.

In religion, as in politics, we sometimes distinguish between the man of progressive temperament and the man who has a profound respect for tradition. The distinction is an unhappy one. If a man really respects the traditions of the past, what he learns from those traditions will encourage him to press forward in the spirit of the pioneers of olden time, in order that he may hand on to his children the heritage of an even nobler tradition. And if a man really desires to march with the armies of progress, he will be eager to learn all that can be learned from the records handed down by those who in days gone by led the armies of progress to the positions they now occupy.

We misread tradition if our reading of it makes us disinclined to welcome further visions of truth and beauty and goodness. We cannot be progressive, in the fullest sense of the word, unless we are humble, willing to learn, and eager to profit by all that the past can teach us. To ask us to cut ourselves adrift from the guidance of tradition is like asking us to fashion human society upon the model of a colony of ants. Ants, guided by instinct, may cope with old situations in a manner which excites the admiration of a Solomon. But their wisdom is of a different order from that which Solomon handed down to his descendants.

Ants are not progressive. Biologists tell us that they appear to have finished the course of their evolution. They are much the same to-day as they were countless ages ago. In amber which is at least twenty millions of years old ants have been found beautifully preserved with every detail of their structure, and these ants differ in no important respect from the ants of to-day.

Man is progressive. He is still almost at the beginning of the course of his evolution. His race is only a few hundreds of thousands of years old—a mere fraction of time, as time is measured in biology and geology. In the ages which are opening up before him, he can press on to unimaginable heights. And he can do this because, unlike the ants, he has inherited a tradition which enables him to begin each fresh generation at the point where the previous generation stopped.

This being the case, we ought not to think of tradition as "a dead hand" holding us back from the paths of progress. Rather, we should regard it as a loving hand, warmed and vitalised by the spirit of sacrifice, stretched forth to pass the torch of truth on from the pioneers of the past to the pioneers of the present. It is significant that Jesus never condemned tradition; what he condemned was the misuse of tradition. He told the Pharisees that they were making void the word

of God because of their tradition, but that was owing to the way in which they had misunderstood and misapplied the tradition.

In his dealings with the Pharisees, Jesus appealed from tradition to tradition. Against the limited tradition of the Pharisees he set a higher and older tradition. The Pharisees had a tradition to the effect that a man, by performing certain ritual acts, might escape from his obligations to his parents. But Jesus reminded them of the older tradition, handed down from the days of Moses, wherein a man's duty to his parents was placed in the forefront.

Jesus was no destroyer of traditions; he was the fulfiller of traditions. The power of his Gospel was due in no small measure to the fact that it was able to begin at the point where the old Jewish faith finished. If there had been no Isaiah, and Micah, and Amos, there might have been no Jesus. If there had been no traditions to be taken up and extended and amplified, there might have been no Christianity. There could have been no Parable of the Good Samaritan, to explain the meaning of the word "neighbour," until some spiritual genius among the ancient Hebrew people had risen to the idea that the first duty of practical religion was to love one's neighbour as oneself.

Behind all traditions lie the experiences which gave birth to them. Different traditions have different values. No tradition is altogether devoid of significance—even the tradition which John Smith tried to fasten on the Nonconformists of the Midland town means something, and may be studied with advantage. But some traditions have tremendous significance—for example, traditions which have come down to us from races of great spiritual genius, such as the ancient Hebrew people, or from times when men were passing through periods of spiritual upheaval, such as when the Christian Church began.

The facts which theology must face and interpret are the

primary facts of religious consciousness wherever they are and whatever they are. The study of Comparative Religion indicates that the primary facts of religious consciousness are capable of being interpreted in many different ways, and these different interpretations are enshrined in the different traditions of the various religions of the world. But charity begins at home; it ought not to end there, yet if it is to begin at all, it must begin there. So, when studying religious tradition, we shall be wise if we begin with the tradition by which we are surrounded—the tradition enshrined in Christian history.

It is possible to be so eager to see the good points in the various non-Christian religions of the world that we overlook the good points in the Christian religion, just as it is possible for a man to merit the rebuke that he is "the friend of every country except his own." It is probable that there is more real community of feeling between the patriots of rival countries than may be found among the little company of denationalised cosmopolitans who are equally at home in all countries because they are thoroughly at home in no country. It is certain that there is more fundamental agreement between an Anglo-Catholic priest, a Salvation Army captain, and a Unitarian minister, than there is between either of these and a man who holds that "one religion is as good as another and it doesn't matter what a man believes so long as he does what is right."

How can a man do what is right unless the beliefs which grip his heart and direct his actions are right beliefs? Granted that there are some beliefs which exercise no appreciable influence over conduct, it remains true that there are other beliefs which exercise a profound influence. We sympathise with a man of another faith—that is to say, we *feel with* him—when his enthusiasm for his faith is matched by a corresponding enthusiasm on our part for our faith.

We are told nowadays that we must cultivate the inter-

national mind. But the international mind, as distinct from the cosmopolitan mind, is not cultivated by suppressing the patriotic instinct, but by sublimating it. So also in matters of religion. The man who is loyal to the Christian tradition pursues a policy of enthusiasm for the interpretation of religious experience which is associated with the name of Jesus Christ. He does not pursue a policy of opposition to those interpretations which are associated with the names of the founders of other great religions. Loving the tradition which he has inherited, he desires to make it a yet more perfect thing, and so receives with joy all that other lands and other ages can teach him. He is a progressive because he is in touch with tradition, and he is in touch with tradition because he believes in progress.

CHAPTER III

THE WITNESS OF CONSCIENCE

“ Tradition and conscience are the two wings given to the human soul to reach the truth.”

MAZZINI.

“ A man’s power of conscience is the measure of his moral communion with the Infinite.”

THEODORE PARKER.

IN the interpretations of religious experience which are enshrined in Christian tradition, we find a fusion of two apparently contradictory ideas. On the one hand, the Christian disciple has felt that he was in some sense the offspring of God, “ made in the image and likeness of God.” On the other hand, his experience of frustration and moral failure has caused him to feel that he was in some sense sundered from God, a sinner, “ fallen and come short of the glory of God.” Some forms of Christianity have placed the emphasis on one of these ideas, whilst other forms have concentrated on the other idea.

But wherever due attention has been given to both ideas, there has been a sense of conflict. St. Paul put the matter as clearly as it can be put : “ The good that I would I do not ; but the evil which I would not, that I do.” All the theologies which enter into the history of the formation of Christian tradition are attempts to explain this sense of conflict which we experience within ourselves.

Even if the explanations are regarded as mere fancies of the mind, the thing which they attempt to explain is no fancy of the mind. That man has to wage a continual conflict, with his lower appetites warring against his higher impulses,

is a fact of experience. The “ still small voice of conscience ” is a fact of experience, and this would still be true even if “ the voice of conscience ” were only another name for “ the voice of society.” But what is “ conscience ” ?

It would be hard to beat the definition of the small boy who said : “ I’ve got something inside me that I can’t do what I like with.” The possession of “ something inside us that we can’t do what we like with ” is one of the distinctive marks of humanity. No man is altogether without a conscience. There is something inside him which often arouses a sense of conflict when it whispers : “ This is right ; that is wrong.” Religious history is the history of an evolutionary process which is still going on, whereby the “ something inside us that we can’t do what we like with ” is made to speak with greater accuracy, with wider scope, with more penetrating clearness, and with ever-increasing moral sensitiveness.

The Old Testament records show us that the voice of conscience did not always speak with acute sensitiveness among the primitive Israelites. They suffered from what has been described as “ a defective sense of individuality.” But this is merely the negative way of putting it ; in positive terms, we may say that they were dominated by a feeling of group consciousness. Each Israelite considered himself not as an individual but as a member of a blood-brotherhood ; God was not *his* God, but the God of his group. In a sense, there was no God of the Israelites ; there was only a God of Israel.

But the idea of the blood-brotherhood of Israel was held in a strictly limited way. In practice it led to some shocking immoralities. It encouraged the corporate infliction and suffering of vengeance, with the result that any member of a group to which an offender belonged might be punished in his stead. For example, in 2 Samuel xxi. we are told how seven of Saul’s sons and grandsons were executed as a punishment for a crime committed by Saul. It is curious to observe how this old Hebrew idea of corporate respon-

sibility has been revived in modern times in certain European countries, where penal proceedings are sometimes taken against the relatives or even against the co-religionists of those who are regarded as traitors to the State.

This method of procedure is the result of a defective sense of individuality. Such a defective sense of individuality lies at the root of the doctrine of original sin—or, to speak more accurately, at the root of the doctrine of original guilt—whereby Adam's sin is made to involve the whole of Adam's race. The decline of the doctrine of original sin has been brought about through the development of a keener sense of personal responsibility in matters of religion.

But the doctrine of personal responsibility is a hard doctrine. If, by any means, we can throw the burden of our shortcomings on someone else, we are glad to do so. About two hundred years before the birth of Christ, Carneades was accused by his teacher Diogenes of falling into an error in logic. The pupil's reply deserves to be remembered. "Either I have reasoned rightly, O Diogenes, in which case you have reasoned wrongly; or else you have reasoned rightly, in which case I have reasoned wrongly. Now if I have reasoned rightly, the fault of your wrong reasoning is clearly yours; but if I have reasoned wrongly, again the fault is yours, since you are my teacher and ought to have taught me better. Wherefore, if I have reasoned rightly, you should admit your error; whilst if I have reasoned wrongly, you should return to me the fee I paid you for my lessons." There are still plenty of people who reason like Carneades. The fundamental wrongness of this method of reasoning lies in its unwillingness to accept personal responsibility.

In former ages, the attempt to escape from the sense of personal responsibility took place most commonly in the realm of theology, but to-day it takes place most commonly in the realm of sociology. The deadly danger to which the old evangelical theology was exposed was that it tended to make

people forget their personal responsibility for their shortcomings. Adam, in the Garden of Eden, threw the blame on Eve, and Adam's descendants were encouraged to throw the blame on Adam.

The old evangelical teaching about "the imputation of Adam's sin" is not so popular nowadays, but its decline has not brought a complete triumph to a better teaching. Many people who have rejected the phraseology of the old evangelical theology are still clinging to the fundamental principle on which that theology was based. Instead of blaming Adam for the condition in which they find themselves, they blame their environment and their inherited tendencies; instead of looking to Jesus to deliver them from their condition, they look to the State. To do this is to transfer the problem of responsibility from the realm of theology to the realm of sociology.

In many quarters to-day, the "good news" which "the multitudes hear gladly" is to the effect that the State is responsible for us—the State "ought to" provide for us, and educate our children, and build houses for us, and take care of us when we are sick, and show a benevolent interest in us from the moment when it becomes clear that we are going to be born until the moment we die. There is a large measure of truth in all this, of course, but it is not the whole truth. It is simply the aspect of truth which dominated the thought of the ancient Hebrews—the idea of corporate responsibility. It is a sound principle when it is recognised as part of the truth, but it becomes dangerous when it is regarded as the whole truth.

The aim of all sound sociology must include the task of making a man more conscious of his personal responsibilities to society. Can we not say that the aim of all sound theology must include the task of making a man more conscious of his personal responsibilities to God? Crude and one-sided theological theories in the past tempted men to lean on

Jesus, instead of standing upright on their own feet and following in the footsteps of Jesus. Crude and one-sided social theories in the present tempt men to lean on the State, instead of standing upright on their own feet and doing their utmost to make some real contribution to the welfare of the State. Whether men seek a temporal happiness by relying on the State, or an eternal happiness by relying on "the finished work of Christ," there is a danger that they may overlook their own personal responsibility for the condition in which they find themselves.

Those who do this, whether they do it in the realm of theology or in the realm of sociology, are the spiritual descendants of the early Hebrews, and like the early Hebrews they are emphasising the sense of corporate responsibility at the expense of the sense of individual responsibility. In the later Hebrew prophets—in Isaiah, in Jeremiah, and most explicitly in Ezekiel—we find a growing recognition of individual rights and duties. But, on the whole, the later prophets teach that individual salvation can only be achieved in and through the salvation of the society to which the individual belongs. The idea of corporate responsibility is combined with, and not excluded by, the idea of individual responsibility.

When the thought of individual salvation is sundered from the thought of the salvation of society—in other words, when the idea of individual responsibility receives exclusive emphasis—we get results as horrible as any produced by exclusive attention to the idea of corporate responsibility. For example, the Rev. Jonathan Edwards published a series of *Practical Sermons* in 1788. In one of them he says: "When the saints in Heaven shall look upon the damned in Hell, it will serve to give them a greater sense of their own happiness . . . with how much greater admiration and exaltation of soul will they sing of the free and sovereign grace of God to them."

It is possible to think like this if we worship a certain kind of God, and if our religion is merely a matter between God and our own individual soul. But, on any view of the nature of God, we cannot think with Jonathan Edwards if we have a spark of group consciousness left in us. We cannot be completely happy on earth whilst we are conscious that many of our fellows are living amid conditions which prevent them from making the fullest possible use of their talents and capacities. We should be utterly miserable in Heaven if we thought that any members of the group to which we belonged were being tortured in Hell.

A defective sense of individual responsibility and an overwhelming sense of corporate responsibility led the early Hebrew writers to commend Jael for her treacherous murder of Sisera, since she was loyal to the only God they knew—the God of the group to which they belonged. A defective sense of corporate responsibility and an overwhelming sense of individual responsibility moved Jonathan Edwards to contemplate the possibility of rejoicing over the tortures of the damned. When either idea—corporate responsibility or individual responsibility—is emphasised at the expense of the other, we are led astray.

The glory of the Christian Gospel is that it arouses the individual conscience at the same time as it arouses the social conscience. It takes up and harmonises and extends the two ideas which it inherited from the Hebrews—the idea of corporate personality or blood-brotherhood as held by the early Hebrew writers, and the idea of individual responsibility as taught by the later Hebrew prophets. Neither idea can be ignored. Man is faced with two problems: "What must I do to be saved?" and "What must I do to save society?" Christianity affirms that these two problems are really two aspects of one problem.

Of late years we have become more fully conscious of our common humanity, and this consciousness is an extension or

amplification of the group consciousness of ancient Israel. No longer are the limits of "Who is my neighbour?" marked by the group into which we were born; they are marked only by the road along which we journey. But the road along which we journey nowadays is one which brings us into contact with the people of France, of Germany, of China and Japan, of Russia, of the United States, and of the whole wide world. Christ tells us that there is no man to whom we may deny membership in the brotherhood. We enjoy fellowship with God, as individuals, only so far as we try to bring society into fellowship with Him.

It follows that the answer to "What must I do to be saved?" is "I must try to save society." Conversely, the answer to "What must I do to save society?" is "I must be saved—delivered from bondage to sin." What we call our "social problems"—war, unemployment, slums, and the rest—have grown up through the operation of sin, especially the sin of Ignorance and the sin of Selfishness. When the sense of corporate responsibility is fused with the sense of individual responsibility, we realise that social salvation is bound up with individual righteousness, so that one leads to the other and the other leads back to the first.

Which comes first, social salvation or individual regeneration? To ask such a question is like asking, "Which comes first, the hen or the egg?" All we know, and all we need to know, is that the one is vitally connected with the other.

CHAPTER IV

BEING AND BECOMING

"O Lord, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it find rest in Thee."

ST. AUGUSTINE.

A BOY went to his father with a conundrum: "There's one thing I can do that you can't. What is it?" When the father "gave it up" the boy replied, "Grow!" It is obvious that he was thinking of growth as a purely physical process. But there is such a thing as moral and spiritual growth. With this extension of meaning, the boy's answer to the conundrum no longer holds good. Where there is life there is growth. Growth in the spiritual life is the necessary and sufficient sign of the reality of the spiritual life. The boy's father, no less than the boy himself, can "grow."

There are two ways of judging man. We may judge him by what he is or by what he may become. Both methods of judgment have their place in the Christian interpretation of religious experience. When we are thinking of what man may become, we tend to emphasise the idea that he is a child of God, with something of the nature of his Heavenly Father inherent in him. When we are thinking of what he actually is, we tend to emphasise the fact that he is a sinner. It is only by placing due emphasis on both considerations, of what he is and of what he may become, that we are able to reconcile the experience of moral failure with the experience of spiritual renewal.

The two considerations are combined in the Parable of

the Prodigal Son, which is a striking illustration of Christ's teaching concerning the nature of man. The Prodigal Son, even in the days when he is wasting his substance in the far-off country, is still a son. The nature of his father is inherent in him. But he is a free being, and in the exercise of his freedom he has chosen to go into the far-off country. His sin is the result, but not the necessary result, of his freedom. When he "comes to himself"—that is to say, when he awakens to a realisation of his possibilities—he returns to his father's home.

Which idea is the more fundamental in the teaching of Jesus—the idea of man's sonship to God, or the idea that man is a sinner? At first sight we may be inclined to say that the former idea is the fundamental one. Implicit in the teaching of Jesus we have the most daring affirmations concerning the tremendous possibilities which are opened up to man through the gift of human freedom. Jesus was firmly convinced that every man was a child of God, of supreme value in the eyes of God. This conviction dominated the whole of his teaching, and controlled every action of his life. No degree of frustration or depth of degradation, such as prostitution, could hide from him the tremendous possibilities of a child of God.

But there is a clear difference between possibilities and actualities. The "possible" is reached through changes produced in the "actual." Jesus never ignored the "actual." He called men to repentance—that is, to a changing of their thoughts—and his call to repentance involves his recognition of sin as a fact of experience. It is misleading to say, as some have said, that the subject of sin forms but a small part of his teaching. He saw boundless possibilities in the sinner, but he did not treat sin lightly. He pictured the true relation of man to God in the prayer of one who said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." He declared that the forgiveness of sins was a greater blessing than the healing of the body. He

taught his disciples to pray for forgiveness as regularly as for daily bread.

But his sympathetic insight into the boundless possibilities of the sinner prevented him from placing a pessimistic emphasis on the sin itself. He saw beyond the actual, and was sustained by his faith in the ideal. Any interpretation of religious experience which minimises the idea of man's sonship to God has departed from the teaching of Jesus; any interpretation which treats sin as a light matter is ignoring the facts of life.

It may be an exaggeration to say that history repeats itself, but controversies which were supposed to have been settled ages ago come up again for judgment. The modern notion that the best way to educate a child is to allow him full liberty to express his own individuality raises an issue which was fought out long ago, and which has a direct bearing upon the apparent clash between man's thought of himself as "the offspring of God" and his knowledge of himself as a sinner.

Augustine, before he became a Christian, was a teacher who experimented with the method of "free self-expression." At the first school which he opened the pupils were free to attend lectures or to stop away, just as they pleased. Many of them stopped away. Augustine transferred his school to Carthage, where he was able to gather a larger number of pupils. But the lack of discipline in the school was notorious, and attracted the attention of the authorities of the city. Augustine moved to Rome, and the school which he opened there was more successful. The students did not behave so badly as to come into conflict with the authorities. But Augustine was still trying the method of "free self-expression," and within wide limits his pupils were allowed to "do as they pleased." They "did as they pleased" when it came to a matter of paying their teacher's fees; they invariably failed to pay. As an educational organisation, the school in Rome was an

interesting experiment; but as a financial enterprise, it was a failure.

It is possible that Augustinianism—the interpretation of religious experience with which the name of Augustine is identified—may be traced back to Augustine's reaction from his experiences as a teacher. He had learned that the idea of "free self-expression" may be carried to an extreme where it becomes unworkable. The notion that "to do as you please" is the only way of expressing your real self will not bear examination. In opposition to it, Augustine adopted as his guiding principle a wider notion: "Love God, and do as you please." He had been led to realise that "to do as you please" is only safe, for you and for your neighbour, when what "you please" is what "God pleases." The love of God must come first; then, and only then, it is right to "do as you please."

This truth, which Augustine saw so clearly, lies behind the somewhat pessimistic view of human nature which is implicit in his theological system. His great opponent, against whom his controversial writings were mainly directed, was the British monk Pelagius. In effect, Pelagius taught that human nature was fundamentally good, whilst Augustine seems to have regarded it as fundamentally bad. Pelagius was condemned as a heretic, but his system of theology has never really ceased to influence the Christian Church. Some of the greatest leaders and thinkers in Christian history have been more or less tinged with Pelagianism—notably Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas.

On the issue as to whether human nature is fundamentally good or fundamentally bad, it can hardly be denied that Pelagius rather than Augustine voiced the modern interpretation of experience. Pelagius taught that a little child, dying unbaptised, was not therefore lost; Augustine suggested that baptism was essential to bring the child within the scope of the supernatural grace of God—a view which may

easily lead to a magical theory of baptism. Yet on the main issue Augustine was not wholly wrong, nor was Pelagius wholly right. As Dr. James Drummond puts it: "The calmness of a sedate Pelagius cannot understand the storms of a passionate Augustine. And yet the more passionate nature, in which spiritual experience presents itself in exaggerated forms, may have the truer insight into the facts." (*Studies in Christian Doctrine*, p. 215.)

The modern advocates of complete "free self-expression" in education are the spiritual heirs of the old British monk Pelagius. Ultimately, the faith of Pelagius and of all his followers, ancient and modern, rests on the proposition that God is in us, and that therefore, when we express ourselves, what is expressed is the actual life of God. This proposition may be right, but it is not *quite* right. God is in us; and yet, mingled with the God in us there is something which is not of God.

Pelagius saw the God in us, whilst Augustine saw the something which is not of God. What is required nowadays is a synthesis of the rival theologies of Pelagius and Augustine. Such a synthesis may be achieved by placing due emphasis on the two standards by which we judge our fellows. Sometimes we judge them according to what they are, weighing their present worth with as nice an accuracy as human ignorance allows; and sometimes we look upon them as a mother looks upon her child, seeing the glorious possibilities inherent in them, and valuing them for what they are capable of becoming. If we are seeking a complete interpretation of the facts, we cannot ignore either standard of judgment. We must use both, and use them both together.

Some people use both standards of judgment separately. They judge their fellows by the standard of present worth; they judge themselves by the standard of future possibilities. They might do better to reverse the process, taking a more pessimistic view of themselves and a more optimistic view

of their fellows. John Tauler, the saint and mystic who was born near Strasbourg in 1290, makes a striking confession in one of his books: "Notwithstanding all the gifts and enlightenment that God bestowed upon me, there was yet a secret spot in my soul, the which was altogether unknown to myself. And it was that, when I looked upon my fellowmen, I esteemed them as they were in this present time, and stood before God in their sins; and this was a hidden spot, for I ought, through grace, to have regarded them, not as they now were, but as they might well become."

To look upon men, not as they now are, but as they may become, is to realise a buoyant faith in the possibilities of human nature. But if we apply this standard of judgment to ourselves, we must apply it with caution. If faith in possibilities leads us to lose sight of actualities, we are building on sand instead of on rock. Possibilities are real and ideal; sin is real and actual.

According to Christian tradition, God thought it worth while to send His choicest treasure, His best-beloved Son, to live as a man among men. Jesus came, not for the sake of what we are, but in order to show us what we might become. The "old, old story" set forth in the New Testament is, in a very real sense, the story of "God's remedy for sin." It is not so much the story of man's search for God as the story of God's search for man. The idea that God is seeking us far more earnestly than we are seeking Him is a vital element in the Christian interpretation of experience.

" Though we long, in sin-wrought blindness,
From Thy gracious paths have strayed,
Cold to Thee and all Thy kindness,
Wilful, reckless, or afraid I
Through dim clouds that gather round us
Thou hast sought, and Thou hast found us."

We can only understand the story of God's search for man, as expounded in the New Testament, when we hold fast to the twin ideas of Divine Immanence and Divine Transcendence.

In the last analysis a purely immanent Deity turns out to be one who is practically indistinguishable from ourselves. Many attempts have been made to substitute such a Deity for the God of Christian devotion. We are told of a "life-force" which is "making use of us"—of a "God" who is "becoming." But how can we pray to a God who is "becoming," or to any sort of Deity who is not beyond and above us? The term "God" loses an essential part of the meaning which Christianity has associated with it unless it carries with it the notion of something utterly above and beyond the best that is in humanity.

But a purely transcendent Deity would be one with whom we could hold no communion. Man's sense of communion with something or Somebody "other than himself" is one of the facts of religious experience which has to be explained. In order that there may be communion, there must be similarity as well as difference. God, to be worshipped by me, must not only be above and beyond me; He must also be "like me." This likeness of God to us is what we affirm when we say that God is immanent in His creation.

The immanence of God means that there is no point of space or time where God is not. But some aspects of creation and some episodes of history reveal Him more clearly than others. Thus we see Him more adequately in the development of a beautiful human personality than in the development of a beautiful crystal; more clearly in the history of the early Christian Church than in the history of the Wars of the Roses. But God is present everywhere, so that every point of space and time reveals to us as much of God as it is capable of revealing—or, rather, as much as we are capable of seeing. Experience indicates that we are so fashioned that we see God most clearly in the truth and beauty and goodness mediated to us through human personality.

For many of us, the Logos—the Divine Intention for man, or God's Idea concerning what man might become—is seen

most vividly in the life and work of Jesus Christ. There are many people to-day who think they are worshipping Jesus as God, when what they are really doing is to worship God as Jesus. This form of worship is implicit in a phrase which has become very popular in some quarters of late years: "God is like Jesus." There is truth in the idea behind the phrase, especially when we understand it to mean that God is like what man is capable of becoming.

Jesus reveals to us the possibilities of our human nature, and in revealing these, he reveals God. He thus becomes the standard by which we test our lives. Those who interpret their experience in this fashion will be, in a sense, Christocentric in their theology; but it is important to note that if they are Christocentric so far as their method is concerned, they are Theocentric with respect to their goal. Their aim is fellowship with God, and the supreme object of their worship—whether they are fully conscious of it or not—is the God whom Jesus knew as a Heavenly Father.

They think of Jesus as one who in his life and character has shown them what God is like, so far as this can be shown under the limitations of human existence. For them, Jesus is the highest example of the many ways in which God is continually manifesting Himself. God is everywhere, at every point of space and time; but those who adopt the Christocentric method with the Theocentric goal are so fashioned that they see the Divine in Jesus more vividly and more adequately than they see it anywhere else.

CHAPTER V

THE JESUS OF HISTORY

"No life of Christ, even were it written by a writer of greater genius than ever yet attempted the task, could be more beautiful and more perfect than the Gospels."

GIOVANNI PAPINI.

If we try to explain our ideas about God by saying "God is like Jesus," we may be asked: "Which Jesus is it to whom we turn in order to see what God is like?" The Jesus of the Synoptics? or of the Fourth Gospel? or of St. Paul? Or are we thinking of One who died, and rose from the dead, and is present throughout the world to-day wherever two or three are gathered together in his name?

To questions such as these the reply is that we must face all the facts, and try to understand the reality behind all the interpretations. Notwithstanding the progress which has been made in Biblical criticism and theological scholarship, we are still far from fathoming the full meaning of the character and life and abiding influence of Jesus Christ. The Synoptic Gospels give us the broad outlines of his life on earth; the spiritual genius who wrote the Fourth Gospel adds his interpretation of the scope and purpose of that life; St. Paul caught something of the spirit of his Master somewhere on the road between Jerusalem and Damascus; and in all succeeding ages, multitudes of humble souls have felt themselves united, in a way they could not explain adequately in words, with the Living Christ who in the days of his flesh was Jesus of Nazareth. Any satisfactory doctrine must take account of all this varied experience, ignoring nothing.

The experience of communion with the Living Christ will be considered later. In this chapter we are concerned with the Jesus of history. Was he the ideal man? Did he show us, by a life of moral splendour, what we are capable of becoming? Is it true that he passed through our world without the stain of sin? And if he did, is it possible to hold that his life was fully human?

It has been argued that experience of sin is bound up with our common humanity, and that a life without this experience would be lifted out of the category of the truly human. But the fact—if it be a fact—that experience of sin is universal gives us no right to assume that it is a necessary element in human nature. What is a necessary element in human nature is the opportunity to sin. A being who was without experience of temptation, so that he could not sin, would be outside the category of humanity; he would be either sub-human or super-human. Nobody maintains that Jesus was lifted above temptation. He was tempted in all points as we are tempted.

Being tempted, did he fall? A few daring thinkers have examined the records of his life with a keenly critical eye, and detected, or thought they detected, points where he fell short of the moral ideal. Let it be admitted that those who find flaws in the character or teaching of Jesus are animated by an honest desire to face the facts. They are filled with a pure passion for truth. But whence came this passion? They were, most of them, brought up in a Christian atmosphere; they learned from Christian parents to love the truth that is in Jesus more than they loved any theory about Jesus. Paradoxical though it sounds, their very criticisms of the character and teaching of Jesus are an additional testimony to his abiding influence. As the late Frank Lenwood says: "It is Jesus who allows us, and indeed compels us, to criticise himself." (*Jesus—Lord or Leader?* p. 133.)

When we look at the alleged flaws in the character and

teaching of Jesus, however, most of them turn out to be purely intellectual limitations. It is certainly true that Jesus was not lifted above the intellectual limitations of his age. But it is as a revealer of moral and spiritual truth that Christians accept his leadership. This leadership is in no way affected by his apparent acceptance of the theory of demonic possession or the imperfections in his knowledge of Old Testament criticism.

It is true that the critics of Jesus do not confine their attention to purely intellectual limitations; they also point to words and acts of his where they think he fell short of the moral and spiritual ideal. For example, in Luke xiv. 14, and in Matthew vi. 1, 4, 6, 18, he appears to set up rewards and punishments as the motives for moral action—a view which we instinctively reject as inadequate and sub-Christian. His treatment of the Syro-Phœnician woman (Mark vii. 25 f. and Matthew xv. 22 f.) shows, or seems to show, traces of race prejudice and lack of courtesy. Most important of all, his wholesale condemnation of the Pharisees strikes us as unduly harsh.

But when the critics are examining these and other elements in the life and teaching of Jesus which seem to them to indicate an imperfect moral standard, by what standard do they judge? They judge by a standard which they have extracted *from some other elements in the teaching of Jesus*. Whether consciously or unconsciously, they appeal from Jesus to Jesus. This is very significant. Remembering the circumstances in which the Gospel records were compiled, we must judge them as a whole. We have a right to appeal to the total impression made on the mind by a reading of all the recorded words and works of Jesus. If, here and there, we come across utterances or acts which seem out of harmony with the whole, it is not unreasonable to assume that something has been added, or omitted, or misreported, or torn out of its context, or given a twist which causes us to mis-

understand it. The true nature of some of these discordant passages may be more fully revealed at a future date by the X-rays of New Testament criticism. Meanwhile, what concerns us is the total impression made by the life and character and teaching of Jesus when considered as a whole.

What is this impression? Despite all the doubts which modern criticism has thrown upon many of the details in the life of Jesus, most of us have a reasonably clear idea of the type of man he was, the kind of life he lived, and the general nature of the teaching he gave. We may reject the notion that he was born of a virgin, but few of us would go so far as to say that he was never born at all—that his story is a mere myth or legend which grew up at a time of great spiritual unrest. We may doubt whether he worked “miracles” which changed the face of nature, such as walking on the sea or blasting a fig tree; but few of us would deny that he worked “miracles of grace” which transformed the lives of the sin-weary men and women with whom he came into contact. We may be perplexed by some of the eschatological passages in his recorded utterances, but our hearts respond to the Parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. We may not be able to reconcile the chronology of the Synoptic Gospels with that of the Fourth Gospel; but there stands out before us, in broad outline, the figure of One who met every test with triumphant faith, and is recognised to-day as the greatest spiritual genius this planet ever saw. In the Gospels, as Dr. James Drummond has suggested, the impression we receive is that “one transcendent soul was lifted clear above the common infirmity, and lived from the first in undisturbed communion with God.” (*Studies in Christian Doctrine*, p. 313.) It is because of his consciousness of unbroken communion with God that Christians have accepted Jesus as Master in the realms of the spirit.

This consciousness of unbroken communion with God is the positive and precious element which lies behind the doctrine of the sinlessness of Jesus. So far as the Gospel records go, there is no hint that Jesus was ever conscious of falling below the standard of his ideal, but the records are too fragmentary to *prove* that he was “without sin.” Even if they were not fragmentary, however full they were, it would always be possible for a critic to say that, if only they were a little fuller, they would contain some account of moral failure on the part of Jesus. It is sufficient, however, to state the matter thus: in the accounts of the life of Jesus which have come down to us we have the picture of One who had a vivid sense of personal communion with God, and preserved this sense unbroken throughout his earthly career.

An apparent exception is the cry from the Cross—“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” There, it seems, for a brief instant the sense of communion was interrupted. But the words were wrung from tortured flesh which was no longer under the full control of the animating mind; in all probability they were no more than a half-conscious reminiscence of the opening verse of the 22nd Psalm, and they were followed by the triumphant affirmation, “Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.” Reading the story of Jesus, multitudes have felt that they were reading of One who was not only a man, but also the ideal man. In him they have seen the divinity of human nature demonstrated, and the glory of human destiny achieved.

Feeling thus about him, the writer of the Fourth Gospel was moved to declare: “The logos became flesh.” Taking this statement out of the phraseology of Greek philosophy, and putting it into our modern terminology, what the author of it affirms is that Jesus was the “thought” or “intention” or “mind” of God expressed in terms of human flesh. Just as the Bible may be said to reveal God’s mind in terms of the written word, so Jesus reveals God’s mind in terms of “the

living word." The Bible shows us what God is like by telling us about God; Jesus shows us what God is like by living as God would live if He were subject to the limitations of human flesh. There is a sense in which every man is an expression of a "thought" of God. A cathedral is an expression of human thought—it exists as an idea in the mind before it exists as a plan on paper or a building in stone. In the same way, every man is an expression of divine thought. But there are degrees of significance. Some people express the divine thought more clearly than others. We give a rational explanation of the life of Jesus when we say that in him the thought of God was expressed to such a degree of significance that we cannot imagine a clearer or more adequate expression. If we can imagine a clearer or more adequate expression of the mind of God, what is it?

We can only form a mental image of what God is like by seeing the qualities of the Godhead expressed somewhere. For many people the qualities of the Godhead seem to be expressed more fully in human nature than in any other department of nature, and most fully, though not exclusively, in the life of Jesus. He was a man tempted in all points as we are tempted—an expression of a "thought" of God just as we are expressions of the "thoughts" of God. But the significance of the Divine Thought manifested in him gave him a unique place among men. A simple analogy may help us to understand this. Water at ordinary temperatures is a liquid. When raised to boiling point it becomes steam, and water in the form of steam can do things which water in its liquid form can never do—for example, it can drive a railway engine from London to Edinburgh. In the same way, when the "thought" of God is raised to the degree of significance to which it was raised in the historic case of Jesus, it produces results *of a different order* from those produced at the ordinary levels of humanity. Yet these results, though of a different order from those realised in ordinary humanity,

lie within the compass of what humanity is capable of becoming, and they became actual results in Jesus.

When we think of the vast distance that separates our humanity from the humanity of Jesus, a sense of inferiority fills our minds. But this sense of inferiority does not overwhelm us; it does not cause us to sink down beneath the dark waters of despair. Therefore it is not an inferiority complex, since the distinguishing mark of an inferiority complex is that it does overwhelm us. The Christian who is pressing on towards the mark of his high calling in Christ Jesus knows that he is far from having attained the mark, and the consciousness of his shortcomings produces in him a feeling of inferiority as he contemplates the holy humanity of Jesus. But this feeling of inferiority is a healthy feeling. It is not a psychological complex in the recesses of his subconscious mind, but a conscious and deliberate facing of the facts of experience—a realistic outlook on life.

The supreme test of whether a man is pressing on towards the mark of his high calling in Christ Jesus will be found in the attitude he adopts to the commandments of Jesus. "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments. . . . This is my commandment, that ye love one another." Lack of love is the cause of all evil—as St. Teresa said, "Satan would not be Satan if he could love." The duty to love lies at the heart of the teaching of Jesus, and this love is to be so wide in its scope that it embraces enemies as well as friends. The ideal is high, but not impossibly high. It is within the measure of our capacity, for history furnishes many notable instances of men and women whose dealings with their enemies have been marked by a Christ-like love.

Part of the reason why we consider the commandment to love our enemies so difficult to carry out is because we try to begin at the wrong end, with the enemies of whom we have heard but never met, instead of with the enemies with whom we are thrown into daily contact. It is impossible to love

anyone, either as a friend or as an enemy, unless you *know* him.

Love is always a personal and individual affair, and it cannot be brought into existence by a system of mass production. During the French Revolution there was a certain demagogue of whom it was said: "He loved humanity, yet hated men." This type of mind is not uncommon. We are constantly coming across people who are utterly sincere and passionately earnest in their love for humanity in the mass. They would make enormous sacrifices to promote what they suppose to be the cause of universal brotherhood. But, owing to some curious twist in their spiritual nature, they cherish the most violent antipathies towards those who do not see eye to eye with them in their schemes for the welfare of humanity. This is to begin at the wrong end with the application of the commandment to love our enemies.

The commandment of Jesus is that the enemy man, whom we know by personal and first-hand experience to be *our* enemy, is to be included within the circle of our love. We are to bring such influences to bear upon him as are calculated to change him from a personal enemy to a personal friend. We do not know the meaning of love if all we know of love is limited to a vague feeling of good-will towards humanity in the mass. We must love men and women individually, for what we know them to be and for what we hope they are becoming, before we can love them collectively as members of the human species. We cannot make up for our lack of love for our brother whom we have seen by professing a disinterested friendship for our distant cousin whom we never have seen and never shall see.

In our efforts to apply the commandment of Jesus, therefore, we must begin with the enemies who are known personally to us, and whom we meet from day to day. To love them, to treat them with kindness, to strive to turn their enmity into friendliness—all this is not easy. Nobody ever

suggested that the practice of Christianity was easy. But it is not impossibly difficult. When Jesus told us to love one another, and to include our enemies within the circle of our love, he set us a task big enough to test our souls, but not so big as to try us beyond our capacity. When we strive with earnest simplicity to follow along the way of his supreme commandment, we are pressing on towards the mark of our high calling, and showing our love for Jesus by the method which he himself enjoined.

CHAPTER VI

THE RESURRECTION

“The resurrection was the standing up of all things to immortal life; it was not the same body, but a re-clothing in some higher form of the purified spirit.”

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA.

IN order that we may press on towards the mark of some splendid ideal, two things are necessary—the vision of the ideal itself, and the energy which drives us on towards it. In Christian experience the ideal is seen in the words and works of Jesus, and may be described as the religion of Jesus, whilst the energy which drives us onwards is derived consciously or unconsciously from certain convictions *about* Jesus. Prominent among these convictions, through all the ages of Christian history, has been the assurance that he who hung on Golgotha’s hill did not go down to a lone Syrian grave but rose triumphant from the dead. Can this assurance be justified?

One thing we may assert with confidence. It is impossible to explain the beginnings of the Christian Church, immediately after the Crucifixion, without assuming that something happened which was quite above the ordinary levels of experience. Consider the circumstances amid which the Church arose. A little band of men and women, the first disciples of Jesus, found all their hopes dashed to the ground. Their leader had failed; their cause was lost; he whom they had regarded as the hope of Israel had been led to a felon’s death; and the years which they had spent in his company had turned out to be years of delusion. So they must have thought.

What transformed this little band of broken and despairing men and women into a mighty company of daring adventurers, unconquerable in faith, going forth to plant the standard of the Cross wherever they could gain a hearing? Nothing can happen without a cause adequate to explain it, and we cannot explain the change which came over the first disciples soon after the Crucifixion without affirming that, somehow or other, the conviction reached them that their Master had not failed. He was not dead; he was with them still; he was alive for evermore. How did they become convinced of this?

Were they deceived? Were all who came after them, sharing their experience, deceived in like manner? It is a strange delusion which runs counter to all the experience coming to us through ordinary sense-impression, persists through nearly twenty centuries, wins the support of some of the keenest intellects the world has ever known, endures to this day amid all the discoveries of modern science, and produces the fruit which Christianity has produced. The long-accepted delusion that the earth was the centre of the Universe offers no analogy, since this is a delusion which is in apparent harmony with the ordinary experience coming to us through the physical senses.

Most people to-day, if pressed to give their reasons for believing that the earth revolves round the sun, would find difficulty in proving their case from first principles, and they would find it utterly impossible to give convincing reasons for accepting those views of the Universe which are derived from the theory of Relativity. Modern scientific theories concerning the nature of the physical Universe have been built up on a basis of sense experience, only it is sense experience of a wider nature than that open to the average individual. But, if we leave on one side the evidence offered by modern Spiritualism, the delusion that Jesus was alive after he was dead—if it is a delusion—is one which contra-

dicts all the experience coming to us through our physical senses, both the limited sense experience of the average individual and the wider sense experience of the skilled scientific investigator.

Yet it was an experience in the minds of the first disciples, and it produced results which nothing else could have done. How was it brought about? Were they the victims of an hallucination? Did they so concentrate on what had happened on Calvary that they became telepathically connected one with the other, and goaded on the image-making faculties in each other's minds, till in the end their frayed nerves and distressed spirits caused them to project a subjective experience into an objective appearance?

What is a subjective experience? It is something happening in the brain cells of a man. What causes this "something" to happen? Sometimes the subjective experience is produced by a real object in the external world, and then we say there is an objective reality; sometimes the experience is simply a rearrangement and adaptation of past experiences, as when we dream or allow our imagination to have free course within us, and then we say there is no objective reality.

By the very nature of the case, it is impossible to prove that there was an objective reality behind the experience which overwhelmed the first disciples. We can only believe. But we are entitled to ask those who think there was no objective reality behind the experience to explain how the subjective experience—the hallucination or delusion—arose.

Suppose one morning a telegram is delivered at my door; I open the brown envelope and learn that someone has left me a considerable fortune. In all probability this message will revolutionise my life; certainly it will cause me to make very great changes in my plans and domestic arrangements. All these changes will be the result of the message. But how came the message to reach me? You may say that it

reached me because certain electric currents travelling through many miles of wire tapped out certain signs in the Morse code, and these signs were taken down and translated into the letters which appear on the telegraph form. If you say this, you will be right—in a sense. Yet, in another and more important sense, I shall be right if I say, "The message reached me because somebody sent it."

The vital fact about the telegraphic message is not the electric currents in the wire, but the person at the other end whose activity causes the currents to flow. It is exactly the same with the Resurrection of Jesus. The superficial discrepancies in the Gospel narratives bear testimony to the independent character of those who compiled them. The compilers were not acting in collusion, and they agree on fundamentals. They tell us that a message reached the men and women who had seen the dead body of their Master taken down from the Cross and laid in a tomb. The first persons to receive the message were some sad-hearted women who approached the tomb in the early dawn of the first Easter Day. They came with spices and ointments to embalm the body; when they reached the tomb, the stone was rolled away and the body was missing. For the moment we are not concerned with what had happened to the body; we are concerned with the message which reached the women. As they stood gazing at the empty tomb, it seemed to them that they saw two angels, or messengers, from whose lips came the words: "Seek him not here. This is the place of the dead. He is not here. He is risen."

In some accounts we are told of one messenger; in other accounts, of two. Sometimes the messengers are called "angels"; at other times, "men." St. Luke uses both words (Luke xxiv. 4, 23), showing that he thought of angels appearing in the form of men. It might be argued that there were two messengers, and that one of them was not always visible, thus accounting for the conflicting nature of the

reports on this point. But it is not to be expected that separate reports of the same event should agree in every particular, especially when the event is one outside the normal range of experience. The superficial discrepancies in the Gospel narratives strengthen the independence of their witness, and the fundamental point on which they all agree is that a message reached the women.

What shall we say of this message? We may say that the experience through which the women passed was dramatised by them; they translated their subjective impressions into objective images, so that it seemed to them as if they actually saw beings in shining apparel, and heard words uttered by angel messengers. If we explain the matter thus, no one can prove that we are wrong, and we cannot prove that we are right. Suppose we are right—suppose the message reached the women by means of a subjective impression. At the very utmost, to talk about subjective impressions is only like talking about the electric currents which convey a telegraphic message from one point to another.

Whatever may have been the medium through which the message came to the women, the source from which the message came is unaffected. We are entitled to believe that God can speak through the tongues of men and of angels; through direct voice, through indirect voice, through the subconscious minds of receptive individuals, through instinct, through imagination, through intuition, through inspiration, through dreams and visions, through premonitions, through all the ways and means and methods known to man, as well as through thousands of ways and means and methods for which man has not yet found names. Whether God speaks in the thunder of the earthquake or in the still small voice of conscience, it is God who is speaking. When God spoke to the women at the sepulchre, whether He spoke directly to their souls or indirectly through the lips of angel messengers, it was God who spoke.

In the last analysis, the telegraphic message does not come to us because electric currents are set up in the wires; it comes to us because somebody sends it. So with the women at the tomb—the message that the Lord was risen did not come to them because of certain subjective experiences through which they passed; it came to them because somebody sent it. They *felt* that the Lord had risen because the Lord *had* risen. The Resurrection was a fact; and to talk about subjective impressions will not explain the fact, though it may explain how the fact came to be recognised as a fact by human minds.

All knowledge comes to us through the medium of subjective impressions. But, setting aside cases of definite mental disease, in all our dealings with what we call “the outside world” we believe that the outside world is *there*. We believe, and we are entitled to believe, that our subjective impressions correspond to some objective reality. In all probability the objective reality is very different from the way in which it appears to us. Still, there is a correspondence between the subjective impression and the objective reality. What the women saw and heard when they stood gazing at the empty tomb corresponded to something which was really there. In a sense higher than can be grasped by minds held in the limitations of time and space and matter, Jesus was alive after he was dead. The message which the women received was a true message.

Moreover, we must remember that neither they nor anybody else expected to receive such a message. Simon Peter, when his Lord was crucified, had no confident hope that he would ever see him again. Saul, journeying to Damascus, had not the slightest expectation that he was going to meet Jesus somewhere on the road. If anyone had spoken to him on the subject, he would have said that Jesus was an impostor who had stirred up a lot of trouble, and been caught and put to death, and was now as dead as dead could be.

What happened to these people—to the sad-hearted women at the sepulchre, to the shifting sand that was Peter, to the persecutor whose name was Saul? They received a message which revolutionised their whole outlook on life. To try to explain the coming of the message in terms of subjective impressions, whilst denying that there was any objective reality to start the impressions, is not to face the facts, but to evade them.

We may believe where we cannot prove, and we have a right to believe that the subjective experience which alone can explain the origin of the Christian Church as a missionary institution can itself be explained by nothing short of the proposition that it was an experience of reality. Mere "day dreams" or "hallucinations" or "regroupings of past experience" do not produce such phenomena as marked the birth of the Christian Church. We may not safely pin ourselves down to the details of any particular interpretation of the experience. We have much to learn about the constitution of the "spiritual body" or "ethereal substance" which the risen Jesus used, or appeared to use, in some instances to bring conviction to the hearts of his stricken followers. But the essential fact is that the conviction did come to them; and the only adequate explanation of this fact is that he who had been crucified was not dead, but alive.

Whether we find this explanation credible or incredible will depend to a very large extent on what we believe about the nature of God. If the very self of Jesus was blotted out upon the Cross, he is still the greatest figure in human history and the chief of martyr souls. If all we have is the memory of a hero who perished nearly 2,000 years ago, the influence of the hero remains with us as an abiding inspiration. But God—the God of Christian devotion—does not remain. If the Almighty allowed His loyal son to go down to final disaster and utter defeat—if the grave did hold Jesus—then God may be "the Almighty," but it is difficult to see in what

sense He can be regarded as "our Father." If we believe that God is "our Father," we must believe that with Him and in Him all values are safe. If, further, we believe that the supreme value manifested in history was the personality of Jesus Christ, it follows that Jesus passed triumphantly through death, and is alive for evermore with God.

What happened to his body? Who rolled away the stone from the tomb? How came the tomb to be empty? We do not know. What we do know is that the "body" in which the risen Jesus manifested himself to his disciples was a "body" of quite different composition, and with quite different powers, from these bodies of material particles with which we are endowed. The necessary and sufficient explanation of the facts recorded in the New Testament is that after the death of Jesus his soul passed on, and took unto itself another medium of manifestation corresponding to but not identical with the medium of manifestation—the body of material particles—which he possessed in the days of his flesh.

The doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh, in its old traditional form, seems to suggest that the only possible medium of manifestation in the other world will be a body of flesh—bone and blood and material tissue—of the same sort as the physical bodies we wear here on earth. Such a doctrine is utterly untenable nowadays. What is tenable is the belief that in the next life God will provide us with "spiritual bodies," of a far higher and finer type than the bodies of material particles which we use to make contact with a world of matter. By means of these "spiritual bodies" we shall be able to make contact with the inhabitants of the other world, to meet and hold converse with our loved ones once again, and to know even as we have been known. The "resurrection body" in which Jesus manifested himself to his disciples after the Crucifixion appears to have been developed from a body of this type.

Any attempt to discover what happened to his other body—the body which was laid in the tomb—must rest on pure speculation. An ingenious speculation (put forward as a tentative suggestion by Sir Oliver Lodge in an article in the *Hibbert Journal*, January 1932) is that when Jesus was put to death, his earthly body was so transfused with the spirit which had animated it that it dematerialised and left the tomb empty. Sir Oliver Lodge goes on to suggest that in thus dematerialising his earthly body Jesus anticipated what will become the normal rule for the higher grade of mankind which will arise in the future. After a long course of evolution, human bodies may dematerialise at death, and all the repulsive paraphernalia of burial or cremation to get rid of the unwholesome residue of disintegrating matter will no longer be necessary. This, of course, is pure speculation; but it fits the recorded facts and offers a possible explanation of how the tomb of Jesus came to be empty. But even if it should turn out to be the correct explanation, it would not mean that Jesus took his earthly body with him into the other life.

What did he take with him? He took himself, and “all things appertaining to the perfection of man’s nature”—his unflinching faith in God, his limitless love for men, and all the values which he had gathered into his identity during the course of his earthly career. These eternal “values,” and not the flesh and bones of his mortal body, constituted the “things appertaining to the perfection of man’s nature.” These “values”—including the “value” of his personal identity—were safe in the hands of his Heavenly Father. They *could not* perish, though in the world of time and space they were to operate henceforth through a medium other than the body which Jesus wore in the days of his flesh.

CHAPTER VII

THE LIVING CHRIST

“Jesus spake, saying, ‘Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.’”

Matthew xxviii. 20.

“Jesus not only *was*, he is still the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. He exists now. . . . I confidently expect, at no distant period, to see him face to face.”

W. E. CHANNING.

THERE are many people to-day who think of Jesus as the greatest teacher of spiritual truth this world has ever known, but regard all forms of organised religion with indifference. They might be prepared to acknowledge, in a vague and general way, what they would describe as “the leadership of Jesus.” Let us examine this phrase. What does it mean?

Once in English history a sick king, leading his army northward, died before he encountered the enemy. Tradition asserts that he gave instructions for his dead body to be placed in a coffin and carried at the head of the English host till the conquest of Scotland was completed. In a sense, Edward I was the leader of the English forces against Robert Bruce, but it was a dead Edward who led the English army. Is it in this sense that Jesus is “our leader”? If so, we can hardly hope to fare better than the English army at Bannockburn. All the victories won by Christian faith and devotion in the course of the centuries have been won by men and women who felt themselves guided by a living leader. In its origin, and in its historical development, Christianity has not been the faith which venerates the

memory of a dead martyr; it has been the faith which affirms that he who was a dead martyr is a Living Lord.

Let it be admitted that when an individual is convinced that he is in communion with the Living Christ, his conviction involves not only an experience but also an interpretation of the experience. The experience is valid, but the interpretation may be inadequate. All human interpretations fall short of the full truth, since finite minds cannot grasp the fullness of Reality. But to admit this is very different from suggesting that the notion of the Living Christ is based on a pure illusion. Whilst guarding ourselves as carefully as we can from the dangers of "religious impressionism" and the influences of mass suggestion, we may feel constrained to believe that the subjective experience of the Living Christ corresponds to some objective reality, the full nature of which we cannot grasp.

Consider an image seen in a mirror—anyone can see it, and take a photograph of it, which suggests that it is objective; but nobody can touch it, which suggests that it is subjective. Most people would agree that the image *corresponds to an objective reality*; it is a sign of something which actually exists. We need claim no more than this for the experience which is interpreted as communion with the Living Christ. The *feeling* of communion points to something real which produces the feeling.

If it be said that the feeling arises through mass suggestion, we are compelled to ask how the mass suggestion began. It began with an experience which overwhelmed the first disciples, and which they interpreted to mean that Jesus was still present with them, though they had seen his dead body placed in the tomb. We cannot deny their experience, and we are entitled to believe that behind it was some objective reality. The belief that this objective reality still endures is what is meant by belief in Christ as a Living Leader.

Belief in the Living Christ follows logically from the

conviction that the personality of Jesus was of supreme value, and that all "values" are safe in the hands of God. Faith rests on the axiom that whatever has "value" survives, and survives for all that it is "worth." Since there are degrees of value, there must be something corresponding to "degrees of survival." It is obvious that a thing cannot survive unless it first exists, and anything which lacks distinctive identity—a vegetable, for example, or perhaps one of the lower animals—cannot secure individual survival. But there comes a point in evolution where personal identity appears, and this has "survival value." The "degree" to which it survives depends on what it is "worth." A great personality survives in a great way; a feeble personality survives in a feeble way. If Jesus was the greatest spiritual genius the world has ever known, his personality must have survived in an unparalleled way.

On the human plane of existence, individuality or real personality manifests itself through an instrument made up of material particles forming the body of a man. When the instrument disintegrates, it does not follow that the user of the instrument has been destroyed. Smashing a violin is not the same thing as killing the violinist. Because a human body is the instrument through which a human personality is manifested normally, we have no right to assume that it is the only possible instrument.

The "value" of a man is not the "value" of his body, but the "value" of what he is capable of doing with his body. Shakespeare's body may have been worth less than the average human body to-day, since the average expectation of life in his day was less than it is nowadays. But this does not affect the "survival value" of Shakespeare's personal identity. After making full allowance for the lessons of experience which enter into the social inheritance of the race, the fact remains that experience is an intensely individualised affair. If it is to be passed on without loss of value, it seems necessary

that the personality of the individual in whose life it has been developed should pass through death into another life. Mere "survival" in the memories of those left behind would not safeguard the survival of all the "values" which are gathered together in the experience of an individual.

When we pass through the change of death, we leave our physical bodies behind us, but these were never more than an arrangement of particles of matter temporarily associated with us. What survives, according to Christian belief, is personal identity. After death, we shall be changed in form, but we shall not be different people. Leaving behind all that was never an essential part of us, we take with us all that has become an essential part of us—all that we have gathered together and built up into the fabric of our personalities, and all the "values" of personal relationships and contacts with minds akin to our own. It is difficult to see how these "values" can be preserved unless there is some reality corresponding to the notion of "reunion in eternity."

We cannot imagine what life in "the next world" is like, or what means will be provided for one personality to make contact with another. But the belief that personality does survive, and that contact is made, is a reasonable deduction from the conviction that all "values" are safeguarded by God. The impossibility of forming a clear conception of life in "the next world" arises out of the fact that we have no experience of life which is not manifested to us through the medium of physical bodies. We are held by the forms of time and space and gravitation, and cannot imagine the conditions in which we shall find ourselves when time is transcended and space is obliterated and we are no longer subject to the forces of gravitation. When we try to imagine these conditions, we describe them in language of metaphor and analogy which we know to be inadequate. But recognition of the fact that we cannot say *how* our personal identity

will survive is perfectly consistent with a strong conviction that it *will* survive.

Personal identity has no more than an incidental connection with the medium which it uses for its manifestation. What do we mean by "identity"? Two men were discussing the proposition that "a thing remains the same, notwithstanding the substitution of some of its parts." One said: "Suppose I lose the blade of this penknife and get another blade inserted, will it be the same knife as before?" On receiving an affirmative reply, he continued: "Suppose I now lose the handle and get another, will it still be the same knife?" The reply, though given with some hesitation, was still in the affirmative. "Well, then," persisted the inquirer, "suppose somebody finds the old blade and the old handle, and puts them together again, what knife will that be?"

But the inquirer, in his final question, has introduced a new factor into the situation. He says: "Suppose somebody finds the old blade and the old handle, *and puts them together again.*" Exactly! The old blade and the old handle, between them, do not make a knife; they only make a knife when somebody puts them together, not anyhow, but in the special way in which a knife is put together. It is the "putting together" which is vital. The inquirer gets the identity of his extra knife by introducing a mysterious "somebody" who creates the identity. Any object which can be regarded as a single thing must be made up of a number of parts. If one part is lost, the object will be mutilated; but if the missing part is replaced by a new part, the object is restored to its original state, and it may be argued that its identity is not affected.

When we ascend from the realm of inanimate objects to the realm of organic life, the principle of the persistence of identity operates even more clearly. A man is still himself after he has had his appendix removed. He is conscious of an identity which transcends the continual flux of the parts

of which he is composed. Scientists have calculated that in the course of about seven years the whole of the material forming the physical body of a man is completely changed. Somewhere, mingled with the dust of the earth, all the atoms of carbon and hydrogen and oxygen which constituted my body seven years ago are still existing. Suppose the Divine Creative Activity takes them and puts them together again to fashion a human body, and breathes into them—we must not forget the Divine inbreathing—to form a living man, what man will that be? Will he be me? Foolish as the question sounds, it is parallel to the inquirer's question, "If somebody finds the old blade and the old handle, and puts them together again, what knife will that be?"

Personal identity is more than the vehicle of its manifestation, and there is no reason why it should not survive the dissolution of the vehicle adapted for its manifestation under the conditions of time and space and gravitation. It survives for all that it is worth. Herein lies the answer to those who tell us that we ought not to think of Jesus as living or present in a different way from St. Paul or St. Francis or our own departed friends who are being used by God to carry His messages to us. It may be that Jesus is not living "in a different way" from St. Paul or St. Francis or anybody else in "the other life" who is being used by God to convey messages to us, but—using the only language available for us—we may say that he is living in a more significant degree. There are degrees of "worth," and therefore there is some reality corresponding to the idea which we express inadequately as "degrees of survival." St. Paul is alive, and St. Francis is alive, and our friends who have passed through death are alive, but for those who are striving to live in his spirit Jesus is supremely and most significantly alive. His supreme survival is the necessary result of his supreme worth.

If this is theory, it is theory which fits the facts of Christian

experience. The normal experience in Christian worship is not experience of the presence of St. Paul or St. Francis, but an experience which is usually interpreted as the presence of the Living Christ. Generally, this experience is described in subjective terms—nothing is seen or heard, but the worshipping company have a feeling that Christ is exerting a spiritual influence in their midst and is really present with them. They have a right to trust this feeling, and to believe that corresponding to it is some objective reality which they cannot fully explain or understand.

With some people, at rare moments, the feeling of the presence of Christ is so vivid that the experience appears to take an objective form. It would be easy to multiply instances of this. An impressive modern instance is given by Canon C. E. Raven, in *A Wanderer's Way*.¹ Canon Raven describes how, as a young man, beset by intellectual difficulties about religious matters, he went to visit an old college friend. They talked about old times, old books, old comrades. They did not speak about God. "But," says Canon Raven, "it was evident that a third person was there: I do not know how else to express it. . . . Jesus was alive and present to my friend as he had been to the eleven in the upper room. . . . And as the day passed, this sense of a third person present with us extended itself to me: I was admitted to their partnership as surely as if I had been formally introduced to the new-comer. There was nothing strained or fantastic, abnormal or supernatural about it. Quite literally it was as simple and obvious as if my friend had had with him a revered and sympathetic colleague who listened to our talk and influenced our every movement by the atmosphere of his presence."

Sometimes, though the sense of the presence of "another person" is so vivid that it is interpreted objectively, the individual who has the experience does not connect it con-

¹ Quoted here by permission of the author.

sciously and explicitly with the risen Jesus or with any particular person. When Sir Ernest Shackleton set out on one of his expeditions, he had with him two companions, Worsley and Crean. The explorers were stranded on the ice-field, and only escaped after a long and agonising march. Afterwards, recording their experiences, Shackleton wrote: "When I look back on those days I have no doubt that Providence guided us. . . . I know that during that long and racking march of thirty-six hours over the unnamed mountains and glaciers of South Georgia it seemed to me often that we were four, not three. I said nothing to my companions on the point, but afterwards Worsley said to me, 'Boss, I had a curious feeling on the march that there was another person with us.' Crean confessed to the same idea. One feels 'the dearth of human words, the roughness of mortal speech' in trying to describe things intangible, but a record of our journeys would be incomplete without a reference to a subject very near our hearts." (*South*, p. 164.)

The two instances quoted above are not taken from the recorded experiences of saints and mystics of bygone ages. The first instance relates to a meeting in a lodging-house between two normal young men, who talk about past events and current happenings without any trace of emotionalism. The second instance deals with an adventure on the Polar ice-cap. "It was evident that a third person was there," says Canon Raven. "It seemed to me that we were four, not three," says Sir Ernest Shackleton. These experiences are facts, and as facts they require explanation.

But what chiefly requires explanation is the normal experience in Christian worship, where the worshipping company have a very definite feeling that Christ is really and truly present in their midst, though they may not offer any particular theory, objective or subjective, concerning the manner in which he is present. How shall we account for this experience? Hallucination? Delusion? Glandular

secretions? Wish fulfilments? Or shall we say that God is still sending His messengers to guide men along the paths of life, and using the Living Christ—who in the days of his flesh was Jesus of Nazareth—as His supreme messenger to those who are striving to live as disciples of Jesus?

CHAPTER VIII

ABSTRACT TRUTH AND LIVING TRUTH

"Christianity is not an abstract creed, a system of thought; it is not a philosophical system—it is the personal influence of a great soul."

JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE.

"You tell us, for instance, that love is of God, and that we must love our brethren. But what is love? To know it, we must see it and feel it; and when we kneel before the cross, we know it, and, perceiving at the same time our own emptiness and need, we find that the commandment to love is turned into a quickening spirit."

JAMES DRUMMOND.

"ABSTRACT truth," said a well-known public man, "is one of our greatest dangers at the present moment." What did he mean? An abstract noun is the name of "something" abstracted from the "something else" through which it is manifested. So with truth—the abstract truth is some aspect of truth abstracted from the living truth which gives it vitality. For instance, the notion that St. Paul did not write the Epistle to the Hebrews is an abstract truth. The living and life-giving truth lies in the Epistle itself. The danger of abstract truth is that it may be regarded as a substitute for the living truth. The learned theologian who can prove that St. Paul did not write the Epistle to the Hebrews, and nearly prove that somebody else—Barnabas, or Apollos, or Priscilla—did write it, may nevertheless miss the life-giving truth of it. The humblest peasant who takes the English translation of it at its face value and believes that it came direct from the hand of the Apostle to the Gentiles, yet finds his soul responding to the marvel of its last three chapters, has grasped the living truth which lies hidden in it.

This does not mean that scholarship is unimportant; it

only means that we must beware of confounding intellectual discovery with spiritual insight. Religion is an experience; the interpretation of experience is a problem. Those who have the experience will do their best to solve the problem, but they will not be unduly perplexed if they cannot arrive at a perfect solution. It is possible to "tune in" a wireless receiver without being able to give a convincing explanation of how the wireless waves are propagated through the ether, and it is possible to respond to the spiritual influences which are all around us without being able to explain how the influences reach us or how the response is made.

Any abstract truth is dangerous when it is isolated from its context. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" is an abstract truth which may be isolated from its context, but Jesus did not leave it as an abstract truth; he told the Parable of the Good Samaritan to answer the question "Who is my neighbour?"—and at once the abstract truth was placed in its proper setting, so that it became a warm and living and vitalising impulse. The living truth is not something to be believed, but something to be lived. We can believe an abstract truth, but we cannot live it till we have brought it into relation with the set of circumstances through which it is manifested.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved" is an abstract truth which may be, and often is, isolated from its context. People suppose that "belief in the Lord Jesus" means giving intellectual assent to certain theological propositions about Jesus. But we believe in the Lord Jesus, in a living and life-giving way, when we live with him—that is to say, when we live in definite and conscious fellowship with him. We are in definite and conscious fellowship with him when we are striving to live in his spirit, and to cultivate the same mind in us as was in him. If we are doing this, we are believing in him in the only real and practical way. All the abstract ways of believing in him have been tried and

found wanting. But the day of the dominion of abstract truth is drawing to a close. The Spirit of the Living Christ is working in the world to-day; men are coming to see that their little systems and their abstract propositions are not so important as they had thought; a new Christianity, idealistic and realistic, is arising on the ruins of the old abstract theology which has so often been mistaken for Christianity.

One of the characters in a modern story is Pilate—not Pilate in the days when he was Governor of Judæa, but in his later years, after he had been deposed and was living in exile in Gaul. The ex-governor is looking back over the course of his life; presently he remembers that once upon a time he was called upon to pronounce judgment in the case of a man named Jesus, who had been accused of some crime. He tries to recall the precise nature of the crime, but it has escaped his memory. It had something to do with the Jewish law, he had had some doubts about the prisoner's guilt, there had been an uproar, and in the end he had acquiesced in the popular demand for the prisoner's execution. But he has forgotten the details. He had paid no special attention to the matter, regarding it simply as an incident in a day's work.

Such a representation of Pilate's mentality in his later years has no historical evidence to support it, yet it is not improbable. What Pilate, in common with many other clever people of his generation, regarded as a mere incident in a day's work, turned out to be the most significant event of history. We are able to understand something of the significance of that event because we view it in its proper perspective. But if we had lived in Pilate's day we might have regarded it as he regarded it.

We can only estimate things aright when we see them in their proper perspective. There is a well-known hymn which begins, "I think, when I read that sweet story of old, when Jesus was here among men," and goes on to affirm how the

hymn-writer would have liked to have known Jesus in the days of his flesh. But if we had known him then, when he walked in Galilee, should we have known him as truly and as fully as we may know him now, when nearly twenty centuries bear witness to his abiding influence? We need not lament that we never met Jesus in the flesh. Pilate met him—and forgot all about him.

Others, who did not forget, were yet unable to appreciate the nature of the influence which he was destined to wield. Even the inner circle of his chosen disciples were constantly misunderstanding the things he said. "Sir, we would see Jesus," said the Greeks who came to Philip; but Paul, who never met Jesus in the flesh, knew Jesus far more vividly than Philip ever did. True knowledge of a man is not acquired through mere contact with his material flesh, but through surrender to his spiritual influence. The Living Christ has made and is making his influence felt throughout the world in a way which goes far beyond anything that was possible in the days when he walked in Galilee.

How does the Living Christ make his influence felt in our age? Once, in the days of his flesh, Jesus made himself known to men through a body composed of earthly particles similar to those which form our physical bodies. To-day, his contact with the world is made normally through the medium of a "body" of a different type—the "Body" which is his holy Church. The true Catholic Church which functions as "the Body of Christ" is composed of all men and women and little children who are trying to express as much as they can of the Spirit of Christ. The boundaries of this Church are known to God alone, and cannot be marked by any device—such as subscription to a Creed or verbal formula—invented by man.

It is a common thing nowadays to hear a man say: "I believe in Christianity, but I do not believe in the Christian Church." But is it possible to have Christianity without a

Christian Church? Let it be granted that the Christian religion is more than the organisation which exists to propagate it, just as a man is more than his body. Yet the body is the instrument which a man must use in order to make his influence felt in a world of time and space. If the Christian Church disappeared to-morrow, Christ would still exist, and God would still exist, but the knowledge of God revealed through Christ would be withheld from the world unless some society or "body" of witnesses existed to bear testimony to it.

We know that our actions as individuals do not spring from our physical bodies. All our thoughts and words and works spring from the promptings of the mind or spirit dwelling within the body. It is just the same with the Church which is the Body of Christ—it is, or it ought to be, under the direct control of the Spirit which it was fashioned to manifest, the Spirit of Christ. Jesus said: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." These words must mean something, and for many Christians they mean everything. They mean that Jesus is really and truly present, unchanged in personal identity and changed only in the means by which he makes himself known, throughout the world to-day wherever two or three are striving to follow along his way of life.

Those who interpret their experience in this fashion cannot prove that they are not the unconscious victims of mass suggestion. But is it quite certain that mass suggestion must necessarily lead us astray? Majorities are often wrong, but sometimes they happen to be right. It is true, as Ibsen says, that "the race is saved in all ages by its faithful minorities," but not all minorities are faithful minorities. As a general rule, the minorities which are in the right maintain their witness, and perhaps become majorities, whilst the numerous minorities which are in the wrong disappear. We see the minorities which have maintained their witness; we do not

see the minorities which have vanished. We remember the Quakers; we forget the Muggletonians.

Thus we may be led to think that there is something to be said for a minority simply because it is a minority. Such a view is clearly false. One man with God on his side will be in the right when twelve men without God are in the wrong; but twelve earnest men, honestly trying to get at the truth of a matter, are more likely to arrive at the truth—and therefore to have God on their side—than one man of equal calibre who works in isolation.

If we confine our attention to Christendom as a whole, we may suppose that there is a very considerable majority on behalf of that interpretation of the experience of the Living Christ, and of the Communion of Saints, which affirms an objective reality behind the experience. This majority produces what we call mass suggestion. But if we guard ourselves against the mass suggestion, let us be equally zealous to guard ourselves against anti-mass suggestion—that is to say, against the tendency to think that an idea *must* be wrong if it is held by a majority. We do well to remember that there was a time when the Christian Church was a minority—a faithful minority. Indeed, has it ever really been anything else, even in lands nominally Christian?

No interpretation of experience can be proved; it can only be accepted or rejected on grounds of probability. If some perverse individual were to deny that I have a memory, and challenge me to prove that I have a memory, what could I do? When I start to argue the matter with him, by the time I reach the second point in my argument I am tacitly assuming that I remember the first point—that is, I am assuming the very thing which is in dispute. We must trust our experience, and there is no need for us to go through life in the spirit of the cautious metaphysician who prefaced every statement with the formula: "It seems to me that I think I believe." But we ought to examine our interpretations of experience

in the light of reason, comparing them with the interpretations of others, and especially with the interpretations of those most qualified to judge. If our interpretations agree with the interpretations of others, that is so much added support for our view, and it is foolish to frighten ourselves with the bogey of mass suggestion.

We have a right to trust the experience which leads us to affirm that Christ is present wherever two or three are gathered together in his name. But we have neither right nor reason to suppose that the Living Christ is present wherever two or three are gathered together in some other name. The experience of the presence of Christ is a valid experience, and not an illusion, but it is obviously valid only for those who have it. Among those who have it not, there are many noble souls, the reality and depth of whose religious experience is unquestionable. God has numerous messengers, and the devotees of another religion may be drawn into communion with Him through the witness of another messenger. Dr. J. E. Carpenter has pointed out how the practice of Buddhism to-day rests on the assumption that "the devout Buddhist enters into living communion with his heavenly Lord (*i.e.* the historic Gotama); and some of the different experiences of the Evangelical and the Catholic Christian are reproduced in similar types *sub specie Buddha*." (*Place of Christianity among the Religions of the World*, p. 51.)

From such a comparison it is possible to infer that the experience of the Living Christ is parallel to the experience of the Living Buddha, and that both are illusions. But the opposite inference is equally legitimate—the very similarity of the two types of experience suggests that both are based on reality. The Lord Buddha is alive and the Lord Jesus is alive, and the devotee has fellowship with the one or the other of them according to his faith. The old division of religions into "the true" and "the false" is obsolete, but many of them may be classified according to the messengers used by

God to draw men unto Himself. This does not mean that "one religion is as good as another." It does mean that faithful response to the spirit of any of God's messengers—Buddha or Christ or any other—brings the soul into communion with God.

If we pray in the spirit of Christ, we shall pray with Jesus rather than to Jesus. But to pray with Jesus means to pray as he did, and his method of prayer is well known to us. Prayer is to be addressed to God: "When ye pray, say, 'Our Father which art in Heaven.'" It is to be uttered with confidence: "Ask, and it shall be given you." It is to be the outpouring of a heart freed from every trace of bitterness: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." To pray like this is not easy. Prayer in the spirit of Christ is never easy.

Yet, throughout the world to-day, multitudes of men and women are striving to pray in the spirit of Christ. They are looking to Jesus as a pattern and guide and example. Testing their lives by his standard, they are made conscious of how far they are from having attained; struggling upwards towards the heights where he stands, they feel themselves lifted into a more abundant life. In all this there is no need to think of Christ as interceding with God on behalf of men; rather, we ought to think of Christ as interceding with men on behalf of God. It is God seeking men, and using Christ as His messenger, which forms the theme of the Christian gospel.

Salvation is deliverance from sin, both corporate sin and individual sin. It is not deliverance from the penalties of sin, though by a natural process it carries with it the gradual overcoming of the results of sin, as health overcomes sickness in the process of curing a disease. Such salvation finds its necessary and sufficient cause in the effort to respond to the challenging example of the ideal man, Jesus Christ. Jesus died on a Cross nearly two thousand years ago, yet he is more

alive to-day than in the days when he walked in Galilee. No longer subject to the limitations of time and space and gravitation, he is "seated on the right hand of God." The phrase is only a metaphor, of course—only the crudest anthropomorphism would interpret "the right hand of God" in a literal fashion—yet it is a very expressive metaphor, and the idea which it seeks to convey is a very necessary one.

A man's right hand is the hand with which, normally, he works; so also "God's right hand" indicates the place where God is working. Therefore, when we say that Jesus is seated at God's right hand, we are asserting that he is present where God is working. This is what is meant by faith in the Living Christ. It is God who is working, and the Living Christ is the messenger through whom He works on the souls of those who feel the challenge of the Spirit of Christ. According to our response to the Spirit moving within us, we are being saved as individuals and as members of the Brotherhood of Man, that the Reign of God may come.

RELIGION: ITS MODERN NEEDS AND PROBLEMS

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