

JOHN McLACHLAN

**THE
DIVINE IMAGE**



JOHN McLACHLAN, M.A., B.D., D. Phil (Oxon)

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England
Human Rights in Retrospect and Reality
The Old Nonconformity in Fulwood

**THE DIVINE IMAGE—
RELIGIOUS HUMANISM FROM
HOMER TO HAMMARSKJÖLD**

‘The theologian who surveys the broad fields of thought and experience sympathetically may be deemed a humanist. He is in favour of a humane social order and universal peace.’

J. K. Mozley, *Tendencies in British Theology*



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Foreword

Under the terms of her will, Miss Susan Minns of Boston established a fund in memory of her brother, Thomas, 'a descendant of John Wilson, the first Minister of the First Church in Boston'. The larger part of the income from the fund was to be used for a lectureship under the management of the First Church and of King's Chapel, Boston.

Since 1941, six lectures have been given each year. The lectures for 1969 were delivered at King's Chapel, Boston, and at Meadville/Lombard Theological School in the University of Chicago. The aim of the lectures, which now appear in slightly expanded form, is to examine the origins and discuss the development of what I have called 'Christian Humanism'. They were inspired by a suggestion of the late Victor Gollancz which he made some years ago in an Oxford common room—namely, that man's great need today was a religious humanism or 'a more humanistic religion'. These lectures are a contribution to the present debate, from a point of view that has not yet been ventilated. They try to show how the humanist emphasis derives in part, and in particular, from Jesus and a stream of undogmatic

Christianity which has not received the attention it deserves.

I am most grateful to the Trustees of the Minns Foundation for their kind invitation to deliver the lectures and to the Trustees of the Dr. Daniel Jones Fund and the Hibbert Trust for generous help towards publication.

JOHN MCLACHLAN

*Stratton House
Cambridge*

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I

**THE NEED FOR A RELIGIOUS
HUMANISM OR A HUMANISTIC
RELIGION**

'The purpose of life seems to be to acquaint man with himself. . . . The highest revelation is that God is in every man.'

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Diary*, written on his way home from England.

The Need for a Religious Humanism or a Humanistic Religion

'Orthodox religion', writes Colin Wilson, author of *The Outsider*, 'has been dying for several centuries, and it is now at its last gasp.'

This is, perhaps, a pardonable exaggeration, but it contains an important truth. Religion is certainly not the power in Western Civilisation that it once was, nor can it be claimed at the present time that it promises to stage 'a come-back'. Indeed, the Dean of King's College, Cambridge, the Rev. Dr. D. L. Edwards, author of the recent study *Religion and Change* (1969), remarked to me earlier this year that the danger was that religion might get shunted into a ghetto. In England, at all events, Christianity, as represented by the mainstream churches, has suffered a severe setback in the past fifty years, and does not look likely at the present time to stage a quick recovery. One has only to keep one's eyes open when walking about our larger towns and cities to see quite a number of buildings, formerly churches, that have been turned into warehouses, stores, and workshops. Near my old home in Manchester, for example, there are three such, quite close together, which I remember as flourishing congregations in the 1920s. All are now serving non-ecclesiastical purposes: one is a large furniture store, and the Unitarian church whose Sunday School I attended as a small boy and in whose

choir my mother sang as a young woman, is now the property of the British Broadcasting Corporation and used as a depot for their 'outside broadcast' trucks and apparatus.

This is symptomatic of the decline of religion in the United Kingdom. The population of the country between 1911 and 1961 increased by well over ten million (viz. 1911 : 42,082,000; 1961 : 52,673,000), but the number attending churches diminished considerably. Figures for church attendance are very hard to come by. Published statistics of membership are also difficult to obtain. Those available indicate, however, unmistakably grave reductions in numbers in recent years. For example, in 1912 the Baptist denomination counted 418,600 members. Today it numbers around 200,000, a reduction of over fifty per cent. I suspect that this sort of percentage reduction may be true of most of the other churches. Church of England confirmation figures fell by over eleven per cent per thousand of the population between 1956 and 1966 (1956 : 34·5; 1966 : 23·2 per thousand), and Easter communicants in 1966 numbered only 2,074,673 out of a population of over fifty-three million. Methodism early in the 1960s numbered 'about 750,000 adherents' (*Chambers' Dictionary*). In 1966 the figures showed a marked decline to 678,766. Congregationalism in 1959 counted 212,017 adult members; in January 1966 : 180,171. It is fair to say that a similar decline probably affected all the major denominations. (Both the Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of England have reported a loss of membership over the past year. Membership fell by 18,190 in the Church of Scotland, and by 1,975 in the Presbyterian Church of England!)

As you know, we have some fine old medieval churches in many of our cities. In York and Norwich, for instance, there are so many churches in the older parts of the city that you are never out of sight of one or more. They are devoted to various uses. In Norwich one is a Youth

Centre, another a museum, a third is closed. In York it is much the same.

We are faced with the same problem of too many churches in Cambridge, whilst in the rapidly growing centres of population in the Midlands and South-east the difficulty is to find clergy and churches in adequate supply. Today, organised institutional religion in England is losing grip. In my lifetime it never had too firm a hold on the masses, but in the years since 1920 the retreat from the churches has been steady and unmistakable. In the past two decades the pace of it has increased. . . .

Many writers have attributed this (I think correctly) to the secularisation of life in all its aspects. The Church, which once formed part of the accepted scenery of daily life, with the vicar and parson as welcome and respected figures in the public eye, appears to many to be merely an anachronistic survival from a dead past. The tide of public events sweeps by, little, or not at all, affected by religious precepts or practices. What churchmen call 'the faithful' become rapidly fewer, and involvement with organised religion represents an attitude on the whole rarer today amongst intelligent and sensitive people than at almost any time in history. The flight from faith is a fact, but inertia ensures that a certain number of people continue to attend church services—'because of the children' or 'because we like the man' (i.e. the minister), or because 'we don't swallow all the doctrines of the Church, yet we feel the need of some such centre for the spiritual nourishment of our minds and hearts'.

Further, the concepts of a medieval theology no longer appeal to the great number even of regular church-goers today. The straitjacket of the 4th and 5th century creeds that the Church fastened on Christianity still cramps the spirit of religion, and the mode of interpreting the Bible which rejects reason in favour of 'revelation' prevents acceptance of a fresh and meaningful understanding of Scripture in many quarters. In the

context of modern scientific thought and methodology the old confessional logomachies and conflicts appear unreal and unimportant. The attention of the thinking public is concentrated not upon theological niceties, as it was three, two, or even one hundred years ago, but upon social and political factors that appear to have vital and significant bearing upon daily life.

Hence it is a fact that faith and hope-for-the-future are *not* related, on the whole, any longer to the Church, to organised religion. They are derived from, or inspired by, other activities and concerns : by human need of one kind or another—poverty, handicap, distress, disease, destruction; by the need to find homes for the homeless and bread for the hungry; by the need to reduce racial tensions and to bridge the gulf dividing people from people; in short, by the need for reconciliation and understanding in a world that is rapidly becoming materially, if not politically, one.

True, for the most part, the Christian churches have realised where their duty lies; have created channels through which they may convey succour to the needy and the wretched : the work of 'Christian Aid' and 'Oxfam' in this connection is noteworthy, but as yet many church members seem to be strangely unaware of the demand that faith makes upon them for service to mankind. Consequently, some of the more spiritually sensitive folk of our time have become estranged from organised religion. Theology appears to be a hobby for parsons, but of no particular relevance for the laity. It touches no nerve, conveys no practical meaning for today.

'Where do we look now for faithful, stimulating, profound accounts of what it is to be alive in the 20th century?' asked H. E. Root in *Soundings* a year or two ago, and continued, 'We look to the poet or novelist or dramatist or film producer.' In these and their creative works of art we discover 'meaningful and truly vital *materia theologica*, or, better still, materials for religious inspira-

tion. . . . The disengagement of theology from imagination is all but complete.'

This is a terrible admission. It means that orthodox Christianity has really lost touch with a principle that is fundamental to religious thinking, namely, that God incarnates Himself continually and universally; that all the time and in *our* time He is present, if we will only look for Him sensitively and imaginatively. As Francis Thompson reminds us,

'The angels keep their ancient places;—
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangéd faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry,—clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames !'

Little wonder, perhaps, that some of the most religious men and women of our time, like Simone Weil and Dag Hammarskjöld, have fought shy of church associations and have taken refuge, instead, in a form of mysticism which finds a place for the imagination and, we may, and must, add, for the compassion which is a genuine part of the religious consciousness of man today.

Henry P. van Dusen in his interpretation of *Markings*, Hammarskjöld's fascinating diary—the record of a remarkable pilgrimage of faith—has underlined the fact that 'the Church holds no place whatever in Hammarskjöld's recognition', and he adds significantly: 'It is quite possible that had Dag Hammarskjöld maintained even a minimal formal association with conventional ecclesiastical practice, we would never have had *Markings*—and the remarkable faith there declared.'

A moment or two ago I mentioned compassion as an essential constituent of the contemporary religious consciousness. One of the reasons why the Christian churches

today fail to attract many thoughtful people is that they find them simply lacking in love and compassionate care for others. True, the relevance to modern life of a great deal of ritual and ecclesiastical convention seems doubtful, whilst much of the theological posturing of those who claim to speak for the churches carries little conviction. In fact, it must appear to the critical mind a species of double-talk. Possibly, too, the dullness and drabness of a great deal of public worship help to antagonise people. But the decisive stumbling-block in the way of those outside and inside organised religion, who are seeking a satisfying faith, is that churches are not inspiring in their members the thoroughgoing humility and genuine love of their fellow men and of God which should distinguish Christian character.

'Give me a humanist or agnostic who *cares*', writes Dr. Norman Pittenger. 'In him I can see the charity of God working anonymously. . . . Whenever and wherever I see self-giving love, I shall know it is of God . . . and very likely a great deal of it will be found outside the limits of the ecclesiastical organisation.'

Alas, that it should be so.

Yet whilst institutional religion may be declining, it is by no means true to say that religion itself is entirely at a discount. Orthodoxy may have been tried in the balance and found wanting, but St. Paul's trinity of Faith, Hope and Love abide, notwithstanding.

The nature of man is such that he cannot rest content with 'a dead universe' or a life that is purposeless, with a meaningless existence. The nihilism which Nietzsche prophesied would sweep over Europe has taken its toll in recent years. Amongst other things, as you know, it has encouraged men to speak of God as though He were 'dead' (not an entirely new mode of speaking of God, by the way!). But, even so, it has provoked a reaction. On the one hand, it has led to a reappraisal of orthodoxy by men who call themselves 'radical theologians', like Dr. John Robinson, formerly Bishop of Woolwich. On

the other hand, it has been responsible for the birth and spread of new sorts of religion, substitutes for Christianity (and for Liberal Religion) such as Theosophy, Scientology, the Bahá'í Faith—and there are others. Such deviations and substitutes supply the need for meaning and purpose in human life and provide answers, more or less satisfactory, to the interminable questions and perplexities of modern man. The tide of faith, receding from the established churches, has eddied and swept back into the portals of new-fashioned edifices, carrying with it the flotsam and jetsam of humanity who are ever on the look-out to 'tell or to hear some new thing'.

In this respect, strange to say, religion seems to have gained a kind of 'second wind'. Theologians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Germany, Paul Tillich in America, and John Robinson in England have set out to tailor orthodox Christianity to fit the demands of the 'post-Christian', secular age. Both movements, new and old, the impulse to strike out entirely novel religious paths and the effort to renew the established churches through 'a New Reformation' are of interest, and have received considerable attention. Deviationism and Reformationism both have their devoted adherents. But it is my submission that neither path will lead modern man in the direction in which he should be heading. The philosophy of religion which they inculcate is inadequate. The mind of late 20th century man cannot rest there. It is like the bed of which the prophet Isaiah spoke when he warned Israel against making a covenant with death, and recalled them to the worship of God :

'For the bed is too short to stretch oneself on it,
And the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in it.'

This applies to almost every kind of religiousness or doctrine that resorts fundamentally to the old clichés of orthodoxy or involves the acceptance of a God who is wholly transcendent.

William Nicholls, in an important article in *The Modern Churchman* (for April 1967), discussed 'The Death of God theologies today', and concluded that though 'God may be dead as the transcendent other, he may [yet] be experienced by contemporary man after his own fashion . . . as a greater Self, to which our deepest self seems to be indissolubly united.' He thinks he observes 'the rise of a new monism, which takes the modern scientific outlook entirely for granted at the level of consciousness to which it is appropriate, but flatly denies that this is the only level belonging to human beings'. He claims with justice that part of our proper human heritage is 'a cosmic consciousness, through which the present world is not annihilated but transfigured, and unshakeable joy and confidence are conferred here and now', 'We may', continues Nicholl, 'be reaching the end of a period dominated by Protestant neo-orthodoxy.'

The last remark is probably true. Biblical theology, which was a reaction away from the liberal Protestant scholarship of an earlier day, has shot its bolt. Its inspiration has run out into the sands of neo-scholasticism, and the death of Karl Barth in 1968 will, I feel sure, be seen to mark the end of an epoch.

The changed accent in theology today may well take the form of a reinstatement of the philosophical approach to religion; and a fresh study of mysticism and religious experience may help towards a new appreciation of the New Testament and, indeed, of religion in general. The religious impulse in man has constantly to be renewed from the depths of the human spirit and every generation must find its own keys to the mysteries of the spirit. I shall return to this point later on. Meanwhile, alongside the failure of mainstream Christianity to satisfy thinking persons today must be set other factors leading to a deterioration of the human situation.

One of the marked features of our time is the violence that characterises human relationships. Such legendary

figures as Ivan the Terrible, Emperor of Russia, who 'in the course of one day consigned to slaughter' fifteen thousand of his subjects with every kind of disgusting cruelty, and those Tartar warriors who burnt Moscow in 1570, when a million people perished in the flames, could only belong, it was thought, to another planet! It was not possible that they should be human beings. Moreover, the horrors for which religion has been responsible tend to be forgotten. And yet history shows that the Western world has inflicted tremendous suffering on various peoples in Asia, Africa, and America, in order to acquire territory or wealth, usually both. The inhumanities committed in the name of religion would be regarded by most decent people today as incredible, were they not documented by, for example, historians like Prescott in his *Conquest of Mexico* or Motley in his *Rise of the Dutch Republic*.

And today, despite nearly two thousand years of Christian teaching, man is just as violent and brutal as he ever was! Why blink the fact, when many of us have lived through two world wars and many smaller conflicts, and nuclear devastation has been visited on two Japanese cities; when murder and violence are rife in most urban centres; when political assassination is still common and human life is held fearfully cheap by large numbers of our fellow men? Whole areas of social existence are stained by moral degradation, sadism, brute force, to which racial tensions only add a more virulent and widespread poison.

It would seem, too, that the growth of cities almost inevitably is accompanied by the increase of crimes of violence, robbery with violence—murder of the very young and the very old. We are watching, it would seem, a progressive de-humanising of our societies, a de-personalising of our relationships as men and women. Industry and the State both tend to regard human beings as units in a complicated calculation, instead of persons in a human situation; as though only in this way can

technology be advanced and the problems of the Atomic Age find solution.

Both in peace and war man is in process of dehumanising relationships with other people and being, in turn, dehumanised himself. That prophetic Czech writer Karel Čapek already in the 1920s perceived the direction in which Society was moving, and gave warning of it in *The Insect Play*. Science, which in some quarters is acclaimed as the modern 'saviour' of mankind, like the wonder-bucket in the tale of the Sorcerer's Apprentice, can be a most malicious master: it can climb into the saddle and ride mankind, producing pandemonium and creating monsters. Long ago, Aldous Huxley cautioned us of the dangers that might arise if we gave ourselves into the hands of an a-moral Science and technology. His *Brave New World* might dispose of a whole host of material goods, to no lasting human advantage, for it had lost its soul!

So today in the fields of biology and psychology the scientists are playing a dangerous game. They are manipulating life, and dictating to the mind, interfering with natural processes of thought, habit, and reproduction, a traffic with the economy of human existence which has come as a great shock to many.

Such scientific 'progress' is a doubtful blessing, and in the hands of unscrupulous men the ability to tamper with biological functions raises nightmare anticipations. Not a few scientists are gravely concerned about the future.

For example, Jean Rostand, biologist and scientific historian, son of the creator of *Cyrano de Bergerac* and member of the Académie Française, published in 1967 a book entitled *Inquiétude d'un biologiste*. After a long life spent in biological research Rostand has become disenchanted. A fundamental source of his uneasiness is the progress of Science. 'We used to think', he says regretfully, 'that at least biology was innocent. Now we are continually faced with ambiguity, and with an am-

bivalence in our will to proceed. Thirty years ago this would have been blasphemy, but I am not sure it is a happy thing that the progress of Science cannot be stopped. . . . Remember, in the 19th century, the days of Pasteur, Science was associated with pure good. Now almost every discovery can be employed *against* humanity.'

In particular, Rostand is both fascinated and repelled by Science's increasing capacity to fabricate a super-man. He sees Society moving towards Huxley's nightmare, towards conformity. 'We know that in all domains, physical and psychical, man is exercising increasing power. We can tamper with personality, with heredity, and now there is talk of being able to inoculate memory. I am sure that chemistry will have the last word. . . . I can visualise the day when mathematicians will all agree; biologists will all agree; politicians, too . . . (!) Montesquieu said that he did not admire the voices of *castrati* because they were "made for that". In the future there will be more and more people "made" for something.'

This admission by a first-rate biologist that Science is, in fact, carrying humanity into a wide sea of unknown possibilities, not all of which can be regarded with equanimity, should give us pause. Much scientific work which we may regard as artificial may be of great service to mankind, as, for example, incubation, artificial insemination, and the like. But this does not mean that all natural frontiers can be breached with impunity. Scientists in Britain, at all events, in 1969 decided it was time to found the 'British Society for Social Responsibility in Science' whose aim it is to halt the trend of a Science entirely divorced from the practical business of social life.

That man may fall victim to his own techniques is entirely probable. (The case of thalidomide babies springs to mind.) One might instance also the damage to human amenities done in England by the demands

for increased air transport and new and larger trunk roads. (Not long ago Cambridge and its environs were threatened by the proposal to build London's third—and biggest—airport in the vicinity.) Such developments in a comparatively small country have to be balanced against the wholesale destruction of good agricultural land and the creation of new centres of population which may not always be suitably sited. Furthermore, where airfield construction is concerned, as, for example, at Stansted in Essex or at Cublington in Buckinghamshire it often means the destruction of whole villages and the creation of new noise zones in which no one in his senses will want to live. The opponents of the Concorde supersonic transport aircraft see its development 'as a clear case of a choice having to be made, namely, Is technology to be sanely controlled, or is it to be allowed increasingly to degrade and destroy our human environment?' ...

Properly considered, this is a religious question, because concerned with the general and important question of Conservation. Conservation of man's natural environment is desirable, so far as is humanly possible, in order that natural flora and fauna may not be carelessly and thoughtlessly destroyed, and the world in which we live impoverished through an insatiable lust for power and merely selfish convenience. For such destruction is, unfortunately, irreversible. It often upsets the balance of nature, and causes further changes and side-effects, both unforeseen and regrettable. Many examples of this could be cited.¹ The introduction of myxomatosis in certain districts has destroyed rabbits, which fed on a particular scrub; this, when left alone, covered the ground and provided a habitat that favoured a different kind of bird-life, to the exclusion of other species

¹ In recent years the use of chemical agents to 'keep down' the grass verges of many of our roads in England has meant the disappearance of numbers of wild flowers over large tracts of the countryside.

altogether. In a small town in Bolivia, DDT was sprayed against mosquitoes. The cats died, and the town became infested by a wild mouse carrying black typhus, from which many people died. Pollution of the biosphere, that part of the planet, namely, in which continuous and self-sustaining life is possible, is going on at an increasing rate. In September 1969, in Paris, a UNESCO conference of experts from fifty countries reported that 'within the next two decades our planet will be showing the first signs of succumbing to industrial pollution. The atmosphere will become unbreathable for men and animals; all life will cease in rivers and lakes; plants will wither from poisoning.' A Swedish delegate produced evidence which indicates that fumes from British chimneys may be affecting the yield of Swedish forests and even contributing to the death of fish in Swedish lakes. Lake Erie is a classic example of water being killed by fertilisers and sewage. It has grown into a 9,000-square-mile cesspool, and in the past ten years boating and swimming have become impossible.

(Other examples of technological encroachment on natural and human environment are radar installations on coasts and moorlands, Atomic Energy plants and military establishments in places of particular natural beauty (e.g. Lulworth Cove).)

A final example of the dangers we are in from so-called scientific 'progress' may be found in the development of computers.

Three years ago I was present at a meeting when a scientist (Mr. H. G. Heal) stated his anxiety over the introduction of computers into so many fields of commerce and industry. 'Very soon', he declared, 'the human race will be desperate for an idea or principle that can restore its self-respect. The churches must provide this or they will go into well-deserved oblivion.' Computers and the automation that accompanies them pose a real problem to the religious-minded. 'What limits should we set to their uses? Is it good to have more and more

leisure destroy a man as a spiritual being?' Moreover, 'what about the Welfare State, which increases the responsibility of society for each individual but reduces the responsibilities of individuals for each other, the latter being such an important consideration in Christian thinking? Too often, these problems are regarded as purely technical, to be solved by political changes or by social scientists armed with plenty of statistics, but no principles. Yet they are really *religious* problems. They are the most important problems facing mankind today.'

The speaker, who was addressing a gathering of Northern Ireland Non-Subscribing Presbyterians, many of whom call themselves Unitarians, felt it was the peculiar duty of churches of the Liberal Faith to study such human problems. At all costs, they must take account of the impact and consequences of man's interference with his rapidly changing environment, and find solutions that would uphold human dignity and self-respect.

To save man from himself and to prevent his total surrender to the machinery and technology of the Atomic Age, it is necessary for him to possess some sort of key to living. Experience teaches that the purely materialist viewpoint can lead only to frustration and disaster. The secular life, devoid of a transcendental reference, not only disappoints and baffles, but also implants an uneasy sense of insecurity and loneliness. Dreams of a marvellous state of human affairs arising out of planned, scientific, mechanised, one hundred per cent efficient organisation tend, like Prospero's vision, to melt into thin air and leave not a rack behind. The Welfare State, in which almost everything is taken care of by officials, and in which personal life is more and more constricted, though it has relieved much undeserved suffering and provided opportunities for individual physical and mental growth not possible before, has nevertheless not produced the happiness that many people anticipated. It does not help a man to take away his personal initiative

or offer him a social substitute for individual effort.

It is a fallacy to suppose that one can solve the problems of the human spirit by improved material conditions. If the improvement of the human person's lot, the reduction of working hours and the provision of extra luxury items, and so on, be thought to make a man happy, one has only to look at the story of the past quarter-century of social history in England. Welfare legislation has not, in general, made men any more spiritually satisfied. It has not meant fewer strikes, better industrial relations, fewer broken homes, less poverty. For 'poverty' is a relative thing, and people are still poor who do not know how to manage their affairs, even though the wage-earner is bringing in £40 a week and the home is stiff with labour-saving devices!

As one of our leading newspaper commentators, Paul Johnson, recently observed, 'Human beings have mysterious yearnings which cannot be satisfied just by improving their lot.'

Thus, it seems that Utopianism of a humanist kind has not materially succeeded in changing human standards of value or promoting a faith that will move the mountains of ignorance, prejudice, and hatred which prevent progress and threaten disaster. The scientific-materialist, in the long run, has to face up to the problem of why the Welfare State has proved in many respects so disappointing.

Some time ago, Mr. Lester Pearson voiced his doubts about the glib confidence of the utopian scientist. Those who thought that science and technology alone would save our civilisation, he said, were living in a fool's paradise. 'We should awake from our dream of a superior civilisation merely because we have a car in every garage, a refrigerator in every kitchen, a colour TV in every room. The defence of our values is the most important task for those who believe in our Western civilisation.' The challenge to our society today comes 'from within'. The threat arises from 'the decline of active and dynamic

belief in the spiritual values of our free society'. And amongst these Pearson set in first place 'the integrity, dignity, and worth of the individual personality'. Lose this and we lose everything. 'From this all our freedoms flow.'

So the debate about the future of our Western Civilisation would seem more and more to be focussed upon the question of the nature of man. What are the spiritual needs of human personality? What is the basic philosophy required to undergird human life? And, in particular, can morality dispense with religion?

It is at this point that the controversy has arisen regarding the truth or otherwise of traditional religion, and voices have also been raised in criticism of the ethical relativism of humanism and its denial of the transcendent.

On the one hand we have seen the orthodox Christian scheme of salvation severely handled. Attempts to revive a new scholasticism, both Roman and Protestant, have not carried great conviction. Academic circles have lately frowned upon metaphysics, and creedal formularies no longer appear to be vitally related to a spiritual faith.

On the other hand, not a few writers like Bultman and Reinhold Niebuhr, alarmed by the process of dehumanisation implicit in modern technological mass-society, have come to the conclusion that a liberal theology which enshrines a romantic conception of the kingdom of God—a gradual extension of the divine rule into the hearts and over the lives of men—is inadequate to meet the present human predicament. Paradoxically, religious liberals are being steadily forced into a cramped position between the old religious orthodoxy and the new scientific humanism, the inadequacy of both for our time becoming ever more patent.

Probably, in the West, scientific humanism represents the creed of most intellectuals and of a multitude of non-intellectuals too, yet it seems unable to meet the total need of the human person and of human com-

munities. It may appear to defend, and even exalt, the dignity and worth of man, but in so doing it is somewhat ambivalent: it is like a back-handed compliment—it slams him down and cuts the nerve of his spiritual well-being. In its hurry to disown what Edmund Leach, Provost of King's, Cambridge, has called 'the worn-out authority of a traditional past', it tends to describe 'an apocalyptic future' and to idolise man as a self-sufficient entity, who has no need for reverence and awe. Sooner or later, however, as Leach (who is a prominent humanist) himself confesses, it has to face the issue: *what are people for?* And the answer to this is not easily framed in subjective or relativist terms. For one man or group may hold one, and another quite a different, even an opposite, opinion.

For example, Hitler in his day exalted the Aryan race, and took his measure of manhood from the Germanic ideal. The Third Reich intended an apotheosis of 'the German spirit'. To symbolise this the dedicatory motto over the Arts Faculty Building in Heidelberg, where I studied, was changed, during the revolutionary 'thirties, from '*Zum menschlichen Geist*' to '*Zum deutschen Geist*'. The 'German spirit' was considered the measure of all that was good! And what followed? In the name of man—true, a particular kind of man—man (another kind of man) was most cruelly maltreated and done to death, not in thousands but in millions! . . . One need not labour the point. But of course it can also be illustrated from communist-controlled countries which, again and again, afford striking instances of the persecution and oppression of man, in the name of humanity!

Both great communist powers treat their own nationals with contempt. The Russians' record with regard to national minorities shows that they are entirely capable of trampling on their own professed creed of 'democratic socialism'. For example, tens of thousands of Crimean Tatars have been exiled from their native land, persecuted, and settled far away in Uzbekistan and

elsewhere; and the harsh treatment, over many years, of Ukrainian nationalism at the hands of the Kremlin dictators is documented in blood. Such ideal or legal entities as 'human rights' make no appeal whatever to an authoritarian regime that subjects all human considerations to a doctrinaire ideology.

Again, both Russia and China have been guilty of horse-trading in human beings. That is what the detention of Gerald Brooke, the English schoolmaster, in Russia and of Anthony Grey, the English journalist, in China amounted to. They were political prisoners to be traded off like pawns for political purposes. The taking of hostages is (alas!) by no means an outmoded practice. It exists today, and is feared by people not only behind the Iron Curtain but in so-called 'Western-oriented' countries, like South Africa and Greece. Such usage of men and women is abhorrent to any sensitive and thoughtful person and is in breach of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the laws and customs of most civilised communities. It has been well said (by *The Guardian*, 20th May 1969) that 'to trade in human beings is the negation of civilisation'.

A recent and shocking example of the lengths to which so-called communism will go was the invasion of Czechoslovakia in the name of democracy and socialism. Western observers were probably naïve when they supposed that communism could be 'liberalised'. Dubček purported to be giving a new lease of life to communism, by creating 'communism with a human face'. It would seem, however, that fifty years have not been enough to bring home the plain truth that no such thing as 'communism with a human face' is possible. As Tibor Szamuely wrote in *The Spectator* at the time, 'Communism and humanity cannot co-exist within a single body politic. The one cancels out the other.'

It seems then that we cannot easily make man 'the measure of all things', for there will hardly be agreement among us as to what constitutes man.

Arnold Toynbee, in his *Historian's Approach to Religion*, proves to his own satisfaction, and I think to mine, that any attempt to idolise one's own particular conception of man and to sacrifice others to it is a form of madness, and he concludes that 'Man-worship of any kind is unable to satisfy Man's spiritual needs'. It is a point to be taken seriously.

Materialist or scientific humanism, atheistic humanism, or 'Positivism', as one form of it used to be called, does not effect a deep enough analysis either of the human predicament today or of the nature of man himself. To take the latter only, the paradox that has been disclosed by every penetrating analysis of human nature, wherever, and whenever applied, reveals 'a union of opposites', namely: 'Man, a little lower than God'² (the Psalmist); man 'a God in ruins' (Emerson); man a saint and a sinner; selfish and unselfish, great and wretched, kind and cruel. Man, in short, in the words of Sir Thomas Browne, is 'that great and true Amphibium, whose nature is disposed to live, not only like other creatures in diverse elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds.' . . .

It is the two-fold nature of man that invariably defeats any simplistic attempt to define precisely what he is or what his destiny can be. Leave out one half of the equation and it becomes easier to describe him. He is essentially spiritual, of the heavens heavenly, or he is basically fleshly—of the earth earthy. Both Christianity and humanism may make the mistake of over-emphasising one aspect or the other. Both Christianity and humanism can extol and both under-estimate man.

According to the Barthian scheme, man is a fallen being who has no native capacity for improvement, no power to reach out beyond himself to the reality we call God: a pessimistic view that goes back to Augustine, and through him to Paul.

According to classical humanism, on the other hand,

² Revised Version (*Psalms* 8:5).

man is capable of 'reaching for the stars'; his achievements are little short of divine; he is self-sufficient, and has no need of the hypothesis of 'a Power not himself that makes for righteousness'.

The argument I am pursuing in this course of lectures is that somewhere in between these two positions there is another point of view that shuns extremes and takes into account the bi-polar nature of man and the historical fact that neither orthodox Christianity nor a purely materialist-scientific humanism has at any time created conditions remotely approximating to the ideal kingdom of God or even an earthly Utopia. Morality, it seems, cannot dispense with religion, nor humanism with a metaphysic. That religion which involves a disparagement of man is self-defeating, whilst that humanism which underrates the power and extent of evil is no less destructive of human well-being. What is needed is a *religious* humanism, that is a combination or union of a religious metaphysic with a humanistic ethic—if you like, a synthesis of theism and humanism that will satisfy man's spiritual needs and cater for the world in which he lives, with its triumphs and its disappointments, its joys and its sorrows, its known and unknown circumstances, its deceptions and its truths.

Experience shows that it is not possible for men to face the complex and world-wide problems now confronting them without some sort of a 'map', or plan, or philosophy, to which they can refer, and by which they may be led to control their thoughts and conduct. By this, I do not mean an authoritarian blue-print, but rather a frame of reference, an atmosphere of values (e.g. truth, goodness, beauty, or 'fitness'), a complex of feelings, within which thought and action may be cradled and nourished, and from which we may proceed to carry out the functions of 'living as human beings'. . . . In the language of theism we need to 'live and move and have our being' in this spiritual environment. St. Paul called this 'God'. I am going to call it 'Christian human-

ism', intending thereby to make the best of both worlds—Christianity and humanism.

In doing this I am mindful that Christianity and humanism have a very great deal in common; that there is a strong humanist 'accent' in traditional Christianity, and that, historically, humanism is a by-product of Christianity and has inherited some of its qualities.

Moreover, it seems obvious that the scientific progress of our time and the beliefs of humanists in general owe a great deal to their Christian background. Incidentally, I hope to show, later, how great is this debt.

I wholeheartedly agree with those, like Kenneth Barnes, who think we ought not to use the word 'humanist' as a sort of 'cussword'. He once rightly observed that 'The significant division is [really] not between Christians and humanists, but is a line cutting across both categories.'³ In any event, what the adherents of both points of view require is an attitude of humility and teachableness, so that each may learn from the other. Probably the most important distinction to be drawn today is, in fact, not between those who believe in God, the immortal soul, and the ultimate victory of good and those who do not, but between those who regard man as a machine, or at best as an animal, and those who believe that he is a unique creature on this planet, possessed of free will, blessed and cursed with true responsibility, purposive, and worthy of care and veneration. Certainly, the Christian and the humanist agree in one most important respect: they are both basically concerned with human beings. And this concern must colour and inform actions and attitudes within a wide and varied spectrum of human activity and response.

'How to be human now: that is the greatest single search that unites our distracted world', declared Dr. John Robinson in his university sermon, preached at Great St. Mary's, Cambridge, on 24th January 1971. He went on to cite Bonhoeffer: 'To be a Christian

³ Letter to *The Listener*, 26th, March 1964.

is not to be religious in a particular way, but to be a man.' Bonhoeffer is, of course, the outstanding theologian of our time to have grasped unerringly the central issue and to have emphasised the importance of a Christian humanism: 'It is not some religious act which makes a Christian what he is, but participation in the suffering of God in the life of the world.'⁴

The world of men and women, in all its depth and variety, its personal relationships, its comedy and tragedy, its triumphs and its failures, must be the focal centre of anyone who seeks to be a Christian today. 'The experience of the human' (as Bonhoeffer put it) 'must colour and control all our thinking and action. . . . People are more important in life than anything else.' Such an affirmation can be made by Christian and non-Christian humanist alike. Baron von Hügel, the distinguished Roman Catholic philosopher, wrote: 'Caring is the greatest thing; caring matters most.' It is acceptance of this attitude that unites Christians and humanists and points the way forward for the Church and indeed all men of goodwill, for all, in short, who realise that true Christianity and true humanism mean existing for humanity, living for others.

Now, it may be said that Christian humanism expresses a growing spiritual consciousness which the creeds of Christendom no longer convey. It is, for example, an awareness of solidarity with oppressed and suffering humanity, a consciousness of responsibility to society for actions aimed not merely at reforming the political and economic structures of the world but at changing the entire quality of life. It is a compassion that holds sacred those 'virtues of delight' which the poet Blake enumerated in his 'Divine Image', i.e. 'Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love'. One might call it—and it has been called—'Essential Christianity'.

Perhaps it is a sign of the times that more and more religiously minded people today are recognising the need

⁴ *Letters from Prison*, Fontana, 1960, p. 123.

for humility and openness to new thought and experience in their relationships with their fellows. The old, rather rigid dogmatisms and conventions are breaking down. Thus at Uppsala, in the summer of 1968, the President of the World Council of Churches, Dr. Visser t'Hooft, could say, 'Church members who deny in fact their responsibility for the needy in any part of the world are just as much guilty of heresy as those who deny this or that article of faith.' And the Chairman of the Central Committee, Dr. M. M. Thomas, made the significant remark that 'Christian ecumenism has truth and meaning only as it becomes the ground and pillar of a *new humanism* which can provide the framework of understanding and critical participation in the revolutions of our time.' . . .

Over twenty years ago, in the common room of Manchester College, Oxford, the late Victor Gollancz, publisher and philanthropist, Jewish Christian and co-founder with Canon L. J. Collins of 'Christian Action', gave a talk in which he said that the greatest need of the world today was a 'more humanistic religion' and a 'more religious humanism'.

That remark has haunted me ever since; and it is from that text that these lectures really proceed. Fundamentally, Christianity and humanism are not diametrically opposed to each other. They are psychologically complementary, and historically closely related. Gollancz was a notable example of a man who combined what has been called 'a social conscience' with an individualist flair for culture and enjoyment. He was not by any manner of means what we signify by a puritan. He was a patron of the arts, a passionate lover of music, in fact a *bon viveur*. But, like William Blake, he came to realise and distinguish the essence of the Christian religion, which is a deep compassion and care for mankind, especially men and women in distress. More than once I heard him speak on the theme of 'Christian Action' as the dynamic of faith—in Oxford Town Hall in 1946, and

in the Sheldonian in 1947. It was in many ways a simple, direct, but compelling gospel. The moral precepts of Jesus, the Golden Rule, the two Great Commandments, the doctrine of forgiveness, the parable of the Good Samaritan, these, perhaps, epitomised the substance of what he found most precious in Christianity. Doubtless, some would call this a 'works-righteousness'—an illustration of the saying of St. James: 'I by my works will show thee my faith.' But what struck most observers, especially those who were nearest to him, and what came through so patently and so genuinely in a famous 'Profile' on British television conducted by John Freeman, was his complete and wholly sensitive identification with suffering humanity. It was, first and foremost, a deeply humane and active sympathy with the object of his attention, and then an underlying mystical conviction that this was basically a *religious* act.

Deep down, Gollancz reacted strongly against any kind of 'establishment religion'. Like Tom Paine, he thought it too much wrapped up in ecclesiastical garments to attend to human needs. Yet at the same time he realised that a humanism devoid of a mystical note, robbed of a transcendental reference, too easily falls prey to a self-sufficiency, even to a titanism, that is anti-religious. Hence his plea for a genuinely humanistic religion and a truly religious humanism: two ways, perhaps, of saying the same thing.

Gollancz faced the problem of the irrelevance of the Church today, and refused to be overwhelmed by the complexity or novelty of the human situation. A new humanism, he felt, could solve the most recalcitrant of our problems, but it must be a humanism which recognises the element of mystery in human life and in the universe as a whole, and which underscores a sense of abiding values. A genuine humanism must take account of all the facts of life, and these include the mystical element in religious experience and the moral consciousness of man, which points beyond itself. A new Chris-

tian humanism, Gollancz felt, could save man from his ever-menacing inhumanity and the world from another holocaust of war. It could also make him feel at home in the vast and often alien-seeming universe, because rooted in a historical process. Nevertheless, I think he saw the danger in an enthusiasm for humanity which sentimentalises the object of its devotion and erects another idol of the mind. He shunned, as we must, abstractions. Over-optimistic humanism and titanic anti-theism are a fatal illusion, for revolutions and Utopias invariably degenerate.⁵

Those who belonged to the generation who felt deeply involved in the Spanish Civil War, whose enthusiasm was roused and then doused by the bitter happenings of that 'curtain-raiser' to the war of 1939-45, will not easily forget their disenchantment. It is not enough to feel a genuine enthusiasm for humanity. One has also to come to terms with the fact and the realisation that man is capable of committing immense evils as well as doing great good, and that a purely anthropocentric religion is inadequate to control his passions or direct his purposes. Man must look outward, away from himself, as well as inward, in order to achieve the synoptic vision that gives a balanced view and furnishes depth and proportion to human life.

History often provides a corrective to philosophical anarchism. Man is evolving from a past with which he has strong links of continuity, and to which he is indebted for a sense of perspective and depth. To conserve this sense of history, to keep our connections with a living past, is not merely the task of the historian or the archaeologist; it is the duty of the theologian and the man of faith.

In the lectures that follow, I propose to trace the ancestry and history of Christian humanism, I hope to

⁵There is now a Victor Gollancz Humanity Award. The recipient in 1969 was Lord Ritchie Calder, Professor of International Relations at the University of Edinburgh.

show that it is a valuable strand of our religious tradition, and one which we have every right to consider offers us today at once inspiration and assurance.

The Christian humanist believes in God and man : God as 'the Determiner of Destiny' and the ultimate of man's experience, what an old Confession once described as 'the chief end of man'; and man as His 'child and care', whose nature implicitly postulates the divine. The Christian humanist also believes that all men, of every race, creed, and colour, are equally dear to God and that we have a duty to care for them as bearers of the 'divine image'. Religion today must be broad-based upon universalist and humanist insights or it cannot serve as the emotional and integrating force that is needed to save human life from failure and destruction.

It is encouraging to find that not a few thinkers connected with the more traditional Christian churches today are coming round to this point of view. The Second Vatican Council (1962-5) rather startlingly affirmed a new 'reverence for man' and championed 'the godlike seed which has been sown' in man. Indeed Pope Paul, in the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, spoke of 'a transcendent humanism', a 'new humanism', and 'a universal humanism'. It would seem that Saul (Paul) is also 'among the prophets'! A similar viewpoint was also expressed by the chairman of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches at Uppsala in 1968 when he said : 'A new humanism . . . can provide the framework of understanding and critical participation in the revolutions of our time.'

But the new humanism differs from the old in that it is less cocksure than formerly, more reverent, readier to acknowledge that it may not have got 'all the answers' to the human predicament. It is by no means so sure, as a previous generation was, that 'man is the measure of all things', whatever that may mean, but rather is convinced that whilst Science has removed the obscuring veil of mystery from many phenomena, we are still con-

fronted by a basic and universal mystery, the mystery of existence in general, and of the existence of the human mind in particular.

Perhaps the emotion of wonder and the feeling of personal humility before the forces of nature, and the idea of infinity, which is one form of the idea of God, come closest to the source of the religious mysticism which is a fundamental trait of Christian humanism. Einstein maintained that what he called 'cosmic religiousness' was the 'strongest and most noble driving force of scientific research'. If you open up the Self to the influence of 'that which is more than Self', you are acting religiously. You are receiving something to which earlier teachers have given the name of 'Grace', and which some have recognised as putting a person 'in touch with the Infinite'.

Roger Shin, in his book *The New Humanism* (1968), has distinguished a *closed* and an *open* humanism. In the first, man appears to be in a mood of conquest and plunder. The world is his apple. The idea of care for his environment, of conservation, for example, is alien to such a philosophy, which regards everything as subservient to the will, not of God, but of man. In the second, the *open* type, man is found appreciating the sources of his own being and also the non-human environment that nourishes his life, evokes his wonder, and endures beyond the limits of his historical existence. Man recognises his responsibilities to others, and to all forms of life (cf. Schweitzer), including inanimate Nature. As a Christian, he responds in particular to a man, namely, Jesus of Nazareth, and finds in him a life 'full of grace and truth' (*John* 1:14). The humanity of Jesus calls forth his own humanity, and challenges him to love and serve others and thus God, and in this service find 'perfect freedom'.

'As I look back on the part of the mystery which is my own life', wrote that most unorthodox poet Edwin Muir in his autobiography (1954), 'what I am most

aware of is that we receive more than we can ever give; one receives it from the past, on which we draw with every breath, but also—and this is a point of faith—from the Source of the mystery itself, by the means which religious people call Grace.'

Our human horizons must never be limited merely to time and sense. That way is altogether too constricting for the human spirit. It needs a 'far outlook', if it is to expand and mature. This wider outlook adds meaning and dignity to the ordinary traffic of our lives, and sets the common rounds of duty, as well as the rarer achievements of humanity, in a cosmic setting—*sub specie aeternitatis*.

Christian humanism combines insights into both past and present, rests upon history, reason, and experience, and bases its hope for the future upon a faith that the divine element in the universe is a continuum undergirding all sentient life and incarnating in human beings at different points in history and in different degrees. Such a faith makes human life a vocation, not—and never—'a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing'.

II

THE ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN HUMANISM:

(i) BIBLICAL

'God can no more do without us than we can do without Him.'

Meister Eckhart

II

The Roots of Christian Humanism :

(i) Biblical

'To go back in order to go forward' is a maxim not entirely agreeable to *avant-gardistes* in politics or religion. The past is past : let it go, say the spiritual progeny of Walt Whitman and Robert Louis Stevenson. The Open Road lies before us. Let us get on with the journey !

'*Allons*, we must not stop here,
However sweet these laid-up stores, however
convenient this dwelling.'

But even the most rebellious, in their more reflective moments, realise that they owe a debt to the past. That is the springboard from which alone advances can be made. The child of yesterday is the father of the man of today. Edmund Burke's axiom is true, that 'People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors'.

Petrarch is sometimes regarded as the first of the Renaissance humanists, but there is another before him, namely Dante. And he wrote both his faith in man, the pilgrim and voyager into the unknown, and his reliance on man's origin and history into the words of Ulysses :

'Consider the seed from which you are sprung : you were not made to live as brutes live, but to follow virtue and knowledge.'

Here, indeed, is the humanist ideal :

'Considerate la vostra semenza,
Still at the worst we are the sons of men.'

Even in the changing world of the 20th century we need to consider the roots and source of any movement of thought or feeling, in order rightly to understand ourselves. For though outward circumstances are always changing, our mental inheritance is fixed, and those thinkers who remind us of the influences that determine our present—and to some extent our future—are wiser than those who vainly suppose we can write a new chapter of human history on the *tabula rasa* of our times either by rejecting all previous interpretations outright or by spinning new webs of thought entirely out of our own heads.

I propose, therefore, in this lecture to go back to the source of humanism in Western history and to discuss in particular the tradition of *Christian* humanism, with which I am especially concerned. In general, I hope to show that the humanistic civilisation of the West is, in great part, at any rate, a legacy of Christianity, and this not solely or even mainly of the ecclesiastical type, but of the broad and deep Christianity of Christ.

Now, it is sometimes said by writers who have, for one reason or another, become estranged from the Christian churches, that the sources of humanism are to be found (i) in ancient Greece, (ii) in the Renaissance, and (iii) in the 18th century.

This is the kind of half-truth that is very misleading, because of its incompleteness. Of course, all three of the above-mentioned sources have contributed a very great deal to the development of the humanist tradition, but the historical picture is not faithful to the facts unless we take account also of the Bible and Christian history.

In his brilliant and penetrating Introduction to Bonet-Maury's *Early Sources of English Unitarian Christianity*, James Martineau wrote: 'There is one unorthodox

influence so powerful and so extensively diffused as almost to supersede inquiry into the personal pedigree of English Unitarianism—I mean the English Bible.'¹ He then went on to demonstrate conclusively that a fresh and unbiassed reading of the Bible offered no support to the vast paraphernalia of orthodox Christian doctrine and practice, but actually presented a much simpler and more humane gospel in the 'purely monotheistic character of the Biblical Theology and the genuine humanism of the Christology'. Throughout the centuries, the Scriptures have constituted 'the charter of spiritual rights', over against the whole assemblage of Fathers, Councils, and church traditions. In them we find a constantly renewed source of inspiration—especially in the utterances of the Old Testament prophets and in the teachings of Jesus. The 'Oracles of God' are no less 'The Book of Man', and in them are to be found the roots of a religious humanism. 'Lay but the Christian records before a mind devout and clear, and leave them alone with each other', wrote Martineau, 'and is it wonderful if the Christianity of a Channing should emerge? And if this may happen in one place, so may it in a hundred.'²

Christianity, in fact, is by no means alien to the humanist tradition, a point that Mr. H. J. Blackham, a leading British humanist, has readily admitted in his recent 'Pelican' book on *Humanism*.³ On the contrary, Christian theology is saturated with a humanist outlook, and humanist theology has always been implicit in the Christian attitude and estimate of things.

Take first the humanist accent in the Old Testament. The prophetic books, for the most part, reflect the native Hebrew zest for life in all its aspects. The main prophetic tradition of Israel stresses the overruling importance of ethics, and expresses disgust at any form of religion that

¹ Op. cit., p. xii.

² Op. cit., p. xvi.

³ Op. cit. (1968), p. 127.

tends to emphasise the cultus or promote religious formalism. Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah all teach the essential connection of religion and morality, both individual and social. They formulate an ethical conception of human life and world history which had revolutionary implications in their own time and still continues to be a worthy criterion by which to measure people and events. Writes the late A. W. F. Blunt: 'The prophets are the great preachers of individual holiness and of social equity. . . . The conventional system of sacrificial worship is repudiated, because it goes with a failure to realise God's moral demands on man.'⁴ This linking of morality and religion was bound to have one very important effect. It tended to take worship out of the realm of the esoteric and to bring it into connection with the whole of human existence. It may be said to have at once spiritualised and naturalised the religious life. Thus it is not surprising to find the prophetic line of thought issuing in the recognition of the fundamental unity of the human race, and ultimately culminating in the idea of humanity itself. Religion, with Jeremiah, became a personal and inward concern. He announced a new covenant 'with the house of Israel' unlike the old one, in that God would write His law not on stone but on the hearts of His people, and 'every man' would recognise in his own heart what was right and true. Thereby he provided a charter of spiritual rights and obligations which later reformers looked back upon as the beginning of real religious emancipation.

About three hundred years later, the writer of the book of *Jonah* summed up what must have been an increasing conviction amongst the more perceptive of Hebrew thinkers, namely, the universalism of God's purpose for man, the potentiality of all men for salvation. A Jewish idealist writes an allegory in which he states it as his firm conviction that the Gentile world is capable of the

⁴ *The Goodly Fellowship: Studies in the Hebrew Prophets* (1942), p. 165.

worship of Yahweh and that it is the duty of the 'chosen people' to preach the good tidings to their less fortunate brethren. *Jonah* has been described as 'the most Christian book in the Old Testament'. Most certainly, its catholic broadmindedness and large-heartedness paved the way for further development in the direction of religious humanism and universalism.

Thus the prophetic tradition foreshadowed the belief that it was the destiny of mankind to realise, more and more, the good within itself. Man must discover the elements within his nature that respond to the Divine and express these in thought and conduct, taking his share of responsibility for the shaping of historical events, and drawing men together in unity of purpose and mutual understanding.

Around the year 450 B.C., that is, some one hundred and fifty years after the death of Jeremiah and some one hundred and fifty years before the appearance of *Jonah*, the idea of the divine-human link is very clearly stated in a story for which the priestly editor of the book of *Genesis* is probably responsible. In *Genesis* 1:26 we read: 'Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness', and again in *Genesis* 9:6: 'Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image.'

This important concept of the *imago dei* is found in both Old and New Testaments and is, of course, a controlling concept in biblical theology. Yet it is permissible to suggest that its significance for a philosophy of religion has not always, or fully, been realised. Nor has later Christian theology altogether come to terms with it. Creation in the image of God differentiated man from all other creatures on the earth. The Hebrew understanding of man was that he was not just a part of nature like the animals but was intimately related to God. Intimacy, however, did not denote identity. What the doctrine of the divine image was intended to convey was, in Dr. A. S. Peake's words, 'man's community of nature

with God',⁵ the idea that human nature, rightly and fully developed, manifests the divine, and is a reflection of what it has received from God. The medieval view tended to split human life in two, accentuating the distinction between nature and grace, between things secular and things sacred. The biblical view, on the other hand, affirms the spiritual affinity of man with God discovered in his moral nature at its best: a view echoed in the New Testament by St. Paul when he declared, 'In Him we live and move and have our being'.

The Hebrew insistence upon the divine-human link is a fact which many Christians are apt to overlook. It is, therefore, in these days of racial and national tension, important to recollect the words of a great rabbinical scholar, Leo Baeck. In his fine study *The Essence of Judaism*, he wrote: 'It is common to all men, no matter to what nation or race they belong, that they are the image of God, that they were created by Him in order themselves to create.' Men are separated, he continued, 'by that which is merely human (by the 'human all-too-human' one might add) and it is the good and the divine which unites them all.'⁶ . . .

It is true that Jewish monotheism's chief emphasis is upon the character and purpose of Yahweh-God. Yet second only to this is its concern for man in all his aspects. Both the Law and the Prophets contemplate the daily lives of men and women, and seek to regulate their family and neighbourly relations, organise their associations with strangers and foreigners, and enter into the *minutiae* of trade and commerce, ensuring, so far as possible, the observance of upright and humane conduct and mutual respect in all dealings with one's fellow human beings.

For the Jew, the worship of God was bound up implicitly with a humanist outlook. Behaviour towards others should be governed by care and consideration

⁵ *Commentary* (1920), p. 137.

⁶ *Op. cit.* (1936), p. 241.

in thought and act. So *Leviticus* 19:15: 'You shall do no injustice in judgement; you shall not be partial to [i.e. unfairly treat] the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbour.' Or again, and this passage is, of course, cited by Jesus (*Mark* 12:31 and parallels) cf. *Matt.* 19:19—*Leviticus* 19:18: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

According to the Levitical code, the rules of justice and fair dealing must be regarded as of equal importance with those governing the religious cultus, possessing indeed a divine sanction. Thus, for example, we read in *Leviticus* 6:1: 'The Lord said to Moses, "If any one sins and commits a breach of faith against the Lord by deceiving his neighbour in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbour or has found what was lost and lied about it, swearing falsely . . . he shall restore what he took or got . . . in full, and shall add a fifth to it" . . .' Reciprocity, mutual give-and-take, are of the essence of the Jewish code of conduct, which implicitly sets upon man and his material needs a valuation second only to God.

Perhaps this may be illustrated, and summarised, in conclusion, by two further passages. The first is the familiar one from *Psalms* 8. This is one of the few Nature-hymns in the Psalter; it celebrates the beauties of night, as the 19th does the day. But the starry sky is not the true subject, it is only the background of the picture. In the centre is man, 'crowned with glory and honour'. The poet looks up into the vastnesses of the heavens, and then, in contrast, wonders at God's care for the last of His creations:

'What is man that thou art mindful of him and the son of man that thou dost care for him? Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honour.'⁷

The question, 'What is man?' is asked more than once in the Old Testament (*Ps.* 144:3; *Job* 7:17) but no-

⁷ *Psalms* 8: R.V. margin.

where is it so nobly answered as here. True it is that man is insignificant, compared with the universe about him, compared with the colossal scale of the celestial bodies, but there is a spirit in him that raises him above all other living things and brings him close to God. The psalmist does not elaborate here and, indeed, he is no philosopher, so that his answer is not complete. For a fuller appreciation of man's place and purpose in the scheme of things we have to wait until we come to the New Testament.

The second passage which throws light upon the Hebrew conception of man is perhaps less familiar, but no less striking. It is in II *Chronicles* 28, from a document edited probably around the year 300 B.C. but possibly containing earlier material. Professor A. S. Herbert of Selly Oak has called this 'one of the finest stories in *Chronicles* and the more remarkable in view of contemporary feeling against the Samaritans'.⁸ It is on the theme 'Be merciful if you would obtain mercy' and with it we might compare the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The prophet Oded goes out to meet the army of Israel returning from a sweeping victory over Judah and remonstrates with its chiefs. They are to send back the captives and release the spoils of war—which surprisingly they did!—'And they took the captives, and with the spoil they clothed all that were naked . . . gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them; and carrying all the feeble among them on asses, they brought them to their kinsfolk at Jericho, the city of palm trees.' It is sometimes thought, quite erroneously, that chivalry and humane feeling only came in with the Christian dispensation, and that Hebrew history contains few examples, if any, of truly humanitarian conduct. Nothing could be further from the truth. Cruelty and savagery are, of course, to be found in the annals of the Jews, but this is nothing strange. They are

⁸ *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (1962), p. 367.

to be found also in the history of most peoples, not excepting our own, and not merely in times past! It is useless to point the finger at instances of what is now called 'bloody-mindedness', and draw from these an estimate of human character. Rather, we have to bear in mind that the Old Testament books cover a period of approximately seven hundred and fifty years and that the earlier documents are naturally coloured by the tribal morality contemporary with a more primitive idea of God than that which emerges amongst the 8th and 7th century prophets and the later writings. We can be grateful that there are many instances of truly noble and humanitarian conduct to set against the less savoury passages of Hebrew history.

When we come, however, to the Wisdom Literature and the books of the Apocrypha, in which Judaism and Hellenism are found intermingled (about 200 B.C. to A.D. 200) the writings show a marked development in a humanist direction.

Ecclesiastes (200 B.C.), sometimes regarded as an out-and-out work of scepticism written by one who has been called the Omar Khayyám of the Old Testament, is nevertheless something of a paradox. For whilst on the face of it the 'Preacher' seems to regard human life as a meaningless round of years and endeavours, containing 'nothing new under the sun', at the same time, the work displays an unmistakable Epicurean tone and a curious inconsistency. Human life may be, in many ways, hateful and mean, or—to adopt the well-known words of Hobbes—'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short', yet the possibilities of deriving satisfaction and enjoyment from it are not to be excluded. The material things of life should not be despised: food and drink, and the tasks that are assigned to men—these are 'from the hand of God' and 'to everything there is a season'.

Moreover, strange though it may seem in a context where all appears to be 'vanity and a striving after wind', the writer declares his belief that God has made 'every

thing beautiful in its time: also he has set eternity in men's hearts'. Scepticism appears to be tempered by faith. The darker shadows of pessimism are lightened by a wisdom that, whilst it recognises the harsh realities of human existence, none the less is prompted to accept life's vicissitudes on the basis that there is a Divine Justice whose being and intention must make a difference to the human lot.

Scholars have noted the blending of Jewish and Greek ideas which took place after the fall of the Persian Empire over a period of nearly three centuries up to, and beyond, the birth of Christ. The more nationalistic Jews resisted the incursions of Hellenism, but the Jews of the Dispersion, succumbing to the fascinations of a cultured paganism, became largely Hellenised. In particular, in the large Jewish colony of Alexandria there grew up a school of writers who, though they remained true to their ancestral faith, thought it possible to make Greek philosophy serve as handmaid of religion. An important product of this school was the book of *Ecclesiasticus* (early 2nd century B.C.), whose view of human nature, though at times bordering on cynicism, is not unmindful of the dignity of man and the essential independence of the soul. Some of its descriptions of man are surprisingly modern, and one is inclined to find echoes, almost, of passages in classical Greek writings like Sophocles' *Antigone* (e.g. The Hymn in praise of Man), Aristotle's description of the high-minded man (*Nic. Ethics*, bk. IV, ch. 4) and Diogenes Laertius's the Stoic wise man (Diog. Laert., VII, 117-19).

I refer here only to two passages: *Ecclesiasticus* 17:1-14, in which man is described as 'lord of nature', and 37:12-15, where it is stated that though one may take advice from pious and loyal men, nevertheless each of us should also consult his own heart 'for no one is more faithful to you than it is. For a man's soul sometimes keeps him better informed than seven watchmen sitting high on a watchtower.' Which saying is echoed

by that late Renaissance humanist, the Bard of Avon, when he puts into the mouth of the worldly old courtier, Polonius, the words:

'This above all, to thine own self be true,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.'

Yet this late Jewish writer does not adopt a Greek kind of self-sufficiency. His independence is tempered with humility (3:17). Always, he is conscious of Another:

'My son, perform your tasks in meekness;
then you will be loved by those whom God accepts.
The greater you are, the more you must humble
yourself;
so you will find favour in the sight of the Lord.'

Time will not permit me to dwell in detail on other writings that are products of the Jewish-Hellenistic period, like the *Book of Wisdom* or (to some extent at least) *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. The former contains much noble teaching, reversing, for instance, the Old Testament standard regarding 'length of days' and declaring that it is the quality of human life that really matters: 'For honourable old age is not that which stands in length of time, nor is its measure given by number of years. But understanding is grey hairs unto men, and an unspotted life is ripe old age.' The latter (i.e. *The Testaments*) has impressed posterity by anticipating the ethical teaching of Jesus. Of this book that great authority on the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Dr. R. H. Charles, has written: 'It is the sole representative of the loftiest ethical standard ever attained by pre-Christian Judaism . . . and the natural preparation for the ethics of the New Testament and especially the Sermon on the Mount.' Here, for example, in the *Testament of Dan* (5:3) we find for the first time in literature the two commandments, called 'great' by Jesus, conjoined:

'Love the Lord through all your life
And one another with a true heart.'

In the *Leviticus* passage, quoted earlier, the term 'neighbour' applies only to Israelites. In view of the more generally universalist character of *The Testaments*, it is possible that the idea of the love of another than oneself is beginning to take on a wider and non-racial sense.

But let us pass now to the most typical representative of Jewish-Hellenistic thought, Philo of Alexandria, philosopher and allegorist. Curiously enough, his writings have been preserved for us, not by Jewish agency, but by the Christian Church itself—and for the reason which makes him of particular interest to anyone tracing the sources of Christian humanism. Not only is Philo, like Spinoza (another Jew of unorthodox outlook), 'a God-intoxicated man', not only has he a passion for God nurtured on Jewish Scriptures (mainly the Pentateuch), yet expressing himself in categories recognisably Greek, but, more importantly—his idea of humanity has been enhanced by an infusion of Greek thought.

Philo's teaching on the relationship of God to man and of man to God differs from both his predecessors and successors, biblical and rabbinic. Certainly, he was conscious of, and proud of, his race and their religious mission; he believed that God stood in a special relation to Israel. But the material point to notice is his universalism and its human application. 'Philo', writes Dr. C. G. Montefiore, 'is a teacher of pure religious individualism, and his philosophy applies to all men, and not merely to Israel. . . . The human soul and God: these are the two terms of Philo's religion; these are the two great counters with which he plays. That human soul might belong to any race and to any time.'⁹

This departure from Jewish particularism gives Philo's writings an importance and value that are entirely novel. They are an expression of humanism that is, in its time

⁹ *The Old Testament and After* (1923), p. 497.

and place, comparatively new, moving in the direction of a broader, deeper, and more spiritual attitude to man and to man's relationship to God.

For Philo the Jew, God is great and holy, supreme over the whole universe, and His will, revealed in the Law, is to be obeyed. But to the Hellenised philosopher, there is more to religion than that. Man is akin to the divine; and every man is at least potentially good, and virtually a child of God. 'Every man', says Philo, 'as regards mind is related to the divine reason, for he is an impress or fragment of that blessed nature.'¹⁰ Thus he teaches that every good thought and action has its fundamental source in God. 'It is not I, but God in me.'¹¹ The divine element in man is implanted and nourished by the omnipresent Deity in the universe.

The mystical character of such an affirmation is apparent, but it will not be strange to those who are following these lectures. For the divine-human nexus is an axiom of all religious humanism. James Martineau expressed it in a famous sentence: 'The Incarnation is true, not of Christ exclusively, but of man universally and God everlastingly. He bends into the human to dwell there; and humanity is the susceptible organ of the divine.'¹²

What Philo is saying, roughly about the time of Christ (he was born about 20 B.C.), is what Plato and the Stoics had said before him, and traces of which are found in slightly different form in the New Testament (e.g. in Paul). God, says Philo, 'breathed into man from above something of His own divineness', and man's body is the 'sacred temple of a rational soul'. It is man's reason which is 'the divine image', and which links him with the eternal Logos.

This is a mystical intuition, but it is also a form of universalism and humanism. Philo is speaking not merely of Jew or Gentile but of man as man. In so doing he is a

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 506.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 510.

¹² *Essays*, II, xi, xii.

forerunner of what we may call 'the perennial tradition' of religious humanism which holds all human beings capable of infinity.

The relationship of Philo to the New Testament is probably only indirect, though scholars like James Moffat, T. H. Robinson (*Epistle to the Hebrews*, I.C.C. and Moffat Commentary) and A. S. Peake think the *Epistle to the Hebrews* shows a marked acquaintance with the Alexandrian philosophy. ('The coincidences with Philo and the Book of Wisdom are too numerous to be accidental', writes Peake in his *Century Bible Commentary*.¹³) But similarities of several kinds occur, which may be explained as arising simply from the fact that both Philo and the New Testament writers are engaged in the task of acquainting their Hellenistic contemporaries with a Jewish form of religion.

I pass now to the New Testament.

In general, it is not unfair to say that the ethical teaching of the New Testament is humanist. In the Gospels, for example, we find a strain of humanity and a radical and equalitarian spirit that was quite uncommon in the Levant at the time when Jesus lived.

Doubtless, amongst the chief reasons for the suspicion with which the Galilean 'outsider' was regarded by Pharisees and Sadducees were his anti-authoritarian attitude to the established order in Church and State, and his insistence that persons were more important than rules, and people than traditions.

One of the most remarkable traits of Jesus seems to have been his freedom from the harshness and cruelty of his times. To understand the novel impression that he made, one has to bear in mind the hard world into which he was born. The early narratives represent Jesus as suckled within the rude environment of a country byre, and then after a brief period as a footsore wandering preacher, as summarily tried and executed according to the harsh Roman method of 'dispensing justice' to

¹³ Op. cit., p. 35.

criminals stretched on a wooden cross, to live or die at leisure. In this they are typical of the contrast between the life and personality of the Master and the so-called 'civilised' world of those days.

A papyrus document discovered in the sands of Egypt affords a glimpse into the ordinary lives of people at that time which may help to set things in historical perspective. It was written by an Egyptian-Greek labourer to his wife on the 17th June, 1 B.C., and its survival is a pure accident, for it was not a letter that anyone would keep.¹⁴ The man had gone to Alexandria and had left his wife in the country expecting a baby. He wrote her a rough, but not unkind, epistle :

'Hilarion to Alis . . . greetings. . . . Don't be upset if I don't come home at once with the others, but remain in Alexandria. I pray and beseech you, take care of the little child, and as soon as we have our wages, I will send you something. If you are delivered, if it is a male, let it live; if it is a female, cast it out. . . .' The letter is not unkindly meant. It is just matter-of-fact. Indeed, it finishes with the words, 'How can I forget you? Don't be upset [by my absence].' But it ends, as you see, with a suggestion inconceivable to us today, that if the baby is a girl, it need not be kept. It can be put out on the rocks or in the river, left to kite or crocodile. It was the custom of those days. . . . Plato and Aristotle both allowed the practice; Plato recommending in *The Republic* (Book V, 460, 461) that if the offspring of suitable mates should not be good enough, they should be put away where they would not be found (no doubt in the equivalent of our modern incinerator!).

It was a hard world for women and children . . . But Jesus changed all that. A century and a half later the *Epistle to Diognetus* boasts (v. 6) that Christians do not expose their children. . . .

It was also a vindictive world. Criminals and all who

¹⁴ See A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (1927), pp. 167-8.

were unfortunate enough to be slaves obtained scant justice and little mercy. And it should not be forgotten that both 'the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome' were based on slavery. Slavery was accepted as 'natural' and right by some of the best of Greeks and Romans. As to criminals, the Roman form of punishment was crucifixion, and few greater torments to human flesh and spirit can be imagined. 'I have been good', said the slave. 'Then you have your reward', says Horace, 'you will not feed the crows on the cross.'

It was into this brutal and pitiless society that Jesus came, with what must truly have seemed wonderful 'good news'. A man of the people, with a keen prophetic insight and a deep compassion for suffering humanity, this preacher, who (we are told) spoke 'as never man yet spoke', was not content simply to reiterate the old religious teaching and buttress the old religious traditions but came straight to the point. In precept and parable he commended and powerfully illustrated broad humanist ideals. His first care and consideration was human need. He perceived both men's spiritual and their material needs. He was concerned to feed the hungry and to heal the sick. The stories of what we might today call social welfare activities, the feeding of the hungry and the befriending of the down-and-out, belong incontestably to an authentic tradition.

Professor D. M. McKinnon of Cambridge in the symposium, *Objections to Christianity*, has written of how we may see 'the true pattern of our humanity' in the humanity of Christ.¹⁵ He was a teacher, who spoke to men and women who lived in a particular situation, 'whose attitudes to the choices and emergencies that pressed upon them in their personal and collective existence were very various'. His originality lay not only in his speaking relevantly and intelligibly to those whom he addressed, but also in his 'repeatedly transcending their immediate situation and, by any reckoning, en-

¹⁵ op. cit. (1963), p. 34.

riching the moral understanding of those belonging to ages yet unknown'. This is why Jesus has been termed 'the eternal contemporary'. His attitude is archetypal. Right at the outset of his mission he seems to have taken issue with the authorities of his day over the relative importance of established customs and the actual needs of men. Hence, quite early in his ministry, he is found healing a paralytic and eating with tax-gatherers and sinners—much to the astonishment and disgust of scribes and Pharisees, the 'seeded' churchmen of the age. Yet though he was well aware that his actions were highly unconventional, he seems to have been entirely free from any qualms of conscience, and turned on his critics with inspired commonsense: 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.' . . .

Then he challenged the contemporary Sabbath-worship, setting first things first, and correcting the notion that God desired the strict observance of a day of rest, without regard to other human needs. His disciples were hungry and plucked ears of corn on a Sabbath. 'But did that really matter?' asked Jesus, in effect. Surely not; for 'the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath'. And (he continued) 'the Son of man is lord even of the Sabbath'. It has been suggested that the phrase 'Son of man' is a mistranslation of an Aramaic original meaning simply 'man'. Professor D. E. Nineham of Oxford, in his commentary on *St. Mark* (1963) thinks: 'It would be a very remarkable statement that "man is Lord of the Sabbath".' This is certainly true, but has it not occurred, I wonder, to Professor Nineham that Jesus was a very remarkable man, and did make other rather remarkable statements? It is, I suggest, entirely in keeping with the rest of his teaching that Jesus should utter such a revolutionary saying, and it sets the scene for the 'good news' of a far-reaching Christian humanism.

Undoubtedly, as D. S. Cairns has said, 'Jesus is the great believer in man.' Naturally, as a Jew, his thought

of man was theocentric. God was essential to his concept of humanity. He had been brought up in his home in Nazareth to think of God as the Father of men. A carpenter's son, perhaps his obscure and humble parentage and origin gave him a more sympathetic understanding of ordinary people than the official churchmen possessed. A small-town tradesman would have opportunities to observe and converse with the poor and unfortunate that did not come the way of priests. From the first, it seems, Jesus took an interest in the *Am Haaretz*—'the people of the land'—ordinary folk, for whom ecclesiastics had little time or care.

St. Luke records (4:14 ff.) that he was well known and popular in Galilee and frequently taught in the synagogues. When he returned to Nazareth, 'where he had been brought up', his entry into the synagogue there was marked by his reading a passage from *Isaiah* (61:1-2) significant enough in the circumstances, and indicative of his intentions. It may, I think, be accepted as broadly hinting at the religious-social programme he wished to pursue: 'to preach good news to the poor, . . . to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord'. This announcement that the messianic age was at hand must have startled his hearers, even if they heard it with mixed feelings of joy and disbelief. What manifestly disturbed and enraged them, however, was the suggestion that Gentiles could be admitted to God's kingdom, that those 'without the Law' could benefit from the divine goodness. This was too much for their narrow nationalist sentiment, and might have led to the death of Jesus but for his presence of mind and commanding bearing.

However the revolutionary tone of Christ's utterances may have been diluted, or misunderstood, by his interpreters, there is no escaping the fact that they had a widely popular appeal. Frequently, crowds gathered to

hear him, and it has been noted that, though he had from time to time to withdraw and seek quiet and rest, Jesus was not intimidated or antagonised by masses of people. On the contrary, his heart went out to them (*Matt.* 14:14, *Mark* 6:34), he was 'moved with compassion towards them because they were as sheep not having a shepherd'. His 'good news for the poor', as T. R. Glover once remarked, 'was a new word of delight and inspiration'.¹⁶

The supercilious and contemptuous attitude often adopted by the more fortunate towards those socially and economically beneath them was little short of blasphemous in the eyes of Jesus. He refused to despair of any man—hated tax-gatherer or blatant sinner. All were children of God.

In that perfect catena of three parables in *Luke* 15, which has been christened 'the gospel within the gospel', is contained the golden teaching about the joy of finding what has been lost. Anyone who has lost anything at all that he prizes will know very well what a relief and joy it is to recover it at last, whether it be a purse or a pussy. Everyone can understand the happiness of the farmer who finds the lost sheep, of the housewife who discovers the lost coin, and of the father who finds his son, thought lost beyond recall.

All orthodox atonement-theories come to grief on that corner-stone of truth. For in the greatest of all parables, the Prodigal Son, we find exemplified the most sadly neglected portion of the teaching of Jesus—that is to say, the doctrine of divine forgiveness, the pattern of that human forgiveness, which is the key to reconciliation between individuals and peoples.

It would be possible, almost chapter by chapter, to peruse the records of the life of Jesus and demonstrate that on every occasion when he was compelled to deal with frail and unfortunate humanity he showed not only a tenderness and kindness but a hopefulness and

¹⁶ Cf. *The Jesus of History*, chap. vi.

faith in human nature that are quite remarkable. True, he had no illusions about his contemporaries: he knew their weaknesses, but he was also convinced of their strength. He believed in the powers of renewal with which men were naturally endowed, and which could be activated by the grace of God coming to them from and through their fellow men. Thus he could say to an audience that was by no means sympathetic and numbered amongst them his critics, the Pharisees: 'The kingdom of God is within you' (*Luke* 17:21); and to that rather corrupt and mediocre little man, Zacchaeus, who suddenly saw the error of his ways, he could speak those words of amazing comfort: 'Salvation is come to this house.' No doubt most people, placed in similar circumstances, would consider Zacchaeus too far gone in double-dealing to be capable of reform, but not the Master. He saw possibilities of improvement even in such a man, just as he believed that the hated Samaritan, whom he chose as exemplar of what it meant to be a good neighbour, was capable of sacrificial kindness.

Dr. John Robinson in a university sermon (on 31st January 1971) at Cambridge has spoken of the Good Samaritan as 'a sort of Christ-figure', and 'some have seen here' (he tells us) 'a pen-portrait of Jesus, drawn from the life'. Such speculation is needless, when it is accepted that love (*ἀγάπη*), uncalculating and sincere, is in fact a sign of God's presence. 'God is love; he who dwells in love is dwelling in God, and God in him.' Thus, if we are to take that doctrine seriously, every man in whom love is vitally active may be said to be 'a sort of Christ-figure'—if you want to use that kind of language!

But Jesus habitually pointed beyond himself to his Father (cf. *Mark* 10:18; *John* 14:28; *Matthew* 6 *passim*). Would it not be better, in this our day and age, to avoid the Christ-language altogether and to speak of Jesus as the man who represented God in human terms, and the heart of whose gospel is love, human and

divine? (This would seem to be the purport of *John* 14:9 and 10.)

Tolstoy entitled one of his stories: 'Where love is, God is.' This is, in a phrase, Christian teaching, and it has been projected beyond Scripture into the world at large. Professor Amos Wilder has remarked that 'In the Jesus of the parables we have a humanity in which uniquely the heart of man is recognised . . . and in a way which is universal.'¹⁷ This note of universality in the teaching of Jesus is particularly welcome today, for it chimes with the growing oneness of the world which science and technology are bringing about.

Furthermore, as Wilder, again, has put it, 'The Message of the Kingdom of God, as proclaimed by Jesus, was the highest humanism, for it taught that the men, women, and children who crowded the parables, had a human nature which reflected the character of God.' Thus, in the teaching of Jesus, as in the prophetic writers of the Old Testament, the idea of the *imago dei* is implicitly present. The low view of matter and man, typical of Augustine and his vestigial Manichaeism, was altogether foreign to Jesus. As we shall have occasion later to remark, Augustine led the Western Church astray, in the direction of a total denial of human freedom and dignity. Man, in Augustine's thought, became absolutely dependent upon the grace of God. But such a doctrine (or complex of doctrines) finds little or no support in the New Testament and certainly not in the teaching and practice of Jesus.¹⁸

¹⁷ A. N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric* (1964), p. 96.

¹⁸ Article by Dr. T. F. Glasson in *The Modern Churchman*, July 1969, p. 297, on 'Human Destiny: Has Christian Teaching Changed?':

'It was a tragedy for the West that the influence of this great Christian thinker [Augustine] was so potent, that in many vital matters his judgements were accepted as final, and at length became the dogmas of the Council of Trent. . . . The whole starting-point and basis of Augustine's system

Fortunately, Eastern Orthodoxy has preserved for us a different viewpoint. This stems from the Antiochene theologians of the school of Theodore and Nestorius and the Pelagians. Their idea of humanity tended to uphold the dignity and responsibility of man 'made in the image of God', and their Christology laid emphasis upon 'the Great Pioneer' (ἀρχηγός) who leads mankind to God by his example and sacrifice.

As for the moral ideal of Jesus, it was perfection; and he thought that man was capable, if not of achieving it, most assuredly of closely approaching it, with divine help and in humility of spirit: 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.'

Religion, he teaches, does not consist in a code of rules and regulations, but is an attitude to oneself and one's fellows that is pre-eminently humane and considerate. This is clearly his intention in the *Corban* section in *Mark* 7:6-13, where the idea of a purely legal religion is condemned. Jesus appeals from a tradition upholding the inviolability of oaths to a higher and more humane law, namely, that of respect and care for one's parents. Human needs and interests are paramount. There is no excuse for neglecting 'the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith' (cf. *Matthew* 23:23). No doubt he outraged contemporary opinion by what was regarded as laxity and permissiveness, and is still thought of as leniency and lack of principle by some today. Yet his attitude to women and children completely changed the social code: the world has never been the same, in this respect, since his day. 'Blessed art thou, O Lord our

was that the human race, through the sin of Adam, was "one mass of perdition". From this doomed race, divine grace elected some to salvation. . . . What we have seen in the last few generations has been the breakdown of Augustinianism. We are free now to do fuller justice to those elements of the Bible which encourage us to see the process of human life as the training of mankind, the education of the race, God bringing up His children and leading many sons to glory.'

God, King of the Universe, who hast not made me a woman', prayed the Jew! And in no quarter has the idea of womanhood been more clearly elevated than within Christendom—though, unfortunately, it has not wholly thrown off the traditional Jewish bias against women.

Asked in typical Jewish fashion to summarise the Law, Jesus uttered the two Commandments enjoining love towards God and neighbour. And on this basis Christian humanism has stood ever since.

Turning to the ethical teaching of St. Paul, we find that in the long run it amounts to little more than a reiteration or extension of this accent on the individual, quickened into new life by a vital relationship to God and constantly renewing the inspiration to love one's fellows at the mystical source of 'the indwelling Christ'. Thus *Romans* 12 may be considered in many ways as a humane commentary on the text of *Matthew* 5:38-48 and 25:31-40, care for the unfortunate and suffering being extended also to one's enemies: 'If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink. . . . Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.'

Again, in *I Corinthians* 3, Paul reminds his readers that we occupy the privileged rank of 'fellow-workers' with God. It is a position of dignity and utmost value, of which they must never lose sight. Indeed, they are not only the human instruments of God's will, they are the very dwelling-place of the Most High. Paul, in fact, anticipates that pregnant expression of St. Chrysostom: 'The true Shekinah of God is man',¹⁹ when he writes, 'Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you?' And, for good measure, he adds a sentence which surely has been overlooked too long, echoing as it does those words of Jesus about him who takes the sword perishing by the sword, namely, 'If

¹⁹ Shekinah: the earthly presence (dwelling) of God, from *shākhān*: 'to dwell'.

anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are.' That this was a commonplace of Paul's thinking appears certain from his recourse to the same argument in a later letter to the Corinthians (II *Cor.* 6 :16) where he asks, 'What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God.'

The Johannine literature is also full of a similar theocentric humanism. Take only one instance of this—the *First Epistle of John*, with its wonderful assurance of the Divine Fatherhood and its promise of an even more glorious transformation: 'Beloved', writes this Ephesian elder of the Church, 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be.' . . . The message the Christians have received is one of pure 'love of the brethren', love to the point of self-sacrifice and death, if need be. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (*John* 15 :13). Such is the teaching of the Fourth Gospel, with its marked emphasis upon love and service, which is echoed again and again in the *First Epistle of John* by the call to exercise mercy and compassion towards our brother man: 'But if anyone has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?' And as if to clinch the matter, once and for all, on a severely practical note, the writer—not superfluously—adds: 'Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.'

Evidently there was a good deal of fine talk about loving one's neighbour in those days—as in these—but much of it was merely gossip. It was not translated into practical conduct! We may infer this from the line taken by the writer of the *Epistle of James*, who sets faith and works in strong contrast to each other, and argues that religion is a matter of doing not saying, a matter of applying one's faith and love in the ordinary intercourse of life, not forgetting to be kind to those in need. It is by

loving our 'neighbour', a term interpreted in the widest possible sense, by displaying an all-round benevolence, that we may be said to be genuinely religious and truly devoted to God (cf. *James* 1 :26).

St. Paul stressed the importance of human co-operation with God and, indeed, he seems to suggest that without His 'fellow-workers' God could never complete His plan. Later Christian writers went further, influenced no doubt by Hellenistic thought, and declared that the Christian calling was to a life which participated in the divine nature itself (cf. II *Peter* 1 :4). In short, man was capable of sharing infinite good, if he combined knowledge with love. The inference, of course, is that human nature and the Divine are not separate but related, and that it is possible to build a bridge between the two.

Probably enough has now been said to indicate the broad strand of religious humanism that runs through the early Christian tradition. It was laid down by the Founder at the beginning, and can be traced running through the centuries of Christian history. The tragedy is that it has been overlaid by immoral doctrines of God and man that contradict the original vision and have so perverted Christian thinking that many who have entertained humanist ideas and ideals have had to fight a continual battle against mainstream doctrine and establishment. Latter-day humanism, in the event, has emerged almost completely hostile to Christianity.

In contrast to the orthodox emphasis upon the Fall and Redemption of humanity, upon the basic depravity of man and the need for divine grace to effect a rescue from damnation—to use the terms of the (so-called) 'saving history'—Christian humanism lays stress upon the perfectibility of man, on his filial relationship to God, and on the fact that there is a spirit in man which, whilst capable of being perverted, nevertheless may be a dynamic force for good.

Another way of saying this would, of course, be to

turn to the Logos doctrine of the Fourth Gospel and to stress the universality of the Incarnation. Here again the tendency of the main tradition of Christian teaching has been to narrow the application of the Logos idea, to confine it to one being, one man only—the God-man, human and divine. But the Prologue to *St. John's Gospel* suggests a much wider application. The Logos—the Divine Reason or Word—was a spiritual entity that linked God with man: 'In him was life, and the life was the light of men.' And this light 'enlightens every man'. . . . God was, and is, revealing Himself *in* as well as *to* His creatures. To limit the divine revelation to one so-called 'unique' person is to defeat God's eternal purpose, which is to give Himself continually to His creation, as and when men are able to receive His gifts.

Fortunately, there have been those who have recognised the wide intention of the Johannine doctrine. For example, Edward Caird (1835–1908), Master of Balliol and Professor of Moral Philosophy in Glasgow, held the view that Christianity went astray as early as the teaching of St. Paul. The Apostle introduced, so Caird maintained, 'a kind of separation of Christ from humanity and a kind of identification of him with God', whereas the divine spirit is revealed in both Nature and in man, and this is the one 'article of a standing or falling Church'—'the rock upon which the Christian Church is really founded'. Both he and his brother, Principal John Caird, were convinced that the cardinal Christian doctrine is that of 'the unity of God and man'.

We shall be returning to this point in a later lecture. Meanwhile, it is well to remind ourselves that this was, in fact, Dr. Martineau's contention, namely, that 'The Incarnation, taken in the Church sense, as predictable exclusively of the personality of Jesus, is not only unsustained by proof, supernatural or natural, but an absolute reversal of the animating principle of life and faith. The Church makes it the most stupendous of miracles that he individually was at once human and divine, to

him it was an everyday fact that all men are mingled of human and divine.'

Generally speaking, traditional Christianity tends to deny the natural world, to relegate it to a lower plane of being than that in which God is supposed to operate. This is analogous to the long-established attitude of some Christian apologists towards the Old Testament, which they scarcely treat as a source of independent religious inspiration or revelation in its own right. What we need to understand and appreciate is the truth that the natural world, which includes mankind, is intrinsically spiritual, and human experience, down the centuries of history, is the continuum, in and through which the Divine Spirit is ever active.

The notion, fathered in our time by Karl Barth, of 'irruption' into history, of God's 'breaking through' into His world in one epoch-making effort to bridge the 'gap' which, ostensibly, separates the world He created from Himself, must, surely, seem to any thoughtful person a bogus and unnecessary conceit, and erroneous, too, in its conception of the Divine Nature. For the idea that God is like a volcano and blows His 'top' from time to time is really not very helpful. It is inconsistent with the supposition that we are living in a world that God made; and in any case active volcanoes are notorious for the fact that they erupt many times, and therefore the analogy breaks down, if it is confined to a 'once-for-all-time' occasion! Furthermore, the common doctrine of the divinity of Christ can only artificially be reconciled with the idea of the revelation of God in man.

Hence, if Christianity and humanity are to be truly congruous, it must—I suggest—be on the basis of a thorough-going Christian humanism, which does justice to all the facts of life and is no longer bound by the creeds of the 4th and 5th centuries. These have prevented the development of Christian thinking along truly humane and humanistic lines.

The Barthian theology interpreted Christianity in an Augustinian and Lutheran sense, attacking natural theology and the old liberalism, and presenting a sharp and rugged picture of the human predicament. Doubtless, Barth's emphasis on the seamy side of human nature injected a stream of realism into theological thinking, and pointed up the inertia, stubbornness and egotism of individual human beings and groups. Its pessimism could find justification enough in the Europe in which it was born. But the pendulum swung too far. There is an eternal paradox in man's existence. He may, indeed, be unable to rise by himself unaided, yet he needs to respect himself all the same. There may be a 'No!' to be said to the highest human ideas and achievements, but there is also a 'Yes!'.

Dr. Thomas Browne, the 17th century author of *Religio Medici*, put it this way: 'Man is that great and true Amphibium.' Colloquially, I suppose, we might say: 'He can both sink and swim!'

The foundation-documents of Christianity, however, do not blink the facts about 'that great Amphibium'. They are both realist and idealist in their conception of man. If humanism is a way of looking at life that is at once reasonable, hopeful, compassionate, and reverent; if it recognises the evil, suffering, and pain of human existence, and yet, in spite of this, can still believe in man and his destiny, because (as the author of *Job* so finely declared, over three hundred years before Christ)

'there is a spirit in man:

And the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding,'

then one of the most important sources of humanism is undoubtedly the Bible and its related literature.

Christian humanism, on one side at least, is a descendant of Jewish parents. It now remains to trace its lineage from Classical and Hellenistic forbears.

III

THE ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN HUMANISM:

(ii) CLASSICAL AND RENAISSANCE

'Quid aliud est anima quam Deus in corpore
humano hospitans?'

Seneca

'What else is the soul than God lodging in a human
body?'

III

The Roots of Christian Humanism :

(ii) Classical and Renaissance

The springs of Western humanism, rising in Classical times, combined with Christian influences to create the 'Age of Humanism', that is, roughly the last decades of the 15th and the first half of the 16th century. This was a high point in the humanist tradition. In the last lecture we were concerned with the biblical sources of humanism. In the present lecture, we retrace our steps briefly to recall its Greek origins; and then go on to consider that striking efflorescence of the human spirit which is known as the 'Renaissance'.

It is a matter of common knowledge that Western civilisation and culture derive in great measure from Greek and Roman antecedents. Greek philosophy and political theory, Greek art, drama, and science, in particular, were the forerunners of the traditions of thought and life which have developed in Europe, and through Europe over most of the world, and with which educated man today is largely familiar. Roman laws and methods of government, and Roman civil engineering, to mention only a few legacies from the ancient world, have left their mark upon modern times.

Clearly, no history of ideas is possible without reference to the Classical background. But within the limited scope of these lectures one is compelled to touch only fleetingly and inadequately on the influences underlying Western culture in general and responsible for Renaissance humanism in particular. I shall ask your

indulgence, then, for omitting much and passing over in silence factors which in a longer treatment would necessarily call for consideration.

Already we have had reason to refer to the role of Hellenism in the creation of a humanist outlook, a Hellenism, it is true, that combined with the Judaeo-Christian tradition to produce interesting results. The Hebrew prophetic strain and the Greek philosophic outlook—both, after their own fashion, deeply concerned with morality—blended in early Christianity. The thought of Plato and Aristotle, of the later Neo-Platonists and Stoics, is frequently found powerfully affecting and emerging in the writings of the Christian Fathers. It continued to attract and captivate Christian thinkers throughout the Middle Ages and into the modern period of history.

One of the most remarkable proofs of this is the reappearance amongst liberal-minded churchmen in England in the 17th century of a strain of Platonic thought which still has its fascination today. For example, at least two English philosophers of fairly recent date, A. E. Taylor and W. R. Inge, have admitted their deep indebtedness to the Cambridge Platonists. Stoic thought, in particular, like that represented by Seneca and Epictetus, was a fertile source of inspiration for early Christian writers, from St. Paul onwards.¹

Broadly speaking, Christianity rose, like the phoenix, from the still warm ashes of the Hellenistic world, and has continued to derive spiritual benefit from the lively embers that went on quietly glowing throughout the Dark Ages and were blown up into flame once more at the time of the Renaissance. One of the agents who kept alive Greek learning, making it accessible to his

¹ Cf. *Philippians* 4:8, *I Timothy* 3:2.

Σωφροσύνη ('temperance') and *ἐγκράτεια* ('self-control') are central in Plato and Epictetus as in Paul's Epistles. The lists of moral virtues found in the writings of Marcus Aurelius correspond very closely, with those of the Pastoral Epistles.

contemporaries and mediating the thought of Aristotle during difficult times—he flourished about A.D. 500—was the Roman senator Boethius, whose translations and commentaries served as a store-house of knowledge throughout the Middle Ages. His *Consolation of Philosophy*, written in prison, was translated into many languages. The *Consolation* was not a Christian book, though tinged here and there with Christian thoughts and phrases, but it was much read by churchmen and soldiers. King Alfred translated it into Anglo-Saxon about A.D. 887, thoroughly recasting it in a Christian direction. But there were not many lights like this that went on burning and diffusing a knowledge of an earlier civilisation and culture during the centuries after the fall of Rome.

The humanist tradition in its widest sense may be said to date back to the 5th century B.C., to the Periclean Age, or even earlier. If we say earlier, then it is to Homer we look for inspiration. Homer, the epic poet of Greece, celebrated the deeds of the Heroic Age, and depicted a remarkable and zestful culture, vital, fresh, and fragrant, as of the early morning of the race, and forever glorying in the achievements of man. Amongst these achievements was the city-state which, with all its faults, was regarded with warm affection and loyalty by its citizens, and remains a remarkable milestone in human political organisation.

Of all the city-states Athens bore the palm, and the feeling that Pericles, the greatest of its statesmen, expressed in his funeral oration for those who had fallen in the Peloponnesian War (431 B.C.) demonstrates just how men felt at that time and in that place about their lives as Greeks and citizens. Thucydides recorded it, proudly we may guess, and perhaps with some rhetorical flourishes, but it does register the emotions of the age, and rings true as a description of the Athenian humanist ethos:

'Our constitution', Pericles declared, 'is named a de-

mocracy, because it is in the hands not of the few but of the many. Our laws secure equal justice for all in their private disputes, and our public opinion welcomes and honours talent in every branch of achievement, not for any sectional reason, but *on the grounds of excellence alone*. . . . We are lovers of beauty without extravagance, and lovers of wisdom without unmanliness. Wealth to us is not mere material for vain glory but an opportunity for achievement. . . . In a word, I claim that our city as a whole is an education to Greece, and that her members yield to none, man by man, for independence of spirit, many-sidedness of attainment, and complete self-reliance in limbs and brain. . . . Great indeed are the symbols and witnesses of our supremacy, at which posterity, as all mankind today, will be astonished.'

The closing boast was justified. Athenian democracy, at its highest and best, enshrined a noble human ideal. It gave to the world in thought and art, philosophy, drama, and architecture, an example of what mankind was capable, and we may well be 'astonished' by contemplation of the Greek achievement.

But it was not without flaw; and history has recorded the catastrophic decline of the Greek city-state, overborne by slavery, materialist aims, and warfare. It is a sad irony that one of the most human (and humanist) documents that have come down to us from Ancient Greece is Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, the war which ruined Athens and brought to an end the Classical Age of humanism.

'The city-state, the Polis', writes Gilbert Murray, 'had concentrated upon it almost all the loyalty and the aspirations of the Greek mind.' It was as a citizen of 'no mean city' that the Greek was schooled in humanity, and learnt to be a fully balanced human being, a body and soul organised under the control of reason. This humanist ideal permeated Greek culture in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., and is reflected in the writings of Plato and Aristotle and in the plays of Sophocles and

Euripides. Those of us who have read Sophocles' *Antigone*, for example, can never forget the Hymn in praise of Man, lines which seem so modern in spirit :

'Many are the wonders of the world', he wrote,
'And none so wonderful as Man.'

And he went on to describe with enthusiasm the characteristics of the human being with his 'wind-swift thought' and his amazing inventive ability. . . . Here is Gilbert Murray's translation of part of that Chorus, lines which are at once marvellously prophetic of the achievements of the human spirit, and a premonition of the disaster that awaits those who flout both law and love—'the truth of God in man's inmost will' :

'Wonders are many, but none there be
So strange, so fell, as the Child of Man.
He rangeth over the whitening sea,
Thro' wintry winds he pursues his plan.

Speech he hath taught him and wind-swift thought,
And the temper that buildeth a city's wall,
Till the arrows of winter he sets at naught,
The sleepless cold and the long rainfall.
All-arméd he; Unarméd never
To front new peril he journeyeth;
His craft assuageth each pest that rageth
And defence he hath gotten 'gainst all save Death.

With craft of engines beyond all dream
He speedeth—is it to good or ill?
For one is the City's Law supreme,
And the Truth of God in his inmost will;
High-citied he; but that other citiless
Who rageth, grasping at things of naught,
Upon roads forbidden; From him be hidden
The hearth that comforts and the light of thought.'

Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, Democritus and Protagoras, the schools of Sophists, Stoics and Epicu-

reans, all contributed in different measure to a large body of thought and speculation on the nature of man. There were, of course, marked differences of emphasis, and in fact opposing views were common. Epicureanism, for instance, represented a materialist, but psychologically satisfying point of view, that made much of man's capacity for friendship and enjoyment of the good things of life. The influence of Epicurean teaching, with its emphasis on human reason and independence and its freedom from superstition, was widely felt in Roman circles. Lucretius' long philosophical poem *On the Nature of Things* grappled with problems which have engaged the human mind for centuries and is generally considered to be a masterly exposition of Epicurean thought. It certainly paid high tribute to the classical doctrines of materialism, yet, paradoxically enough, it helped to take a load of fear and anxiety off minds often tyrannised by superstition and terror.

As to Stoicism, though it bore certain resemblances to Christianity, its doctrine of 'indifference' and its somewhat introverted ethic of endurance gave it basically a different character. True, the idea of God as an omnipresent spirit, dwelling in and with all human life, and the concept of man's inner nature as the shrine where duty is, and must be, worshipped, may have paved the way in many quarters of the Roman Empire for the acceptance and eventual triumph of Christianity. According to the Stoics, every good man harboured divinity: the divine spark in the individual person was a part of the 'soul of the world', the Logos or rational principle that informs all Nature. But, though New Testament writers like St. Paul and the author of *I Peter* may at points exhibit similarities to Stoic ethical teaching, it cannot be said that Christian humanism derived much encouragement from the rather austere and cold philosophy of Stoicism.

Though hardly rivalling Greece in conceptual agility, Rome also had its humanistically inclined thinkers. The

writings of Virgil, Ovid, Horace, and Catullus all contain humanist traits, and Cicero, most cultured of Romans, whose education has been described as 'the best and broadest that has ever fallen to the lot of man', was not only regarded as a master of the Latin language and the prince of rhetoricians, but, as his letters reveal, a very human guide, philosopher, and friend.

With the dawn of the Renaissance, Cicero became a dominant figure; and the individualistic character of his philosophy secured for him a leading place among the teachers whom the New Learning regarded as formative and seminal. A general spirit of questioning and experiment informed Cicero's philosophical works. He insisted upon the use of reason and the right and duty of men to inquire into the why and wherefore of things. Thus in his work *On the Nature of the Gods*, he could write: 'Those who ask what I myself think about each matter are unnecessarily curious; for in discussions it is not so much authorities that are to be sought as the course of reason. In fact the authority of those who profess to instruct is often a hindrance to their pupils; for they cease to use their own judgement, but accept what they know to be approved by one whom they respect.' Cicero's influence can be traced into the Deistic movement of the 18th century; Locke recommended the study of Cicero, and Voltaire acknowledged his debt to one whose belief in the power of human effort and in the freedom of man's will is a fundamental characteristic of humanist culture and ethics. The poet Terence, though of a different mould from Cicero, coined the phrase: 'I am a man, and I regard nothing human as a matter of indifference to me.' It could have been uttered most appropriately by Cicero himself.

These and other classical writers represent a corpus of liberal studies and humanist attitudes to which, centuries later, the scholars of the Renaissance were to look back for inspiration and encouragement.

But first came the Middle Ages—a period in which

Classical culture was buried under the weight of a new growth, the medieval Church, with its institutions and thinking almost wholly dominated by St. Augustine. Catholicism tipped the balance against the free and open-minded approach to life which had characterised the Classical Age. Instead, the Church offered a closed conception of the 'economy of Providence', in which God's grace and mercy alone operated, and instilled a profound sense of man as a fallen sinner. The earlier pagan glorification of human life the Church stigmatised as a sign of *hubris*, a pride which naturally came before the fall of the Roman Empire, and required stern correction, if the City of God were ever to be built on earth or realised in heaven. Hence, in the centuries before the Reformation, the emphasis was inevitably upon the revelation of God entrusted to the Church, upon the dominion of grace, and upon the passive role of man as its recipient. Church writers, with various degrees of skill, set out to find solutions to the problems of man's relationship to Nature and to God. In doing so they were often guilty of what Jacques Maritain has termed 'a certain theological inhumanity', which is putting it rather mildly! At all events, medieval piety was not sufficiently alive to the significance which human life and secular activities possess in themselves. In the words, again, of Maritain, 'human nature was lacerated'. The recognition of the Divine Sovereignty was not adequately accompanied by a true appreciation of man as 'a son of God', nor was the world regarded as the right and proper arena in which his powers might be developed and his dignity assured.

Here and there, it is true, medieval Christendom was on the point of developing a virtual and implicit humanism, as, for example, in the 9th century in the writings of John Scotus Erigena and in the 12th century in the person and teaching of St. Francis of Assisi. But such movements are isolated instances.

The fresh human impulse that Francis gave to Chris-

tianity is well known, and needs little or no elaboration. G. K. Chesterton called Francis 'a splendid and yet merciful Mirror of Christ', and at the same time 'the most human of saints'.² What struck Chesterton, and must impress anyone who studies the life of Francis, is its conjunction of saintliness and humanity, its intensely individual, and yet markedly universal, note. His cult of poverty may be regarded as an oblique cult of humanity. For he realised the tendency of man to become dominated by possessions; and when materialism vanquished the spirit then indeed man himself lost far more than he gained: he lost his own self—the humaneness which distinguished him from the beasts that perish. Francis, we may say, is a Christian humanist, *par excellence*. He exhibited a fresh and spontaneous feeling for life that is really a rediscovery of primitive Christianity, and in particular its implicit humanism. He had no interest whatever in theological matters, was no scholastic, but looked upon man and Nature in a way reminiscent of the Galilean. 'When Francis ate with the leper and kissed him out of pure love for a suffering human fellow', wrote Rufus Jones, 'he had discovered the true way to rejuvenate Christianity. It was the beginning of the Reformation, because it was a genuine recognition of a new centre.'³

This 'new centre' was man himself, with his human hopes and needs. He, not the Church, was the focal point upon which God's love was fixed, and therefore should be the object of the moral passion of any true son of God. John Wyclif has rightly been called 'the Morning Star of the Reformation', but Francis of Assisi was undoubtedly 'the rising sun of the Christian Renaissance'. In him the restored humanism of the Gospels is apparent, and the Franciscan movement, in its early stages at least, was indicative of the primitive and everlasting impulse given to Christianity by a Founder who

² G. K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi* (1943), p. 185.

³ *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 152.

was a man of the people and not at all a churchman in the accepted sense.

The great Irishman is less well remembered. Yet Erigena deserves the epithet which Rufus Jones has given him—'a great light in the dark ages'. He seems to have been a man of excellent sense, whose ideas regarding revelation, God, and man were remarkably in advance of his time. But he was bold enough and cultured enough to resurrect within the Church the speculations of the Greek philosophers.

First and foremost, Erigena is a mystical thinker, and his world-view is based on the Platonic intuition that the whole of created nature, including man, is a revelation of God. The temporal process is a continual unveiling of divinity. Material things, the visible universe of time and space, are the outward and visible signs of an inward and invisible 'presence'.

In short, what he is saying is that we live in a sacramental universe. But, and this is important, Erigena found the ultimate ground of truth in the human soul. Here, in the depth of personality, he considered heaven and earth have their meeting-point. The mind of man contains the clue to the riddle of life: it reflects the divine Ideas of goodness, truth and beauty, and forms, as it were, a mirror for God, who is the ground and reality of everything that is—both in Nature and in Man.

Ten centuries later, this basic thought was echoed in a famous poem, thus showing the persistence of what has been called the native Platonism of the human mind, and witnessing to the continuance of a line of humanism, which is at once mystical and humane, and with which one meets again and again in the post-Renaissance period:

'For I have learned

To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing often times
The still, sad music of humanity,

Nor harsh, nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.'⁴

Wordsworth's philosophy has appealed to a large number of thoughtful people in recent times, as it did to John Stuart Mill in the 19th century. Mill, the reformer, was rescued by Wordsworth from the depression that followed his realisation that, if all the social reforms were carried through which he had been taught to regard as supremely desirable, there would be nothing further to live for. Wrote Philip Wicksteed in the appendix to his Essex Hall Lecture on *The Religion of Time and the Religion of Eternity* (1899), 'Wordsworth revealed to him a life which was not only worth the getting, but worth the having.'

'What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind', wrote Mill, 'was that . . . in them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy . . . which could be shared in by all human beings; which had no connexion with struggle or imperfection. . . . From them I seemed to learn what would be the perennial source of happiness, when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed.' It is probable that every man must find his Beatific Vision, if his life is not to remain an organised hypocrisy or to fall back to the dead levels of unconscious impulse.

John Scotus Erigena, one thousand years before Wordsworth, held that man, by contemplation, may rise above the chances and changes of mortality and become that which he beholds. Man, gazing on the 'vision splen-

⁴ W. Wordsworth, *Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey* (1798).

did' finds God, because in this elevated state God is finding Himself in man. So, when we enjoy beauty, acknowledge truth, and are elevated by goodness, it is because God in us is enjoying His creation and His attributes. In the words of the humanist writer of the *Book of Proverbs*: 'The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord.' This was Erigena's deepest conviction: the soul is a revelation of God, and so he could say, with marvellous prescience and widest sympathy, 'There are as many theophanies (unveilings) of God as there are souls of the faithful.' Little wonder that, alone in the Middle Ages, John Scotus Erigena rose above his predecessors and contemporaries and maintained a purely figurative interpretation of the fires of hell! Inhumanity and indifference to suffering seem to have been very prevalent in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, and churchmen were not free from the taint. Yet it is to the credit of this noble product of the Celtic Church that he tempered fanaticism by an infusion of mysticism, promulgated a doctrine of progressive revelation and universal 'God-manhood', and turned men's thoughts, for once, away from legalist and externalist religious attitudes to a humane and mystical appreciation of 'a presence' in nature 'and in the mind of man'.

It is time now to turn to consider more closely the movement which led to the break with medieval ways of thought and ushered in, at length, the modern age of European history.

It is sometimes said that the Renaissance gave birth—to nothing! But this is a typical piece of academic shock tactics. The fact is that, despite much that seems merely a digging up of the past, despite a good deal of preoccupation with antiquities, the Renaissance as a whole produced an entirely new atmosphere of mental freedom in Europe. It revived Classical studies, turned men's minds towards a literature and philosophy which were, at that time, wholly unfamiliar, made respectable a rebellion against medieval systems of thought, but

above all acted as a spiritual catalyst. The Renaissance appealed from authority to truth, from orthodox tradition to the deliverances of the human mind, seeing things afresh; moreover, it laid the foundations of modern science.

It was a movement for whose tendencies the Catholic Church of the late 15th century was, paradoxically enough, largely responsible. If early Italian humanists seem to present a pagan and somewhat anti-clerical appearance, this was a natural outcome of the condition of the Church itself. When, amongst Popes and highly placed churchmen, religion was almost wholly dis severed from morality, it is hardly surprising that scholars and artists looked back with fondness and regret to the more humane and natural world of the Greeks and Romans, in which man could be seen again as an independent, free, and cultured agent, worthy of admiration, because capable of high aims and lofty discourse.

Hitherto, the Christian Church had dominated all thinking with an 'other-worldly' attitude, that considered the life of the individual and the history of peoples as merely a preparation for the future which awaited men after death, if fortified by the rites of Mother Church. The idea that God could be at work in the temporal and physical universe, the notion that the world and human life possessed intrinsic value in themselves, was largely foreign to medieval thought.

Renaissance man, on the other hand, looking back at his very considerable inheritance from the past, grasped a new time-scale and a new sense of values. He was taught a fresh approach to the works of man and the processes of Nature. He learnt to delight in the new world of human achievement that was opening up on every side. He began to appreciate what men at different times and in different places had accomplished. The voyages of explorers like Vasco da Gama, Columbus and Magellan expanded his view of the physical world, whilst the rediscovery of the Greek and Roman masters

of literature acquainted him with a mental field of amazing variety and extent.

Thus Renaissance humanism emerges primarily as a process of re-valuing the material world and the personality of man. Human existence came to be visualised in a new way. Men were catching vistas of worlds beyond the cloisters, shedding the blinkers of superstition and prejudice, and beholding for the first time for centuries the beholder himself, a creature of true worth and dignity. A representative work is the humanist Giannozzo Manetti's, whose title is a pointer to the spirit of the age: *On the Dignity and Excellence of Man*.

Beginning in Italy, a fresh appreciation of human capacities, a new sense of power, and a new ideal of life seized the imagination. The 'modern spirit' was on the point of emerging. The New Learning penetrated the strongholds of University and Church, and the spirit of free inquiry began to raise its head all over Europe. Unfamiliar horizons swung into view as men probed new regions of literature, philosophy, art, and architecture, and began to explore the geography of the oceans, the biology of plants and animals, the anatomy of man himself. Most significantly, the ordinary human being, with his individual and emotional experiences, became an object of intrinsic interest and study for the first time: 'a discovery of no less importance than the discovery of a new continent on our globe and of new worlds in the heavens'.⁵

All this took place within the context of civic life. The Italian communes of the 15th century were, in fact, the seed-bed of the new humanism. Florence of the Medici, Siena of the Petrucci and the Soccini, Venice of the Colleoni, Titian and Tintoretto, Milan of the Sforzas, Verona of the Scaligers, and Mantua of the Gonzagas attracted and nurtured the new spirit. Anatomists like Andreas Vesalius (1514-64) and artists like Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), Michelangelo (1475-

1564), and Raphael (1483-1520) focussed attention upon the human body. Further north, in the Netherlands and Germany, artists like the Van Eycks began to paint with gusto pictures inspired by daily life, masterpieces no longer confined to so-called 'sacred' topics, but finding inspiration amongst the common people and ordinary avocations of the contemporary world. Realistic portraiture, paintings that revealed the inner life of the subject, first saw the light in the studios of Jan and Hubert Van Eyck (1410-41). Later Albrecht Dürer and Hans Holbein extended the range and depth of humanist painting.

Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) is, in this respect, a most interesting case. The Renaissance spirit so imbued him that he actually painted himself in the traditional pose and likeness of Christ, explaining this by saying that he thought creative power was a divine quality and he wished to pay homage to his own genius by depicting himself as God! Dürer's portraiture always aimed at uncovering and asserting 'the man within'. A truly religious feeling impelled him 'to discover something of the divine in all men'. Indeed, he sought to express a heavenly gleam in the eyes of his sitters, 'for he was determined to prove each individual a mouthpiece of the Creator'.⁶ His *Four Apostles* (1526) in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich, may be said to represent the culmination of his art and faith, and here, says his latest biographer, man is portrayed as 'the channel of divine revelation. He is the mouthpiece and voice of God, the vehicle of his word'.⁶

Art and learning thus emancipated themselves from thralldom to the Church, and religious attitudes underwent a humanising influence, issuing in the natural depiction of religious subjects seen, for example, in the works of Rubens (1577-1640) and Rembrandt (1606-69), notably in the latter's etchings.

An interesting example of the changed temper of the

⁵ Höffding, *History of Modern Philosophy*, I, p. 11.

⁶ Marcel Brion, *Dürer* (1960), p. 285.

European mind is given by the Oxford Erasmus scholar, Dr. P. S. Allen. He describes a wood-carving in a church in Thann, in Alsace, which breathes an air of reality, typical of Renaissance fidelity to life :

'A young mother bowing tenderly over her child. A figure blown along in the wind, its robes flying; clutching with one bare foot, muscles standing out in the effort, at a big stone as it passes. A man climbing, the left hand stretched back over his head, grasping a rock almost out of reach, the left foot standing tiptoe, while the right knee, lifted as far as it will go, presses with the right hand against the cliff, striving for support by mere force of adhesion, every muscle tense, till you can almost hear him pant in his fearful struggle.' (One could almost imagine that this was a description of a modern rock-climber on a smooth face, trying to overcome an awkward overhang : the carving is evidently cut from life.) The dynamic, modernistic note of this wood-carving is symbolic of Renaissance humanism, of a new interest in human behaviour, of a determination on the part of Renaissance man to tear himself free from ancient models and to forge new forms of expression and fresh conceptions of life in all its astonishing vitality.

From the theological point of view, however, the early years of the Italian Renaissance were not very productive. The only humanist who can be said to have interested himself in theology was Lorenzo Valla (1406-57), whose *Notes on the New Testament* (written in the 1440's) may rank as the beginning of modern biblical criticism. Later, in the 16th century, Italian radical reformers, influenced by Renaissance thought and even more by the German Reformation, were to make an important contribution (as we shall see) to a religious humanist synthesis.

Marsilio Ficino (1433-99), the head of the Florentine Academy, is typical of many who were attracted to Greek philosophy, preferring it to Christianity, and found in it an anchor for their spirits. For him Plato was the

master of all philosophers, a tower of inspiration, linking faith and reason in an incomparable conjunction. His influence is traceable amongst the 16th century English 'Grecians', Linacre and Grocyn, Colet and More—and in the 17th century amongst the Cambridge Platonists.

But generally speaking one must pass north of the Alps to discover the mood which gave birth to a strong religious humanistic tradition. Here, in Germany, the Low Countries, and England, the Renaissance was by no means a merely secular triumph. Christian scholars shared in it, and were conscious of no radical break with Christianity.

As the enthusiasm for the Ancient World and its culture moved northwards, the second half of the 15th century saw Germany become a centre of the New Learning. Teachers in schools and universities, like Cologne and Vienna, where Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (afterwards Pope Pius II) taught for a time, wandering humanists like Conrad Celtes (1459-1508) and patricians like Willibald Pirckheimer of Nürnberg (1470-1508) all took up the new discipline. At Erfurt, for example, a group of humanists, of whom the most remarkable was probably Mutianus Rufus, gave the Thuringian university considerable fame.

The change from medieval scholasticism to Renaissance humanism is, perhaps, most perfectly illustrated in the person of Conrad Muth, usually known as Mutianus Rufus.⁷

Born at Hamburg in 1471, he was at school with Erasmus at Deventer. Then he migrated to Erfurt, and finally went to Italy, where most humanists of the time yearned to go, just as most Jews in our day wish to pay a visit to Jerusalem. Returning to Germany in 1502, Mutian took a poorly paid canonry at Gotha, which served his material wants for the rest of his life. Here his house was the Mecca of all aspiring young students, during

⁷ Charles Beard: *Martin Luther and the Reformation in Germany*, p. 78.

the period when humanism flourished at Erfurt, and here he taught, amassed a considerable library, and conversed rather like a 16th century Dr. Johnson.

Charles Beard in his work on Luther and the Reformation has described this remarkable man. 'Though he retained his Church preferment, and performed with more or less regularity the duties of his office, he was at heart neither Catholic nor Protestant, but only a scholar, who loved, and sought for, the truth. He had grasped the idea that Christianity is older than the nativity of Christ, and that the true Son of God is that Divine Wisdom of which the Jews had no monopoly. "Who", he said, "is our Saviour? Righteousness, peace and joy: That is the Christ who has come down from heaven". Again, "The clear commandment of God, which enlightens the eyes of the mind, has two heads, that thou love God and man as thyself. This law, pleasant to heaven and men, makes us partakers of heavenly things. This is the natural law, not graven on tables of stone like that of Moses, not cut in brass like the Roman, not written on parchment or paper, but by the highest teacher poured into our hearts."⁸

There is, surely, an echo here of a spiritual and ethical understanding of the New Testament and of the teaching of Jesus that links Mutian with all those who through the centuries have understood Christianity as a liberal and humanistic faith, whose spiritual substance is, in the words of a former Provost of King's, Cambridge, 'a divine life and not a divine science'.⁹ Mutian made a considerable impression upon his contemporaries and would have made more upon a later age had he not lived at a time when there were already 'giants in the land'. But of course he was not of the stature either of Erasmus or of Luther. Yet his accent and spirit are not without significance. He showed how it was possible to

⁸ Op. cit., p. 79.

⁹ B. Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, ed. W. R. Inge, century X.

combine enthusiasm for the New Learning with allegiance to an undogmatic, ethical Christian faith. And he was not the only man to do this. Everywhere there was excitement as men put their heads together, read 'old Masters' and thought new thoughts. No longer could medieval theology and Aristotelian-coloured science cover the earth with a dark 'cloud of unknowing'!

Of course, the outstanding name in the Northern Renaissance is what Thomas Carlyle would call a 'representative man'. It is that of Desiderius Erasmus. And to this great humanist we must now turn.

Erasmus was born at Rotterdam in 1466. He began life with a grudge against monasticism, for both his father and he were forced into the cloisters against their will. A pupil of Alexander Hegius at the well-known school at Deventer, he early developed a thirst for learning which no ecclesiastical discipline could either slake or eradicate.

The six years he spent as an Augustinian canon at Steyn were devoted to the Classics, but soon after he obtained a post as travelling secretary to the Bishop of Cambrai, who intended to take him with him to Rome. The journey was never made, but Erasmus was free at last from 'a life for which [he says] I was totally unfit both in body and mind . . . because I abhorred ritual and loved liberty'. As soon as he could, Erasmus directed his steps to the University of Paris where he knew he would have an opportunity to sit somewhat loose to the scholastic philosophy, and could take up teaching along his own lines. Thus began his long connection with university teaching. First Oxford, then Cambridge, became familiar haunts, and friendships with Colet and More and other leading figures in the English Church provided him with an entrée into, and anchorage in, English cultural life which seem to have proved a welcome and a necessary standby for a scholar who was not made of the sternest moral stuff, such as a Luther or a Calvin.

Whilst at Oxford learning Greek, Erasmus seems to

have become imbued with a serious resolve that decided the whole direction of his later career: in his own words, he was minded 'to live and die in the study of the Scriptures'. Where others devoted themselves chiefly to the Greek and Roman classical writings, Erasmus proposed to apply his scholarship and the techniques of 'good learning' to the Bible. It was a momentous decision, and heralded a movement of liberal religious thought to which, amongst many others, Unitarians owe a tremendous debt.

His great importance for the thought-process of what I am calling Christian humanism is that he initiated for the first time a scientific study of Scripture, diffident and somewhat tentative perhaps, but most significant in that he applied to sacred literature the canons of criticism that were already being accepted in the field of the recovered Classics of Greece and Rome.¹⁰

His free handling of the sacred text is well illustrated by his 1516 edition of the Greek New Testament (the first of its kind) in which he omitted the trinitarian text, I *John* 5:7, because it did not appear in the best of his manuscripts. His *Paraphrases*—a kind of commentary on the New Testament which was published between the years 1517 and 1524—was also a marked advance on anything of the kind that had appeared hitherto. For instance, Erasmus was prepared to admit that the Apostles were guilty of lapses of memory and failures of judgement. He regarded them, in fact, as ordinary mortals like the men of his day and not as a kind of peculiar people who 'knew all the answers'! St. Mark's Gospel, he thought, was an abridgement of *Matthew*; and Luke, he reminded his readers, was not an eye-witness of the events which he relates, whilst he was very doubtful indeed about the Johannine authorship of the Apocalypse.

¹⁰ Here, no doubt, he owed something to the boldness and erudition of Lorenzo Valla, whose *Notes on the New Testament* Erasmus published in April 1505.

However, he did not confine his criticism merely to literary topics. Sworn foe of dogmatism and obscurantism in every shape and form, this 'liberal thinker in the guise of a churchman', as he has been called,¹¹ early commenced a religious polemic against the prevailing theology of his times.

Though a scholar and many would say the most learned 'don' of his age, Erasmus possessed a Dutchman's sound commonsense and the practical outlook on life of a cultured layman. It is curious how laymen in the 16th century—and at other times—often seem more liberal and tolerant, more willing to move forward in thought and less fanatically attached to religious shibboleths than their clerical contemporaries. Bishop Stillingfleet once confessed that the eminent Independent minister, John Howe, replying to the Bishop's attack on Dissenters, discoursed 'more like a gentleman than a Divine, without any mixture of rancour, or any sharp reflections and sometimes with a great degree of kindness towards him . . . !' (Theological controversy carried on without rancour was quite the exception in the 17th century.) Erasmus had no time for metaphysical conceits and sacramental niceties. These were 'truths beyond the grasp of man's intellect, and it was useless to insist on definitions'.¹² He believed that in religion, as in ethics, simplicity, naturalness, purity, and reasonableness were the chief requirements. The task of theology was to get back to the original fountain-head of divinity, and to do this with the least possible acrimony and parade of explanations. He was a devout believer in the wisdom of Occam's razor.

'How is it', he asked in the preface to the first edition of his Greek New Testament, the *Paraclesis*, that people give themselves so much trouble about the details of all sorts of remote philosophical systems and neglect

¹¹ John Caird, *University Addresses* (1898), p. 79.

¹² M. M. Phillips, *Erasmus and the Northern Renaissance* (1949), p. 219.

to go to the sources of Christianity itself?' In 'these few books' (by which he means the New Testament) wisdom may be drawn 'as from a crystalline source'. . . . 'This philosophy is accessible to everybody. Christ desires that his mysteries shall be spread as widely as possible.' And then comes the well-known—and in those days somewhat challenging—passage: 'I should wish that all would read the Gospels and Paul's Epistles; that they were translated into all languages so that not only the Scots and the Irish, but also the Turk and the Saracen might read and understand; I wish that out of these the husbandman might sing while ploughing, the weaver chant them at his loom; that with such stories the traveller should beguile his way-faring. . . . This sort of philosophy is rather a matter of disposition than of syllogisms, rather of life than of disputation, rather of inspiration than of erudition, rather of transformation than of logic.' In a word, Erasmus is convinced that Christianity is a way of life and not a system of beliefs or opinions; it is something which the proverbial man-in-the-street is capable of grasping; it is a following, and not a system of knowledge.

This is language that we are to hear more than once from those who inherit the Erasmian spirit. It is the language of a Christian ethic that regards the teaching of Jesus as fundamental, and all else as inessential. It is the language of a man who is basically tolerant and broad-minded, honest and civilised, responsible and open to truth, as it is given him to know truth. Above all, it is the reflection of a mind which has looked around the world, God's world (as he conceives it), and, despite all its imperfections, has found it good; the mind of one who earnestly hopes to reconcile and unite his fellows on a basis, not of dogmatic 'certainties', but of moral truth, finding in unity of spirit the bond of peace.

'What is the philosophy of Christ', he asks at another point, 'which he himself calls *Renascentia*, but the insaturation of Nature created good? . . . Moreover, though

no one has taught us this so absolutely and effectively as Christ, yet also in pagan books much may be found that is in accordance with it.' No theology was of any use that did not persuade men of the importance of a change of heart, a rebirth, a moral renaissance.

We may think this rationalism, this moralism, jejune, but it was nothing of the kind. It was revolutionary in nature and in scope.

Erasmus's views on Christianity were contained in a little work of practical religion—the *Enchiridion Militis Christi*—the 'Handbook for the Christian Warrior'—written in 1501–2 and re-published in 1518 with a letter in its defence, hence we can assume that it represents his later conviction as well as his earlier feelings. Charles Beard has said that 'its tone can best be described as simply and strongly ethical. He alludes to what would be called the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, but does not state, much less define, them. The characteristic superstitions of Catholicism he passes quietly by, placing them in contrast with purely religious aspirations.' The accent throughout is on character and human love, patience, and purity. It was hardly Catholicism as generally understood in universities or convents, nor was it Protestantism. Beard shrewdly comments: 'A Lutheran of a few years later would have pronounced the *Enchiridion* pagan in grain, and traced its inspiration rather to Epictetus than to Paul.' How true this could be is attested by a letter to Luther, dated April 11th, 1526, in which Erasmus complains of Luther's abuse and his charging him with 'atheism, Epicureanism, scepticism in articles of the Christian profession, blasphemy, and what not—besides many points on which I am silent'.

The *Enchiridion* is in fact a plea for culture and a heart purified by reverence. Its thirteenth chapter is an eloquent and passionate appeal for a 'return to the realisation of the inwardness of the spiritual life'.¹³

The spirit of the *Enchiridion* was to remain the spirit

¹³ Op. cit., p. 49.

of Erasmus's life-work. Here is the practical moralist who hopes to leave human society better than he found it. Here is the eirenecist whose intention is to promote brotherhood, sympathy, and mutual tolerance amongst men. Here is the humane and often humorous commentator on his age, who resolves the torturing flames of hell, for example, into a psychological condition—'the perpetual anguish of mind which accompanies habitual sin'—and who is one of the first men in history to feel a sense of social responsibility.

Under the heading 'Opinions worthy of a Christian' Erasmus laments the extremes of pride of class, national hostility, professional envy, and rivalry between religious orders—all foibles of his age—which spoil and wreck the community. We are, he declares, members one of another, and should regard ourselves as our brother's keepers. Christianity is a social gospel :

'Throwing dice costs you a thousand gold pieces in one night, and meanwhile some wretched girl, compelled by poverty, sold her modesty; and a soul is lost for which Christ gave his own. You say, what is that to me? I mind my own business, according to my lights. And yet you, holding such opinions, consider yourself a Christian, who are not even a man !'

In his other writings, especially the *Colloquies* and the *Moria*, Erasmus shows a deep concern for social reform, far in advance of his times. Indeed, his awareness of the debt which each individual owes to society, and of the extent to which society holds in its own hands the key to its improvement, makes Erasmus, in this respect alone, a forerunner of the 18th century. In his own inimitable way, he holds the freedom of the individual in balance with the needs of society, and whilst recognising the importance of expanding the mental life of the individual, he is far from unmindful of the importance of improving the mores of the group, the human environment, which he believes is capable of change. Hence among the interesting ideas that we find him canvassing

in his writings are the idea of universal education without discrimination of class or sex, backed up by freedom of opinion and of the press; the reform of taxation on a rational basis; the curbing of the accumulation of wealth; and the valuable proposal for arbitration as a way of settling disputes between nations and avoiding the futility of war—which to Erasmus, the internationalist, was the height of folly, an absolute denial of the Gospel of Jesus, and the parent cause of immense evils.

Erasmus addressed himself to a reform of Christianity based upon a Christian humanism, whose appeal was to right reason and the teaching of Jesus. Yet it is important to resist the temptation to call him a rationalist, *tout court*. One side of his nature and outlook, we ought not to forget, had been affected by the teaching of the Brethren of the Common Life in which he had been schooled—and there are undoubtedly links between Erasmus and à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*. Erasmus was conscious of the limitations of the intellect, and did not hesitate to pillory intellectual pride, especially in his criticism of the Schoolmen. Abstract argument made no appeal to him, for he was convinced that true Christian understanding is based upon a combination of both the heart and the head. Thus, though Erasmus can no more be called a mystic than a rationalist, it is a fact that he occupies a middle position between the two. As Margaret Phillips in her perceptive work, *Erasmus and the Northern Renaissance*, remarks, for Erasmus, 'both the rational method and the more direct spiritual grasp are necessary, and faith completes the work of reason, just as Christ's teaching lets in a flood of light on the groping of the classical moralists. In this kind of learning alone, he says, reverence steps in where reason is brought to a standstill : *in his solis literis, et quod non assequor, tamen adoro*.'¹⁴

Erasmus's ideal has been termed 'too muted . . .' for the 16th century, a century in which heretics and witches

¹⁴ Op. cit., p. 84.

were burned with impunity by Catholics and Protestants alike (e.g. his disciple Louis de Berquin, in Paris). Yet though he could be quite severe on abuses in society and within the Church, he was also perfectly frank about urging the ecclesiastical authorities to consider, seriously and favourably, questions which are only now being taken up by Roman Catholics: for instance, the question of the marriage of the clergy, the lightening of the burden of abstinence, the translation of the Mass into the vernacular, the conduct of worship in language and terms understood by the people. Formalism and hypocrisy could be avoided, if only men would fill their religious confession and exercises with an infusion of simplicity of address and charity of mind and heart.

Sometimes Erasmus is rated as a recluse bending over his books, but in the quietness of his study he did avoid the estrangements of passion and strife. He may have gained thereby a more lucid and penetrating view of things than many of his more outspoken contemporaries, frequently engaged as they were in fierce theological controversies and faction fights.

At all events, this may be said: that the great Dutchman's peace-loving and humane spirit, though far in advance of its age, had a numerous progeny. He was the forerunner of a host of radical reformers and sectaries who, not so timid perhaps nor so scholarly, yet performed a notable service to mankind by proclaiming, in the 16th and 17th centuries, a Christian humanism of a more developed and far-reaching kind.

The shape of things to come may perhaps be gauged from a quotation from his edition of Hilary of Poitiers (1523), in which Erasmus very pithily and pointedly wrote: 'You will not be damned if you do not know whether the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son has one or two beginnings, but you will not escape damnation if you do not cultivate the *fruits of the Spirit*—which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, long-suffering, mercy, faith, modesty, continence,

and chastity. . . . The sum of our religion is peace and unanimity, but these can scarcely stand *unless we define as little as possible*, and in many things leave each other free to follow his own judgement, because there is great obscurity in these matters.'¹⁵ Of course, Erasmus considered it his life-work to 'advance the study of the Scriptures and the knowledge of God'. His *Adages, Colloquies, Praise of Folly, Paraphrases*, and editions of the Fathers gave him a vast European reputation.

But more important than all his voluminous works, more significant for European culture, were his commentaries on life in all its contemporary aspects, his humour, and his humanity. Men admired his 'stupendous erudition', but they did not forget his 'intensely human temperament'. Unfanatical, undogmatic, 'Erasmus', says one of the best of his modern interpreters, Dr. P. S. Allen, 'found high value in simple goodness; all his life he set it forth and showed it accordingly. . . . Reason to him was God's best gift to man.'¹⁶ Yet though 'Erasmus contributed perhaps more than anyone to the rebirth of confidence in the innate powers of the human mind', and in doing this he was a true humanist, as Margaret Phillips remarks, 'to the Humanism which imagines Man as the supreme lord of the universe, needing no God to inspire and no Christ to redeem him, Erasmus was a stranger'.¹⁷ First and foremost, his was a religious spirit, free from the egocentricity of most classical humanists, and always under the spell of deep reverence for a person. The 'philosophy of Christ' was the controlling factor for belief and conduct. '*Primum autem est scire quid docuerit, proximum est praestare*': 'The first thing therefore is to find out what he taught, the next is to act on it.' The humanism of Erasmus is, then, a Christian humanism.

During the time he taught in Cambridge he had

¹⁵ Cited by Roland Bainton in *Hunted Heretic* (1953), p. 34.

¹⁶ P. S. Allen, *Erasmus* (1934), p. 59.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. xxiv.

rooms in Queens' College. These were high up at the head of a staircase called 'the High Stairs'. Here his portrait used to be seen 'surrounded by prints of gentlemen in pink, riding to hounds—quite a suitable collocation for this very humanly minded scholar'.¹⁸ Today the huntsmen seem to have ridden away, but a fine engraving by Houston hangs outside his former bedroom, whilst a portrait in oils by a late contemporary of Holbein has pride of place over the mantelpiece in the Senior Combination Room. Here, too, at Queens', most appropriately, the latest building of the College, containing new sets of students' rooms, was opened by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Patroness of the College, on the 5th June 1961, and is named 'The Erasmus Building' in memory of the great humanist. But not only at Queens', Cambridge, does the spirit of Erasmus have 'a local habitation and a name'. His debtor is the whole world.

To the spiritual children of Erasmus we shall be referring in our next lecture. They were to be found in Holland, but also in Germany, Poland, Hungary and Bohemia, indeed wherever men felt the need for reformation in religion and desired that this should mean a reformation of morals and life and not merely a change of institutions, professed creeds or outward allegiance. To take one instance only: the translation of his works into the Czech language went on apace from 1518 (*The Enchiridion*) to 1595 (the *Vidua Christiana*, 1529). The Erasmian spirit of Christian humanism had, in fact, a strong following in the Czech lands. It may, I think, be traced in the life and work of that great educationalist and bishop of the Czech Brethren, John Amos Comenius (1592-1671).

Erasmianism is something besides a merely classical sense of propriety or even a primitive and pragmatic biblical disposition. It is (at the same time) an original enunciation of the creed of education and per-

¹⁸ P. S. Allen, *The Age of Erasmus* (1914), p. 137.

fectibility, a proclamation of warm social feeling and of faith in human nature, of kindness and of the need for mutual helpfulness and understanding. It is an early affirmation of the universal presence of good, and therefore of God, in man. 'Christ dwells everywhere; piety is practised under every garment, if only a kindly disposition is not wanting.' With these convictions Erasmus heralds a later age.

In the 16th and 17th centuries such thoughts remained an undercurrent, but in the 18th century they burst forth and flowed broadly through Europe and America.

Thus the Dutch teacher of a religious humanism, the European scholar who preached a humanistic religion, is, assuredly, a precursor and preparer of the modern mind. In his footsteps came Rousseau and Voltaire, Herder, Pestalozzi and the English and American sponsors of human rights and social responsibility. Cultured humanity has cause to revere his memory, and to recognise in him one of the leading figures in the development of European civilisation, a source of the critical spirit that resists all attempts to crush freedom of inquiry, an inveterate opponent of authoritarianism, a pioneer of social and international peace, and a man whose kindness and genuine moral fervour is a model for future generations.

IV

**THE FLOWERING OF
ERASMIANISM**

'I consider Erasmus to be the greatest enemy Christ has had in these thousand years past.'

Martin Luther, *Table Talk*

'Humanism is the appreciation of man and of the values, real and potential in human life. It is concerned with the agonies and triumphs of the human spirit.'

R. L. Shin, *Man—the New Humanism* (1968)

IV

The Flowering of Erasmianism

The poet Ben Jonson once said of his older and greater contemporary, William Shakespeare, that he 'was not of an age, but for all time'. He might almost have said, also, that 'he was not of a land, but for all lands'. One marked feature of the Renaissance scene (to which, of course, Shakespeare himself belongs) is the appearance of writers and artists, thinkers and scientists, who have a distinctly universal touch and reach. We recognise in them our own modes of thought and feeling. We can sympathise with many of their aims and aspirations. They speak a language of the spirit that rings in familiar tones. They belong, in short, not merely to the age in which they lived but to us also, and—we may hazard the guess—to all time.

This phenomenon of feeling ourselves at home with any Renaissance characters is explicable, I think, on the supposition that with the 16th and 17th centuries we have actually entered the Modern Period of European, and indeed world, history. This is what makes this stage of the human story so fascinating. We are looking, as it were, in a mirror, and observing our own kind of habits of thought and conduct, reactions, hopes and fears, ideals and misgivings, not to say attempted achievements, entertainingly reflected. We are looking, in fact, at modern, universal man emerging from the mists of time. From now on it will do no harm to bear this in mind.

The humanists of the Renaissance period, who were stirred into literary and artistic activity by contact with Hellenism and the rich variety of Classical thought, began to look at their own world and at man himself in an entirely new light. The spectacle of gifted writers and artists discussing, treating, and representing human affairs in free, frank, unaccustomed, and exciting ways, uninhibited by external authority, and unimpeded by cramping mental reservations, led to a reappraisal of the contemporary world. It also encouraged a longing for total freedom of expression, a questioning of accepted values (values imposed, as it seemed, by powers inimical to human welfare) and a search for values that were basically humanist in character.

European man awoke 'from out his [dogma-] haunted sleep', and from now on became increasingly restive about the 'medievalisms' of the Catholic Church, which had hitherto dominated life and letters. He looked around him and saw new vistas opening up. He pushed at doors that had hitherto seemed firmly barred. The age of experiment and discovery was at hand. He began to speak, write, draw, paint, build, and explore with a fresh vigour and originality.

This new enthusiasm, impetuosity, and resourceful spirit of experimentation may be seen in the great Florentine, Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). Combining an artist's sensitivity with a scientist's desire for knowledge, Leonardo plunged into the study of Nature in all its aspects. Freely observing natural phenomena of all kinds around him, he also paused to look more closely at man himself. He became seriously interested in the anatomy and physiology of the human body: a fact which is illustrated, for instance, in his Notebooks, where he entered drawings and memoranda of all kinds, even a brief note like this in 1508, 'Go every Saturday to the hot bath where you will see naked men.' But Leonardo, artist and scientist, knew that man was not merely a body; he possessed a soul. He would, I imagine, have con-

sidered our modern nudist cult a somewhat boring and insipid preoccupation. The knowledge of anatomy was not enough. The artist had to penetrate more deeply and uncover the motions of the spirit. This he considered to be the artist's highest purpose, and he himself provided instances of this in his own achievements. His portrait of the Mona Lisa, for example, has always been considered a masterpiece, because it gives expression to an inner life. This passage from his Notebooks on the life of the spirit reveals the warm genius of the Renaissance man, who humbly called himself *uomo senza lettere*, since he did not claim to be a man of letters nor versed in classical literature like most authors of his time. Today, when human life, in some quarters, is shamefully rated cheap and dispensable, we do well to take to heart the implied rebuke:

'And thou, man, who in this work of mine dost look upon the wonderful works of nature, if thou judgest it to be a criminal thing to destroy it, reflect how much more criminal it is to take the life of man; and if this external form appears to thee marvellously constructed, remember that it is as nothing compared with the soul that dwells in that structure; and in truth whatever this may be, it is a thing divine. Leave it then to dwell in its work at its good pleasure, and let not thy rage and malice destroy such a life—for in truth he who values it not does not deserve it.'

The bent of Leonardo's mind was all toward the teachings of experience and against those of authority. Wisdom he considered 'the daughter of experience', and though he never quarrelled with the Church, the dogmas of religion occupied his thoughts little, or not at all. He was too busy studying and appreciating the unfolding truths of human experience to bother overmuch about experimentally unverifiable opinions. Like his great contemporary, Michelangelo, he was grasping new opportunities, utilising new ideas, exploring new regions, both physical and mental, in a word, entering upon an

ever-growing empire of the spirit, and enjoying the mastery of it.

If this was true of the Italian humanists, it was no less so of scholars and artists north of the Alps, in Germany and the Low Countries. These, too, caught the infection of a new enthusiasm for nature and man. Natural objects such as flowers, birds, animals, and landscapes were freshly and naturally observed and carefully delineated. The human figure was no longer subject to extreme stylisation. The contemporary scene in town and country, amongst rich and poor, seized and fascinated the Renaissance artist's eye. He could now leave illustrating purely biblical and religious subjects, so long traditionally accepted as 'right' material for brush and paint, and take the whole world for his canvas. Man and his relationship to the world in which he lived; man and his work, man and his achievements, man and his ideals became regular themes for pictures. Portraits abounded. The 15th and 16th centuries (it has been said) are 'full of faces'. Similar themes also engaged the attention of the writers and thinkers of the late Renaissance.

As to so-called 'sacred subjects', the haloes gradually disappear and the humanity of those depicted begins markedly to emerge.

The sacred figures become movingly human. By the first half of the 17th century, the process is complete. Thus Rubens' 'Holy Family' have all lost their haloes, and Rembrandt's 'Christ at the Column' (a deeply Christian and greater picture) is almost wholly concerned with the humanity of Christ. The very ordinariness of the naked figure leaning solitary and forlorn against the column, and the complete absence of any kind of romantic or formal idealisation, bring home the fact that we have, by now, reached in Rembrandt a genuine Christian humanism that combines a sense of reality with religious compassion and faith.

Characteristic, too, of the transition from the medieval

to the modern world is the humanist's independence of any set formula or tradition, his vivid appreciation of contemporary culture and life, and his determination to 'gang his own gait': to follow the dictates of his own mind and spirit.

This experimental and thrusting self-reliance and energy, so typical of the humanism of the Renaissance, appears amongst such scientists as Andreas Vesalius, the anatomist, William Gilbert, physician and 'father of magnetism', and William Harvey, discoverer of the circulation of the blood, predecessors of the 17th century Scientific Revolution. It is found also amongst philosophers like Francis Bacon and Thomas More, and some theologians of the Reformation period who owed a debt, curiously enough, to the 14th century mystical writers, Meister Eckhart (1260-1329), John Tauler (1300-61), and the unknown author of the *Theologia Germanica*, (14th century). Amongst these may be included not only Erasmus, but Philip Melancthon, the brilliant young classicist from Heidelberg and Tübingen, who already, at the age of seventeen, was an accomplished Grecian and studied not only philosophy but medicine and law.

The early humanists were by no means enemies of religion, as is sometimes supposed. On the contrary, though they broke with scholasticism, and felt the need to carve out fresh lines of thought, they often remained, like Erasmus, loyal sons of the Church.

Thus Nicholas of Cusa (1404-64), who might even be numbered amongst the 'Reformers before the Reformation', combined an enthusiastic classicism with mysticism, and kept his cardinal's hat. In a work which earned him considerable repute, his *De Docta Ignorantia*, he taught that man's true wisdom lay in recognising his own ignorance. Nevertheless, one need not, and could not, stop just there. It was possible to escape from scepticism by accepting the doctrine of the mystics that God can be apprehended by intuition—a state where

human limitations disappear. True, he laid himself open to the charge of pantheism by saying that God was at once the whole and the least in the universe, and thus prepared the way for the bold speculations of Giordano Bruno. Yet though an enemy of medieval philosophising and a pioneer in scientific thought—for example, he anticipated Copernicus by maintaining the theory of the rotation of the earth, Nicholas of Cusa illustrates the fact that in the 15th century the more sensitive and adventurous minds were capable of criticising the medieval framework within which they were imprisoned and were already pressing beyond its frontiers. Some at least considered that the 'New Light' of humanism might properly be combined with the 'Old Light' of religion, and indeed *must* be so combined, if man were to develop in a fully human and God-intended direction. Thus Lorenzo de' Medici (1449-92) could write: 'One cannot be either a good citizen or a good Christian without being a good Platonist.'

But the synthesis of contrasting insights was rarely achieved. Universalism and mysticism—on which to some extent, possibly, universalism depends—were suspect, both within the Catholic fold and within the new Reforming movement which now took and occupied the stage in Europe.

As Europe moved out of bondage to medievalism towards the Enlightenment of the 18th century, the Reformation of the 16th century interrupted an inchoate process that would have recognised man's positive religious value and native capability as the image and child of God, as the bearer of the divine principle in the created world. The Christian humanism of a Nicholas of Cusa or of an Erasmus was prevented from developing naturally within the *corpus Christianum*. Instead, the break-away from medieval Christianity and scholasticism involved a violent surgical operation. Christianity, which basically is the worship of a God not opposed to, but deeply akin to man, Christianity, which

is essentially a religion of humaneness, suffered a crisis of thought.

It is important to remember that Martin Luther was no humanist. He had no enthusiasm, like his disciple Philip Melancthon, for classical culture; nor had he any strong leanings towards an international outlook. Rather was he a German, a pioneer of the German national spirit, and a man of the people. True, he had read and been influenced to some extent by that important mystical work, the *Theologia Germanica*, whose tendency was to free its readers from precise dogmatic assertions and focus their attention upon the traffic and union of the human spirit with the divine. But the major influence in Luther's life, reflected in his theology, was not mystical, but Augustinian. He accepted the teaching that man was a fallen being, incapable on his own of apprehending God, and fundamentally sinful. The statement of a mystic like Juliana of Norwich (1343-1443) that 'our faith cometh of the natural love of the soul, and of the clear light of our reason, and of the steadfast mind which we have of God in our first making', would have seemed to Luther not merely heretical but utterly blasphemous!

The Reformation was Luther's work, and was a distinct break with the Catholic Church on organisational and ethical lines. Intellectually, however, though there was an apparently clear division between Protestant and Catholic, the difference was not nearly so great as the protagonists on either side supposed. Recent scholarship has tended to emphasise the political factors that were really responsible for the Reformation on the Continent of Europe and in England. In Germany, the Reformers canalised the growing German nationalism. In England, King Henry VIII, who had been recently commended by the Pope as 'Defender of the Faith', decided to substitute his own authority for that of the Pope largely, at first, on personal grounds. From one aspect at least, therefore, the Reformation was an ex-

ternal affair. Not for about a century was there any revolutionary change in men's notions about religion or doctrine. Only a century later, for example, in England in the Commonwealth period, do we find men looking at Reform with sharpened perception, and forming popular movements like Independency, the Baptists, and the Society of Friends.

Luther's early days were best. Later, when he realised the possibilities of the Peasants' Revolt, 'he and the Reformation with him became harder, more dogmatic, less spiritual, less universal. He is no longer a leader of thought, but the builder up of a church.'¹ The original aim of the Reformers had been to transform the Christian life, not to exchange one set of theological dogmas for another. But the eventual outcome of the work of Luther and Calvin was a new, Protestant scholasticism. This is with us yet, and in Northern Ireland, for example, exists in a virulent and medievalist form.

The Reformation changed the map of Europe, but left the Christian world-view very much what it had been before. Dogmatic Catholic assertions were confronted by equally dogmatic Protestant assertions, bigotry faced bigotry, and the principles of toleration and free inquiry, though implicit in Luther's claims, were not secured by the Reformation. On the contrary, they were put in jeopardy by the political and religious struggles of the times. The latent Christian humanism of the high Renaissance, so clearly reflected in the writings of Erasmus, whom Gibbon called 'the father of rational theology', was largely eclipsed in the struggle between Reform and the Counter-Reformation. The tender growths of a religion whose accent was on the 'loving-kindness' of God, upon 'the gospel within the gospel' (*Luke* 15) were shrivelled by the heat of the contest between Protestant and Catholic, High Calvinist and Remonstrant, Anglican and Anabaptist.

¹ Charles Beard, *The Reformation of the 16th Century* (1883), pp. 35 ff.

In England, the Puritans of the Centre and the Presbyterians in particular, were no more favourable to the growth of Christian humanist traits than were the more fanatical amongst Continental Reformers. Catholics and Protestants burnt witches with equal abandon, and Calvinism indeed, as Professor Trevor-Roper has, I think, clearly demonstrated, was almost as reactionary as the Counter-Reformation.

In his *Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change* (1967), H. R. Trevor-Roper reminds us that Voltaire, looking back in history, found his predecessors and the beginnings of Modernism not in the Reformation, but in the period before the Reformation, in the period of the late Renaissance, the age of Valla and Erasmus, which was later blotted out by the religious conflicts. Gibbon was of the same view. The rational theology represented by Erasmus and his followers, after a slumber of a hundred years, was revived by the Arminians of Holland, Grotius, Limborch, and Leclerc; and in England by Hales and Chillingworth, the latitudinarians of Cambridge, Tillotson, Clarke and Hoadly.²

It was the heretics (Trevor-Roper asserts) not the successors of Calvin, who fathered the new ideas respecting religion and life, and were forerunners of the Enlightenment. 'Arminianism or Socinianism, not Calvinism, was the religion of the pre-Enlightenment. Calvinism, that fierce and narrow recreation of medieval Scholasticism, was its enemy.'

Further proof of this may be found, if needed, in those chapters of Lecky's *Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe* that deal with the history of persecution. Protestantism might have been expected to turn its back upon the practices of the Roman Church, which had so long encouraged the condign punishment of heretics; but in fact the mainstream of Protestantism, from Reformation times onwards, regarded heresy as intoler-

² *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury (1909), VI, p. 128 and VII, pp. 256-8.

able and worthy of death. Nearly all Protestant writers advocated the lawfulness of persecution, with the honourable exception of Zwingli, Socinus, and a small group of radical Reformers and Anabaptists, of whom Castellio and Acontius are amongst the best known. The *cause célèbre* of Servetus, burnt at Geneva, with Calvin's connivance, an act defended by most orthodox Protestants of the age, sent a shudder of horror through not a few sensitive minds. But for the most part, churchmen, whether Catholic or Reformed, deludedly believed that they possessed the sole key to salvation, and were most heartily ready to light the faggots at the stake (faggots which, in the Spanish doctor's case, were purposely green and slow-burning!). Such inhumanity sprang from a sore lack of self-criticism, but in Protestants it was also entirely inconsistent with their proclaimed religious principles. Luther had affirmed the right of private judgement, and therefore toleration should have been a normal consequence of the Reformation. That it was not so is one of the great tragedies of history.

One of the saner voices raised on behalf of tolerance and freedom in the 16th century was that of Castellio, to whom we shall refer a little later on. In his *de Haereticis an sint persequendi* (1554) he declared that universal charity and beneficence were the leading features of Christianity. But this, of course, was a minority view, that of a rationalist and humanist, a voice crying in a wilderness of religious bitterness and strife. It was left to Castellio and comparatively few others to defend the rights of conscience and reason and to advocate a humane faith respecting man and his destiny.

The Reformation proper, then, based as it was on the authority of Scripture, interpreted still in medieval fashion and buttressed by the writings of Augustine, could not, in the nature of things, engender a humanistic religion. The Reformers' idea of God was that of a Sovereign Being, whose nature was fundamentally stern and unbending. Typical of this attitude was Luther's

reply to Erasmus's defence of free will—a frank and brutal assertion of predestination. 'The human will', said Luther, 'is like a beast of burden. If God mounts it, it wishes and goes as God wills; if Satan mounts it, it wishes and goes as Satan wills. Nor can it choose the rider it would prefer, . . . but it is the riders who contend for its possession.'³ . . . And again, 'This is the acme of faith, to believe that He is merciful who saves so few and who condemns so many; that He is just who at His own pleasure has made us necessarily doomed to damnation; so that as Erasmus says, He seems to delight in the tortures of the wretched, and to be more deserving of hatred than of love. If by any effort of reason I could conceive how God could be merciful and just who shows so much anger and iniquity, there would be no need for faith.'⁴ 'This', writes Lecky, is 'one of the most revolting declarations of fatalism in the whole compass of theology.' And the doctrine of John Calvin and his school was no less explicit.

Calvin, stressing as he did the depravity and helplessness of man, gave a central place in his theology to the doctrine of absolute and unconditional predestination. The result was to surrender all human initiative in morality and make obedience to the Divine will the chief end of the Christian life. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Book IV, Chap. x, par. 7) Calvin writes: 'All rectitude of life consists in the conformity of all our actions to [God's] will as their standard', hence 'We might consider Him as the sole master and director of our life. . . . He requires of us nothing more than obedience.'⁵

Thus both Calvin's and Luther's thought of God and man was basically Augustinian and medieval, owing more to Hebraic than Hellenic sources, and departing

³ *De servo arbitrio*, I, 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, sec. 23.

⁵ Cited by A. C. McGiffert; *Protestant Thought before Kant* (1911), p. 90.

seriously from the teaching of Jesus. If, however, religion and the humanist spirit were to blend with any hope of success and produce a theistic humanism or a humanistic theism, it would plainly not be by way of a return to any form of Augustinianism or indeed to purely Hebrew archetypes. Such kinds of theological thinking were unlikely to help solve the riddle of the divine-human relationship and issue in a fruitful synthesis. They were, in fact, deceptive *culs-de-sac*, for they devalued man and did God a grave disservice by implicitly saddling Him with bungling His creation and making Him appear ethically inadequate.

The Erasmian spirit moved in a totally different direction. Indicative of this is the title of a tract by Erasmus which was very influential in his day and later, namely *The Immense Mercy of God*. It inspired another treatise with a similar title by Celio Secondo Curione, professor at the academy at Basle, one of several Italian refugees who made their home in that city. Curione's dialogues *De Amplitudine Beati Regni Dei* (1554), 'concerning the amplitude of God's mercy', are a covert attack upon Calvin's doctrine of election, and aim at setting God's love above His justice. They belong to that small but nevertheless important group of writings, many of them by Italian refugees from the Counter-Reformation, who had made their homes in Switzerland, and who represent a universalist tendency and a profound spirit of tolerance in striking contrast to the particularism and intolerance of other leading Reformers.

Following Erasmus in the main, these Christian humanists changed the emphasis in the Christian life from dogma to moral vision, from theology to ethics, from the institutional Church to the personality of man. They represent a markedly humane religious tradition deriving faith from the whole of life, and founding it upon the essential nature of the human spirit, which they believed was from God. Combining humanism with a mystical faith and consciously broadening their understanding of

human nature, they undertook to give to reason and conscience due status in the religious life.

To this religious tradition and its spiritual continuators we must now turn.

What we may perhaps venture to call 'a third force' in 16th century religious history emerges (perhaps somewhat surprisingly), amongst the Italian evangelical-humanist Reformers who moved into the Grisons, Basle and Zürich, and the south German cities, and carried their rationalism and tolerant spirit into the main current of the Reformation. Many of them were laymen, and therefore, on the whole, freer from a vested interest in orthodox theology than ministers of the Gospel. They were also men of considerable native culture, so much so that Calvin superciliously christened them 'the academic sceptics'. Several had been members of a remarkable coterie of men and women gathered round the Spanish Erasmian reformer, Juan de Valdés, in Naples. Vittoria Colona, the friend of Michelangelo, was one of these, as was Bernardino Ochino, vicar-general of the Capuchins, and Pietro Martire Vermigli, prior of an Augustinian convent. Two works of Valdés appear to have had considerable influence: his *Christian Alphabet* (1536) and his *110 Divine Considerations* (Basle 1550). The latter was eventually translated into English by Nicholas Ferrar (1592-1637), of Little Gidding, and published in Oxford in 1638. It became favourite reading with the clergyman-poet, George Herbert, who wrote 'Brief Notes' to Ferrar's translation.

Valdés propounded a simple, mystical piety that stressed the 'inwardness' of religion, its personal qualities and its moral requirements. It has been suggested that he was unsound on the Trinity, but in fact he was more interested in practical theology than speculation. Critical of the established church of his day, he aimed at a reform of manners through the revival of personal piety. Ochino became his enthusiastic disciple, and the year after his death (in 1541) fled into exile in Geneva,

and afterwards to Augsburg and Basle, where he became friendly with Sebastian Castellio and other radical reformers.

Ochino, whom Calvin once described as 'a man of eminent learning, and manner of life exemplary', is a brilliant but tragic figure, who but for the Inquisition of 1542 might have become the leading reformer of Italy. The herald of a warm, evangelical rationalism, he opened the way, says Bonet-Maury, 'for the free development of a more human Christology'⁶ and an idea of God as a gracious and loving Being. His Sermons (*Prediche*, printed in Venice, Geneva, and later in Basle, 1539, 1545 and 1555) reveal an enthusiastic and constantly questing mind that moved over all the theological topics of his day with a freedom and critical acumen unique at that time. It would be tempting to examine in detail the arguments by which Ochino reached and sustained his leading idea that God is love and that man has but to surrender himself to the Spirit of God which acts and speaks in him. Suffice it to say that Ochino belongs to the line of those who held that guidance comes from the interior Word of God (*Dei sermo interior*), and that this inner voice of the Spirit is superior even to the written word of Scripture.⁷ It is a position to which an in-

⁶ G. Bonet-Maury, *Early Sources of English Unitarian Christianity*, p. 138.

⁷ On 2nd September 1566 Theodore Beza scolded a minister of the French Church at Emden for having the *110 Considerations* of Valdés translated into Flemish, because (he said) Ochino had from it derived his profane speculations, amongst others, 'several Anabaptist blasphemies against the Holy Scriptures', e.g. 'The Holy Spirit, being the source of Scripture, is superior to it, and can alone give the key to its interpretation. The Spirit has retained the power of revealing divine truth to the heart of man, as in the days of the Apostles; and this inward and present revelation is more fresh and vital than the written Revelation.' This statement, which, inferentially, is a criticism of the 'fundamentalist' attitude to Scripture, frees the mind from literalist bibliolatry and asserts that

creasing number of 16th and 17th century writers and thinkers gave their assent, and one which Anabaptists in different centres adopted.

We thus find a strain of undogmatic, evangelical, humanist rationalism spreading from Italy northwards, and meeting here and there with groups amongst the Protestants of Germany and the Netherlands who are, perhaps, best described as Anabaptists and 'Spiritual Reformers'. The characteristic traits of these Radicals of the Reformation are important, as foreshadowing later developments. They may be summarised as exhibiting a strong leaning towards a primitive, ethical Christianity; as favouring, in many cases, a mystical understanding of religion; and as essentially individualist, often pacifist, and in general disposed to stress God's love more than His justice.

My old teacher in Heidelberg, the late Walter Köhler, regarded Erasmus as one of the spiritual fathers of Anabaptism. And truly, if ever the Dutch and English Anabaptists departed from their rather rigid Scripturalism to cite a human authority in their defence, it was under Erasmus's writings that they sheltered their heresy.

An extract from a report to the Inquisition in 1569 illustrates the extent to which Anabaptists were influenced by the New Testament exegesis of Erasmus. It is the judicial examination of an Anabaptist preacher in Flanders, Herman van Flekwijk, burned at Bruges on 10th June 1569, just over four hundred years ago.

The Inquisitor asks him whether he believes in the Holy Trinity and has read the Athanasian Creed. The Anabaptist replies: 'I am a stranger to the Creed of St. Athanasius. It is sufficient for me to believe in the living God, and that Christ is the Son of God, as Peter

'humanity is a susceptible organ of the divine'. We recognise here, writes Bonet-Maury, 'the preponderance of the mystical principle inherited from Valdés'. G. Bonet-Maury, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

believed, and to believe in the Holy Spirit, which the Father poured out upon us through Jesus Christ our Lord, as Paul says.'

Inquisitor: 'You are an impertinent fellow, to fancy that God pours out His Spirit upon you, who do not believe that the Holy Spirit is God. You have borrowed those heretical opinions from the diabolical books of the cursed Erasmus of Rotterdam. . . .'

The examination continues, the Inquisitor again blaming Erasmus for ideas which the preacher had cited, concluding thus:

The Inquisitor quotes the 'heavenly witnesses' passage—I *John* 5:7—in support of the doctrine of the Trinity, whereupon the Anabaptist declares, 'I have often heard that Erasmus, in his *Annotations* upon that passage shows that this text is not in the Greek original.' Thereupon the Franciscan who is conducting the examination turns to the Secretary and Clerk of the Inquisition and says, 'Sirs, what think you of this? Am I to blame because I attack so frequently in my sermons Erasmus, that cursed Anti-trinitarian.'⁸

Anabaptism owed much to mystical and Chiliastic sources; hence its representative leaders frequently found the ground of religious authority within themselves. 'The line between mysticism and rationalism is easy to draw in theory', wrote Charles Beard, but often both tendencies were united in one person.

This is exemplified in one of the most attractive of the early Anabaptists, the Bavarian, Hans Denck (died 1527). Born about 1495, he studied at the University of Ingolstat and was admitted *baccalaureat* in 1517, the year that Martin Luther posted up his *Ninety-five Theses* in Wittenberg. Three years later, we find him at Augsburg, then at Basle, proof-reading for the publisher Valentin Curio, and attending lectures by Oecolampadius. In the same year (1522) he was appointed

⁸ G. Bonet-Maury, *Early Sources of English Unitarian Christianity* (1884), p. 39.

director of St. Sebald's school in Nürnberg, a noted centre of humanist studies. By this time, he was moving steadily away from Lutheranism towards a more radical understanding of religion. Well versed in such earlier mystical writings as John Tauler's Sermons, he came to the conclusion that Luther's doctrine of sin and justification was 'an artificial construction', and that his conception of Scripture and the sacraments could only lead to a new and rigid religious conformity. By 1524, when he made his so-called 'Confession of Faith' to the city council of Nürnberg, he had already reached his main, and very important, position, namely, that the chief proof of God's existence lay *within* the soul of man. The Scriptures were of immense value—he had himself, along with Ludwig Hetzer, made the first modern translation of the Prophets and knew the Bible almost by heart!—but the key to its interpretation lay in the Word of God, the Spirit who lives and works in every good man.

'I esteem Holy Scripture above all human treasures, but not so highly as the Word of God which is living, powerful, eternal, free and independent of all elements of this world; for as it is God Himself, so is it spirit and not letter, and written without pen and paper, so that it can never more be blotted out.'⁹

Denck could not accept the Augustinian-Lutheran assumption that man lacks all native capacity for good. Instead, he affirmed that man was potentially divine, and that the whole point of Christianity was to bring out this best in human nature by the appropriate means of moral transformation. This is what Christ's message and ministry signified. 'To be a Christian is', he wrote, 'to be in a measure like Christ, and to be ready to be offered as he gave himself to be offered . . . Christ calls himself the Light of the World, but he also tells his disciples that they too are the light of the world.'

In a fine passage in his *Ordnung Gottes*, Denck dwelt
⁹ G. Arnold, *Kirchen und Ketzer Historie*, pt. iv, sec. iii, par. 31, p. 533.

on the immanence of God: 'See that you seek God [he says] where He is to be sought, in the temple and dwelling-place of the Divine glory, which is your heart and your soul.' God and man, he held, meet in the depths of self. Reality resides, universally, in all men, could they but penetrate to that inner citadel of the spirit—'*das innere Wort*', or '*Die Kraft des Allerhöchsten*'. 'The kingdom of God is within you', he declares in another of his writings, 'and he who searches for it outside himself will never find it, for apart from God no one can either seek or find God, for he who seeks God, already in truth has Him.'¹⁰

Rejecting the Reformers' doctrine of the unfree will, Denck laid stress upon the inherent and native capacities of the human spirit. To some in those days this seemed a rare and welcome note in religion, both liberating and inspiring, though today it may appear just a commonplace of religious thought. But such anticipation of later development is seldom ever appreciated at the time, and free-thinkers like Denck have usually to endure obloquy and persecution. He was banished from Nürnberg early in January 1525, and for the rest of his short life (he died in November 1527) he was a homeless wanderer, retreating from Augsburg to Strasburg and Worms, and dying at last in Basle at the early age of thirty-two. Denck's heresy, for so it was regarded in those days, consisted in his wholesome and undeviating conviction that 'God on the moral side is Love, and Love only'¹¹; and thus we find that, on the one hand, his thought reaches back to John Scotus Erigena and on the other hand, stretches forward to those in the 19th century who rejected the doctrine of hell and endless punishment, as incompatible with the omnipotent love of God. It is a remarkable anticipation of the more humane theology yet to come.

¹⁰ *Was geredet sey*, B. II.

¹¹ C. Beard, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (1927 ed.), p. 210.

Hans Denck and the school of what Dr. Rufus Jones has called 'the Spiritual Reformers' were, in their time, very largely, voices crying in the wilderness. But their historical importance is guaranteed by their courageous rejection of the generally accepted scheme of salvation, basically still medieval in character, and by their radical attempt to do justice to their own moral intuitions. 'This theology', wrote Beard in his Hibbert Lectures, 'is as strongly opposed to Wittenberg, to Zürich, to Geneva, as to Rome.'¹² Profoundly stirred by the mysticism of the late Middle Ages and inspired by the humanism of the Renaissance, Denck and those who followed him blended both these traditions and pointed forward to a genuine 'Religion of the Spirit'—a religious humanism, universalist in scope and modernist in outlook.

No less important a figure in this development, and in many ways more widely known than Denck, is the printer-preacher, Sebastian Franck (1499–1542). A native of Donauwörth in Swabia and a Lutheran, Franck, like Denck, also spent some time in Nürnberg, the home of Albrecht Dürer and Hans Sachs, in or about 1527. Widely read and goaded by an insatiable itch to write, he interested himself in popular history and mystical theology. Translating works of Erasmus like *The Praise of Folly* and the *Paradoxes*, he eventually began to publish works of his own. These took the form of chronicles and theosophical speculations, remarkable for their broad sympathies and liberal temper. His best-known work is his *Chronica, Zeitbuch, und Geschichtsbibel* (1st edition 1531), 'a universal chronicle of the World's history from the earliest times to the present', in which he set forth his own view of religion. It is chiefly characterised by his insistence on the importance of the Inward Light. This remarkable work created a furore and led to his imprisonment. For some years afterwards he was the object of the gravest suspicion amongst his fellow-Protestants.

¹² Beard, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

Being of a practical turn of mind, he supported himself and his family, sometimes by boiling soap, sometimes as a printer's assistant. He seems to have combined mystical intuition with a sane practical outlook on life. Thus, for example, in the foreword to his book, *The Golden Arch* (1538), he rebukes the theologians for their long commentaries, when all the time they were neglecting the practical matters of religion. As for him, doctrine was a purely secondary consideration, for Christians truly needed to know no more doctrine than that contained in the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed. The 'outward ceremonies' of religion were of no importance compared with 'the inner Word'. This, he held, lives and moves in every man, Jew, Christian, Heathen, and Turk.¹³ From this source of light Plato, Plotinus, Diogenes, Seneca and all enlightened pagans have drawn illumination.'

Franck's conception of nature is amazingly modern and attractive. 'The whole world', he writes, 'and all creatures are only an open book and living Bible, in which, without guidance, thou mayest study the art of God and learn His will. For all creatures preach to a man who is considerate and instructed of God. . . . To the devout all is an open book, wherein he learns more from the creatures and works of God, than a godless man out of all Bibles. For who does not understand God's work does not apprehend His Word also.'¹⁴ Franck's debt to Greek antecedents is manifest in such a passage, as it is also when he discusses the nature of the human soul. This, he believed, had never lost 'the divine image', the original element which is God Himself. Scripture cannot be the final authority in religion, for it needs a key to unlock its spiritual meaning, and this key is found in the soul . . . the eternal Logos, the living Word, revealed through the dim lantern of many human lives.

¹³ Beard, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

¹⁴ Cited by Hase: *S. Franck*, p. 30; and C. Beard, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

In his discussion of the Church, Franck plunges through the years to the 19th century to join William Ellery Channing in proclaiming his allegiance to 'the Universal Church'. In this he is the true predecessor of the Boston preacher: 'Nobody is the master of my faith', he wrote in *The Sealed Book*, 'and I desire to be the master of the faith of no one. I love any man whom I can help, and I call him brother whether he be Jew or Samaritan. . . . I cannot belong to any separate sect, but I believe in a holy, Christlike Church, a fellowship of saints, and I hold as my brother, my neighbour, my flesh and blood, all men who belong to Christ among all sects, faiths and peoples scattered throughout the whole world.' And further, 'the true Church . . . is a spiritual and invisible body . . . it is a Fellowship seen with the spiritual eye and by the inner man . . . I belong to this Fellowship, I believe in the Communion of the saints and I am in the Church, let me be where I may.'¹⁵

How radical these thoughts seemed in the 16th century, and how strange they must seem even yet to those who are wedded to institutions, creeds, and religious formularies! Here was a man striving after universal brotherhood, content to be a 'Christian' only and interpreting that word in so wide a sense that it included the wise and good of every age. No doubt, many would regard Franck as a religious anarchist, so free is he from submission to any rigid religious formulary, so loosely does he sit to organised religion. But his hold on reality, on what a recent writer of the same name, S. L. Frank, has called the 'God-manhood', in which all mankind is involved, is firm and sure. It marks him out as a pioneer of the religious humanism whose history we are tracing. His protest against Protestant rigorism, his conception of religion as fundamentally a personal, ethical, unsectarian thing, undoubtedly made its impression at the time.

¹⁵ Rufus M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, pp. 52, 58.

Such sentiments could not be permitted to go unchallenged by orthodox Reformers. Luther denounced Franck as a 'blasphemer', considering a theism expressed in terms of universalism and immanence far too subjective a faith. But his strictures were made public only after Franck's death. It is a measure of the *odium theologicum* of those days and of Luther's failure to understand a different point of view that he could call him 'an evil man . . . the Devil's own and favourite mouth-piece . . . [who] has wandered through all kinds of filth and has at last got stifled in it.'¹⁶ Such was Luther's verdict on one whom Troeltsch has described as 'one of the noblest and freest souls of that period, . . . winning, human, and gracious'.¹⁶

It remains to notice, briefly, two other Christian humanists of the 16th century, who made important contributions to religious thought.

The first is Sebastian Castellio (1515-63), a champion of religious toleration; and the second is Dirck Volckertz Coornheert (1522-90), the Dutch humanist and forerunner of Arminianism.

Castellio (Chateillon), a Frenchman born in a village near Lake Geneva, at twenty-five was a classical scholar of some note. His training at Lyons is thought to have introduced him to the works of Erasmus, and his translations of the *Theologia Germanica* and the *Imitatio Christi* certainly brought him into touch with the contemporary currents of mystical thought. Thus again, in yet another Reformer, humanism and mysticism were blended. In 1540 he became a Protestant, and left Lyons for Strasburg, where he first met Calvin. Two years later he was appointed rector of the College at Geneva on Farel's recommendation and with Calvin's approval. In to the details of his life and relations with John Calvin at Geneva it is unnecessary to enter here. However, we may note that two men of such different temper, the

¹⁶ E. Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, II, p. 971.

one a rationalist and humanist, with a mystical appreciation of God and man, the other a basically rigid systematiser of doctrine, a Protestant scholast, could hardly be expected to run in harness with one another. Before long, Geneva was the scene of violent differences, and Castellio left the city for the more temperate atmosphere of Basle, where Erasmus had lived, and where, two years before, Sebastian Franck had died.

For ten years (1545-55) Castellio lived in Basle in comparative poverty, proof-reading, fishing driftwood out of the Rhine to keep himself and his family warm in winter, and engaged on a major and engrossing task—the translation of the Bible into Latin (1551) and French (1555).

In the preface to his Latin Bible, which he dedicated to the young king, Edward VI, he appealed for freedom of conscience: 'I address you, O king', he concludes, 'as a man of the people who abhors quarrels and hatred, and who wishes to see religion spread by love rather than by fierce controversy, by purity of heart rather than by external methods. . . .' So he expressed his mind, as ever, eloquently pleading the cause of toleration and personal liberty of thought—one of the first of modern propagandists in the field of Human Rights.

Two years later came the 'Servetus affair', the burning in Geneva of the Spanish anti-trinitarian physician whose heresies had so mortally offended John Calvin. This was closely followed by a defence of this action by both Calvin and, later, Beza. At once Castellio took up the cause of religious freedom and published anonymously his important manifesto in favour of toleration, 'one of the mother-documents' of freedom, *De Haereticis an sint persequendi*. With typical enthusiasm, he declared that it was wrong to quarrel about matters of belief, on which certainty is not attainable. Moreover, one ought to distinguish between fundamentals and non-essentials in religion. The Bible contained many obscure passages which God did not intend to be

absolutely plain. In any case, however, 'to burn a man is not to defend a doctrine, it is to burn a man.'—'Christ's teaching means loving one's enemies, returning good for evil, having a pure heart and an hunger and thirst for righteousness. You [he said, turning to Calvin] may return to Moses, if you will, but for us others Christ has come.'—To be essential to salvation a doctrine must be crystal clear and capable of being understood by human reason. 'Reason is the daughter of God . . . a sort of interior and eternal word of truth, always speaking.'¹⁷

Such opinions may seem commonplace enough today, but in the 16th century they were considered, in both Catholic and Protestant circles, *outré* and utterly blasphemous. An erring conscience was denied any rights; and this is still the Roman Catholic hierarchy's attitude towards those who, on conscientious grounds, cannot accept the Papal Encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*.¹⁸

Castellio is thus another Modernist before his time, who, turning away from the logomachies and systematic theology of contemporary Protestantism, asked instead the question: 'What is the nature of *man*, and what does this imply when we consider the nature of God?' The answer he gave was that man, according to both Scripture and the deliverances of his own inner self, is made in the image of God, and is endowed with freedom. He can choose both good and evil. The office of Christ is to reveal what our humanity is capable of and to inspire faith and hope in the future. Rejecting the orthodox theory of the atonement as cruel and basically immoral, this French scholar looked into his own heart and courageously trusted his own reason, the gift of God to man, reason which less than fifty years later Shakespeare, in one of his greatest dramas, was to proclaim 'godlike' and not intended 'to fust in us unused'.¹⁹

Castellio suffered great privations for his convictions,

¹⁷ In his tract on *Doubting and Believing*.

¹⁸ On birth control; see *Guardian*, 13th February 1969.

¹⁹ *Hamlet* (1602).

for Calvin never forgave his intervention on behalf of Servetus. But though he died ten years later, worn out by his exertions, his spirit and the truths for which he had fought were by no means consigned to oblivion. The cause of tolerance and freedom of inquiry eventually triumphed.

Meanwhile, the torch of the Erasmian enlightenment fittingly found another upholder in the person of the Dutch humanist and politician, D. V. Coornheert, translator of Boethius and Cicero. In England it fell to John Locke, later, to carry on the same liberal tradition. Locke certainly became acquainted with Castellio's writings during his exile in Holland in the 1680s, and there can be little doubt that, spiritually, he was one of the Savoyard's residuary legatees. It has been said that the English philosopher 'warmed his hands before the fire of Castellio',²⁰ and it is worth recalling that both men had similar interests: both wrote treatises on liberty and both paid serious attention to the problem of knowledge.

The Dutchman, Coornheert, for his part, translated several of Castellio's works, and reveals in his own writings the influence of the earlier mystical writers, to whom reference has already been made, as well as the rationalist and pragmatic attitude to religion that Erasmians like Franck and Castellio display. True religion, states Coornheert, is always inward and spiritual. The kingdom of God comes not in some far-off Jerusalem or in a remote realm in the sky but in a man's own heart—through faith. For good measure also, Coornheert, like Franck, believed that the 'Indwelling Christ' or 'Light within' was also to be found beyond the confines of Christendom: the Logos brought new light and life to souls in the non-Christian world.

This universalism is something new and noteworthy in religious thought. We shall find it cropping up again and again amongst religious humanists and mystical writers. Indeed, to hope for the spiritual unity of man-

²⁰ Roland Bainton.

kind is a natural (and proper) consequence of upholding the dignity and worth of the human spirit as a channel of divine revelation.

In the 17th century John Amos Comenius (1592–1671), Christian Platonist and mystic, educationalist and believer in the unity of knowledge, became the leader of the Czech Brethren, centred at Fulnek in Northern Moravia. A refugee from the Counter-Reformation in his own land and in Germany and Holland, Comenius made friends in Holland and England, and was in touch with Samuel Hartlib, friend and correspondent of Locke. His enemies thought him an impractical visionary, if not a dangerous fanatic, but the more perceptive of his contemporaries realised that this ‘incomparable Moravian’ was a portent of things to come. His textbooks on education reveal a forward-looking mind, and his educational philosophy was based upon a concept of universalism that owed not a little to the radical, reforming tradition with which we are concerned. He reflects, unmistakably, the influence of the Renaissance idea of human dignity as that quality which makes a man complete, an adept in the art of living and a perfect citizen. As an educationalist, Comenius believed in the teachableness of man: his nature was malleable and capable of improvement. Theologically, he was powerfully influenced by Boehme, the shoemaker of Goerlitz. If, however, we discard his millenarian delusions, Comenius still appears to be more of a humanist than most of his contemporaries—even though he wrote against the Socinians! He did not, for example, agree with Luther or Calvin in their pessimistic appraisal of humanity, but—on the contrary—took the Erasmian view that reason was an important source of religious knowledge, and that true religion is evidenced by moral conduct and love of one’s neighbour. Fundamentally, his attitude was undogmatic, practical, and internationalist. He was a stout ally—at least—of the 17th century Christian humanists to whom we must now turn.

V

THE ORIGIN AND EMERGENCE OF A HUMANE THEOLOGY IN THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES

‘Humanism in the best sense of all is the love of man; and for many this is the best way of learning to love God better.’

W. H. Thorpe, *Quakers and Humanists*
(Swarthmore Lecture, 1968)

The Origin and Emergence of a Humane Theology in the 17th and 18th Centuries

Among those influences making for rationalist and humanist attitudes in 16th century Europe one that played a leading role and is responsible in no small measure for the subsequent development of religious humanism is that associated with the name of Faustus Socinus.

This Sienese lawyer and heresiarch died in 1604, but the Church of 'the Polish Brethren', of which he was really the founder, flourished for some fifty years after his death, and Socinianism proper belongs rather to the 17th than the 16th century. This is confirmed by the fact that the writings of Socinian scholars circulated widely on the Continent in the 17th century, after the founding of the Socinian Press at Rakow, and when it was suppressed in 1638, continued to influence religious thinking through works printed in Holland, especially at Amsterdam, where the well-known *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* was published from 1665 to 1668.

Socinianism may be considered a bearer of the liberal spirit of the Renaissance, *par excellence*. As I have written elsewhere, 'It is a part of the larger movement towards free inquiry, part of the break-away from medieval scholasticism in the direction of modern empiricism. . . . Owing much to humanism, perhaps more than any other religious movement in Europe, it helped to pave the way for the Age of Reason, and its influence on latitudinar-

ian thinkers in England and on the Continent was potent.¹

Scholars have variously assessed its importance, but none has denied its undoubted connections with the humanistic spirit of the 15th and 16th centuries. A. C. McGiffert stressed its basic insistence upon 'the moral ability of man'. 'Like the humanists in general, the Socinians had a controlling ethical interest, and it seemed to them essential to moral living that a man should have adequate native power and freedom of will to choose and follow virtue for himself.'² They denied the doctrine of original sin and held predestination to be both false and immoral, destructive of any human initiative and incompatible with the divine nature. They stressed the pure humanity of Jesus, and pointed out that the fact that he was truly a man gave his life real ethical value for all his followers. Wherever the Socinians went, concludes McGiffert, 'they promoted a more humanistic way of looking at things'. Indeed, the intellectual tradition which they espoused undoubtedly hastened the application of reason in religion, especially in biblical criticism, and smoothed the path of those thinkers, like John Locke, who, insisting on toleration, developed the liberal theory of the State.

Ruffini, in his *History of Religious Liberty*, pays a similar tribute to Socinianism, and claims that to it 'alone belongs the glory of having made toleration a fundamental principle of ecclesiastical discipline, and of having determined . . . all the subsequent revolutions in favour of religious liberty'.³ Dr. Foakes Jackson underlines the fact that, though a minority movement in Europe, 'nevertheless, it has had an abiding influence upon the history of progress, humanity, and social justice.'⁴

¹ *Socinianism in Seventeenth Century England* (1951), p. 337.

² A. C. McGiffert, *Protestant Thought before Kant* (1911), p. 109.

³ F. Ruffini, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁴ Preface to D. M. Cory, *Faustus Socinus* (1932), p. ix.

very characteristic of Socinian thought was its attachment to the ethical teachings of Jesus, to whose authority *vis-à-vis* the contemporary State Socinians constantly appealed. The Polish nobles renounced their privileges, freed their peasants from serfdom (three hundred years before the final emancipation of the serfs in Europe), sold their estates, and gave the proceeds for religious and charitable purposes.⁵

It has been said that in the first three decades of the 17th century a change of religious mood can be detected. 'Something fresh in the air of Protestantism is blowing through the palaces of doctrine and morals, coming mysteriously, impossible to seize and entrap.'⁶ Part of it may be attributed to the maturity of the Reformation, a sense of increasing security, a feeling that the liberties already gained were no longer in jeopardy, a kind of relaxed enjoyment of new experiences in thought and life. But the wider horizon and larger view are also to be attributed to the gathering force of more liberal thought that was making itself felt amongst thinkers such as Jacob Arminius and the Dutch Remonstrants. They, like the Socinians, rebelled against the rigorism and dogmatism of predestination theory and contended that the God of the New Testament was a loving, moral Being who would not condemn men to hell without regard to their behaviour, even granting that there was such a place at all!

Arminius was professor at Leyden from 1603 to his death in 1609, and whilst there taught a modified Calvinism. At this point in time his protest against the high Calvinist doctrine of election and reprobation of individuals to eternal life or death may seem very moderate, but in fact it created considerable controversy. In the course of a declaration which he made at a special meeting at The Hague in October 1608, Arminius went on

⁵ V. Stanislaw Kot, *Le mouvement anti-trinitaire au xvi^e et au xvii^e siècle* (1937), p. 73.

⁶ Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation* (1966), p. 219.

record that 'a doctrine of Divine Predestination was taught which was contrary and repugnant to the Nature of God; to His wisdom, justice and goodness; to the nature of man, to his free will; to the nature of life and death eternal; and finally . . . was contrary to the glory of God and the salvation of man, lessened the earnest desire for piety and good works, took away 'the fear and trembling' with which we ought 'to work out our own salvation', produced despair, subverted the Gospel . . . and overturned the foundations, not only of the Christian religion but of all religion.'⁷

The Remonstrance of 1610, signed by forty-six ministers of the Reformed Church in Holland, rejected unconditional predestination and came out in favour of a universal atonement. Salvation was dependent not merely upon divine fiat, but upon human character and co-operation, God's grace working together with man's efforts. All men were capable of responding to a divine initiative. This effort to soften the extremes of Calvinism suffered a temporary setback at Dort in 1619, when the Remonstrants were expelled from the Synod, but the tide of events at length set in favour of a more liberal doctrine. The exiled Remonstrants returned to Holland in 1625, and their leader, Simon Episcopius, and his colleagues moved steadily in the direction of a rational, anti-dogmatic Christianity, having certain affiliations with Socinianism. They formed a small, but influential, centre of attraction for all those spirits in Holland, France, and England who were feeling their way slowly towards a more humane, tolerant, and universal kind of religious faith than either contemporary Catholicism or Protestantism represented.⁸

Episcopius maintained the right of each individual to arrive at his own conclusions regarding religious doctrine and stated unequivocally his opposition to any form

⁷ See A. W. Harrison, *Arminianism*, p. 40.

⁸ See H. J. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth Century England* (1951), pp. 8, 55-62.

of persecution. The seat of authority in religious matters was not the Church but the individual conscience enlightened by the teachings of Christ. This liberal and tolerant position was developed and set out even more fully in the writings of the Arminian, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), who went to some pains to stress the spiritual nature of religion. In his famous work, *De iure belli et pacis*, he defended toleration and criticised that view of Christianity which regarded doctrinal uniformity and State support for it as a necessity of civilised life. On the contrary, Grotius argued, conscience may not be coerced, for religious ideas are innate rather than inculcated, and Christianity needs to be reduced to its fundamental teachings as a preliminary to peace and unity within Christendom.

Arminianism owed much to Italian radicals like Bernardino Ochino, the eloquent ex-Capuchin reformer and Giacomo Aconzio, engineer-theologian and philosopher-lawyer. Both these men spent several years in England and their writings, circulating widely in Europe, penetrated and influenced the thinking of leading theologians. The tradition they represented was radically fortified by Arminian approval and participation and proved a powerful solvent of the rigorous and dogmatic medieval theology. Wherever, in the 17th and 18th centuries, Arminianism spread in Holland, France, England, or, later, America, it challenged the asperities of Calvinism and made for a type of thought which emphasised the divine mercy towards sinners, diluted bigotry, prepared the way for a broad tolerance, and laid stress on the real humanity of Christ. Arminians argued persuasively that human nature was not totally depraved, but rather universally redeemable, and by that fact not permanently estranged from its Creator. Moreover, Arminianism, sitting loose to the Calvinist decrees, was also averse from disputation regarding doubtful points of theology.

This it had probably learnt from Aconzio, who in his

treatise on *The Stratagems of Satan*, an eirenicon which is said to have inspired the finest pages of Milton's *Areopagitica*, laid it down that the basic articles of Christianity were few in number, whilst it was possible for good men to interpret others in several different ways.⁹

We may be permitted to comment here that once a grain of uncertainty or scepticism is introduced into the cauldron of theological controversy, its effect is usually cathartic and entirely wholesome. So was it at the turn of the 17th century and in the years that followed. Arminianism and Socinianism, in general, struck a practical and rational note, which was reflected in different degree not only by the latitudinarian Churchmen associated with Oxford, like John Hales, William Chillingworth, and Lucius Cary, Lord Falkland, but also in the gifted coterie at Cambridge, known as the 'Cambridge Platonists'.

The 'ever-memorable' John Hales of Eton (1584–1656), after hearing Episcopius at the Synod of Dort is said to have 'bid John Calvin goodnight'. His writings breathe a charity and commonsense rare in those times, and his plea for toleration in religion in his *Tract concerning Schism and Schismatics* doubtless powerfully influenced Chillingworth. Charles Beard called him a prophet of 'that Reformation of Erasmus that is yet to be'. That Hales had read the works of Castellio and Aconzio is certain. He and Chillingworth were familiar with the *Stratagemata*,¹⁰ two editions of which had been republished in Oxford in 1631, edited by Dr. Christopher Potter, provost of Queen's College and close friend of Chillingworth. Moreover, Falkland's circle at Great Tew, of which the Oxford latitudinarians were members, was undoubtedly sympathetic towards the Italian's broad and comprehensive view of the Christian faith.¹¹

⁹ McLachlan, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹⁰ *Stratagemata Satanae* (1565), two editions printed by Peter Perna at Basle, 1610; 1631 at Oxford; 1652 at Amsterdam.

¹¹ McLachlan, *op. cit.*, chap. v.

But Oxford was not the only university in the mid-17th century where men were reading and appreciating the writings of Continental humanists and representatives of a tolerant and eirenical school of thought. In Cambridge also, the home of Puritanism, men like Joseph Meade (1586–1636), John Goodwin (1594–1665) and Benjamin Whichcote (1609–83) combined humanism with a Puritan temper. Scholars have paid tribute, in particular, to the 'Cambridge Platonists', whose moderation and freedom in philosophy and divinity Burnet praised in a well-known passage. Their temper was such, he said, that 'they were called men of latitude . . . they read Episcopius much, and [added the liberal-minded Bishop] the making out the reason of things being a main part of their studies, their enemies called them Socinians'.¹² Like Hales and Chillingworth before them, the Cambridge thinkers were less interested in matters of abstruse doctrine or systematic theology than in the underlying and universal ideas of religion which, they held, might unite Christians at a deeper level than dogma, afford a means of settling disputes, and end the warfare of contending sects. 'Without exception', writes Principal Tulloch, 'the Cambridge latitudinarian divines may be termed religious philosophers. . . . They sought to marry philosophy to religion, and to confirm the union on the indestructible basis of reason and the essential elements of our higher humanity.'¹³

John Goodwin, republican divine and early advocate of toleration, deserves closer study than he has, as yet, received. Described by A. G. Matthews as 'the acutest and most liberal of Puritan controversialists of his day', he began life as a scholar and fellow of Erasmus's old college, Queens', Cambridge. He then took orders, became vicar of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street, London, but later turned Independent and an Arminian, and

¹² Burnet's *History of my own Times*, ed. O. Airy (1897) i, pp. 331–5. Cf. F. J. Powicke: *The Cambridge Platonists* (1926).

¹³ Tulloch, *Rational Theology*, ii, pp. 13–14.

during the Commonwealth became an enthusiastic republican. His mind seems to have been saturated with humanist learning, and his many writings are full of references to Greek and Latin authors. His *Imputatio Fidei or a Treatise of Justification* (1642) contains an impressive theological defence of toleration and intellectual freedom, and it is not surprising that he was instrumental in getting a part of Aconzio's *Stratagemata Satanae* translated and printed under the title of *Satan's Stratagems; or the Devil's Cabinet Councel discovered*, to which he appended a commendatory preface (March 1648).

Goodwin's combination of scholarship and a rational approach to religion made him a doughty opponent of contemporary Presbyterianism. He held that Scripture contained the Word of God, but that it also asserted that there is a natural capacity in all men to feel after God and find Him. Indeed, the Word of God 'was extant in the world, nay, in the hearts and consciences of men, before there was any copy of the Word extant in writing'. So he affirmed in his *Divine Authority of the Scripture asserted* (1648). His voluminous writings are not now of general interest, but here and there one finds sparks of remarkably advanced thought, and a plea for thinking more highly of man than contemporary Calvinists were ever prone to do. One of his most copious works, *Ἀπολύτρωσις ἀπολυτρωσέως or Redemption Redeemed* (1651) is dedicated to Benjamin Whichcote, then vice-chancellor of Cambridge University. This is certainly not surprising, since Whichcote was the leader of the liberal school in Goodwin's old university and a philosopher with whom he had considerable sympathy. To this group belonged also John Smith, Henry More, and Ralph Cudworth. They represented a Christian humanism which aimed at rehabilitating the moral consciousness and drew its religious inspiration, not from speculation about the mysteries of the Godhead, but from a consideration and reevaluation of the basic nature of man.

In his *Discourse before the House of Commons* on March 31st 1647, Cudworth emphasised the inward nature of religious inspiration: 'The great mystery of the Gospel [he says] doth not lie only in Christ without us, . . . but the very pith and kernel of it consists in Christ inwardly formed in our hearts. Nothing is truly ours, but what lives in our spirits. Salvation itself cannot save us, as long as it is only without us [i.e. outside us].' Here and in other statements by the Cambridge Platonists we find a blending of humanism and mysticism, indicative of an idea of man utterly different from the Augustinian and medieval notions hitherto prevalent in Catholic and Protestant circles.

Benjamin Whichcote (1609-83), one-time student of the Puritan college, Emmanuel, became Provost of King's in 1644. His friend and tutor, Anthony Tucker, took him to task for being too set on what he called 'a kinde of moral Divinitie, onlie with a little tincture of Christ added', and even accused him of following in the footsteps of the Socinians and Arminians—an accusation which Whichcote firmly rebutted. Yet the resemblance in thought was there. Basically, Whichcote and his friends, seeking a restatement of Christian doctrine, returned to the Platonic tradition and sought to free Christianity from a rigorous dogmatism by fusing revelation with reason, and doctrine with ethics, and these within a framework of mystical awareness that discovered in man a source of spiritual apprehension. They were convinced that there is something in the 'very make of man' which links the human with the Divine, a 'seminal principle', a 'seed of God'. 'God', says Whichcote, 'is more inward to us than our own souls.' 'God's image is in us', he says in one of his aphorisms, 'and we belong to Him. Reverence God in thyself; for God is more in the mind of man than in any part of this world besides.' Frequently, he cites the famous sentence in the Book of Proverbs: 'The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord.' The truth it expresses is for him the core of

religion. And yet he is never carried away, like some enthusiasts of his time, into supposing that revelations of a peculiar or private nature must take precedence over all else. This was the danger of the reference to the inward monitor. Conscience requires to be instructed, to be controlled by some external means, if it is not to be entirely, and possibly wildly, subjective. And this control Whichcote found in 'scripture interpreted by Reason'. There was thus no danger of fanaticism being given free rein, little risk of antinomian excesses, or of morality being severed from the highest deliverances of religion rationally understood.

Another member of the group who endeared himself to students and staff in Cambridge was Henry More (1614-87), who entered Christ's College about the time when Milton left it. Beginning as a poet and lover of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*—and therefore perfectly familiar with the spirit of the English Renaissance—More ended as a voluminous prose writer, a 17th century humanist devoted to music and the care of his fellow men—so kind to the poor (it is said) that 'his very chamber-door was a hospital for the needy'. It is interesting to reflect that More's kind of piety flowed from an ethical mysticism concerned less with theological niceties than with moral rectitude and humaneness of life and learning. Perhaps it might not be too far-fetched to consider him a 17th century forerunner of that true existentialist and Christian humanist, Albert Schweitzer.

The same is true of his younger contemporary, John Smith (c. 1618-52), whose main contribution was not to philosophy but to life. Simon Patrick, who preached his funeral sermon, called him 'an interpreter of the spirit'. Educated at Emmanuel, where Whichcote was his tutor, he became a fellow of Queens' in 1644. His friends regarded him with affection, not merely as a scholar, but as a genuinely good man. It seems that the philosophy of Christian Platonism could not only occupy the mind but engage the affections: it produced in men

like More and Smith a kind of life admirable in itself. It tended to illustrate Whichcote's penetrating aphorism that 'Christianity is a divine life, not a divine science'. Smith held a lofty view of man. The human soul (he said) had a 'royal pedigree and noble extraction', and 'the best philosophers have always taught [that] we must enquire for God within ourselves'. The principles of truth were 'engraved on man's heart by the finger of God', and Christ is an example of 'what human nature can attain to'.

It is, indeed, a far cry from the pessimistic doctrines of a Luther and a Calvin, which emphasise the native sinfulness of human nature, to the moral conviction of a John Smith that 'in the spirits of men [is] the Seed of God . . . whereby they are formed to a similitude and likeness of Himself'. And there are echoes of Sebastian Franck in Smith's assertion that Scripture is insufficient of itself to enlighten and save a man: 'To seek our divinity merely in books and writings is to seek the living among the dead: we do but in vain seek God many times in these, where His truth too often is not so much enshrined as entombed. No: seek for God within thine own soul!' *Select Discourses* (1859), p.3.

This departure from orthodox Protestant scholasticism is really a return to a more primitive and classical tradition. It is reminiscent of a line of thought, traced earlier in these lectures, and overlaid, but persisting, nevertheless, as a hidden current beneath the oceans of theological apologetics and controversy which have swept, and sometimes raged, down the centuries of the Christian era. What has been called 'the natural Platonism' of humanity finds ample expression in these Cambridge scholars, who maintained that reason is the organ of the Divine Spirit and morality the fruit of a divine life. Man, they felt, is inveterately religious—is, in truth, the chief witness to the existence of God. Bereft of the human mind and heart, most certainly darkness would cover the earth.

The 17th century saw not a few writers, several of them noted puritans, some preachers and some poets, who were of this opinion. The Renaissance recovery of Platonism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism powerfully affected religious thought and made men readier to entertain the notion of Plotinus that "He who reflects upon himself, reflects upon his own original", and finds the clearest impression of some eternal nature and perfect being stamped upon his own soul'.¹⁴

Thus Francis Rous, a member of the Long Parliament, provost of Eton, and friend of Oliver Cromwell, wrote three little books of a mystical nature, in one of which he almost rhapsodises in terms that remind us of Wordsworth's famous 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality': 'I was first breathed forth from heaven and came from God in my creation. I am divine and heavenly in my original, in my essence, in my character . . . I am a spirit, though a low one, and God is a spirit, even the highest one.'¹⁵

Or again, Peter Sterry (1613-72), graduate and fellow of Emmanuel College and contemporary of Whichcote, is found, like the early Quakers, proclaiming 'a Divine Root or Seed in the soul of man'; and when he writes 'Go into thyself beyond thy natural man, and thou shalt meet the Spirit of God',¹⁶ he would seem to be anticipating Frederick Lucian Hosmer's lines by well over two hundred years :

'Go not my soul in search of Him
But to thyself repair.

and :

¹⁴ John Smith, *A Discourse of the Existence and Nature of God* ch. i.

¹⁵ F. Rous, *Mystical Marriage* (1635). Cf. L. P. Jacks, *Religious Perplexities*, p. 92, the whole passage ending—'God, said Jesus, is spirit: man is spirit no less; and when the two meet in fellowship there is religion.'

¹⁶ P. Sterry, *Rise, Race, and Royalty* (1683), p. 96.

The outward God he findeth not
Who finds not God within.'

Richard Baxter called Sterry, who incidentally, like Baxter, was chaplain to Cromwell, a representative of that 'mixture of Platonisme, Origenisme, and Arianisme which was more rational than scriptural'! The remark betrays Baxter's own personal leanings, but it also justly characterises a tendency which was destined, in due course, to influence the more liberal minds of the next three hundred years. In Unitarianism, at least from the time of Martineau's *Rationale of Religious Enquiry* (1836), the balance was decisively tipped in favour of reason and conscience.

Already, however, in the 17th century, some of the most sensitive spirits, like the poet Thomas Traherne, were feeling their way out of bondage to the strict *schemata* of Reformation theology, and finding the seat of authority in religion within. A more humane and optimistic valuation of man occupied the minds of those latitudinarian thinkers who were affected by the humanist and mystical outlook, and this 'practical divinity', as it has been christened, remained remarkably free from fanaticism, or what the 18th century—sometimes unfairly—was later to deplore, namely, 'enthusiasm'.

On the whole, Puritanism had been deficient hitherto in mysticism. But as it developed in the 17th century it became fused, in certain minds that were open to such influences, with a mystical tradition derived from Platonism and the medieval mystics. This resulted, as we have seen, in a shift towards a more rational theology and a humanistic and even humanitarian religion. And this was more than just a mood. It was a sustained attitude towards life that owed something to a heightened sense of moral good, but even more, perhaps, to the imagination.

Seen from the narrow standpoint of Reformation dogma, this 17th century form of Christian humanism,

which set value on man as man, on man as the bearer of a divine image and a substantial revealer of God, may have appeared in many respects defective. But as a philosophy of religion that took account of experience and remained free from ecclesiastical constraints, it belonged to the future. It looked forward to the nature-mysticism of Wordsworth and the humanism of Ruskin, and set the stage for William Blake and his vision of Jerusalem 'in England's green and pleasant land'. It found inspiration mediated through human consciousness and self-awareness, and began to grasp the true significance of Imagination, which Wordsworth and Coleridge were later more positively to unfold:

'Imagination, which in truth,
Is but another name for absolute power
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood.'¹⁷

Moreover, it paved the way for a higher synthesis of Nature and of man, the awareness of a single divine life immanent in, but transcending, all things: the realisation that the universe itself is sacramental, and human existence may be a 'means of grace' and give substantial grounds for 'a hope of glory', since its moral force and imaginative and creative energy springs from a divine, universal continuum flowing beneath, and rising in, the life of man.

From the University of Cambridge to the Parliamentary Army may seem a long stride. Yet the spread of ideas within a given period from one area of society to another is often surprisingly rapid. Moreover, in an age when the printing-presses were busier than they had ever been before, when what has been termed 'the biggest free-for-all battle of books and ideas in the whole of early modern history' was taking place,¹⁸ it should not

¹⁷ W. Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book Fourteen.

¹⁸ R. C. Latham, Art on 'English Revolutionary Thought, 1640-60' in *History*, xxx, no. 111.

astonish us to find exponents of Puritan democracy basing their claims upon humanistic religious grounds.

For example, the Levellers (Puritans of the Left), who regarded liberty of conscience as one of the natural rights of man, derived their individualism from a stout conviction of the moral ability of man. They appealed from reason, as the fount of truth and source of rights, to forms of democratic government that should rest upon the 'agreement of the people'. It is no accident that Colonel John Lilburne, the activist leader of the Levellers in Cromwell's army, should end his life as a convinced Quaker. Indeed, it is a sign of the close and natural connection that one would expect to find between religion which stressed the human element in revelation and the more radical kind of political thought and action. The Quaker emphasis upon the inward witness powerfully appealed to Lilburne, so that by May 1656 he was 'fully convinced', and marked his conversion by a tract in which he publicly declared his 'real owning, and now living in . . . the life and power of those divine and heavenly principles, professed by those spiritualised people called Quakers'.¹⁹ Pauline Gregg, his most recent biographer, has characterised the Levellers as 'true Radicals', who breathed 'the spirit of radical humanitarianism into an age which [already] was so much occupied with worldly success as to be in danger of forgetting the human values'.

Something of 'the religion of the spirit' rubbed off also, and perhaps more directly, upon Gerard Winstanley, chief spokesman of the 'Diggers'. Fundamentally, Winstanley was a deeply religious man. His theology derives from the premise that 'man has a teacher within him and this is the spirit that made the globe and lives in every creature.'²⁰ Devoutly he believed in the inward and complete presence of God, personally experienced by the individual. Some of his tracts are nothing less

¹⁹ Pauline Gregg, *Free-Born John* (1961), p. 344.

²⁰ *The Saints Paradise* (1649), p. 93.

than public declarations of what the Quakers termed 'openings from God'. He used the word 'Reason' to explain the workings of the spirit of God in man, just as the Friends did the 'Light within'. Winstanley, also, is an instance of a man whose religious faith impelled him into social action. He points the way which later religious humanists tended to follow, namely, towards active involvement in social and political reform, intended to benefit mankind and to ensure that 'faith' is attended by its complementary 'works'. In the end, like Lilburne, he, too, found himself at home among the Quakers, no doubt a suitable spiritual resting-place for his religious activism. Writes W. Schenk, in his *Concern for Social Justice in the Puritan Revolution*,²¹ 'It would seem . . . that the kind of spiritual religion represented by Winstanley was one of the factors changing the climate of opinion at a crucial period of European history. Some of its doctrines—notably the possibility of perfection in this life and the immanence of God in the world—were likely to support a tendency, widespread for many other reasons, towards secularisation.'

'The closing years of the 17th century', says Herbert Butterfield, saw 'the Great Secularisation of thought and society. The scientific revolution undermined the great authority hitherto accorded not only to the Middle Ages but also to classical antiquity. In the 18th century much of the prevailing ideology . . . was hostile to traditional Christianity.'²² Butterfield is not alone in noting this important process. But the growth of the scientific spirit and of rationalism, though it militated against thinking of the mainstream Christian type, was not opposed to religion as such. Nor were the 'natural philosophers' of the late 17th and 18th centuries anti-religious. To regard the Enlightenment as an age intrinsically irreligious or hostile towards religion would be a grave error. Many of those responsible for the Scientific Revolution

of the 17th century, such as Newton, Boyle, and the members of the Royal Society in England, and Kepler and Galileo on the Continent, were sincerely religious men, inspired by a desire to base Christianity on a wide and firm foundation of natural law, experience, and experiment.

The 'New Philosophy' (as it was called), though it produced a distrust of tradition and undermined the foundations of generally accepted beliefs, did not clash with the idea of a God who had designed and created the universe. Nor did it rule out the idea that man was an agent of God and in a position (as Kepler affirmed) to 'think God's thoughts after Him'. The world, it seemed, was rational through and through, and could be explained on rational lines, thus linking the mind of man with the mind of his Maker.

True, the men of the Augustan age and the *philosophes* of the 18th century may have been critical and sceptical in their attitude—and French Encyclopedism did declare war openly on religion as then practised—but though they rejected traditional theories and doctrines, they held humanity in high regard and believed that a man by nature was capable of good and not necessarily and ineradicably disposed to commit evil.

It has been well said that latitudinarianism in a modified form persisted well into the 18th century. Archbishop Tillotson died in 1694, but his *Sermons* were the ethical handbook of the new age, the stock-in-trade of many 18th century nonconformist divines. They can still be found on the library shelves of some dissenting meetinghouses in England. . . . The title of Locke's work, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) is an indication of the ethos of the age, whilst Pope's 'Essay on Man' sums up in well-known lines the preoccupation of a period that has been called 'The Age of Reason':

'Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
The proper study of mankind is man.'

²¹ Op cit., p. 110.

²² *Christianity in European History* (1952), p. 35.

The 18th century is often regarded as a time of decadence and deadness of spirit. Yet its scepticism and rationalism were really a godsend in disguise. They gave religion 'a new look', emancipated it from much superstition, enhanced the authority of reason, and favoured the cultivation of tolerance. Above all, the Enlightenment, though it counteracted dogmatism, promoted a new confidence in man. This can be seen in the writings of Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), author of the *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1695-7, 1702), and of Montesquieu (1689-1755), author of *Lettres persanes* (1721) and *L'Esprit des lois* (1748), of Voltaire (1694-1778), Diderot (1713-84), and Rousseau (1712-78). The last-named began as a disciple of the Encyclopedists, as an apostle of Individualism and Rationalism. But being a man with whom feeling played a most important role, Rousseau could not remain content with an abstract deism. In the 'Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar', the famous digression in *Émile* (1762), it is noteworthy that the Vicar (a composite portrait of two priests whom Rousseau had known and admired) interests himself not at all in dogmas and takes little account of interpretations and forms of worship. Nature and man are books open for all to read, and 'the essential worship is of the heart'. True, its author has been called 'a sentimental deist'.²³ But he was a deist with a difference! His deism was a halfway house to a religious humanism. 'I perceive God everywhere in his works [he declared]; I feel him in myself.' Thus God is the immanent spirit in Nature and man, and man is most truly himself when he recognises the divine possibilities of his own nature.

So Rousseau turned away from the dry rationalism of the 18th century conception of God to an imaginative and spiritual idea. 'It was', writes Morley, 'the elevation and expansion of man, as much as it was the restoration of a divinity.'²⁴

²³ G. Saintsbury, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn.

²⁴ J. Morley, *Rousseau*, II (1905), p. 266.

No less importantly, the 'apostle of humanity' revolted against the oppression and cruelty of his times, and set himself to right the wrongs of the common people. 'It is man that interests me', he wrote in one of his meditations, 'it is the common people who compose the human race; what is not the people is so trivial that it is not worth taking into account.' The intrinsic worth of human beings captured his imagination and led him to proclaim himself a defender and admirer of the common man. Running through his writings, not least *The Social Contract*, published in the same year as *Émile*, is this accent on man, 'born free, and everywhere in chains', as he put it in those famous opening words.

Such democratic feeling as he expressed arose from a fresh impulse of humanism and humanitarianism, of liberalism and internationalism, discernible in nearly all the leading European thinkers of the time. Rousseau's influence was felt in Germany, and is reflected notably in the works of Lessing and Herder, though his emphasis upon human thought and experience as channels of the divine energy had been anticipated already by Leibnitz, the mathematician turned philosopher.

Leibnitz (1646-1716) was a pioneering thinker of the age. 'Our reason', he wrote, 'illumined by the spirit of God, reveals the law of nature.' And again in his essay *Of the True Mystical Theology* he declares: 'In our being is contained a germ, a footprint, a symbol of the divine nature, and its true image.' A renewed emphasis on human personality and the importance of the mind of man marks, we might say, almost a second Renaissance of the human self-consciousness.

Thus a two-fold movement is observable in the 18th century development of ideas: a rediscovery of the importance of man's inner being, such as Leibnitz foreshadowed, and an accent upon humanity, upon the place and rights of the common man—a democratic and revolutionary note—such as Rousseau typified. And this latter represents a broadening and, if you like, a secular-

ising of an originally religious or metaphysical belief about man, as it is applied to the social and political spheres of man's existence.

So belief in, and love of, humanity, almost or completely independent of purely traditional Christian faith, takes the stage, and a cleavage between religion and humanism arises, that has continued into our own day.

Revolutionary thought in England, France, Germany, and America, basically humanist and optimist, stressed the growing feeling that the individual person was of unique value and possessed inalienable rights. Over against institutions like Church and State, party and city, it set the human being, for whom such entities alone exist, and apart from whom they are but the veriest abstractions. Yet the advanced thinkers, Voltaire and Lessing, Herder and Condorcet were not the only apostles of humanity; not the only writers to proclaim the dignity of human nature and the sanctity and significance of human life. Others more definitely associated with the churches and religion began to occupy similar ground. For instance, in England, theologians like John Taylor (1694-1761) of Norwich and Warrington Academy, Richard Price (1723-91), and Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), philanthropists like John Howard (1726-90), the prison reformer, William Wilberforce (1759-1833), abolitionist of the slave trade, and Hannah More (1745-1833), religious writer and educationalist, all showed a new concern for human welfare and happiness based upon a proper respect for human nature. Taylor, in his influential work *The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin*, helped to deal the Calvinistic view of human nature a mortal blow. 'What can be more destructive of virtue', he wrote, 'than to have a notion that you must, in some degree or other, be necessarily vicious? . . . If we believe we are in nature worse than the brutes, and this doctrine represents it as such, what wonder if we act worse than the brutes?' In Dr. Taylor's judgement the Calvinist thesis of man's moral depravity is utterly

disabling, and tantamount to 'giving a dog a bad name'. This, he argued, is certainly not in accordance with the mind of Christ. The line from Taylor to William Ellery Channing is direct and unbroken.

As to Price and Priestley, both were ardent lovers of civil and religious liberty and opposed to the war with the American colonies. Both greeted the revolutionary events in France with enthusiasm.

In a famous sermon *On the love of our country*, Price welcomed the destruction of the Bastille and thanked God that he had 'lived to see a diffusion of knowledge which has undermined superstition and error. I have lived to see the rights of men better understood [and] thirty millions of people spurning slavery and demanding liberty.' . . . He continued, addressing 'the oppressors of the world', 'You cannot now hold the world in darkness!²⁵ It was language that roused Burke to write his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* which in turn was answered by Paine in his *Rights of Man*.

Priestley's theology was a curious amalgam of old and new. He passed from the Calvinism of his youth through Arminianism to Socinianism, and finally became Humanitarian in his view of Christ, remaining generally conservative in his attitude to the Bible. For example, he rejected the Virgin Birth and held that Jesus was born in Nazareth, whilst he accepted the miracles as literally true, and to his dying day expected the Second Coming, like any Millenarian. His contribution to a humane theology lay, not in any particular doctrines he entertained, much less in his philosophical stance (which was necessitarian and inherited from David Hartley), but in his religious spirit, his feeling for humanity. 'I stand in need of liberty myself', he wrote, 'and I wish that every creature of God may enjoy it equally with myself.' This explains his support of abolition of the slave trade, his welcome for the French Revolution and his consistent advocacy of reform in Church and State.

²⁵ R. Price, op cit., 4th November 1789, 4th ed., pp. 49 ff.

In considering the deists and *philosophes* of the Enlightenment, it is important to remember that their anti-clericalism did not signify antipathy to religion. They may have held that the universe was a vast mechanism, God a *deus absconditus*, and revelation in the Christian sense unnecessary. Yet these apostles of reason were compelled to acknowledge the existence of values, values inherent in the human spirit, moral and aesthetic values, and those attending the quest for truth in science. They found it possible to regard the secular life of man as an entirely adequate substitute for the so-called 'religious life', represented hitherto by ecclesiastical customs and institutions, and directed their idealism into social and international spheres, the struggle for human freedom and democracy, and the general elevation of the human condition. Voltaire was an anti-clerical, but not an atheist. It was he who said that 'if there were no God, it would be necessary to invent one'. It was he also who took up the cases of oppressed and ill-treated humanity, like that of the judicial murder of Jean Calas.²⁶ Against intolerance and injustice he waged an unceasing battle. This was his 'holy war'. We may, perhaps, regard this kind of involvement with human needs and sufferings as entirely outside the pale of religion, though the churches today are perfectly familiar with it as part of their Christian duty. We may also look upon it as a secularisation of religion, religion here being construed as an agency for the improvement of man's material condition, which is what some people today seem to

²⁶ Jean Calas (1698–1762) was a French Calvinist merchant of Toulouse. One of his four sons, Marc-Antoine, was found hanged in his father's warehouse. His father was accused of hanging him to prevent his abjuring Protestantism. The father was condemned to torture, broken on the wheel, and then burnt. He suffered bravely and protested his innocence. The property of the family was confiscated and the two daughters were forced into a convent. Voltaire interested himself in the case and had the father pronounced innocent.

think is a right and proper *raison d'être* for the churches. On the other hand, we may think of it, more profitably, as the humanisation of secular affairs, the sanctifying of the secular.

Freedom of inquiry, human rights, civil liberties, and the dignity of the human person—these and other human concerns were dear to many in the 18th century whom the adherents of Orthodoxy reckoned free-thinkers or even atheists; but, in fact, though they might have repudiated most of the traditional doctrines of the Christian Church, these religious 'rebels' were not as irreligious as was supposed. Amongst them we may reckon some of the most spiritually sensitive reformers and thinkers of the age: for example, Price, Priestley, and Paine in England, Jefferson, John Adams, and Franklin, among the 'founding fathers' in the United States.

The 'truths' which the Declaration of Independence proclaimed 'self-evident'—'that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights'—derived their persuasive force and ultimate appeal from the fact that they were grounded on an old yet ever-renewed and ever-growing consciousness of the place and value of human personality, that owed more to the Christian tradition than perhaps the 18th century Constitution-makers realised. Thus Alexander Hamilton could roundly affirm that the 'natural rights' of man were not to be 'rummaged from among old parchments or musty records', but were 'written as with a sunbeam in the whole volume of human nature by the hand of divinity itself and can never be erased by mortal power'. 'The whole volume'—to be complete—would have to include the Christian Scriptures and the developing tradition of Christian humanist thought down the centuries. . . .

With this reminder of the sacredness of the individual man and woman it has been well said that the humanist age in politics and society was ushered in.²⁷ At the same

²⁷ W. B. Taverner, *The Path of Humanism* (1968), p. 46.

time, Tom Paine heralded an outward-looking and the roughly democratic stance in religion when, with refreshing bluntness, he announced, 'The world is my home, mankind are my friends, to do good is my religion.' 'When I contemplate the natural dignity of man', wrote Paine in his best-seller, *The Rights of Man*, 'when I feel for the honour and happiness of its character, I become irritated at the attempt to govern mankind by force and fraud, as if they were all knaves and fools.' One can still feel that irritation today, and for the same reasons. . . . Paine was a prophetic figure and spelt out the direction in which the world was moving. Truth to tell, there is something of the '*chrétien manqué*' about this first patriot of the world, but it is, of course, a 'Christianity with a difference'—in fact a Christian humanism of the kind with which the 20th century is now much more familiar. We recognise in Jefferson also, not merely an American nationalist, but an internationalist, whose concern for humanity at large can only be understood against a background of religious humanism. Charles and Mary Beard have called Thomas Jefferson 'the natural leader of a humanistic democracy'. To read his noblest utterances is indeed to feel in the presence of one who had escaped for good from the cramping confines of all ecclesiastical formularies and has stepped out on to the breezy and refreshing heights of the 'religion of mankind'. With William Blake, Jefferson would, surely, have gladly confessed that 'Religion is politics, and politics is brotherhood.'

In a discussion of Christian humanism, it may seem something of a digression to include the 18th century rationalists and deists. Yet though humanism is not rationalism, it is its first cousin, and its frontiers are not easily defined.

If we accept the broad definition that 'Humanism in the best sense of all is the love of man',²⁸ then clearly a vital and vigorous 'Christianity of the spirit' of necessity

²⁸ W. H. Thorpe, *Quakers and Humanists* (1968), pp. 68–9.

will fuse with a humanism that is not overtly religious, or religious in the hitherto generally accepted sense of the word. Avowed Christian and avowed humanist are, in fact, 'men under authority'. This is a fact. How exactly it is interpreted is of secondary importance. The Christian may acknowledge the authority of the Divine Spirit which rises in him and is conceived as capable of mastering the physical processes around him, whilst the humanist will accord to values, which he regards as inherent in human life and thought, pre-eminence and commanding force. Pragmatically the difference, if any, between them is negligible, especially if the humanist avoids the trap of deifying man and supposing that he stands in no need of grace, or (to put it another way) of a 'love that will not let us go'—however that love and its operations may be conceived.

The rift between Christians and humanists began with the rise of modern science in the 17th, and of rationalism in the 18th, century, and these undoubtedly prepared the ground for 19th century anti-Christian humanism and scepticism. Today, the gap between humanist and Christian appears to have opened up even more widely, and we are threatened with the spread of a non-religious humanism and even titanism, which are ultimately amoral and must be destructive of humanity. For those who recognise the tragedy of this situation, it is important to make two things clear :

First, it is necessary to convince humanists that the religious conception of life is just as valid as the scientific, and that there is no point in holding that one is truer than the other. It is necessary to point out that both are different ways of understanding Reality.²⁹

Secondly, it is necessary to recall that humanist theology has always been implicit in the Christian religion, and to demonstrate the historical emergence of human-

²⁹ Cf. F. J. M. Stratton, *An Approach to Truth* (1947); *Religion and Humanism* (B.B.C. Symposium, 1964); W. H. Thorpe, *op. cit.*

ism as essentially an emphasis on the capacity and potential of man rather than a denial of God. Theistic humanism, in short, is not merely a possibility, but an actual fact—a philosophical or theological position which occupies the frontier between religion and science.

What seems to have united men of different backgrounds and disparate theological views in the 18th century (as before and since) is, in general, a liberal humanist attitude, which might be described as 'reverence for personality'. This runs out into philanthropic reforms of all kinds, into democratic usages and traditions—insistence upon human rights, opposition to warfare, the growth of a social conscience, and a sense of communal responsibility for the less fortunate—the slave, the prisoner, the illiterate, the diseased and the poor.

Whether such a strong emphasis upon human personality, such an enthusiasm for humanity—what a 19th century Irish lady, Lady Elizabeth Foster, daughter of the eccentric but liberal-minded Bishop of Derry, writing to her son, called '*l'oubli de soi-même*'—is really feasible, unless it is accompanied by a powerful conviction of the spiritual nature of man and the universe, in fine, unless it is buttressed by a religious faith, is—say the least—doubtful.

There are those, like the late Baron von Hügel, who have regarded the immanentist or subjectivist movement in religion, some facets of which we have passed in review in an earlier lecture, with suspicion and misgiving. Von Hügel, for example, 'was profoundly convinced that religion could not dispense with faith in a transcendental object of worship'.

Others, however, have thought it possible to 'retain all that men have valued in what they took for communion with a transcendental God, while translating it into terms which recognise that the dwelling of God is not without but within'.³⁰

In either case, personality in all its depth and signi-

³⁰ C. C. J. Webb, *Religious Experience* (1945).

ficance is ultimately a leading constituent of what Teilhard de Chardin has designated as a single hyper-personal centre, a focus of psychic union at the 'Omega Point'. Man is the expression of the evolving processes of life; through his consciousness Reality moves towards its consummation. To adapt a biblical phrase, 'God is in man reconciling the world to Himself'.

The 18th century had its prophets and seers in the field of social and political revolution. It also had its pioneers in religious thought. And both owed much to an underlying Christian ethos. In reaction against the one-sidedness of the orthodox Christian dogma of God's absolute transcendence and man's utter sinfulness, some philosophers have been inclined to swing over violently to an opposite conclusion, to make man the object of worship, to cultivate an atheistic humanism. This was the case with some leaders of the French Revolution, like Robespierre and St. Just.

But this danger was avoided by those who remained, in general, within the Christian tradition and yet managed to accord to human personality a vital moral and spiritual role in the process of divine disclosure. It was not found necessary to jettison a genuinely religious attitude in order to become truly humane, or to further what Sir Julian Huxley has recently described as 'the twin goals—the development of the individual soul . . . and the greater good of the human community'.³¹

I want to conclude this lecture by referring to two representative figures, one well known, the other not so familiar, both of whom, though distinctly different and even contrasting in outlook, nevertheless regarded the individual person as quite unique and important, and in their public utterances, writings, and way of life advanced the cause of Christian humanism.

The first is an American—William Ellery Channing (1780–1842); the second an Englishman—Gilbert Wakefield. The inscription on the monument to Channing

³¹ *Religion without Revelation* (1967), p. 175 *passim*.

in Boston Public Gardens is remarkably appropriate: 'He breathed into theology a humane Spirit and proclaimed a new divinity of man.'

Channing held that man was a creature of divine origin, and that he can realise God only through his own nature. We discover God around us in nature and in man, because, paradoxically, He is already within us: like speaks to like. As a moral being, man reflects the character of God, and finds the seat of authority in religion and life within. His moral nature links him with the Divine, and when he is most himself, he is most like God—an echo, it would seem, of that basic utterance of Jesus: 'The pure in heart shall see God.' One is spoilt for choice to illustrate from Channing's works his view of mankind. One could, of course, cull passages from his address on 'Self-Culture', his discourse on 'Likeness to God', or his lecture on 'The Elevation of the Labouring Classes', three of his noblest confessions of faith, whose titles indicate the character of his particular concern for man.

I confine myself to two passages only. The first demonstrates the breadth of his humanism and the depth of his religion: 'A man is great as a man, be he where or what he may. The grandeur of his nature turns to insignificance all outward distinctions. . . . Let us not disparage that nature which is common to all men; for no thought can measure its grandeur. It is the image of God, the image even of his infinity'.

Channing saw in the spiritual nature of man the greatest reality on earth. All else was but a passing shadow. Little wonder that he commenced, but never completed, a *Treatise on Man*. It shows what importance he attached to the subject. 'The keynote to the whole of Dr. Channing's character and convictions', wrote Martineau, 'is found in his sense of the inherent greatness of man. . . . It was . . . a fundamental point of faith.'³² This reverence for the individual person 'lay at the root

³² J. Martineau, *Essays*, I, p. 103.

of his attachment to free institutions'. It informed his stout opposition to slavery and war, and inspired his efforts to raise the standard and the lot of humanity the world over.

It was because he thought the religion of his day lacking in realism and true humanity that he broke with Calvinism, preached a Christianity free from the bleak dogma of man's inherent sinfulness, and affirmed the divine-human character of every soul.

'For want of an enlightened conviction of man's participation in a divine Principle, religion in all ages [he wrote] has sunk more or less into superstition. It has bowed down the spirits which it ought to have uplifted. It has been deemed a means of propitiating a Higher Power, instead of being regarded as the ascent of the Soul to its Original, as the Divine in man seeking the Supreme Divinity.' . . . 'By Christian goodness we are made partakers of God's nature, . . . we become temples of the Divinity, God dwells in us.'³³ So Channing's faith in human nature made him the friend of humanity and the defender of the unfortunate and the underprivileged.

Like Channing, in this respect at least, was the English scholar and radical, Gilbert Wakefield (1756–1801). He paid the penalty of his outspokenness and impulsive sympathy with suffering humanity by undergoing two years' imprisonment that undermined his strength and led in 1801 to his early death.

Wakefield is the typical example of a man brought up in orthodoxy, a member of the establishment whose reading and experience of life carries him over somewhat violently to the opposite camp.

A scholar and fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, he began his active life with a curacy in Liverpool, combining classical studies with a particular concern for prisoners brought in by privateers, whom he visited in gaol. He tried to rouse public opinion against both privateering and the slave trade, of which Liverpool was then

³³ W. E. Channing, *Works* (1884), p. 11.

the centre. Eventually his studies converted him to Unitarianism of the scriptural type, and he left the Church of England to become classical tutor at Warrington Academy (1779-83). The latitudinarians Haies and Chillingworth were among his favourite authors, and served to confirm the humanism which he derived from Classical sources. No doubt, contemporaries regarded him as an eccentric. Porson said: 'He was as violent against Greek accents as he was against the Trinity.' Crabb Robinson described him as a political fanatic. It is the fate of radicals to be calumniated and misunderstood. None the less, Wakefield deserves to be remembered as a late 18th century 'freedom-fighter' and anti-war agitator. Indeed, he can be said to have anticipated a great many of the causes now engaging the modern mind.

Besides being a slavery abolitionist, and regarding war as completely incompatible with Christian morality, he opposed capital punishment, worked for prison reform, and strongly condemned the practice of solitary confinement. A man of deep humanity, he hated cruelty of all kinds, and abandoned his favourite sports, including fishing, as soon as he realised that they involved cruelty. He also vainly attempted to persuade his friend, the Whig leader, Charles James Fox, to do the same. Of the slave trade he wrote: 'I am persuaded that we shall never prosper as a nation until that execrable traffick be abolished, which is conducted with circumstances of barbarity to be sought in vain among the records of Pagan abominations.' Sensitive to misery in any shape of form, Wakefield clung to the idea of biblical revelation, and drew his arguments in favour of the divine origin of man from such passages as *Genesis* 9:6, 'God made man in his own image', and *James* 3:9, which speaks of 'men, who are made in the likeness of God'. Such biblicism no longer appeals to us, even when dressed in modern garb.

Yet though no rationalist, like Tom Paine, whose *Age*

of Reason he rebutted, Wakefield was anxious to show that (as he put it) 'a reformer could also be a Christian, with as warm an enthusiasm for the universal equality and the unalienable rights of man, as ever actuated the breast even of the hallowed Milton'. Moreover, he detested the doctrine of human depravity as both unscriptural and immoral, quoting with approval Dr. Taylor's work on *Original Sin*. Thus liberal minds discover their allies across the patterned pages of history and substantiate Benjamin Franklin's dictum that 'a good man is the finest work of God', whatever his particular opinions may be.

Wakefield is a notable instance of a religious-minded man whose concern for scholarship and Scripture did not dull his conscience, nor blind him to the needs of his fellow men. Not all dons are as socially sensitive or politically aware. . . . In his day, he may have been considered somewhat rash and impulsive, but so was the young doctor from Strassburg who made his way out to Equatorial Africa in 1913 in the conviction that it was a religious duty to express in active service one's 'reverence for life'.

Writes Schweitzer in his autobiography:

'A lady full of the modern spirit "proved" to me (so she thought) that I could do much more through *lectures* in the matter of bringing medical help to the natives than through the action I had in mind.'—Why should he waste his talents by going out to Africa? On which he remarked: 'The "In the beginning was the deed" of Goethe's *Faust* no longer counts today; now, propaganda is the mother of events.' . . .⁸⁴

But for himself, people counted more than pious professions, and the duty of the privileged is to 'prove neighbour' to those less fortunate than themselves. This existential humanism would seem to be a logical consequence of a religious belief in man.

⁸⁴ A. Schweitzer, *Aus meinem Leben und Denken* (1932), pp. 74-5.

VI

**NON-TRADITIONAL RELIGION
AND THE NEW HUMANISM**

'Gradually, we shall all come from a Christianity of Word and Faith more and more to a Christianity of Thought and Deed.'

Goethe : *Conversations with Eckermann*

The way to holiness lies through action.'

Dag Hammarskjöld : *Markings*

VI

Non-traditional Religion and the New Humanism

In his book *A Humanist in Africa* President Kenneth Kaunda has suggested a definition of religious humanism that can be usefully applied to recent thinkers and events in the fields of both religion and politics, considered in the widest sense of both words.

'By Christian humanism [he writes] I mean that we discover all that is worth knowing about God through our fellow men, and unconditional service of our fellow men is the purest form of the service of God. . . . When man learns, by bitter experience if no other way, that the only hope for the peace and happiness of the world is to give political and economic expression to love for others we shall have entered not the kingdom of man, but the Kingdom of God.'

The truth that love of neighbour is an absolute concomitant of the love of God, and indeed is the surest way to knowledge of the divine, seems to have been revealed in growing measure during the 19th and 20th centuries. This could be illustrated on a large scale in a full treatment of the theme. Obviously, however, in the limited compass of these lectures it is only possible to pick out some instances and to highlight developments that show the general direction in which the more progressive and humanist of Christians have moved in recent times. Consequently, what follows must, of necessity, seem somewhat selective in choice of subject, but

it may at least stimulate the reader to fill in some of the gaps from his own knowledge.

The American and French Declarations of Rights (1776 and 1789) may be said to have ushered in 'the humanist age in politics and society'.¹ The 'rights of man movement' was, in fact, the political expression of a humanist impulse which received positive reinforcement in England during the Commonwealth period. The Army Debates at Putney forcibly illustrate this point, and show how closely democratic feeling in the mid-seventeenth century was linked with the Christian ethos. Statesmen and philosophers, with different emphases, proclaimed human rights to be natural, universal, and—not least—sacred. And this theory, so typical of many 17th and 18th century constitutional reformers and humanist thinkers, continued throughout the next two hundred years to inspire the struggle for political liberty and equality in all the lands affected by Western thought and practice.

It would be possible to trace an unbroken stream of religious-humanist thought and action throughout the 19th century and show how it issued in important contributions to social progress and political reform in many European countries. However, to avoid confusion and too wide a sweep, let us confine our attention to the English scene, and make our point of departure those churchmen and religious radicals who were moved by a Christian conscience to effect changes for the better in the living conditions of their fellow men. Many of them inaugurated reforms of various kinds that affected men's working lives, like the Factory Acts. Others powerfully and effectively impinged upon the intellectual and social welfare of growing bodies of people by their establishment of voluntary school-systems, like the Lancasterian and National Schools, and by the founding of libraries, art-galleries and museums. Others, hearing 'the still, sad music of humanity', took pity upon the sick and

¹ W. B. Taverner, *The Path of Humanism* (1968), p. 46.

diseased, and set up dispensaries, hospitals, and homes for the mentally or physically handicapped.

The number of benefactions and philanthropic institutions, charities, almshouses, and humanitarian trusts of all kinds is legion.² When one comes to examine closely who were the moving spirits behind this proliferation of aid and charitableness, one discovers, not surprisingly, that it was those who found inspiration for their often self-sacrificing labours in the religious tradition in which they had been brought up, or in the challenge that Christianity, seen as a charter of personal liberty and social amelioration, presented. The names of William Wilberforce, Lord Shaftesbury, Elizabeth Fry, and Florence Nightingale are, of course, familiar the world over, and much has been written about their work and the springs of piety and imagination from which they derived their energy and devotion. Others of similar character and no less disinterestedness have attracted little attention, except among specialists in social history.

John Fielden of Todmorden (1784–1849), Quaker-Unitarian, cotton manufacturer and pioneer of factory reform, founded schools in his native town and for thirty years worked for the improvement of conditions in the textile factories. Entering Parliament as member for Oldham in 1833, he confessed in his election address, that 'nothing but an anxious solicitude to see the people restored to their just rights, and especially the labouring portion of society greatly improved could have induced' him to candidate. 'Honest John Fielden', as he came to be called, championed the cause of the spinners and weavers, and eventually steered the Ten Hours Bill through Parliament (1847), an important measure for the control of working hours which proved a boon to all workpeople in fast-developing industrial England.

J. L. and Barbara Hammond in *The Bleak Age* describe the Ten Hours Bill as 'the most striking and im-

² Many of these are now listed in the General Register of Charities, set up by the Charity Commissioners.

portant manifestation of the new spirit' of the mid-nineteenth century. Sir Robert Peel, typically, thought it was a public danger. But the Ten Hours Act contained an entirely novel idea. It freed the English workman from continuous and crushing toil and enabled him to enjoy a more generous and leisurely life. What was the use of parks, art-galleries, museums and other such amenities, unless men had *time* to spend in them?

Thomas Southwood Smith (1788-1861), medical doctor, Unitarian minister, and apostle of public health, laid the foundations of sanitary reform, and along with Edwin Chadwick made possible the healthy growth of towns and cities. His work for better housing and living conditions for the poor derived from a settled benevolence of spirit and concern for his fellow men already manifest in the work that he wrote whilst studying medicine in Edinburgh, namely, *Illustrations of the Divine Government*. The book is an argument in favour of the doctrine of universal restoration of men 'to purity and happiness', as against the Calvinist scheme of election and predestination. It is based on a careful discussion of the goodness of God, the nature of man, and the object of punishment. It is interesting to note that in the Appendix the author supplies a list of works which support his views. This includes writings by Henry More, Archbishop Tillotson, Charles Chauncy, Elhanan Winchester, and Theophilus Lindsey—latitudinarians, Unitarians and Universalists. Southwood Smith's granddaughter, Octavia Hill, continued his work as a housing reformer. A close friend of his, to whom I shall refer later, was the radical Unitarian, educationalist and journalist, Anti-Corn Law League orator and member of Parliament for Oldham, William Johnson Fox.

Evangelicals, Quakers, and Unitarians, pioneered many, if not most, of the voluntary associations for social reform and philanthropy which, in the 19th century, made life in England more humane. Moreover, the ground for the legislation which followed the Beveridge

Report of 1942 and set up the Welfare State, was prepared in the 19th century by religious-minded men and women, many of whom proceeded upon the maxim of Jeremy Bentham—'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'—and regarded this principle almost as a re-statement of the Golden Rule! Incidentally, some years ago, in conversation with Sir William Beveridge, I learnt how deeply he had been influenced in his work for social betterment by Unitarian precept and example.³

It would, I think, be possible to examine the writings of many leading 19th century thinkers in both America and Britain and discover a latent, if not patent, humanism coupled with, and based upon, a theistic foundation. For the present, however, I will refer only to two men who did much to make religion relevant to life and keep it democratic and humane. Both were prominent Unitarian ministers, who have hardly received their due from the historians of social and religious movements. The first has already been mentioned, namely, William Johnson Fox. The second is Charles Beard.

Of Fox, John Stuart Mill once said, 'Fox's religion was what the religion of all would be if we were in a healthy state; a religion of Spirit not of dogma, and catholic in the best sense.' Fox was typical of those radical churchmen—the race of whom is not yet extinct—who felt that a broad religious outlook necessarily involves a constant concern for social reform, educational advance, and international understanding. His idea of the ministry would have appealed to many a young, enthusiastic, and active parson today. It was satisfying to him, because it provided great scope for a man possessed of shrewd insight and abounding energy. The minister, he held, should be not only a theologian and preacher, but also a publicist and reformer. A cultured religious leader should not stop short in his activities at the purely

³ He informed the writer that he came of Unitarian stock on his mother's side. Unfortunately, his autobiography, *Power and Influence*, begins only with his student days at Oxford.

ecclesiastical level : he is bound by his spiritual commitment to venture out into the highways and byways of human life and to pledge his support to a wide variety of movements for the protection of human dignity and the fostering of human welfare.

Hence the leading part Fox played in the Anti-Corn Law League agitation. In 1840, at Cobden's request, he drew up an address to the nation, and spoke frequently on the League's platforms. He strongly supported the movement for compulsory secular education, and unsuccessfully introduced a bill for this into the House of Commons in 1850. He was also in favour of an extended franchise, believing that all men must enjoy the right of self-government. These and other radical views he constantly aired in public, and in the course of a long career in journalism promoted what Richard Garnett has called 'the great aim of his life, namely, to benefit the classes from which he had sprung'.

A Suffolk man, born on a small farm, Fox was mainly self-educated. Brought up a Calvinist, he had, by 1812, become a Unitarian, and before long was recognised as a leading orator and writer in the denominational interest. In 1824, he became minister at South Place Chapel, Finsbury, and was appointed in the following year foreign secretary to the newly formed Unitarian Association (the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, of which, according to Dr. Martineau, he was the original founder). At the same time he was writing regularly for *The Monthly Repository*, which he was later to edit and to own. His sermons illustrated a marked tendency amongst radical dissenters of the period to grapple with social problems, and *The Monthly Repository* in Fox's hands became less a denominational organ than a purveyor of the broadest humanism.

Fox's advocacy of causes such as women's suffrage, universal education, and indeed 'all forms of Moral and Mental Progress', to use words inscribed on his memorial in Brompton Cemetery, has earned him opprobrium as

one who 'secularised' the pulpit and the office of minister. Such a charge would not have worried Fox, if by 'secularise' was meant changing the emphasis in religion from other-worldly-centred ecclesiasticism to a religious concern with men in their various everyday circumstances; if it meant a rejection of the old categorising of life into sacred and profane, ecclesiastical and lay, 'holy' and commonplace. For Fox's pioneering philanthropy and radical reformism must be seen as really a form of religious humanism, for which the times were crying out, and one entirely in harmony with the tradition of radical dissent handed down by Priestley and Price and other 18th century progressives.

His—for that time—advanced views, similar in many ways to those held by his contemporary in America, Theodore Parker, eventually put him out of touch with the biblically orientated English Unitarians of the day. Like Parker, he found himself ostracised by his colleagues. But, although he discarded the title of 'Reverend', he never wanted to lay aside the character of a minister. In a series of addresses given towards the end of his ministry at South Place Chapel, and published in 1849 as *The Religious Ideas*, he set out his main thesis : 'Religion belongs to Nature; it belongs to humanity.' Moreover, he went on to declare that 'There is a Religion of humanity, a religion which belongs to human nature . . . which is to be found wherever man is found. . . . Rooted deep within us, it is free from the collisions which ever attend specific theologies.' In saying this, he was asserting that religion must be, in the deepest and broadest sense, humanistic, and from a conventional point of view, radical. He had found orthodox clergy and religionists generally a drag on progress, and deplored the opposition of the then-Establishment to almost every measure of social justice and mental emancipation. He was not the only one to make this discovery, and to apply an antidote.

The minister who wished to bring the Christian ethic

to bear upon the social and political problems of his day had to become a reformer and a publicist. It was not enough merely to preach to a rather circumscribed group of the faithful every Sunday. Nor would it do to remain inactive on issues which were exercising the public mind, such as, in Fox's time, the repeal of the Corn Laws or the lack of facilities for a general education or the disfranchisement of large numbers of people on grounds of inadequate property-qualifications. The Christian humanist had to seize and occupy a wider and more commanding position: he had to utilise the techniques of the public meeting and, not least, the opportunities afforded by the press, a fact which was well understood by Fox when he took over *The Monthly Repository*. In short, if he was a minister, he had to become what in the 20th century is known as a 'political parson'.

An outstanding instance of such a one is the Unitarian scholar and educationalist, Charles Beard (1827-88).

Son of the founder and first principal of the Unitarian College, Manchester, Beard in his prime was, in the judgement of Dr. L. P. Jacks, next to Dr. James Martineau, the most outstanding figure in the Unitarianism of the period. A fine preacher, who could also, on a public platform, hold a popular audience spellbound, his Unitarianism was of the Martineau stamp,⁴ but with a significant difference. Martineau was, politically, a conservative, and though originally trained as an engineer, he never realised the possibility, or even desirability, of 'social engineering'. Beard's interests, on the other hand, covered a wider field. He combined historical scholarship of a most thorough and painstaking kind with a brilliant flair for interpretation, and both of these with journalism and public work. For many

⁴ Martineau departed from biblical Unitarianism, and already in 1836 in *The Rationale of Religious Enquiry* had made reason the authority in religion: 'the last appeal, in all researches into religious truth, must be to the judgements of the human mind', op. cit. (1836), p. 127.

years he was a leader-writer on the *Liverpool Daily Post*, and as editor of *The Theological Review* (1864-79) was responsible for the appearance of a wide-ranging series of learned and masterly articles on religion, history, and philosophy. He greatly valued education and took a leading part in the founding of University College, Liverpool (later Liverpool University).

For Beard, religion was essentially a mixture of idealism and realism, and had necessarily to concern itself with the whole of human life, in all its fascinating variety and stirring ramifications.

The way in which his mind moved forward and outward in sympathy with the life of his times, expressing what may be termed 'an experimental faith', is illustrated in ten lectures published with the title *Unitarian Christianity*, with a preface by James Martineau. In one of these he says, 'A religion is true as long as it is living, operative, a fire in the individual heart, a renovating power in society', and not 'hedged . . . around with definitions and built up into the symmetry of a system'. Like W. J. Fox, he was concerned with, and for, the poor, and whilst minister at Gee Cross, Hyde, lived and worked amongst working-class people. Speaking on 3rd June 1867, shortly after his settlement in Liverpool, he said: 'I have been much amused of late at being condoled with in the rise of certain small cottages, of £18 rent, opposite my house. . . . Why, for the last seventeen years, I have lived in the midst of cottages of smaller size and less rent! I could hear the children of the poor playing, night and morning, round my house, and I could not go out of my door without receiving the greetings of working men. I have lived among these men; they formed the bulk of my congregation, their children filled my Sunday School. There is nothing I miss in Liverpool so much as their faces on a Sunday afternoon, looking up to me as I preach.'

In a series of popular lectures in the Concert Hall, Lord Nelson Street, Liverpool, in 1875, afterwards

published from the reporter's notes as *Christianity in Common Life*, he dealt with almost every problem of modern city life, showing a versatility of mind and a humanity rare amongst contemporary preachers. In the last, 'On Woman', he pleaded for a woman's 'right of a free career'. 'If she wants to sit in Parliament, let her sit there, if she can find a constituency that will elect her'—a sentiment almost fifty years in advance of the extension of the franchise to women. The audience for many of these lectures numbered two thousand.

Like Fox, Beard 'did many unclerical things'. He commonly 'did not wear the white tie nor the black trousers that distinguished most 19th century dissenting ministers'. Theologically humanitarian, a believer in 'a Christ in whom was manifested the finest and most consummate union of divine and human, which might be, and was, partially manifested in every clear mind and heart and conscience', Beard's Christianity was in fact a mystical humanism. In this he was followed by others who represented main stream Unitarianism into the 20th century, and by those who, like Philip Wicksteed (1844-1927), combined the deepest insights of medieval Christianity with a recognition of the importance of economic factors in the development of human society.

Wicksteed, for example, illustrates the paradox (which religious history frequently affords) that a truly inward-looking religious faith is often the most realistically outward-looking as well. Concern for humanity and an affirmation of human status and dignity often accompany and issue from a deeply felt belief in God. Wicksteed took seriously and at full value Christ's emphasis on the two Great Commandments, and in what is probably the finest Essex Hall Lecture ever delivered, demonstrated beyond a peradventure that the only 'Religion of Time' that is of permanent worth is rooted in the 'Religion of Eternity'. The broad religious humanism of such radical Unitarians as Beard and Wicksteed, Fox and Philip Carpenter, men who repudiated the idea that

religion had nothing to do with politics, has been one of the factors contributing to the rise and progress of the Welfare State. Indeed, even some of the most learned and scholarly of men, like Joseph Estlin Carpenter (1844-1927), biblical scholar and authority on Buddhism, were by no means mere academics: they were students of social and practical affairs. Carpenter, for example, for years enthusiastically supported efforts for peace and international understanding. The Library of Manchester College, Oxford, of which he was a distinguished principal, still contains many volumes of sociological and international interest that he bequeathed to it, and which reveal the breadth of his social and humanitarian sympathies.

With this rather inadequate reference to a line of 19th century theistic humanists, which could be greatly extended, I pass now to more recent times to consider the phenomenon of 20th century religious humanism in the person, first, of a leading internationalist. (Perhaps it is no accident that some of the most notable humanists of our time have been thoroughgoing internationalists: e.g. Rabindranath Tagore, Albert Schweitzer, Paul Geheeb, and Pablo Casals.)

In his remarkable 'Diary'—*Markings*—the late Secretary-General of the United Nations records the growth of a soul. Dag Hammarskjöld has been rather happily described as 'a Renaissance man at mid-20th century'. This really hits off his many-sided personality, with its humanity,⁵ its sensitiveness to beauty, and its awareness of the inapprehensible, the hidden, the numinous. Moreover, it takes into account the broad field of his interests: he was a connoisseur of both books and pictures, fond of drama, painting, music, and sculpture,⁶

⁵ 'Others' is a key-word throughout *Markings*. Its frequent occurrence has been noted by Henry P. van Dusen: in nearly a fifth of some six hundred entries.

⁶ His friendship with one of the greatest of modern sculptresses, Barbara Hepworth, issued in the massive piece—

and a keen mountaineer. He was also a poet, with a mystical perception that 'each man was a cosmos of whose riches we can only catch glimpses'. His inner life seems to have been almost entirely hidden from even his closest colleagues. Yet now and then a light shone on, and from, the depths of personality which moved him. For example, on 24th October, United Nations Day, he would choose Beethoven's 9th Symphony for the concert celebrating the anniversary of the Organisation, and preface the performance with a tribute to the composer's 'enormous confession of faith in the dignity and worth of the human person, . . . in the victorious human spirit, and in human brotherhood, a confession valid for all times'.

When Hammarskjöld spoke of faith in a religious sense it was with a meaning closely akin to the great mystics . . . 'an untroubled faith springing from the unity of all things', and his favourite guide was St. John of the Cross and his great saying that 'Faith is the marriage of God and the soul'.

Hammarskjöld probably began to study the medieval mystics late in the 1940s. Already in 1951 he was citing Eckhart, and Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* was his bedside book and the only one he took with him on his last visit to the Congo. His thought reverberates with mystical overtones, but mysticism with him was never an end in itself: it led on, through love, to sacrificial service. It is hardly surprising that one of the most powerful influences in Dag's life was Albert Schweitzer. 'In his work', he wrote, 'I found a key for modern man to the world of the Gospels.' At the core of his own feeling for life was a Schweitzerian 'reverence for life', where 'life', as J. P. Lash (his biographer) observes, 'is more than the antonym of matter . . . Spirit and matter are both manifestations of a central life force, or energy, which finds expression in painting, music, literature, 'Single Form'—which stands today in the United Nations Plaza as a tribute to Hammarskjöld.

friendships, nations and international society', and which . . . he believed was moving mankind by an evolutionary process towards new types and higher degrees of social organisation.

Of traditional Christian teaching practically nothing remains in *Markings* or elsewhere in Dag's utterances. Orthodox theology played no part in forming his convictions. But the figure of Jesus and his ethical teaching undoubtedly impressed him deeply. If a single verse of Scripture more than any other may be cited as applicable to Hammarskjöld's life it would be the injunction: 'If any man would come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me.'

'In our era', he declared, 'the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action.' A reading of *Markings* suggests also that the obverse is equally true: that the road to action adequate to the demands of our time, necessarily passes through the 'world of holiness'. In short, meaningful action and dedicated personality are reciprocally related. This man of affairs, who was also a man of the world, became acutely aware, because he was mercilessly honest with himself, that true service of humanity must always proceed from a religious base; that only when a man has a living relationship to God, to the Beyond, to what he sometimes called 'the Frontier'—'not I, but God in me', to use his own words⁷—can he acquire the self-knowledge which enables him to follow a straight path, and to be of use to his fellow men.

Hammarskjöld may well be considered representative of 20th century man 'in search of a soul'. His was a pilgrimage from an inherited, traditional, Christian belief, through intellectual doubts and fast-changing material circumstances, to a fresh formulation of faith. He found a foothold in the present through service to humanity, and acknowledged his debt in particular to the medieval mystics, and to Martin Buber and Albert Schweitzer, both of whom were concerned with the

⁷ *Markings*, p. 87, and see p. 169.

inner nature of man and the laws governing that nature and its impact upon the world of action. Clearly, what he called 'the mystical experience' was a controlling and decisive factor in his life. He put it thus: 'Always: *here and now*—this is a freedom in the midst of action, a stillness in the midst of other human beings. The mystery is a constant reality to him who, in this world, is free from self-concern, a reality that grows peaceful and mature before the receptive attention of assent.'

Such a confession springs from the recognition of the reality of a Being at once informing and transcending humanity; from a continuing awareness of the self as a pointer to the nature of the universe beyond the self, and of which the self is only a part. 'Selfhood', writes Sir Julian Huxley (in *What dare I think?*), 'is the final stage and most complex type of the entire terrestrial evolutionary process.' Huxley is loth to venture further and say what a theist like F. R. Tennant does not hesitate to affirm, namely, that 'personality is the key to the universe'.⁸ Indeed, Huxley's 'scientific humanism', with its emphasis on the self, leaves one asking a number of questions. For man, the microcosm, is not a world by himself. His humanity is only fully developed, fully human, in relation to other 'selves' and to a macrocosm, the universe around him. Thus a purely anthropocentric humanism cannot adequately explain the whole of human experience. It cannot offer a satisfactory explanation of the imperatives of the moral life, the qualities and values associated with religion, the rapture and ecstasy of religious experience, the feeling of contact with a Power or forces beyond the self, or the nature of personality, mind and consciousness. There would seem to be an essential mystery at the heart of things, and this is the origin of every form of religion that man has ever entertained.

In his Riddel Lecture on 'The Foundation of Faith and Morals' (1934-5), Bronislaw Malinowski concluded

⁸ *Modern Materialism and Emergent Evolution*.

that 'the substance of all religion is deeply rooted in human life; it grows out of the necessities of life'. Science cannot generate religion, any more than it is possible artificially to create forms of symbolism that appeal to the depths of the human soul. Religion is a function of the human mind and spirit, a province of its own, with categories that the scientist is bound to recognise as self-validating.

What Teilhard de Chardin has called 'the phenomenon of Man'—'the most subtle of all the successive layers of life' that have emerged in the evolutionary process—displays characteristics which are basic to any true explanation of life's purpose and destiny. Teilhard is, of course, a theistic evolutionist, but he is at one with Huxley in stressing the importance of the human person. He lays emphasis upon the 'process of hominisation', the development of increasingly human (humane) qualities in man: the growth of personality, according to Teilhard, is 'the goal of ourselves'. 'Without the primacy and triumph of the *personal* at the summit of the mind', he writes, 'we can hope for no progress on earth.'⁹

Teilhard's kind of Christian humanism ties up well with the natural theology of an earlier time and with the scientific outlook of a Julian Huxley. He sees the world as an arena for increasingly close, intimate, and complex personal relations, and in this he echoes the thought of Martin Buber, who, despite his denial, may be regarded as a mystic. What, in Buber, appealed to Dag Hammarskjöld was just this enormous concern with personal relations, this conviction that 'man in himself' was always incomplete: he needed contact with others to be a whole person.

So Teilhard believes that man must move into community, but that this movement will come from the conscious choice of the human will. The unity to be aimed at is that of a unity of persons who choose to be related together in love. The centre of our lives is to be found

⁹ *The Phenomenon of Man* (1959), p. 297.

in God, Who is Love. This is no narrow theological foundation for religion, but a religious-humanist conception, which stresses the sanctity and equality of human beings as arising ultimately not from merely individual human traits, but from 'divinised personality' whose beginning, development, and end is God.

Such a view of life regards ultimate reality not as material, but as spiritual, and in some sense eternal. Such a view recognises that human creativity is significant in its own right, and that man as a person is indeed what St. Paul long ago designated him, namely, 'a fellow worker with God' . . . 'in Whom we live, and move, and have our being'. Such a view of life is the Christian humanism which affords mankind a faith for the future, a faith that rejects the hitherto prevalent tradition respecting humanity, deriving from St. Augustine, and stands squarely for the divine possibilities latent in the spirit of man.

Sir Alister Hardy, the eminent British zoologist, in his Gifford Lectures for 1963-5 (*The Living Stream, The Divine Flame*) examines the psychic factors at play in evolution and argues that man's spiritual consciousness has a natural place in the evolutionary process. Calling himself a theistic humanist, he is convinced that 'the world today must have a Natural Theology. Humanism is not enough.'¹⁰ Approaching the subject of man's religious consciousness from widely different angles, biology and animal behaviour, social anthropology, psychology, psychical research, studies of the numinous, the love of nature, and the inspiration of art, he concludes, that religion, 'this feeling of contact with a Greater Power beyond the self, seems to be a fundamental feature in the natural history of man'.¹¹ Hardy quotes with approval a passage from the late Dr. L. P. Jacks's Hibbert Lectures of 1922 (entitled *Religious Perplexities*):

'God, said Jesus, is spirit: a man is spirit, no less; and

when the two meet in fellowship there is religion. All religious testimony, so far as I can interpret its meaning, converges towards a single point, namely this. There is that in the world, call it what you will, which responds to the confidence of those who trust it, declaring itself to them as a fellow worker in the pursuit of the Eternal Values, meeting their loyalty to it with reciprocal loyalty to them. It is a Power which can help, deliver, illuminate and gladden; the companion of the brave, the upholder of the loyal, the friend of the lover, the healer of the broken, the joy of the victorious—the God who is spirit, the God who is Love.'

The religious humanist, it is true, lays stress upon man's powers and initiative; but equally, he is in no doubt about the built-in forces for good that exist within the universe. Life has a divine reference, both within and without human personality. Love unifies God and man.

One good definition of religion, that of William James, is 'the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto'.¹² Christian humanism seeks to hold the transcendence and immanence of God in equilibrium. It is a religion that posits a God who is not standing over against but together with man. It is a humane and humble faith, firmly convinced that man is the creature in and through whom God seeks to express His own nature, personality, and love.

In traditional Christian thought, the idea of God's transcendence definitely predominates over that of His immanence. Yet Christianity is fundamentally a religion of God-manhood. The ethics of Christ underline the truth that man is by no means so worthless as he is often represented to be. In New Testament language he has value as 'a child of God'. We are commanded to love our neighbour; and the true love of neighbour would seem to involve an awareness of something sacred and

¹² W. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 52.

¹⁰ Hardy, *The Living Stream* (1966), p. 263.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

God-like in him. This suggests, indeed, that there is inherent in man's being something 'divinely-human'. The mystics have always recognised this—from St. Paul onwards, through Tertullian, Plotinus, Eckhart, to St. Teresa and Francis de Sales.

The Russian philosopher, S. L. Franks (in his *Reality and Man*, 1965) has also expressed this thought, which we have already seen was present in the writings of both medieval mystics and Renaissance thinkers. 'The idea of God-manhood', he writes, 'implies the presence of God as a transcendent reality in man's inmost being. God and man both acquire positive meaning only when conceived as indivisible but distinct aspects of God-manhood.' Such language suggests that a basic religious humanism is native to Christianity, for Franks asserts that the idea of personality in all its depth and significance can only have arisen on Christian soil. Doubtless, we need reminding of this truth, and this is a service which the liberal Eastern Orthodox tradition has rendered to our day. Of this tradition, Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900) and Nicolas Berdyaev (1874–1948) are representative.

Soloviev understood the Incarnation less as an event which had taken place at one point in history than as something continually taking place. God is for ever becoming incarnate in the world. That is the meaning of the whole historical process: God becomes man so that man may one day become God. Soloviev thought that East and West had grasped only half of this truth. But Christianity would be reunited and the Kingdom of God would be realised when it was seen that both God and man are needed to compose the true pattern of life.

Basically, this is also Berdyaev's position. He held that the human element in religion has been largely sacrificed to the divine: man is treated as the passive recipient of an absolute truth brought to him by the Church or as a helpless sinner saved by grace. But, says Berdyaev,

man is part of the life of God. He is God's 'other self'; his co-operation is necessary throughout the whole gamut of life's activities and the whole range of history, if the world is to be transformed and made truly human and divine. Man is a creative being, a fact which links him infallibly with God, and makes him a co-partner in God's creativeness. In short, 'to be human is . . . to be a centre of initiative'. Hence Berdyaev finds God revealing Himself in the artist, the scholar, and the scientist, indeed, wherever beauty, truth, and good are created. Thus genius, as well as sainthood, is a form of God's self-expression. The divine cannot be restricted merely to the normally accepted channels of religious revelation. Humanity and human experience and effort are organs of the Divine Spirit, which works not only in the processes of Nature, but in the events of history.¹³—Obviously, Berdyaev's Christian humanism is closely related to the view put forward at an earlier date by James Martineau.

'The one deep faith which has determined my whole word and work', said Martineau in his parting address to his Liverpool congregation in 1857, 'is in the living union of God with our Humanity.' And again, 'If you believe that God exists, and understand your words when you call Him "infinite" and "eternal", you cannot expect to find Him as one object among many, but as a Spirit in all.' The divinity of Christ was not unique but representative: Christ was not a God-man, but a man who revealed God—'the first among many brethren'. . . . 'The Incarnation was true, not of Christ exclusively, but of man universally, and God everlastingly.' The Church has narrowed into a single miracle what was an every-

¹³ N. Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, p. 196. 'Human life becomes truly terrible when there ceases to be anything above man and when there is no place for the mystery of the divine and infinite. . . . The image of man is defaced when the image of God is obliterated from the human soul.' Cf. also pp. 206–21 *passim*.

day fact to Jesus himself, namely, 'that all men are mingled human and Divine'.¹⁴ Such a limiting of the divine Martineau regarded as contrary to the New Testament evidence and as a complete reversal of the principle which animated the life and faith of Jesus. Humanity was the significant vehicle of deity, and man's moral nature threw light upon the universe as a whole. Man's conscience and compassion were pointers to a divine spirit, whose delegates men are. Man is no chance-product of whirling atoms but is made 'in the image of God'.

It has often been said, and repeated in these lectures, that humanist theology has always been implicit in the Christian religion, just as is universalism. The present need is to make it more explicit, and to draw the necessary conclusions.

Humanism derives its strength, wittingly or unwittingly, from what Aldous Huxley has called 'the Perennial Philosophy'—what may, perhaps, be described as 'the Natural Theology of the Saints'. All the great world religions and the mystical experiences of every race and age rely for their appeal and efficacy upon their ability to place man in a living relationship (in Huxley's words) to 'the one, divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and minds'.

Mysticism can, and often does, lead to universalism, which in turn recognises in all positive religious traditions a similar process, Philosophically regarded, Christianity and other religions are seen to be closely related, and stress is laid upon the timeless and universal element which Christianity contains.

The chief feature of Christian mysticism is the sense of the unity of all things, and the leading idea of Protestant mysticism (as we have seen in Lecture IV) is that God dwells within man as Life and Light. The Greek Fathers and the German mystics, the early and later Platonic writers, the religious humanists of our own day,

¹⁴ J. Martineau, *Essays*, II, xi, xii.

like Teilhard de Chardin, Berdyaev, and Franks, are all in agreement on this point.

Humanism in our Western World also draws inspiration from what one may call 'Essential Christianity', from the life and teaching of the Man of Nazareth, and from the central Christian tradition that regards the whole of life as the arena in which the Divine Spirit is at work. The true religious humanism for which the world is waiting claims that God may be experienced here and now, in this life, in man and his concerns, in time as well as eternity. It deplores what Edward Caird once called 'that false way of thinking of God as purely a transcendent Being . . . who does not reveal Himself in ordinary man.' Caird's religious philosophy¹⁵ (as already indicated in my second lecture) points in the direction which theology must take today, if it is to overcome the prejudice which modern man seems to have inherited against religion; if it is to tide us over the revulsion which the 20th century scientific spirit naturally feels when faced with neo-Calvinist dogmatism and ideas of a divine 'irruption' into this world, considered as fallen and corrupt.

Caird was at pains to remove the barrier between the divine and the human, and yet to maintain what he called 'the transcendence of mysticism and the immanence of pantheism'. He considered the greatest theme of contemporary philosophy to be 'the problem of the relation of the human to the divine, of the spirits of men to the Absolute Being.' 'God is manifested in man [he wrote] under the ordinary conditions of human life, whenever man gives himself to God. The power that builds and holds the universe together is shown in a higher form than in any creative act in every man that lives not for himself, but as an organ and minister of

¹⁵ See *supra*, p. 66. Edward Caird (1835-1908), master of Balliol College and philosopher, author of *The Evolution of Religion* (1893) and *The Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers* (1904).

divine love to man.¹⁶ The Christian humanist position has rarely been better expressed. In other words, if the finite spirit lives and moves and has its being in the Infinite, it is no less true that the Infinite Spirit lives and moves and has its being in the finite. Man is no less necessary to God than God to man.

What, it may then be asked, is the place of Jesus in this Christian-humanist scheme, which stands so affirmatively for the experience of God in everyday life? Briefly, it is summed up in the central idea of his teaching that man is 'a child of God', that he is capable of reflecting and even incarnating the divine love. His own humanity and compassion convinced him of this fact. His concern for 'all sorts and conditions of men' and women, so powerfully illustrated in the pages of the Gospels, indicates an essentially humanist understanding of life.

Jesus believed in the infinite possibilities latent in human personality. He was not simply a moral reformer, an ethical teacher—though he was certainly in the line of the Hebrew prophets and moralists in this respect. But he was also a man filled with a lively sense of God's presence. His self-consciousness was also a God-consciousness, epitomised in the utterance of the Jesus of St. John: 'I and my Father are one.' This it is that has inspired men to live in accordance with his faith and example, drawing strength and inspiration from the belief that God is Light and Love.

Thus the doctrine of the Incarnation, from this point of view, is significantly broadened and kept closely related to that of the Divine Immanence. God is seen in all men, though in some to a higher degree than in others. Christ's revelation of God is no longer isolated, but regarded as part of the world's spiritual order and not as an exceptional incursion into history. The Divine Word is still being spoken to our day and generation.

¹⁶ H. Jones and J. H. Muirhead, *The Life and Philosophy of Edward Caird* (1921), p. 256. Cf. Kenneth Kaunda's words on p. 165.

It has been said that 'there can be no true doctrine of God that is not based on a true doctrine of man.'¹⁷ The task of Christian humanism today is to enunciate a true theory of man and to put it into everyday practice.

An atheistic humanism, a deification of man either on the lines of the Nietzschean deification of the individual or the Marxist deification of the Collective can only lead to human misery and frustration. By a cruel paradox, the loss of any sense of the transcendent, spiritual basis of human existence and the focussing of attention on man alone, turning him, as it were, into a 'man-god', inevitably ensures that personality will wither and humanity becomes less than human. Non-religious humanism and titanism have found expression in modern times in various parts of the world, notably in Nazi Germany and in the communist states. And where has there been greater need to defend men against their own inhumanity? Martin Neimöller has said that in the communist-controlled countries the supreme task for the Christian is simply to remain human. It would seem, therefore, as though faith in man, without faith in the reality of God as eternal source and ground of life and love, can only lead to a fundamental self-contradiction, to an existential 'anguish' that knows no end...

It is my belief that the kind of humanism that is apt to deify man and to suggest that he is in control of time and space, that now he has 'grown up' and is able to dispense with religion because he possesses and can utilise the techniques of science to change his environment, is riding for a fall! This notion is common enough amongst those who are always insisting that we should 'move with the times'—without being too clear as to the precise direction in which the times are moving! It has been well described as 'the most dangerous half-truth now current among scientists and technicians and those

¹⁷ A. Seth Pringle Pattison, *The Idea of God*, p. 254.

who blindly follow them'.¹⁸ We may emphasise the importance of human personality and say that our scientific tools and conquests are all intended to enhance the status and well-being of man; but unless this is accompanied by a powerful affirmation of man's spiritual nature and needs, we are courting disaster.

'Humanism in itself', said John Wren-Lewis, one of our leading philosophical scientists, in a lecture to the International Association for Religious Freedom in 1966, 'is not a dynamic for living.' Though this may be true, nevertheless unless we take human personality seriously as the most significant fact in the universe today, and regard man as surrogate for God, the creative power moving in and through us, we shall not make much headway in solving the pressing problems of our day. We shall not feel, or discharge, our responsibilities. Increasingly, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for those who live in a technological society, in which the scientific method reigns supreme, to entertain the traditional religious attitudes. 'Our task', therefore, continues Wren-Lewis, 'must be to find a vision of the good which will inspire men to tackle the problems and overcome the dangers [of our time], but yet is not rooted in the traditional outlook.' Such a vision is bound to be, in a sense, humanist, but—and this is very important—it may remain Christian, first because it is 'a proclamation of a God, an ultimate value and power, 'in here', at the heart of ordinary experience', which is what Jesus wished, I think, to demonstrate in his 'parables of the Kingdom', the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, the Seed growing secretly. And secondly, because this God is not just omnipotence after the fashion of the old mythical deities, Greek Zeus or even Hebrew Jehovah, but Love, the Love immortal, which Christianity at its best has always preached and nowhere more persuasively than in St. Paul's great Hymn to Love, in I *Corinthians* 13. The

¹⁸ W. H. Thorpe, *Quakers and Humanists* (1968)—see especially chap. III.

Christian humanist believes that the power of man acting in the service of love is stronger than anything else in the universe: 'Love, Thou art absolute, sole Lord of life and death.'¹⁹

Thomas Masaryk, first President of the Czechoslovak Republic, may count as a leading representative, in the 20th century, of Christian humanism, and one who enshrined its working-philosophy in institutions. 'Humanism', he declared, 'in the best sense of all is the love of man.' Not surprisingly, he saw to it that words were translated into deeds, and one of the earliest creations of the Czech Ministry of Social Welfare and the first of its kind in Europe was the Masaryk Home for old people just outside Prague, built in the 1920s, a fine block of specially planned residences for the aged. 'The human ideal is Jesus, not Caesar', wrote the philosopher-statesman. 'I say it is our task to make realities of the religion and ethic of Jesus, of his pure and immaculate religion of humanity.'

The same ideal gripped Victor Gollancz, the rationalist London publisher and founder of the Left Book Club. Born a Jew, Gollancz became a Christian mystic. Despite the unutterable cruelties perpetrated during the Nazi domination of Europe, despite the untold sufferings of his fellow religionists, Gollancz in 1945 founded the 'Save Europe Now' campaign. This was designed to relieve starvation in Germany, and became responsible for the sending of thousands of food parcels from England. Later, Gollancz turned his attention to the Near East and strove to effect a reconciliation between Jew and Arab. He also campaigned for the abolition of capital punishment, and helped to found 'War on Want', a relief agency which has a remarkable record for services to tens of thousands of sufferers the world over. For him, religion was fundamental to life, but it had to be a humanistic, a fully humane, imaginative

¹⁹ Richard Crashaw, *A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the admirable Sainte Teresa*.

religion, outgoing and open to the truths of experience and the sometimes harsh facts of life.

So too, humanism with its affirmation of the supreme importance of man must also be humble and ready to recognise that man has 'not got all the answers'; that there are many things we do not know and probably never will, and that though progress is always possible, man is fallible, he makes mistakes, and some of these can be very costly! Moreover, we have to confess that being human lays us open to suffering and tragedy. In all humility, we must come to terms with our mortality and not assume the prerogatives of God, by trying to take the laws of the universe into our own hands.

The radical fault of anthropocentric humanism, one feels, is not its humanism, but its anthropocentric fixation. And the radical fault of traditional Christianity is that it tends to limit the divine activity to a comparatively small area of time and place, whereas revelation (if you wish to call it such) arises rather from a substantial continuum of spiritual energy underlying human life and history.

Christian humanism, on the other hand, takes in the whole human drama. It lets the world's needs determine its course. It is radical, positive, creative—identifying itself with the sorrows and suffering of humanity, humble but hopeful. It has an open mind on many questions that assail and puzzle contemporary man, but it accepts that man is able to link himself with the forces that make for truth and justice, goodness and mercy; it does not despair of the future, though it is by no means cocksure, and frankly admits that man will have his work cut out to subdue social and international chaos!

Christian humanism pleads for, and works for, a truly, not merely decorative, Christian society. It believes in the abolition of all that is derogatory to man and unworthy of faith in his destiny; it demands human rights and acknowledges human obligations. Abandoning the absurd claims of dogma and metaphysical systems, it

bases its hopes for the future upon the conscience and spirit of man touched to fine issues by an Inner Light that is the reflection of a 'Light that never was on sea or land'.

What, we may ask in conclusion, must be the direction in which such a religious humanism must tend, when acting within and upon society? What, in the present environment, do we need and dare we hope?

It has not been possible to discuss the wider aspects of religious humanism in these lectures, because they have been primarily concerned with tracing the main features and development of a particular stream of religious tradition, which has emerged and continued as a reaction against a theology which appeared to denigrate man.

It would be interesting, of course, to extend our consideration of this, in greater detail, to the social and international spheres. Clearly, a new, constructive philosophy of life must impress and inspire every man living today, wherever he may be. Our contemporary world is virtually one, even though politicians have not yet caught up with the tremendous changes taking place in science and technology; and even though most of us are living blissfully ignorant of the rate of change that is transforming our world in every respect, save that of our personal and moral conduct. Yet the spread of a dynamic religious humanism must obviously be epoch-making, and full of tremendous possibilities for mankind. Here I can only suggest possibilities, and I am content to leave the last word with the Oxford historian, John Bowles, now Professor at the College of Europe in Bruges.

Bowles concludes his major work, *Politics and Opinion in the 19th Century*,²⁰ by arguing that it is vitally necessary to transcend the ideological, national, and class conflicts of our day 'in a common will for life.'

'This course is plainly indicated by the present world-

²⁰ Op. cit. (1954, 1963), p. 481.

situation. Before the tremendous power of modern weapons of mass-destruction, it demands the creation . . . of a supra-national commonwealth, implementing a rule of World Law. Its objectives the guidance of policy by compassion, according to biologically sound patterns of mutual aid rather than conflict, and the maintenance of the creative minorities on which all knowledge and civilisation depend. . . .

'The new humanism is world-wide, transcending all frontiers. Its exponents are world-citizens. . . . It is concerned with the whole planet; with all the rich diversity of culture and language of the earth. . . . Today its background is predominantly Atlantic. Here it has its roots. Here, it may be, there can yet develop the spirit of a World Society, of which the technical expressions are the jet aircraft, supersonic speed and instantaneous radio and television. Over this society there looms a hideous threat: the mushroom cloud which follows the flash of the nuclear bomb. But before it lies, also, the promise of the ordered cities, the far-flung territories, of a World Commonwealth of all Mankind and of the enrichment of life they may express.'

The humanist and the Christian are essentially one in holding this view. It is neither necessary nor sensible that the rift between them should widen. It may, and must, be closed, by mutual recognition that religion and humanism have the same personal, social and international ends in view.

Perhaps the realisation by both camps that there is a 'middle way' of long and honourable standing, which manages to fuse Christianity and humanism together in a vital and spiritual interpretation of life, may help to compose unnecessary strife and point to the ever-present danger of forgetting that man has a body and is a 'living soul'.

John McLachlan

Dr. McLachlan was educated at Willaston School, Nantwich, and at Manchester, Heidelberg and Oxford Universities. He was Hibbert Scholar and Graduate Research Scholar of Manchester University, 1932-3. For eight years he was Tutor and Librarian at Manchester College, Oxford, then minister of the historic First Presbyterian Church, Belfast (1952-67), before returning to England, where he is now Minister of the Memorial Church, Cambridge.

In Northern Ireland he was Regional Officer of the United Nations Association for three years, and Chairman of both the Belfast branch of the U.N.A. and the Northern Ireland Group of Amnesty International. He has travelled widely in Europe, America and India, been engaged in refugee relief in Czechoslovakia and Austria, and written and spoken on international affairs over a number of years. His hobbies are photography and mountaineering. He has two sons and a daughter, all married.