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RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE



CLEMENT CHARLES JULIAN WEBB

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RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

A PUBLIC LECTURE DELIVERED IN THE
HALL OF ORIEL COLLEGE ON FRIDAY

19 MAY 1944, BY

C. C. J. WEBB

M.A., D.LITT., HON. LL.D. (ST. ANDREWS), HON. D.THEOL.
(UPSALA), HON. D.D. (GLASGOW); SOMETIME ORIEL PROFESSOR
OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

WITH A FOREWORD BY L. W. GRENSTED, D.D.
HIS SUCCESSOR IN THAT CHAIR

PRINTED, TOGETHER WITH A BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF HIS PUBLISHED WRITINGS, AND PRESENTED
TO HIM BY SOME OF HIS FRIENDS AND
PUPILS ON THE OCCASION OF HIS
EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY

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FOREWORD

THIS little volume is a war-time substitute for the *Festschrift* with which we should have desired, in easier days, to welcome the eightieth birthday, 25 June 1945, of our friend and teacher, Clement Charles Julian Webb. Instead of a series of essays by some of the eminent philosophers of the day we are giving him of his own, taking this occasion to publish the latest of his Oxford lectures, adding thereto a bibliographical record of his published writings, and doing ourselves the honour of inscribing our names in the volume so produced.

But there is, in fact, a special appropriateness in the use for this purpose of the lecture upon Religious Experience which is here printed. It is not often that a professor can invite his predecessor to lecture fourteen years after his resignation from the chair upon reaching the age-limit of sixty-five. Such was my good fortune. I had begun to feel that Oxford was in danger of forgetting what she owes to the philosophers of forty years ago, and that there were things which that generation might well say to this, things which would both deserve and gain a hearing if said by the right man. I appealed to Webb, and the result was this lecture, here printed exactly as it was delivered in the hall of Oriel College on 19 May 1944. For its message the lecture may speak for itself, but even apart from its message it was a remarkable occasion. Webb spoke to a large audience for almost a full hour, with a vigour and clarity which would have been admirable in a man of half his years, and the fact that even in war-time the hall was filled is a testimony to the interest with which his lecture was received. I myself found it hard to remember that there was a gap of thirty-seven years since, turning from mathematics to Greats, I went to his lectures and owed to him a substantial part of my introduction to philosophy. The manner, the voice, the long sentences which fell into an orderly pattern as he enunciated them, and which always came out right in the end, all were there, and there was added the easy mastery of one who had earned the

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right to speak to us by nearly sixty years of hard and sincere thinking. Some of the things he said to us sounded straightforward and simple enough, as he said them. But even a simple thing becomes a thing of price when it has had so long and so rigorous a testing. And there are some simple truths which the Oxford of to-day is in danger of forgetting.

But there is another reason why this particular lecture on this particular subject is peculiarly fitting as in some degree summing up Webb's long years of service to scholarship and to Oxford. He has himself put on record¹ the spiritual crisis through which he passed in his first year as an undergraduate at Christ Church, a religious experience which profoundly affected his whole approach to philosophy a year or two later. 'It found me', he says, 'sceptical after a youthful fashion, yet with a no less boyish pose of contempt for such heterodoxy as I found current among my contemporaries and a boyish pride in my knowingness about things religious; it left me with a profound conviction of the reality of God and of the duty of open-mindedness and intellectual honesty; a belief that it was the first of religious duties to keep one's ears open to any voice, from whatever quarter, which might convey a message from God; a delightful sense of expectation of strange and wonderful things, though it might be stern and severe things, that any such voice might have to tell me.' It can, I think, be truly said that those sentences contain the explanation of the manner in which the wide range of Webb's interests and learning came to be unified in the service of the philosophy of religion, and therewith of the debt which, throughout almost the whole of his long life, the Church has owed to him. That in his old and vigorous age he should speak to us of Religious Experience is appropriate indeed.

But though this undergraduate awakening goes far to explain the freshness and vigour of interest which Webb brought to the study of the philosophy of religion, the setting of his life as a boy had much to do with the direction which that interest took. His father, the Rev. Benjamin Webb, was a London clergyman of some prominence, a Tractarian of the Cambridge variety, a friend of J. M. Neale, and a

¹ *Contemporary British Philosophy, Personal Statements* (Second Series), p. 336.

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leader in what has been called, rather obscurely, the ecclesiological revival of the first decade of the Oxford Movement. His mother, Maria Elphinstone Mill, was daughter of the Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge. Thus the whole setting of Webb's early days was among the most vigorous influences at work within the Church of England. It is natural enough that many years later he should have become one of the most clear-sighted commentators upon the Oxford Movement and its results. But this was to be as an Oxford man. The Cambridge influences upon his boyhood passed when he went up to Christ Church with a scholarship from Westminster School. From that time Oxford claimed and held him as her own, and it was within the Oxford tradition of the School of Literae Humaniores that his own characteristic contribution to philosophy was forged.

This is perhaps the proper place to add that this ecclesiastical setting of Webb's home life was renewed when, in 1905, he married Eleanor Theodora Joseph, daughter of Canon Alexander Joseph, of Rochester, and, incidentally, so became the brother-in-law of his pupil, H. W. B. Joseph, of New College, one of the most rigorous and critical philosophers of his generation. There are many among those whose names are appended to this volume who would wish to bear tribute to Mrs. Webb as friend, as hostess, as a contributor of no mean ability to a group which met in Oxford for many years to discuss current theological problems, and as supplementing Webb's wide intellectual interests with a practical ability of the highest order, both in private and public affairs. When, in his later Oxford days, Webb made himself a home at Old Marston, he became, with Mrs. Webb, a corner-stone of the life of the parish, and his influence there as churchwarden, and hers with him, are still very gratefully remembered.

For the first major allegiance of Webb's life we must return to his boyhood. As a member of Westminster School he found himself a living part of a long and rich historical tradition, of which his surroundings spoke even more eloquently than books. Here, as later on at Christ Church, Magdalen, and Oriel, he found a sense of something stable,

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not only amid the flux of the historical process, but also amid that more terrible awareness of flux and insecurity which so easily besets the mind which has a drawing towards the wide spaces of metaphysical reflection, and which finds itself involved in the formless tension between time and eternity. Webb has more than once noted, as a loose end in his philosophy, the difficulty and even distaste which this tension has always had for him.¹ Few philosophers of his eminence have had so little to contribute, positive or negative, to the discussion of the problem of immortality. At Westminster history, made tangible in the ancient buildings and customs of school and abbey, gave a secure foothold and made a claim upon his loyalty which never failed. Friendships, too, made in Westminster days, have been close and enduring, and one of them, that with C. J. Shebbeare, to whom Webb dedicated the second series of his Gifford Lectures, he has described as 'the personal influence whose effect upon my intellectual and religious life has been more continuous and powerful than that of any other'.² As I myself sat with Webb and Shebbeare together throughout the sessions of the Doctrinal Commission, over a period of thirteen years, I can fully understand the warmth of this acknowledgement.

The debt which Webb owed to Westminster School was not all one-sided. An old Westminster, Clement F. Rogers, has told me of the immense influence which Webb exercised upon the life of the school when he became head boy, an influence all the more remarkable in that he was wholly devoid, then and thereafter, of prowess in games. In 1905 Webb became a governor of the school, and for forty years has remained in the closest contact with its destinies, not least as Chairman of the Busby Trustees.

At Christ Church Webb came fully under the influence of the Oxford philosophy of his day, mainly idealist, and strongly coloured by the close study of Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Ethics*, and by T. H. Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics*. His teachers at Christ Church were J. A. Stewart and, later, Cook Wilson, whose philosophy at that date was still in line with the current idealism. He has himself said³

¹ *Contemporary British Philosophy*, pp. 356-7. ² *Ib.*, p. 340. ³ *Ib.*, p. 338.

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that it was not Green that stirred him most, but the English translation of Kant's *Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten*: 'The presentation herein of Morality as a "categorical imperative" made an extraordinary impression upon me, reviving and reinforcing the sentiments of my "conversion" of two years before, and leaving ineffaceable traces on all my subsequent thought.' I find it curious to reflect that just twenty years later I came under the influence of the same teachers, for I attended Stewart's lectures, and was for two years a member of the seminar conducted by Cook Wilson, by this time developing his philosophy in the direction of realism, and unforgettably brilliant and incisive in his logical analysis of the forms of common speech. And in my own case too it was Kant's *Grundlegung* which had a far-reaching effect upon my mental and moral outlook. But the influence of Cook Wilson has been for me, as for Webb before me and for so many others, the most profound of all, and I believe that that influence is still powerful in Oxford to-day, and that much of what is best in the logical positivism and the realism which is current among us can be traced to the progressive movement of his metaphysic and to the drastic logical analysis which he applied alike to conventional phrases and to the familiar turns of the ordinary language of everyday life.

In 1889 Webb became a Fellow and Tutor of Magdalen, a position which he held for thirty-three years, and from that point the record is one of the typical, quiet life of an Oxford tutor, devoted to his books and his pupils, and steadily developing the range of his own thought and intellectual interests. Of the regard in which his pupils held him there are many to testify, and I know that there must be more than a few who would have wished to join with us in making this presentation if I had known how to discover them. For that failure I must ask their pardon, and Webb's pardon also, but the difficulty of getting into touch with all those who might have added their names to our list was more than I could solve. The many letters from old pupils, in one or two cases pupils of fifty-five years ago, leave no doubt of Webb's influence as a teacher, a teacher who has often remained a lifelong friend.

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It is of some historical interest to record the names of those who gave its characteristic form to Oxford philosophical speculation during the thirty-one years of Webb's work as a Greats tutor at Magdalen. Perhaps this can be done best by a note upon the two societies which, between them, included almost all those who were actively interested in philosophy. The first, the Oxford Aristotelian Society, had a long history which came to a close with the beginning of the last war, in 1914. It met on Monday evenings in term, in the rooms of its president, I. Bywater, in Christ Church, and the list of members, as it has been given to me, included J. Burnet, E. Cannan, F. E. Corley, A. S. L. Farquharson, R. F. A. Hoernle, A. J. Jenkinson, H. H. Joachim, H. W. B. Joseph, H. A. Prichard, W. D. Ross, J. A. Smith, and J. L. Stocks. Most of these were also members of another anonymous and less formally constituted club, which has had a much longer history. For many years this had its centre in Cook Wilson, with H. H. Williams, the present Bishop of Carlisle, as secretary. The list of members, present and past, is much longer, some of the earlier, in addition to those already mentioned as members of the Aristotelian Society, being E. F. Carritt, A. D. Lindsay, Hastings Rashdall, and F. J. Wylie. There can be few places in the world where philosophical studies have been carried on in such a setting and with such a wealth of contributors.

Webb himself has always had his own characteristic position in the wide field of Oxford philosophy. Competent and more than competent over the whole range of philosophical subjects required for the school of *Literae Humaniores*, he was not specially interested in logical analysis, and still less in the mathematical digressions which accompanied Cook Wilson's tentative progress towards realism. Nor did he take an outstanding part in the long debate upon ethical principles to which some of Oxford's ablest philosophers have devoted much of their attention. From an early date his bent for the borderland between philosophy and religion began to show itself. It is a significant fact enough that he should have begun his career as a reviewer with a review of *Lux Mundi*, and though he has reviewed many books in

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different departments of pure philosophy he has always been in special demand for reviews of books upon subjects connected with the movement of religious thought. In a very few years he had begun to find a place peculiarly his own among English thinkers, interpreting the facts of religious experience, both in its individual expression and as embodied in the age-long development of the doctrines of the Church, in the light of a metaphysic based upon the Platonic tradition and upon the radical criticism of the transformation of that tradition by Descartes. This is perhaps the place to remark that as a reviewer Webb has had few equals, both in his conscientious appreciation of the matter of the books he has reviewed and in the manner in which he has used the occasion of the writing of a review to make his own personal contribution to the subject under discussion. His great friend, P. V. M. Benecke, when I showed him my first notes of the bibliography included in this volume, remarked that he never read a review by Webb without finding some fresh point of view or new enlightenment upon the matter with which it was concerned.

Thus it came about not unnaturally that Webb came to play something of the role of an adviser to the Church of England in the more philosophical aspects of doctrine. He was not, with such Oxford friends as H. H. Williams, H. Rashdall, and, later on, William Temple, led to take Holy Orders, but none the less he has played a large part in broadening and stabilizing the theology of our time, especially in the field indicated by the title of his earliest important book, *Problems in the Relations of God and Man*. This, first published in 1911, was followed eight years later by his Gifford Lectures, the first series being entitled *God and Personality* and the second *Divine Personality and Human Life*. These two volumes, of which the subject-matter might equally well be termed doctrinal or metaphysical, are by general consent accepted as among the most important theological discussions of recent years, greatly clarifying the traditional account of God as Personal.

One of his most important contributions upon this side was through his membership of the Archbishops' Commission

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on Doctrine in the Church of England, a body which met annually, and sometimes more than once in the year, for several days at a time, and which spent fourteen years in detailed discussion before issuing its Report in 1938. In these debates Webb took a full and characteristic part, and it was there that for the first time I myself came to know him at all well. His great critical power, coupled with his desire to do justice to all our varied points of view, made him an invaluable member of our counsels. Yet my main memory of him during those crowded and busy sessions is less of his learning and his clear-sighted comments than of the friendliness and simplicity of character which never made his junior and less learned colleagues feel for one moment ill at ease.

The other side of his thought which was developed during these years sprang from his interest in history, and especially in the history of ideas. Historical studies were for him rather a hobby than a part of his main taste in life. But a hobby which could and did produce his magnificent edition of the works of John of Salisbury, by far the most considerable published work of his literary career, is something to be taken seriously, and in point of fact Webb can claim a place among the distinguished medievalists of our time. He shows, indeed, a most unusual combination of the metaphysician and the historian, and it is perhaps the balance between the two which gives his philosophical writing so pre-eminently the character of sanity. To his surprising knowledge of out of the way fragments of history a long series of reviews and notes in the *English Historical Review* bear witness. The influence upon him of the great tradition of Westminster has indeed come to its own.

The events of his Magdalen life were those more or less normally incidental to the life of a College tutor. He took an active, or rather a vocal, part in the academic debates of his day upon such questions as the continuance of Greek in Responsions. In 1905 he became Senior Proctor, and of his year of office nothing perhaps needs mention except his final *Oratio Procuratoria*. That was also the year of his marriage, and for all the importance of University discipline the making

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of a home is, in the end, a more important matter still. He and Mrs. Webb achieved that task with a success to which his friends can testify. It was, I think, in 1907 that I attended his lectures, and I note that that is the one year over a very long period for which the Bibliography shows no record of any published work. In 1911 he became for three years the Wilde Lecturer on Natural and Comparative Religion, an unsatisfactory lecturership upon a very obscure and unsatisfactory subject, which nevertheless brought him to some extent out of the field of ordinary Greats teaching, and which prepared the way for his election as Gifford Lecturer. The two series of Gifford Lectures, delivered at Aberdeen in 1918-19, at once gave him his place in the front rank as a student of the Philosophy of Religion, a subject upon which he had already lectured for some years in the ordinary course of his teaching at Magdalen, and a year later came the one great break in his academic life with his election as first Oriel Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion.

This chair, founded by the generosity of Dr. C. F. Nolloth, was created with Webb's peculiar attainments and interests directly in view. It was made open to laymen, provided that they were communicant members of the Church of England, and differed therein from the Ireland chair, upon which there is no denominational restriction. These are the only two theological chairs open to laymen, the others having canonries attached to them. The chair was assigned to Theology and not to *Literae Humaniores*, as was indeed inevitable in view of its title and of the ecclesiastical requirements laid down with regard to its holder. The effect of this separation from the Greats tradition and environment was unimportant in Webb's case, since his footing among Oxford philosophers was unquestioned. It may be more serious for those who follow him. Nor indeed has Webb, with his own high attainment in this subject, left an easy task to those who will have the duty of electing his successors, especially as the very small attention which can be paid to the Philosophy of Religion by candidates for the Honours School of Theology (attention ludicrously disproportionate to that given to philosophy by those reading Greats, though the subjects are of

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equal dignity and difficulty, if not of equal range) makes it wellnigh impossible that scholars worthy of the chair can find their initial training within the Theology school itself. My own interest in psychology has, indeed, carried the problem one stage farther still. But whatever happens to the tradition of the professorship it will always be in debt not only to its pious founder, but to its inception under Webb's auspices.

The chair is attached to Oriel College, and was named accordingly, though the name has now been changed to form a permanent commemoration of its founder, Dr. Nolloth. In consequence Webb's allegiance was transferred to Oriel and there it has remained until the present day, since upon his retirement from the chair in 1930 he was made an honorary fellow of the college, an honour which was also conferred upon him by Magdalen in 1938. It would now be hard to think of Oriel without him.

In 1930 he reached the age-limit of sixty-five and retired. But his conception of retirement was more like a release of youthful energy than the quietude of old age to which most of us look forward. The following years were filled with travelling and lecturing, and with a considerable literary output. That output has not ceased, and is, we hope, by no means complete. In the winter of 1930 he went to India, delivering the Stephanos Nirmalendu Ghosh lectures in Calcutta. In 1932 he went to Sweden, as the Olaus Petri lecturer at Upsala, where he was given the honorary degree of D.Theol. This was not his first honorary degree, as St. Andrews had given him its LL.D. in 1921, after the publication of his Gifford Lectures. Later on, in 1938, Glasgow gave him an honorary D.D. Further courses of lectures were the Forwood lectures in Philosophy of Religion, given in Liverpool in 1933, and the Lewis Fry lectures at Bristol in 1934. Since that date he has consented to a quieter life, though his literary activity has continued, and so has his usefulness to the Board of the Faculty of Theology as an examiner for the research degrees.

The story has been told baldly enough. Those whose names are appended to this volume could each of them fill in that story at many points, and their personal recollections

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would fill not a foreword but a full and picturesque biography. It is with those recollections in mind that we have tried in this manner to express our debt and our gratitude to a fine scholar and to a good friend.

In writing this Foreword I have made no attempt to give any account even in outline of Webb's own philosophical position. He has himself done so, very briefly, in his contribution to *Contemporary British Philosophy, Second Series*,¹ from which I have already quoted more than once. Still less have I ventured into the field of criticism, or even of scholarly appreciation. All that I have tried to do is to furnish some sort of background, which may help those who read Webb's lecture or who may come to use the bibliography of his writings.

I am rather proud of the bibliography, not so much because I believe it to be complete, or very nearly so, but because, thanks to Webb's own amazing memory and to the immense number of cuttings which he has kept, I have been able to trace quite a considerable number of unsigned reviews and letters, to the authorship of which in a few years there would have been no clue at all. And we all hope that there will yet be many additions to it for 1945 and after.

One other detail, over which I hesitated a little before coming to a decision, may be mentioned here. This volume has been almost twelve months on its way since the first plans for it were made. Inevitably there have in that time been some gaps in the ranks of Webb's friends, and one or two names of those who have passed away have been left in the list. To leave them there seemed more natural by far than to remove them. Two of these ought to be mentioned here, William Temple, to whom we owed so much and hoped to owe so much more as Archbishop of Canterbury, whose sudden death anticipated by only a few hours a letter which I was about to send asking him to be the writer of this Foreword, and P. V. M. Benecke, without whose aid I should have had the greatest difficulty in getting into touch with many of Webb's older friends, and who, as a colleague and friend of Webb throughout almost the whole of his Oxford

¹ pp. 336-59.

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career, could have filled in the detail of his life and work with a far surer touch than mine.

And so the task of expressing our appreciation and our debt has fallen to me, Webb's successor in the chair which he was the first to adorn, and thereby, perhaps, marked out for the task. At least I know that Webb himself will not fail to read, mostly, it may be, between the lines, the gratitude both for philosophical enlightenment and for unstinted friendship with which these words are written.

L. W. GRENSTED

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

*A Public Lecture delivered in the Hall of Oriel College, Oxford
Friday, 19 May 1944*

IT is twenty-four years—nearly a quarter of a century—since I stood in this Hall as the nominee of that munificent benefactor of his College and University, that holy and humble man of heart, Charles Frederick Nolloth, to inaugurate the Professorship of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion which his liberality had established and associated with the ancient Foundation under whose auspices he had himself received his academic education. Invited by my successor in the Chair to address you to-day in the same place, I have chosen, as the subject of my Lecture, *Religious Experience*. I have chosen it because I have lately observed that this expression, *Religious Experience*, which was much in use among scholars at the date of my Inaugural Lecture, has fallen into disrepute with some of those who are interested in the studies which the Nolloth Professorship exists to promote.

If we inquire for the reasons of this distaste for the expression in question, we shall, I think, find that it is connected with a change of mood which has passed over Christian theology here and elsewhere since this Professorship was first established.

Changes of mood are, from the very nature of the case, more easily indicated or suggested than exactly defined. But I think I may say, without going far astray, that, whereas in the earlier years of the present century those concerned with interpreting to the educated public the message of Christianity were principally interested in exhibiting its harmony with the general development of the human spirit and maintaining its claim to be the supreme expression of those immanent ideals by which our race has been guided in its age-long and world-wide struggle upward from a merely animal to a spiritual mode of existence, there has occurred within the last twenty years a marked shifting of emphasis towards the

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unique witness borne by the Christian Church, alone among religious fellowships, to the historically attested impact upon humanity of a transcendent Reality, condemning, converting, empowering that which, without its intervention, was ready to perish. It is scarcely necessary to point out that the experiences of the first World War and of the uneasy period which succeeded it, and which we now recognize to have been entitled to be called a period of peace only in a technical sense, has had much to do with bringing about the change which I have been endeavouring to describe. It is perhaps more important to point out that defenders of the Christian tradition in the generation which had reached maturity, and even in that which was already old, at the outbreak of the last war by no means denied or neglected the importance of truths upon which their successors in the present day more urgently insist, although no doubt their attention was less exclusively directed upon them.

Twenty-five years ago the teachers of philosophy in this University were for the most part—and the same might be said of many of the teachers of theology also—men trained under the influence of a school of thought which may perhaps be conveniently described as that of the British Idealists. The way of thinking characteristic of those whom I have in mind had by the end of the nineteenth century obtained in Oxford, and not in Oxford alone, a decided ascendancy over that which had been long and widely regarded as our national philosophy, the empiricism, namely, whose latest achievements were the Logic of John Stuart Mill and the Synthetic Philosophy of Herbert Spencer. One of the most effective weapons employed by the British Idealists (so to call them) in their warfare against this empiricism, which they had found in predominant possession of the philosophical field, was their demonstration—as I think it may fairly be called—that it left no place for Religion, except as something standing altogether apart from Philosophy, appealing to the authority of a supernatural revelation, and resting on grounds inaccessible to philosophical criticism; while with such a religion it did not (to say the least) dispose its adherents to sympathize. The tendency of the British Idealists, on the

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other hand, was to insist upon the claim of Religion not either to be left on one side or explained away as illusion or misunderstanding, but rather to be interpreted as a form of human experience at least as significant as the moral, the aesthetic, or the scientific. At the same time this very insistence of theirs upon the significance of Religion implied a claim on the part of Philosophy to deal no less freely with the religious than with any other form of experience, and to deny the right of any authority, whether ecclesiastical or biblical (in those days one hardly thought of such pretensions on the part of the State!), to interfere with and restrain a liberty which must be regarded as inseparable from the very nature of Philosophy.

I think it is true to say that in the phraseology of the British Idealists in the earlier stages of their criticism of the empirical philosophy which they set out to challenge, the word *experience* was most often associated with the notion of *sense-experience*, and distinguished as a source of knowledge from what, after Kant, were described as *a priori* principles of synthesis, apart from which 'experience' could yield nothing but transient and unconnected feelings, incapable by themselves of providing for the very sciences whose progress was popularly believed to be bound up with the cause of the empirical philosophy those permanent objects, subject to laws of uniform behaviour, the investigation of which was their peculiar concern. I can myself recollect noticing, when Bradley's famous book *Appearance and Reality* came out in 1895, that the author used 'experience' in a less restricted sense than had been usual with earlier exponents of the idealistic philosophy which was also in essence his, so that he could say 'All is Experience', a statement which struck me as having an unfamiliar sound in the mouth of an 'idealist'. It is, of course, in this wider, though perfectly legitimate, sense that the word is to be taken in the phrase 'religious experience'.¹

This expression seems, as I have already said, to have fallen of late into disfavour in certain quarters. The offence

¹ On 'religious experience' as a collection of (uninterpreted) facts see J. Caird's *Introd. to the Phil. of Religion*, pp. 310 ff.

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which it gives is, if I rightly understand the matter, twofold: both the substantive *experience* and the adjective *religious* suggest to its critics implications which appear to them to conflict with strongly held convictions of their own. The substantive *experience* is thought to place the essence of religion rather in an activity of the human mind than in an act of self-revelation on the part of God; while the adjective *religious* may be taken to hint that what is of primary importance in religion is rather something common to the many modes in which men have 'sought God, if haply they might feel after him and find him'¹ than in the authentic discovery made, not by man of God, but by God of himself to man. My own opinion is that these objections to the expression *religious experience* are to a large extent due to misunderstanding of what was in the minds of those—or, at least, of many of those—who were accustomed to employ it without scruple; yet, at the same time, I can recognize that they would not have been brought against its use, had not those who brought them missed in the outlook of certain among the speakers or writers who favoured the expression something which was really lacking therein.

I will take the two objections separately; and that in the first place which is brought against the word *experience* on the ground of the implied suggestion that the important thing in religion is an activity of the human rather than of the Divine Spirit. Now, no doubt, in using the word *experience*, we are taking the point of view of the *subject* of the experience, the *experiencer*, rather than that of the *object*, the thing (or the person) *experienced*. But, since it is unquestionably, in this instance, *we* that are the *subjects*, this is the most natural point of view for *us* to start from; and, so far from its adoption implying that we are the principal or even the sole party concerned, it rather suggests the independent reality of the object experienced. Thus, when the late Mr. Warde Fowler gave to his Gifford Lectures on the religion of the ancient Romans the title *The Religious Experience of the Roman People*, I think his readers understood, and were intended to understand thereby that he did not regard

¹ Acts xvii. 27.

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that religion as mere fiction or illusion, but as a genuine contact with a divine reality. No doubt a mere feeling, referred to no cause beyond ourselves, may in certain cases be spoken of as 'an experience'; yet we more naturally speak of 'experiencing' or 'having an experience of' something other than ourselves, which impinges, so to put it, upon our consciousness; nay, even when we *do* refer a feeling which we have to no particular cause external to ourselves and yet call it 'an experience', by so calling it we distinguish it from ourselves and describe it as *happening* to us, as something in respect of which *we* are rather passive than active. Moreover, although that which, in what we thus call 'an experience of this or that', impinges upon our consciousness, may be an inanimate object which we regard as taking no conscious or, in any sense, active part in the process described as 'experiencing it', yet it *may* also be a *person* who consciously and deliberately initiates the process and thereby (as we say) *reveals* himself to us in the experience. That religion should be rightly described as an 'experience' of ours is thus in no way inconsistent with its being at the same time a 'revelation' of himself to us on the part of God. Indeed, to me it seems that it *would* be inconsistent with all our notions of what God is that it should *not* be such a revelation; for how could we conceive God to be known to us or even to be sought by us *without*, still more *against* his will?¹ Of a finite being we might conceive this, but not of God. Remember that great saying in Pascal: *Tu ne me chercherais pas si tu ne m'avais trouvé—tu ne me chercherais pas, si tu ne me possédais.*²

The other objection to the phrase *Religious Experience* which I mentioned seems to attach itself to the adjective *religious*. To the believer in a living God who reveals himself not merely in external nature or in the natural operations of our minds, but on particular historical occasions, through individual persons and events that may be dated, it may well be that talk of 'religious experience' may seem to obscure the individuality of the persons with whom the singularity of the events significant for his own religion is bound up, and

¹ Cp. my *Problems in the Relations of God and man*, pp. 25 ff.

² *Pensées*, ed. Brunschwig, § 555.

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to concentrate attention upon a class of emotions which may be, and often have been, excited in—and upon a kind of behaviour which may be, and often has been, practised by—others than those affected by that historical revelation in which alone he himself has heard the voice and felt the presence of the true, the genuine God—emotions and behaviour, moreover, which may be and sometimes are associated with feelings and conduct utterly repugnant to those which his own religion commands and prescribes.

Now I am prepared to admit that the philosophers whose influence was greatest in this University when those who, like myself, were teaching in Oxford in the first quarter of this century had received our philosophical education, tended to underestimate the extent to which the distinctive doctrines and the characteristic piety of the Christian religion—the religion in which, it is to be borne in mind, most or all of them had been bred, and in the teaching and practice of which they found their pattern of 'what Religion is' (the title, as some here may recall, of a deeply interesting little book by Bernard Bosanquet)—the extent, I say, to which those distinctive doctrines and that characteristic piety depend upon what is historical in Christianity and, as such, sets it apart from all other instances of that kind of system of actions, sentiments, and ideas, which, wherever we meet with it, we call by the general name of Religion.

In making this admission, however, I would not leave the impression that these British Idealists were, as a group of thinkers, unappreciative of the significance of history or wedded to a conception of reason which denied to it any concern with real concrete individuals and confined its operations to the sphere of abstract notions and general laws. The fact is, indeed, quite otherwise. Although some of them were often designated by others as Hegelian, most of them were, it is true, accustomed to disclaim that title for themselves; nevertheless, they were always ready to acknowledge that they had learned much from Hegel and regarded him as among the greatest of the world's thinkers. Now it was Hegel who had given to History (if I may so express it) a standing in Philosophy which for his predecessors, down to

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and including Kant, it had not possessed. And it was this same Hegel again whose philosophy was distinguished by a constant insistence upon the inferiority of that 'abstract understanding', as he called it, which, like the knights in the story who disputed whether the shield was gold or silver, was wont to confine its attention to one or other of a pair of opposites which a higher faculty, the 'speculative reason', could recognize to be mutually inseparable aspects of one concrete reality. In such pairs of opposites, which may be found throughout the whole range of being, from convexity and concavity in geometry up to order and freedom in politics, each opposite implies the other and can only exist in union with it. These lessons, taught by Hegel, were certainly not thrown away upon the men who in this country strove to appropriate and to exploit the achievements of the great German philosophers who had flourished at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless they are, I think, justly chargeable with an insufficient appreciation of the difficulty, not to say the impossibility, of detaching the spiritual essence of the Christian religion from a certain attitude towards its Founder, from a certain valuation of the historicity of his earthly life, death, and resurrection, which must always resist attempts to sublimate these into symbols of the presence of divinity in all humanity, and even attempts to see in them no more than the first-fruits in a certain individual man of that consciousness of such a presence which it is the purpose of religion to arouse in all men.

It is only in accord with the usual course of events in the world of ideas that such an underestimate on the part of the thinkers of whom I have been speaking should be, as it has been, succeeded by a reaction which fights shy of any language that might even suggest that the Christian is merely exemplifying under special historical conditions a common human experience. The representatives of this reaction prefer to regard the Christian rather as singled out from the mass of mankind to be made aware of a supernatural activity of merited judgement and unmerited grace directed towards humanity, this awareness being mediated through Bible or

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Church, and in either case through what the medieval schoolmen called *singularia*, unique and individual facts. Such a reaction inevitably brings along with it a tendency to disparage the power and restrict the range of the reason which is common to all men, just as the line of thought from which it is a reaction had leaned to emphasizing that power and extending that range even at the expense of minimizing the importance of what, as historical, can only be apprehended under conditions which appear to be distributed among men on principles irrelevant to their intellectual or moral development.

Ready to hand for those who follow the line of thought which I have described as a reaction from the British Idealists' inadequate appreciation of the historical element in Christianity lies the traditional antithesis of Natural Religion or Theology and Revealed Religion or Theology. One influential school of contemporary theologians doubts whether there can be a Natural Theology at all or even denies the possibility of such; while another, affirming the possibility, nay the necessity of a Natural as a *preamble* to a Revealed Theology, yet halts the natural reason on the threshold of a region, on passing into which it must henceforth forgo criticism and confine itself to exposition. While of an antithesis which has been so long and so widely recognized as that between 'natural' and 'revealed' religion or theology we may be sure that it represents some genuine difference the true nature of which we are bound to seek to discover, yet I believe the terms in which the contrast has commonly been described to be seriously misleading. We cannot, as I have already said, assert the possibility of a *knowledge* of God which is not in some sense *revealed*; for only through God's will and initiative can we conceive any knowledge of him to be attained; neither, on the other hand, can we with a good conscience allow an external authority to impose upon reason a limit of which reason cannot itself recognize the *reasonableness*. A study of the history of the antithesis between Natural and Revealed Religion will, I think, show that what is really intended by it is the distinction between the knowledge of God which is imparted through a common experience avail-

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able to all (for example, that of manifest design in nature) or through processes of reasoning native to the human mind (for example, that by which we infer a necessary ground of any change) and the knowledge of God which is historically mediated.¹ Under this phrase 'historically mediated' I would include the knowledge of God which comes through the channel of an individual's private or personal history (for instance, his perception of divine guidance in the circumstances of his life) as well as what, although now on record, is, or was originally, accessible only by means of social contact under conditions of time and place which vary from man to man. Even when thus stated, however, the distinction is not always easy to draw. It is quite possible to mistake familiarity with ideas deeply embedded in the tradition of the community in which we have been bred for a perception of their necessary and universal validity, and, on the other hand, to suppose that what are really principles of reason depend for their validity upon the authority of the persons or institutions by whom or by which our attention has first been called to them. Such errors indeed must be corrigible by reason; but in any particular case may not have been corrected.

The last twenty years have been in a remarkable degree a time of testing for our convictions in these matters. The deliberate abandonment by great civilized nations of moral standards which had come to be regarded by many of us as acquisitions of the human spirit no less assured than the fundamental axioms of scientific thinking has inevitably led to new doubts whether certain principles are in fact valid independently of the historical antecedents of their adoption, and whether the frontier between the historical and the *a priori* which was generally accepted fifty years ago may not stand in need of rectification. If at that date there was a tendency among philosophers not of the empirical school to regard the historical origin of ideas as comparatively unimportant or at least as irrelevant to the question of their validity, there is now a contrary tendency abroad to distrust any claim made for an inherent validity in ideas which would justify us in ignoring as irrelevant the process by which they

¹ Cp. *Problems in the Relations of God and Man*, pp. 53 ff.

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have attained currency. It is only necessary to advert here in passing to the influence exercised in bringing about this state of mind by the theory of relativity associated with the name of Einstein and its consequences in calling into question assumptions long made by all physicists and generally treated as unquestionable. In this situation we may now ask whether it is not possible to avoid surrendering ourselves to either of these contrasted tendencies and to attempt to safeguard the gains of the past in the way of securing the rights of reason while at the same time not declining the invitation to repair any mistakes into which the champions of those rights may have fallen in their consideration of certain parts of that religious experience which is our present concern./

I will now ask you to bear with a digression with which I should not have ventured to trouble you, had not the friend under whose auspices I am now speaking to you expressed a wish that I should say something in praise of those Oxford philosophers, my own teachers and my colleagues in the teaching of others, who may be reckoned among the British Idealists whom I have in this lecture more than once mentioned, and who were the champions of those rights of reason to the importance of securing and safeguarding which I have just adverted. The word 'Idealist' has more than one connotation, and I shall here take leave to use it in a sense more comprehensive than that in which it is most frequently employed in the classification of philosophers. The earlier in date of those about whom I am about to speak belonged to a generation older than my own. Such were Thomas Hill Green, who died while I was still a schoolboy, but whose posthumous book called *Prolegomena to Ethics* was among the most powerful influences in the School of Literae Humaniores when I was an undergraduate; Edward Caird, whom, after his return from Glasgow to Oxford as Master of Balliol, I sometimes met; William Wallace, whose lectures I might have heard when I was an undergraduate, but never did, not having been sent to them by my tutors, and with whom also I was brought into some slight contact in the earliest years of my own life as a tutor in philosophy; Francis Herbert Bradley, who was for many years a familiar figure in Oxford,

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but to whom I never spoke; and Bernard Bosanquet, who had ceased to reside in Oxford before I came up, but whom, towards the end of his life, I came to know. All these, although by no means all of one mind on metaphysical questions, could, I think, be properly described as Idealists in the usual epistemological sense; they held, that is to say, that the object of knowledge is *constructed* by the mind—not, of course, by the mind of the individual knower, yours or mine, but by the mind which thinks and knows in us, so far as we *think* aright and thereby come to *know*. But, when I come to those by whom I was myself taught, or by whose side I have taught others, learning from them as colleagues, the first I have to name is one who was himself a pupil of Green at Balliol and afterwards a Fellow of this College, and who was probably at the beginning of this century the most influential teacher of philosophy in Oxford; a man to whom I owe more than to any other of my philosophical instructors, John Cook Wilson. He, although, to quote the words of Professor Prichard, departing at first from the epistemological idealism of his own teachers ‘with extreme hesitation and without emphasis’, eventually rejected it and was followed by others in rejecting it and in moving in the direction of a realism which yet may be reckoned as, in a legitimate, though different, sense of the word, an Idealism. For it was a realism for which spirit is no less real than matter, and the spiritual values of truth, goodness, and beauty no mere creations of finite minds, but abiding characteristics of that reality in the apprehension of which all minds capable of apprehending it find their satisfaction. To such a realism we can, I think, scarcely deny the name of Idealism, a name which associates it with Plato, to whose own teaching it is, I think, certainly nearer than any form of *epistemological* Idealism. I would therefore, for my present purpose, include among the Idealists I am commemorating not only those older men whom I previously mentioned and those of my own contemporaries who adhered to epistemological idealism, but Cook Wilson himself, and those who followed him in the abandonment of the idealistic epistemology, while remaining as far removed as any idealists from empiricism and materialism. I desire

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in a few words to acknowledge the debt which all students of philosophy here, and students of the philosophy of religion among them, owe to these men. They set an example, which those who, whether as pupils or colleagues, came into contact with them can never forget, of high seriousness in the pursuit of knowledge, of indefatigable persistence in criticism of themselves and of others, of a delicacy of conscience verging on scrupulousness in matters of the intellect; an example also of whole-hearted devotion to the great principles of freedom of thought, of reverence for truth, and of generosity towards all sincere and unpretentious efforts to attain it. They were veritable Sarah Battles of philosophy in their attachment to the rigour of the game; but it was never to them a mere game, but rather, in the famous words of Hegel, *auch Gottesdienst*, a 'divine service' as truly as that which commonly goes by the name. All these things were true equally of those who were nearer to the positions of Green or of Bradley and of those whose sympathies were rather with the later views of Cook Wilson; alike, to name two only who were but as it were the other day teaching in Oxford and have now passed from our sight, of Harold Joachim and of Horace Joseph; and along with these I will also here mention one other, also not long since departed, and also of my own generation, who, if perhaps less stern and uncompromising in criticism than some of his contemporaries, less steady and consistent in the direction of his own speculation, was so in consequence of the very breadth of his comprehension and sympathy, and who in the range and elevation of his thought was second to none, that brilliant scholar, that master of discourse, the variety, originality, and suggestiveness of whose conversation will ever be treasured in the memory of his friends, John Alexander Smith. In my praise of these men I do not intend to suggest that they had in their time a monopoly of the virtues I have ascribed to them or that they have not successors who inherit them. But these virtues they had, and for them should ever be held in honour among us. I must, however, not let a senile love of reminiscence lead me farther afield, and I will now return to the subject of Religious Experience, reiterating my conviction that we should do ill to abandon in any degree

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the gains of the past, won by such as those of whom I have spoken, the principal of which I take, for our present purpose, to be the refusal to restrict within authoritatively imposed limits of any kind the free exercise of philosophical criticism in the study of Christian as of other religious experience, and the consequent incorporation of that experience in the general religious experience of mankind which forms the subject-matter of the philosophy of religion. On the other hand, neither the exercise of philosophical criticism upon Christian dogma nor the acknowledgement of the essential connexion between Christian religious experience and that of those who do not 'profess and call themselves Christian' should divert, as they may be said to have diverted some of the British Idealists, from an adequate recognition of the uniqueness in fact of certain characteristics of Christianity which hinder it from taking its place alongside of other religions and impose upon it a missionary vocation which it cannot disavow.

Thus I would see in the religious experience of mankind as a whole a genuine unity, and would consider it as the response of the human spirit to a Divine Spirit with which it is by the necessity of its nature in perpetual contact. There are, indeed, as is declared in the title of a celebrated book which had much to do with popularizing the phrase 'Religious Experience' in the early years of the twentieth century, 'varieties of religious experience'. The book in question—I am of course referring to William James's Gifford Lectures—has been not unjustly criticized as devoting a disproportionate amount of attention to such of these 'varieties' as were either eccentric and abnormal, or were more readily accessible to scientific study because they were found in circles which, for one reason or another, encouraged the public confession of religious feelings or at least set no special store by reticence in respect of them. Where interest is concentrated on such 'varieties of religious experience' there is, I think, a serious danger of overlooking the existence of a genuine religious experience which, although taking forms less strange and striking, is not therefore less real and significant, in a vast number of persons who, though innocent of mystical raptures,

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or of crises of conversion, yet pass their lives against the background of a constant consciousness of being in the presence of a Power behind appearances, a Disposer of events, a Judge of conduct, to whom—or to which—they are responsible, and owe reverence, and more or less regularly discharge this debt in ways dictated by the traditions and habits of the social groups to which they belong. Such persons are often easily persuaded to repudiate any claim to enjoy a 'religious experience' at all. To such vivid imaginations of a divine interlocutor as St. Teresa's, to such overwhelming realization of the intolerable burden of sin as Bunyan's—indeed to anything which, however inferior in intensity or urgency, might seem to be of the same species with these—such persons know themselves to be strangers. Yet in acts of worship which they would not willingly altogether forgo—nay, indeed in some cases may very highly prize—in feelings of shame, of thankfulness, of trust, which arise spontaneously in their hearts on sundry occasions, they do plainly show that they are conscious of a divine eye upon them, a divine providence over them, a demand upon them for some outward recognition of the reality of these relations, and thereby as possessors in fact of a 'religious experience', none the less truly such for being less absorbing and catastrophic than that of saints and prophets, missionaries and reformers, notwithstanding their own reluctance, remembering as they do nothing in their own lives similar to what is recorded in the biographies of these, to describe by the same name experiences which seem to themselves to have nothing in common. Thus I believe that many people who would, as I said, deny that they have had any religious experience, actually have one which is fully entitled to that designation and cannot be adequately accounted for except as apprehension of a real object.¹

Professor Whitehead² is responsible for the now often quoted observation that 'religion is what the individual does with his solitariness'. Yet, as it appears on the stage of

¹ In J. Martineau's *Study of Religion*, ii, pp. 26 ff., and in J. Cook Wilson's *Statement and Inference*, ii, pp. 835 ff., there are notable studies of the religious implications of common and familiar sentiments.

² *Religion in the Making*, p. 16.

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history—and especially perhaps in its more primitive manifestations, but by no means there only—religion is so obviously a function of the community that, by an exaggeration in the opposite direction to that suggested by Whitehead's remark, the 'sociological' school of Durkheim has seen in it nothing but an assemblage of 'collective representations', meaningless except in relation to a *group* of individuals. But, in its more highly developed forms, at any rate, and probably to some extent always (as is well brought out in the works of the eminent investigator of primitive religion whom Oxford has lately lost, the late Rector of Exeter, Dr. Marett), the religion of every religious man belongs to him not merely as a participator in an activity shared with others, but as being the individual person that he is. It belongs to him, indeed, not only as the person that he is but as being *all that he is*; with his bodily senses, his emotions, his interests, his social contacts, his affections, as well as with his understanding and with that instinct of curiosity and wonder wherein, when it is cultivated by the understanding with its power of analysis and discrimination, science and philosophy take their rise. To no part of man's life is religion merely irrelevant; only as his total response to what is by him envisaged as the ultimate reality, embracing, in Tertullian's phrase, *totum quod sumus et in quo sumus*,¹ our whole selves and our whole environment, can religion be what it implicitly aims at being; and only as such must a Philosophy of Religion endeavour to interpret it.

Although, as I have said, the phrase *Religious Experience* certainly describes it from our own, the 'subjective', point of view, while Revelation describes the same fact from the other side, that of the Object of our experience or knowledge, I should not call the former a 'merely subjective' description in any sense of the word 'subjective' which would in the least degree suggest a doubt of the independent reality of that Object. The Object of Religious Experience is always God revealing himself, since it is inconceivable that God should be known or experienced except through his own act. So far as we have any genuine knowledge of God it is to him that we must ascribe the initiation of the commerce between

¹ *adv. Marcionem*, i. 10.

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him and ourselves. The acknowledgement of this truth, however, by no means excludes the admission of degrees of knowledge, of various measures of self disclosure. As the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews expresses it,¹ God has spoken to men 'by divers portions and in divers manners'. Nor does it exclude the presence of evil in religion as well as in all human life, and its consequence that the sovereignty of God is manifested as victory in a struggle against evil. Indeed, as a famous line of Lucretius² reminds us, a line which must often have risen to the lips of any serious student of the history of religion, evil is sometimes more terribly obvious there than elsewhere. *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum. For corruptio optimi pessima.* Yet, mysterious as the existence of evil in a world made and governed by a good God must always be, we have no *new* difficulty to deal with in finding it present in religion.

Again, the recognition that there is always in religion some measure of divine revelation need not for us, any more than for the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, whom I quoted just now, exclude that of a culminating experience which can be acknowledged to be a revelation of God mediated by no mere prophet but by the Son or Word of God made flesh. Nor does this recognition in its turn require us to deny to other religious experiences their right to be regarded in their measure as also divine revelations. On the contrary, we may, in accordance with the main tradition of Christian theology, see in them anticipatory contacts with that same Word or Son who is confessed in the Christian creed to be the one eternal utterance or self-expression of a God essentially self-communicative and, as Plato taught,³ of ungrudging goodness. With such a view of Religious Experience, moreover, we not merely leave room for a Gospel of the Son of God, but can also allow, or even insist, that a revelation made to beings which themselves have a history and whose manner of existence is conditioned by time and space must be itself an *historical* revelation, mediated through events occurring at particular places and dates; and it is, as we have seen, just such mediation that is traditionally asso-

¹ i. 1.

² i. 101.

³ *Tim.* 29 E.

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ciated with *revealed* as contrasted with *natural* religion and theology.

There are, however, certain positions which are often found along with the desire to emphasize the uniqueness and supremacy of the Christian revelation, but which appear to me to be untenable; and with a brief consideration of these I will bring this lecture to a close.

(1) First among these, in my opinion, untenable positions I would mention that which, not content with denying the irrelevance of historical fact to truth of universal import, an irrelevance broadly asserted in a well-known saying of Lessing's,¹ seeks to withdraw altogether dogmas based upon historical fact from the scrutiny and criticism of reason. But, as all religious truth is revealed, so is all revelation addressed to the reason. Not only does the content of revelation afford exercise to the reason in tracing its structure and in establishing connexions between it and other parts of our experience; it is in the last resort the sole judge of its claim to be regarded as revelation; for there is no other. This important truth is laid down in decided terms by Butler, even when immediately about to argue that of some things in revelation we are incompetent judges. 'I express myself with caution', says he, 'lest I should be thought to vilify reason, which is indeed the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning everything, even revelation itself.'² We may no doubt speak, as many philosophers, Kant among them, have spoken, of *Faith* as taking the place of Reason when Reason finds itself baffled by problems which it cannot solve, and when, nevertheless, the needs of practical life demand that we act without waiting for their solution; but still such Faith must be a *reasonable* faith. In such a situation it is Reason itself that descries its own limits and, by descrying them, in principle transcends them, finding in what lies beyond not something *irrational* but a 'mystery' which under other conditions than those of our mortal existence would lie open to the contemplation of a reason better equipped but essentially continuous with our own. An admirable thinker, whose loss we have

¹ *Beweis der Geistes und der Kraft* (*Theol. Schriften*, ed. Chr. Gross, iii, p. 12).

² *Analogy*, ii, c. 3.

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had lately to lament, the late Professor de Burgh, has in two works, *Towards a Religious Philosophy*¹ and *From Morality to Religion*,² urged with great force the importance in the Philosophy of Religion of using the word *reason* in a more comprehensive sense than is given to it by those who exclude from its sphere (whether as lying above that sphere or below it) regions of experience which, although we commonly reckon them to possess the highest kind of value, are yet not amenable to the measures and tests proper to the logical, mathematical, and physical sciences.

(2) There is a second position sometimes allied with emphasis on the uniqueness of the Christian revelation which I also could not accept. I mean that which makes what I may call a clean cut between the knowledge of God attainable without or apart from supernatural revelation and that only thereby communicated to us. It will be convenient to illustrate my meaning by the line sometimes drawn between the doctrine of the divine *unity*, which (it has been held) can be established by natural reason, and that of the *trinity* within that unity, which cannot (it is said) be so established, but must be accepted, if at all, solely on the warrant of revelation. Now I do not of course deny that the worship of God by the Christian Church under the threefold Name proclaimed in her baptismal formula cannot be accounted for without reference to certain facts which fall under the head of revelation in the sense in which that word is appropriated to a knowledge of God mediated through historical events. But, be it observed, what is in this sense *revealed* is not the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity; *that* is a philosophical construction, revealed indeed, but revealed through the process of philosophical speculation on the nature of Being, a part of which may be found (as St. Augustine observes³ about the doctrine of the Logos affirmed by the Fourth Evangelist) 'in the books of the Platonists'. What is *revealed*, in the sense of historically mediated, are the *facts* of the life, death, and resurrection of a man, of whom his followers found that they could give no other account than that he was the Son of God.

¹ London (Macdonald & Evans), 1937.

² *Ibid.*, 1938.

³ *Confessions*, vii. 9.

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(3) The third and last position which I would reject is that which affirms the possibility of distinguishing within the knowledge of God which we possess, however we may have come by it, any portion guaranteed to be unmixed with error. In agreement with the late Professor John Oman, who put the point with great clarity and decision in his remarkable book on *Grace and Personality*, I can recognize *infallibility* nowhere, in Pope or Church or Bible. Even had the words of our Lord himself been strictly in this sense *infallible*—and few theologians among ourselves to-day would affirm this in respect of matters (such as the date and authorship of Old Testament books, or, again, as the facts of pathology) which lay outside the range of knowledge accessible to his human intelligence—we have in any case no indisputable record of his *ipsissima verba*, and so a *guaranteed* infallibility would be still to seek.

In thus rejecting the belief that within the revelation of God to man there can be anywhere found a portion which is warranted to be unmixed with error, I must frankly confess that the general tradition of the Church does not endorse this rejection, and also that, if nevertheless I am right in adhering to it, despite the departure from Christian tradition therein involved, we are compelled to believe that the method which God has been pleased to adopt in revealing himself to man is not that which we should have been antecedently inclined to expect. It is indeed by no means to be wondered at that many Christians should be reluctant to surrender their faith in a guaranteed nucleus of infallible truth. I say, you will observe, a guaranteed nucleus. When the Reformers of the sixteenth century, desiring to exalt the authority of Scripture above that of the Church, sought to reconcile their retention of the ancient belief in the infallibility of the Bible with their denial that it was on the authority of the Church that they received the Bible as the Word of God and the foundation of their faith, Calvin fell back upon the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*.¹ To this witness we can still appeal. For, rightly understood, it is not a guarantee of infallibility, hindering our admission of the possibility of error at some one

¹ *Inst.* i. 7.

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assignable point and not at another; it does not ascribe infallibility to a statement because it occurs in Scripture, or in a conciliar decree, or in an article of the Creed, or in a pronouncement *ex cathedra* of the Roman Pontiff on a matter of faith or morals. What it asserts is that when we 'judge of ourselves what is right'¹ the Holy Spirit testifies within us that in prophecy or in psalm, in the records of our Lord's life, teaching, death, and resurrection or in the apostolical comment thereon—and also, we may add, in the 'power of his resurrection'² as manifested in Christianity, with its institutions, its history, its fruits in the lives of men and of nations—we have the living God present with us, speaking to the conscience, supplying grace, enlightening the mind, impelling to charity, but always, as St. Paul says,³ imparting to us this heavenly treasure in earthen vessels, and often using, surprisingly enough, what a distinguished Oxford teacher of our own day⁴ has boldly, but, I think, justifiably, called 'the ministry of error' in our spiritual education.

Is it not true that Christians have been mistaken in supposing, as they have often supposed, that fallen man, while he always does well, even if conscious at the moment of no particular fault, to confess himself a 'miserable sinner', may yet quite well claim to be, and indeed is bound, barring 'invincible ignorance', to be free from all heresy? I am not now thinking of the etymology of that word, according to which it may perhaps be said to imply a self-willed opposition to legitimate authority, but of heresy merely in the sense of theological error. Should we not rather always be ready to admit the possibility, nay the practical certainty, that we are to some extent mistaken in our religious beliefs as well as deficient in our religious and moral practice? I do not ignore the difference which Dr. Wheeler Robinson, to whose use of the expression 'the ministry of error' I have just referred, rightly draws⁵ between states of mind which are and states of mind which are not compatible with that 'good will' which, following Kant, he would say was the only thing which

¹ Luke xii. 57.

² Phil. iii. 10.

³ 2 Cor. iv. 7.

⁴ Dr. Wheeler Robinson, *Redemption and Revelation*, c. 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 36 ff.

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is good without qualification. The fact that error is so compatible should surely make us less rather than more unwilling to admit our inability to escape it.

In my Inaugural Lecture given here in 1920 I began by commemorating three illustrious sons of this House who had made notable contributions to the Philosophy of the Christian Religion, and I will end this lecture by an appeal to the first of these three, the great Bishop Butler. It would indeed be an anachronism to suggest that Butler would have been prepared to endorse such a definite rejection of all guaranteed infallibilities as that to which I have ventured to invite you. Biblical criticism, as we now know it, was in his day, if born at all, only in its cradle; and so was the comparative study of religion. The evidence of miracles and of prophecy is treated by him in a manner very different from that in which even the most conservative scholars of our generation would deal with it. But I think that Butler, were he to come among us and to acquaint himself with the learning of to-day, would be confirmed in the choice of the great argument which he took as the theme of his famous book on *The Analogy of Religion Natural and Revealed to the Constitution and Course of Nature*. He would find, indeed, that the difficulties which beset the evidences of revealed religion, difficulties which he believed to be providentially designed for our trial and probation, were in some respects greater than he had supposed them to be; but he would be ready to acknowledge that they were therefore all the more strikingly harmonious with the mysterious dispensation which permits us to divine in nature the work of an intelligent and beneficent author, yet baffles our attempt to discover his design, while consoling us for our failure by the consideration that it is but reasonable to expect that design to be beyond our comprehension. He would be strengthened in his old conviction that even to the end 'probability is to us the very guide of life';¹ and, looking out upon a world which, while it has in all ages suggested to men the idea of a God of power and goodness behind it or above it, has nowhere disclosed to them the power and goodness which they would fain attribute to its Creator

¹ *Analogy*, Introd.

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unencompassed by the clouds and darkness of difficulty and doubt, he would repeat with greater emphasis than ever the famous words: 'Things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why then should we desire to be deceived?'¹

¹ *Sermon vii.*

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>C.Q.R.</i>	<i>Church Quarterly Review</i>
<i>C.R.</i>	<i>Classical Review</i>
<i>D.N.B.</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>E.H.R.</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>H.Ƴ.</i>	<i>Hibbert Journal</i>
<i>Ƴ.Ph.S.</i>	<i>Journal of Philosophical Studies</i>
<i>Ƴ.Th.S.</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>Mod.Ch.</i>	<i>The Modern Churchman</i>
<i>O.M.</i>	<i>The Oxford Magazine</i>
<i>P.A.S.</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society</i>
<i>T.L.S.</i>	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>

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1925

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1927

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1928

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Rashdall as Philosopher and Theologian, in *Life of Hastings Rashdall*, by P. E. Matheson. (Humphrey Milford.)

Article: Shakespeare and Religion. *H. J.*, Jan., pp. 341-54.

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Review of *Theistic Monism*, by Joseph Evans. *J.Ph.S.*, Oct., pp. 548-50.

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1929

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1930

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1932

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THE CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIANITY TO ETHICS. (Univ. of Calcutta.) [This book was translated into Arabic by Habib Saeed under the title al'ahlâq waddîn, published by the Cairo office of the S.P.C.K.]

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1935

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1939

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Letter: The Roman Tradition. *Times*, 11 Jan.

Letter: Dante and the Occupation of Prague. *Times*, 20 Mar.

1940

Article: Ethics, Christianity, and Nationalism. *Philosophy*, Jan., pp. 38-50.

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Review of *History and Science*, by Hugh Miller. *E.H.R.*, Oct., pp. 670-2.

Review of *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages*, by Raymond Klibansky. *E.H.R.*, Oct., p. 648.

Note: Spinoza and *The Light upon the Candlestick*. *J.Th.S.*, Apr., pp. 161-2.

Letter: The Pope and the Bishop. *Times*, 19 Oct.

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1941

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Review of *The Letters of Arnulf of Lisieux*, ed. Frank Barlow. *E.H.R.*, Jan., pp. 117-19.

Review of *Johannis Scoti Annotationes in Marcianum*, ed. Cora E. Lutz. *Philosophy*, Jan., pp. 87-8.

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Note: Benjamin Webb. *Oxoniensa*, vol. vi, p. 91.

Letter: The Raid on Berlin. *Times*.

1942

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1943

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Review of *Towards a Christian Philosophy*, by Leonard Hodgson. *O.M.*, 21 Oct., pp. 27-9.

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Review of *The Primacy of Faith*, by R. Kroner. *J.Th.S.*, July–Oct., pp. 247–53.

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Obituary Notice: W. G. de Burgh. *The Guardian*, 11 Feb.

Obituary Notice: William Temple, Philosopher. *The Guardian*, 3 Nov.

1945

[The following are due to appear in the course of this year]

Review of *The Christian Faith: Essays in Explanation and Defence*, by W. R. Matthews. *J.Th.S.*

Review of *Theology in an Age of Science* (Inaugural Lecture), by Leonard Hodgson. *J.Th.S.*

Review of *The Introduction of Aristotelian Learning to Oxford* (British Academy Lecture), by Fr. M. J. Callus. *Medium Aevum*.

L. W. G.

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