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SENSE AND NON-SENSE

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SENSE AND NON-SENSE

BEING A STUDY IN BASIC CHRISTIANITY

By CYRIL ALINGTON

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WITH A FOREWORD BY
THE BISHOP OF DURHAM

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FOREWORD

THERE is more than one reason, apart from old friendship, why I am glad to be associated with this book. Its author, I well know, needs no introduction: for many years he has put his experience and skill at the service of those who teach the Christian faith and of the wider circle of those who wish to understand it. But every one who thinks about the matter at all knows that there is special need at time for the kind of help which this latest of his books attempts to give. In our schools new opportunities for religious teaching are given by the Education Act of 1944: it is all-important that they should be used to the full, and I think that many teachers will be grateful for the help here given to that end. And there are many others who will welcome Dr. Alington's fresh and living introduction to the greatest of all subjects. He begins, where we all need to begin, at the beginning. He questions and removes those easy shallow assumptions which so often do duty for thought. At a time when *on* all bands we hear of the need to recover a sense of the meaning and purpose of life, he shows us where to look for the way of recovery. Even the sceptic must recognize that Christianity has profoundly influenced the world's history: the believer holds that, without its Gospel, life is unintelligible. It can fairly be hoped that both, and that great multitude which stands somewhere between the two, will in different ways be encouraged by reading these pages to carry their inquiries further. That in itself would be a great gain, for there is much reason to think that sheer apathy or lack of the sense of wonder is the most dangerous enemy of true religion in our day. It is to be feared that many writers on the subject have

been dull, and the cause of dullness in others. No one will bring that charge against this book, and it will serve a great purpose, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, if it stabs us into thinking again—or even for the first time!—on the subject most deserving the best thought we can give.

ALWYN DUNELM:

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BECAUSE the fashion of the world changes, we think that Heaven is farther off now than in the childhood of the Church. Let our Fathers in God make it clear that every righteous activity is a Divine service, that every aspiration after truth is, consciously or unconsciously, a looking to Christ, that every article of the Creed is a motive and a help to holiness . . . let them offer as the scene of human labour a world not left fatherless, echoing with spiritual voices, and bound together through all its parts with underlying harmonies of love; let them keep steadily before the eyes of men the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy and truth • . . let them hold forth in all its splendour to eager souls the ideal of that Kingdom in which each earthly achievement finds its consummation and each earthly effort its hallowing.

(From the sermon preached by Dr. Westcott at Bishop Lightfoot's consecration—reprinted by Bishop Davidson at the time of his appointment to Canterbury.)

SENSE AND NONSENSE

I

INTRODUCTION

WHEN I first began writing this book, I confess that I had chiefly in mind those numerous schoolmasters who will be called upon for the first time to 'teach religion,' and who may, not unnaturally, feel ill-equipped for the task. As one with some experience of having to teach subjects of which his knowledge was slight, it occurred to me that they might be grateful for some assistance. Otherwise, I said to myself, they may easily find themselves taking the line of least resistance, as many schoolmasters do where religious teaching is concerned: hence comes that insistence on the geography of St. Paul's missionary journeys which adds little to the knowledge of the faith, or that detailed study of the relations between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah which not long ago led a firm of publishers to advertise, with unconscious irony, a volume containing 'Genesis to Esther—the parts usually read in schools.'

Assuming, as, for the honour of the profession, I naturally do, that very many of the new 'teachers of religion' will have a higher aim than that, I began the effort to suggest what the Christian religion really is: the term 'basic Christianity,' properly understood, suggests both the purpose and its limitations. Basic English aims at providing those whose opportunities of education leave them incapable *of* employing, or even appreciating, the finer shades of the language with a reasoned confidence that it *is* English which they are speaking: it is a simplification which claims, at least, to

preserve what is essential. Similarly, 'basic Christianity,' as here interpreted, makes no attempt to cover the whole ground: it is not Christianity as known in its fullness to the saint or to the mystic, but it is the framework upon which is woven all that is best in personal religion as we understand it.

But, as I proceeded, I came to feel that what was wanted was not so much the exposition or justification of particular doctrines,¹ as a general reconsideration of the position of religion as a whole, and that this might possibly be of use to a wider circle than that which I first had in mind.

If I may use a frivolous analogy, no one can play a game, or even enjoy it as a spectator, unless he has some knowledge of the rules under which it is played, and this applies to the game of life: no one can play it with success or estimate the efforts of others unless he has made some effort to grasp its guiding principles: without that, he will be like an unfortunate American sent to watch a game of cricket.

The English people dislike being asked to think of principles, and perhaps thinking at all, and that is why they combine a healthy respect for what are called 'the Christian virtues' with a growing indifference to the doctrines on which they rest. To a more logical nation this would be intolerable, and signs are not wanting that, in this country, the Christian virtues, if left (so to speak) in the air, will not indefinitely maintain themselves.

Is it right and will it do
To pace the sad confusion through,
And say, 'It doth not yet appear
What we shall be, what we are here* ?

Christianity offers an answer to these questions—the only

¹ I have relegated to the Appendix the more detailed discussion of some points of difficulty, because I do not want to distract attention from my main theme.

answer which an English reader is likely seriously to consider, and, we may add, the only one which offers any hope to a distracted world. To refuse to consider it because it is difficult is absurd: the idea that life is a simple affair until religion introduces mysteries is ridiculous. We are steadily growing more and more familiar with the incomprehensible in our daily life: how many of those who listen to the wireless understand its working? or who professes to comprehend the vastness of the solar system? The simple fact is that our life is a mystery whether We like it or not, and that we ourselves are the most mysterious of created beings. If there is no purpose in it at all, let us accept the fact—but, if that is really inconceivable, let us at least make some effort to discover what that purpose is.

The Christian has an answer which, however great its difficulties, does at least provide a basis for the virtues which we all respect and give to human life a meaning and a dignity of its own. Christianity is not a device for promoting respectability: its Founder came very near to denouncing respectability as a sin: He certainly said it was a danger. Christianity is not a certainty: none of the things most worth believing are scientific certainties: it is a heroic challenge to the sins and sorrows of the world.

Its Founder was a man of the people, Who met a shameful death: His so-called followers have not seldom been a disgrace to the name they bear: but His teaching supplies the only doctrine which ennobles the life of every man, and makes democracy anything more than a catchword. When He died on Calvary

On a naked slope of a poor province
A Roman soldier stood staring at a gibbet—
Then he said, 'Surely this was a righteous man V
And a new Chapter of history opened,
Having that for its motto, •

Or listen to this from the earliest of our great poets:

Jesus Christ of heaven
In a poor man's apparel pursueth us ever,
For on Calvary of Christ's blood Christendom 'gan spring
And brothers we became in blood and gentlemen each one.

Christianity is the way of life which there took its origin: in so far as we are set, or set ourselves, to 'teach' Christianity, it is a way of life which we must seek to expound. You can teach a language without any intimate knowledge of the people who speak it: you can teach mathematics without any deep knowledge of the science of numbers: you can teach geography (more or less) without having visited the countries of which you speak: but you cannot begin to 'teach Christianity' without some real knowledge of what is the life which every Christian is bound, with God's help, to seek to live, and some real sympathy with the endeavour. It is in the attempt to provide this knowledge and arouse this sympathy that these pages have been written.

It is a most deadly heresy to hold that Christianity is dull: there is too much reason to believe that it is a heresy widely prevalent to-day.

The life that *is* dull is the life which has no purpose, and that purpose Christianity supplies. That it is in itself a high purpose no one denies, except those who, in the teeth of all the evidence, choose to regard it as a selfish creed. Like every other human endeavour, it has a right to be judged by its best examples and not by the (much larger) number who are Christian only in name.

It succeeds, as no other creed does, in combining authority with freedom, the reverence for the majesty of God with the respect for the humblest of human beings. It offers man the only freedom which is really worthy of the name—the

freedom from every kind of fear, for it calls man to the service of a God Whose one desire for him is that he should be, and do, the best of which he is capable.

It is the only sure basis for any true democracy, the only safeguard against the tyranny alike of the dictator and of the State, for it proclaims the inalienable dignity of man: man, for whom the Son of God was ready to give His life, was not made to be a slave. In Christianity is found the fulfilment of that prophetic vision of the Stoic of old, who cried:

Slave, poor as Irus, halting as I trod,
I, Epictetus, was the friend of God.

To reject it, without consideration, as something too good to be true, is the act of a coward or a fool, for it is cowardly to refuse a challenge to adventure and foolish automatically to assume the worst: it is wilfully to put oneself back to the position of the heathen who, in St. Paul's words, lived 'without God and without hope': for hope, like the anchor to which it is often compared, needs something firm which it can grasp—and that, as we hope to show, the Christian faith does in fact supply.

I am sorry if the last paragraph sounds ill tempered or uncharitable: but when I notice the air of calm superiority with which the claims of Christianity are often brushed aside in some 'intelligent' circles, I am reminded of some words of James Russell Lowell: 'Show me twelve square miles in the world in which I live where childhood is cared for, where womanhood is revered, where old age is protected, where life and property are absolutely safe, where it is possible for a decent man to live decently, where the Gospel of Christ has not gone before and made that life possible; and then I will listen to your revilings of my Master.'

There are, in particular, two preposterous delusions which

these pages may, perhaps, help to dissipate—the one, that Christianity is a religion of bribery and therefore fundamentally selfish; the other, that it is a religion of gloom.

The former (represented by such terms as 'sky pilots' and 'devil dodgers') suggests that it bribes men to religion by the promise of a heavenly reward. Now it is certain that in a reasonable world—and Christians believe that God's world must be a reasonable place—the fulfilment of any function brings happiness with it: they hold that if man fulfils the purpose of his existence, to show forth the glory of God, he will certainly be happy, both here and hereafter, and that, in so far as he fails to do so, happiness cannot be his, except by the mercy of God. But if he makes happiness, either here or hereafter, his object, the function will not be fulfilled and the happiness will neither be earned nor won. A selfish Christian is, or should be, a contradiction in terms: no more repulsive, or unchristian, figure can be conceived than that of the complacent little Jack Horner, familiar in our nursery days, congratulating himself on his own goodness. 'Self-satisfaction' is impossible for those who are bidden to forget, or to deny, themselves.

The latter delusion is equally ridiculous, based, as it is, on the large part which sin inevitably plays in the Christian message. Christians emphasize sin, but emphasize it as a *curable* thing. That evil exists in the heart of man is an undeniable fact, and it is as absurd to blame them for calling it sin as it would be to blame a doctor for diagnosing a disease for which he can suggest the remedy. The Cross is, no doubt, in itself a 'gloomy' symbol, but it is the glory of the Christian faith that it sees in it the symbol and the assurance of the victory of Love.

The Christian religion is, for those who can accept it, the sure source of happiness. As soon as, in our daily services, we

have, so to speak, cleared the ground by acknowledging our own weaknesses (which we call 'sins'), we at once are bidden 'heartily to rejoice' and call on 'all lands' to 'be joyful in the Lord,' to 'serve Him with gladness,' and to 'come before His presence with a song.' A gloomy Christian is (or, once more, should be) as much a contradiction *in* terms as a selfish Christian.

Such are some of the misconceptions which it is hoped to remove. We will now pass to that fundamental delusion which our title suggests.

2

SENSE AND NON-SENSE

(i) THE TYRANNY OF WORDS IN GENERAL

A VERY sharp line divides the kingdoms of Sense and Non-sense, and those who dwell on either side of it entertain the lowest opinions of one another. This is perhaps most obvious in the realm of Art: the eminently sensible statement 'I know what I like' is a byword for derision in artistic circles: when the expert condescends to address the layman he is apt to say (as Mr. Birrell was accused of saying), 'This I admire: I prithee admire it with me: if you don't, I've a mighty poor opinion of your understanding!'

This contemptuous attitude is heartily reciprocated: the plain man of common sense derides the pretensions of 'superior' persons—likes music 'which has a tune to it,' and poetry which he can understand, and has a preference for pictures which 'tell a story.' The war between 'the commonplace young man' and the aesthete, immortalized in *Patience*, is continually being waged by less extreme representatives of the rival camps.

It should be made clearer than it usually is on which side of the dividing line religion lies. There are, we may say, three ways of approach to religion—those of simple faith, of sacramentalism, and of morality, and all three necessarily transcend the limits of sense.¹ In the case of sacramentalism

¹ If it is said that there is an intellectual approach, as of course there is, the answer must be that so long as it remains *purely* intellectual it is not in any real sense an approach to religion at all. Worship cannot be a mere matter of the brain.

this is obvious: the word 'hocus-pocus*' recalls the mediaeval reaction of the plain man. Faith, even the simplest, rests on an act of belief in the unseen which is in itself a denial of the limitations of sight: to say the Lord's prayer is as clear an affirmation of non-sense as the declaration of the mystic that he has heard 'unspeakable words.' The suggestion that morality is a mere affair of common sense is, as we shall hope to show, equally without foundation: the common-sense view of the relations between man and man is adequately reflected in the short story of the pious elephant which Bishop Gore used to delight to recall: 'Each for himself, and God for us all, as the elephant said when he danced among the chickens' (SamWeller's dictum). It is at our peril that we cherish the belief that morality can securely rest on any but a religious foundation. In seventeenth-century England, says a high authority, 'faith was part of the air men breathed,' whereas to-day 'we live in an age when the needs of the body are placed before those of the soul; our gods are the material gods of luxury for the rich and comfort for the poor' (Bryant, *The England of Charles II*, p. 76). Both verdicts may be somewhat exaggerated, but the contrast suggests a notable extension in modern times of the dominion of 'Sense.'

A religion which teaches that we are given a self which we must deny, can have no claim to be called 'sensible.'

It is indeed high time that some literary philosopher or philosophic *littérateur* should attempt a reasoned account of the relationship between men and words. He would have a strange story to tell: men create words to be their servants, and use, or misuse, them as their slaves: not content with classifying some as irredeemably prosaic and others as irredeemably vulgar, they are apt to degrade others by a slow and arbitrary process of misuse till (to give but one example)

'charity, once the greatest of words, has come to very low estate. 'What I like most about an effort of this kind/ I recently heard a chairman say, as he opened a co-operative bazaar, 'is that there's no damned charity about it'—whereas, of course, it was in charity, rightly understood, that the whole enterprise had its root and ground.

But words have their revenge: they come to exercise a hypnotic power over those who use them. If 'Mesopotamia' was once a 'blessed word,' so is 'democracy' in our own day, so that (like the charity of which I spoke just now) it covers a multitude of sins and excuses a great many people from the pain of thought. But perhaps the most striking example is the presumed superiority of 'sense' to 'non-sense' of which we shall have more to say.

But, before we proceed to deal with that wholly unwarranted assumption, let us look at examples from the field of religion in which these processes may be seen at work. Of 'charity' we have already spoken, but a similar degradation has befallen its great synonym 'love.' A generation nurtured on the cinema inevitably forms a conception of love which bears hardly any trace of its Christian origin: it was always a hard saying that we were to 'love' our enemies (or even our neighbours): to the devotee of the films it may well seem not only hard but ridiculous: and, quite apart from the peculiar difficulties of the present day, there is a permanent tendency among mankind to degrade all virtues into a narrow and practical meaning which will make them easier to fulfil: thus we limit 'purity' to abstinence from sexual sin, forgetting that purity of heart must mean that singleness of aim and of eye which alone carries with it the promise of 'light.' Many who have scrupulously abstained from sexual offences will, if they see God at all, be very much surprised at what they see: for to be 'clean in heart' (the literal translation of the

words) is impossible for a man who is full of 'envy, hatred, malice, and all tuicharitableness.'

The same process may be seen at work in the word 'self-denial,' which suggests to most of us only some mild form of abstinence in Lent, and was once freely interpreted as the substitution of salmon for mutton: or in our old friend 'charity' which has often come to mean little beyond the substitution of a shilling for sixpence in the offertory plate.

Sometimes the degradation has a historical origin: the command to 'pray' did not, to those who first heard it, imply only that presentation of petitions with which it is now too commonly identified. The Greek word means rather 'to address God,' to offer vows to Him, to speak to Him as a child to its father. In such an address, prayer, in the ordinary sense, will of course play a part, but by no means the whole, nor necessarily the predominant, part. As our Lord encouraged us to use our knowledge of earthly fatherhood to interpret the heavenly Fatherhood (from which 'all fatherhood in earth is named'), it can hardly be wrong to remind ourselves what we should ourselves feel if our children's intercourse with us was limited to petition, however unexceptionable their petitions might be. It was the Romans, that practical and fundamentally irreligious race, who characteristically gave a translation which narrowed the meaning: *orare* is unquestionably to beg, and in deference to them we have tended to adopt that view. Undoubtedly it conveys part of our duty in this respect, but worship means more than 'prayer': we admire a dog which learns to beg, but we value his affection more when it is less obviously self-centred.

Let us turn to the other side of the picture and see how words have taken their revenge. The two great words 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' had once a noble meaning, and

might have it still—but it can hardly be denied that they have suffered in the using. The original Protestants were right in their protest: the reforms of the Council of Trent removed many of the abuses against which their protest was made: but a religious movement which is *solely* a 'protest' against the faults of others is founded on a negation—and that is really a contradiction in terms. (We are reminded of the curious fact that the Latin word *religio* originally means 'a religious scruple,' and here again the Latin influence has told, for too many English people regard their religion as something restraining them from undesirable conduct.)

The word 'Catholic' means 'universal,' and the great conception of a universal Church is fundamental to Christianity. But it has been too often tacitly allowed to become the possession of those who interpret it in a sense which is, in practice, extremely narrow. That Roman Catholic Christians should refuse to worship with those who, on honest intellectual grounds, reject the claims of the Papacy, and should even entertain doubts of their right to the name of Christian, would seem to suggest that the Protestant error is repeated by those to whom the name of Protestant is naturally abhorrent. It is surely those who, humbly hoping that they themselves will be found among 'the blessed company of all faithful people,' do not doubt that many whose beliefs they cannot fully share, will be found in that company too, who have the true Catholicity of spirit, and the better right to use the name.

But we must take our share of the blame for the degradation of the word 'ecclesiastical/' which has come to suggest a narrow type of clericalism. The *ecclesia*, or the chosen people of God, can never be, as it never has been, predominantly clerical: the laity, in fact, have the prouder title, for that word, little as we remember it, means nothing less than 'God's

folk': the parson, *the persona*, may for certain purposes represent them, but the more truly 'ecclesiastically-minded' he is, the less likely he will be to forget their claims and their rights.

(ii) 'SENSE' AND 'NON-SENSE' IN PARTICULAR

It is now time to pass to the consideration of the two words with which lies our primary concern. We shall do so with a more open mind if we frankly admit (as we surely must) that poets do not talk sense, and that no one thinks the worse of them for that. Burns' lady was not really like a red. red rose: Wordsworth's daffodils did not really dance: and the skylark *is* really a bird, whatever Shelley may say. The champions of common sense would do well to ask themselves why these chartered libertines are allowed such license: they will find it is because so alone are they able to communicate ideas which, when we hear them, we believe to be worth expressing. The moral, if we care to draw it, is obvious.

'Sense/ according to the dictionary, is the 'faculty of perception or sensation'—or, 'the faculties of physical perception or sensation as opposed to the higher faculties of intellect, spirit, etc.'—or, once more (in the plural), 'the mental faculties in their normal condition of sanity.' As 'nonsense' is briefly defined as 'that which is not sense,' we are called upon to explain why, in the common usage, the preference is so clearly for the lower as opposed to the 'higher' faculties and to the 'normal' as opposed to the abnormal workings of the brain, so that to 'talk sense,' even plain common sense, is regarded as praiseworthy, whereas to say that a man is 'talking non-sense' is considered a final condemnation.

If it is pathetic to find so many Christians striving to convince their hearers that they are talking sense, whereas it is

their highest glory) that they are not, it is equally pathetic to find rationalists convinced that they have disposed of the claims of Christianity by an appeal to 'the faculties of physical perception' or to the brain 'in its normal condition of sanity.'

Let us see what is accomplished by the five senses, as guided by the brain 'in its normal condition of sanity,' and endeavour to estimate the greatness and the limitations of their achievement.

The senses have been called the five windows of the soul, but the views which they provide are curiously different. The sense of Smell may perhaps be called the basement window, for its range is obviously limited. It is not clear at first sight why the pleasure it offers should be so generally disregarded, though we are ready to attend to its warnings, but the fact remains that while we are familiar with lectures on the proper use of Sight and Hearing, a course on the proper use of Smell would not attract any considerable attention.

Taste we may appropriately place on the ground, or dining-room, floor: its pleasures have a literature of their own, but, so far as mere pleasure is concerned, both it and its sister Touch are restricted to a somewhat narrow field: it is through the Eye and the Ear that mankind ranges far beyond the practical concerns of daily life, and is able to proclaim its discoveries. Their reports, interpreted by the brain, have achieved what is somewhat grandiloquently called 'the conquest of Nature,' and, though that phrase may be excessive, Science has undoubtedly been enabled vastly to enlarge our knowledge of the world in which we live: if it is not yet able to 'tell the number of the stars and call them all by their names,' it is not unreasonable to hope that it will do so in time: it can in fact tell us almost everything about the world

except the reason (if any) for its creation. No praise can be too high for the unselfish zeal with which men of science explore the mysteries of Nature, and they are in no way to blame if the splitting of the atom leads, as well it may, to the destruction of human civilization.

But our unfeigned admiration should not be allowed to blind us to limitations which they are the first to admit. Limiting themselves strictly to the question 'How,'/ they have no concern with the question 'Why,' and that is a question which mankind rightly and inevitably asks.

A further limitation is obvious when we consider the Arts: scientists can explain how sound is produced, and we continually profit by the control over it which their marvellous discoveries have made possible: but if we ask them why some combinations of sounds have that power to stir the human heart which is exercised by all great music, they have no answer to give.¹ Similarly, though they can tell us why (let us say) Rembrandt or Turner or Sir Joshua were right or wrong in the pigments which they chose to use, they have, as scientists, no answer to the question why, and how, great art differs from the attractive colours of a Christmas supplement.

»

For most of us a still more obvious illustration comes from poetry, of which we shall have much more to say: if poetry consists, as has been said, of 'the best words in the best order,' science has no interest in the question what 'the best words'

¹ 'Where is the beauty of music? All that exists for science is certain undulations which are measurable and which strike upon the drums of our ears, and these, when they have passed, are gone. But, as we apprehend the beauty, we none of us suppose we create it: we receive something from without, something that is conveyed to us by the physical means of musical instruments of one kind and another; yet the thing that we receive is a spiritual thing* (*William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, His Life and Letters*, p. 349).

and 'the best order' are. Science deals with sense, and non-sense is outside its province.

Its hold on the youthful mind in the present day is explained by the claim, often put forward in its name, that its results are clear, definite, and certain—as contrasted with the cloudy mysteries of religion and the confessedly uncertain virtues of faith.

This claim (which few true men of science would make) is clearly open to qualification: the conclusions of science are, in the first place, confessedly provisional, and it is indeed its readiness to learn more which is its greatest glory. Again its simplicity is often overrated. In a famous passage Professor Eddington describes the difficulties which an instructed man of science has to face when he decides to enter a room. 'In the first place, I must shove against an atmosphere pressing with a force of fourteen pounds on every square inch of my body. I must make sure of landing on a plank travelling at twenty miles a second round the sun, a fraction of a second too early or too late, the plank would be miles away. I must do this whilst hanging from a round planet head outward into space, and with a wind of aether blowing at no one knows how many miles a second through every interstice of my body. The plank has no solidity of substance. To step on it is like stepping on a swarm of flies. Shall I not slip through? No, if I make the venture one of the flies hits me and gives a boost up again; I fall again and am knocked upwards by another fly: and so on* (*The Nature of the Physical World*, p. 342).

No doubt this is scientifically a true picture, but to describe it as a 'simple' one would be an abuse of language. Nor, of course, does this great man of science make that mistake: his conclusion is as follows:

'Verily, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a

needle than for a scientific man to pass through a door, and whether the door be barn door or church door it might be wiser that he should consent to be an ordinary man and walk in rather than wait till all the difficulties involved in a really scientific ingress are resolved.'

Some words of Mr. Balfour are worth remembering for the light they throw on what he called 'the controversy infelicitously described as the conflict between science and religion.' 'All men, including all philosophers, are believers. . . . The sceptic says that, as we can prove nothing, we may believe anything. I say that, as we believe a great deal and intend to go on believing it, we should be well advised to discover on what assumption we may believe it most reasonably.' His practice showed that he believed this 'assumption' to be found in Christianity (see *The Times Literary Supplement*, July 24, 1948).

We have seen what Sense, and science its interpreter, makes of the universe: let us turn to consider what it makes of man, and the only answer it can offer is *Pulvis et umbra*. It is true that it does not call him (as Stevenson does in an essay with this title) 'a monstrous spectre, the disease of the agglutinative dust,' but it can only say with assurance that 'dust he is, and to dust he shall return,' and can hold out no hope that he is more than a transitory shadow on this earthly scene. If its followers, going beyond their brief—as, to their honour, they often do—urge that man can, and should, strive to improve the conditions of human life, they can offer no clear reason why the effort should be made, nor give any sure guidance as to the type of improvement which is desired; for to be born into a world like this, or to prolong one's days upon it, must be, in their view, a very doubtful boon. All the more honour to their strenuous and successful efforts to

lessen infant mortality and to better the nation's health—for in so doing they are rejecting, or at least not blindly obeying, the dictates of the brain 'in its normal condition of sanity/ and are following the guidance of instincts which Sense alone cannot recognize as 'higher.'

The only purely 'sensible' view of human life is that taken by 'the ungodly in the Book of Wisdom, who said, 'Short and sorrowful is our life; and there is no healing when a man cometh to his end, and none was ever known that gave release from Hades. Because by mere chance were we born, and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been: because the breath in our nostrils is smoke, and while our heart beateth reason is a spark, which being extinguished, the body shall be turned into ashes, and the spirit shall be dispersed as thin air,' nor is it easy to reject their eminently 'sensible' conclusion, 'Come therefore and let us enjoy the good things that now are; and let us use the creation with all our soul as youth's possession . . . let us crown ourselves with rosebuds, before they be withered: let none of us go without his share in our proud revelry . . . let our strength be to us a law of righteousness.'

It is surely a significant fact that, though this advice has often been taken, it has never commended itself to what we call the conscience of mankind. In other words, there is more 'Non-sense' in us than we are ready to admit: it may well be that this is what distinguishes us from the animal creation. It is of very little use to be 'the captain of one's soul' if one has no idea in what direction the harbour lies, and no chart by which to steer.

It is pre-eminently the poets who insist on the reality of those things which Sense cannot perceive and science cannot demonstrate: it is, in fact, their primary function to encourage us to go on asking questions which can never, in this life,

receive a final answer and to cherish dreamis which in this life can never find fulfilment—to deny, in fact, as one of the earliest and greatest of them did, the belief of 'witlesse men'

That nothing is but that which they can see.

Across the centuries Francis Thompson repeats the implicit claim:

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

Not all our great poets have been as definitely Christian as Francis Thompson and Spenser, though the list would contain many noble names: but they all agree that to limit our view to the world of sense is a disastrous failure: in Shakespeare's tragedies, for instance, we are left (in the words of one of his greatest critics, Dr. Bradley) with an 'impression that the heroic being, though in one sense and outwardly he has failed, is yet in another sense superior to the world in which he appears and is, in some way, which we do not seek to define, untouched by the doom which overtakes him; and is rather set free from life than deprived of it,' and the extension of man's range which Shakespeare suggests in one direction is suggested by Wordsworth in another: when he pours scorn on the man who sees in 'a primrose by the river's brim' nothing beyond itself, or bids us attend to 'the impulse from a vernal wood,' he is recalling us to the greatness of our inheritance, to the 'clouds of glory' which we bring with us from 'that imperial palace whence we came.' 'Might, wisdom, joy, peace, were for Wordsworth not qualities projected by the imagination of man into a lifeless universe, but qualities

that exist outside coman, and may pass into his life, if only he will be quiet and attend.'

Wordsworth, it will be seen, is so far from being content with a 'sensible*' view of man that he refuses even to take a 'sensible*' view of nature, and (as the last quotation from Sir Walter Raleigh will suggest) held opinions which, to the prosaic mind, are undeniably non-sensical.

Dante stated the truth once for all when he said, 'In following the senses Reason has its wings shortened/ but it is perhaps Donne who most definitely challenges the wisdom of the world, and most openly contrasts it with another and a higher certainty:

Poor soul, in this thy flesh what dost thou know?
 Thou know'st thyself so little as thou know'st not
 How thou wilt die, nor how thou wast begot:
 Thou neither know'st how thou at first earnest in
 Nor how thou took'st the poison of man's sin;
 Nor dost thou—though thou know'st that thou art so—
 By what way thou art made immortal, know:
 Thou art too narrow, wretch, to comprehend
 Even thyself, yea, though thou would'st but bend
 To know thy body.

What hope have we to know ourselves, when we
 Know not the least things which for our use be . . .
 And yet one watches, starves, freezes, and sweats
 To know but catechisms and alphabets
 Of unconcerning things, matters of fact,
 How others on our stage their parts did act,
 What Caesar did, yea, and what Cicero said.
 Why grass is green, and why our blood is red,
 Are mysteries that none have reached unto.
 In this low form, poor soul, what wilt thou do?

When will thou shake oifthis pedantry
 Of being taught by sense and fantasy?
 Thou look'st through spectacles—small things seem great
 Below; but up unto the watch-tower get,
 And see all things despoil'd of fallacies;
 Thou shalt not peep through lattices of eyes,
 Nor hear through labyrinths of ears, nor learn
 By circuit or collections to discern.
 In heaven thou straight know'st all concerning it,
 And what concerns it not shalt straight forget.

All great poets, in their degree—though they may not be so 'religious' as Donne—are opening windows into infinity through which lesser mortals may look. As we do so,

we feel that we are greater than we know,

and in that assurance gain the courage to defy the sting of death and to deny the victory of the grave.

Sense and Non-sense agree that things are only Explained' when their purpose is known: the difference lies in the type of question which they respectively ask. Sense only asks those questions which Sense can answer: if, inadvertently, it asks one of a deeper kind, as Pilate did, Sense, like jesting Pilate/ will not stay for an answer. The question 'What is man's chief end?'—the deepest of all questions and the most vital—can only be answered in words as clearly Non-sensical as those of the Scottish Catechism, 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.' But we are seeking to establish not only that there is room for a view of men's character and destiny wider than any which Sense can provide, but that there is a definite necessity for it. We are bound to make some effort to account for the facts before

us, and there are at least two with which the 'sensible' or scientific explanation makes no attempt to deal.

First, there is the persistent demand that there should be some purpose behind the existence of the world and its inhabitants. To believe that it came into being by sheer accident or by the casual collision of a couple of stars, is surely to put too great a strain on the imagination; it would be like imagining that the plays of Shakespeare came into existence by the fortuitous conjunction of letters. In this case, as in all others, the discovery of some purpose, whether good or bad, is the only explanation which satisfies the human mind.

Secondly, we have to explain, if we can, the amazing but indisputable fact that in all human beings there is a sense of obligation to care for others as well as, or indeed in preference to, themselves: the more clearly science demonstrates our animal ancestry, the more difficult it is to explain the existence of a feeling almost unknown in the animal world. Why should we wish to 'let the ape and tiger die'? It is comprehensible that we should desire the death of the donkey (which Bishop Creighton once described as a more enduring animal), but the ape and the tiger, and indeed the pig, lead lives which are, to say the least, self-explanatory.

The scientist who, with little thought of honour or reward, gives or risks his life to secure some presumed benefit to humanity, is as 'non-sensical' as any martyr who dies happily for his creed. There is, as Thomas Hardy, once at least, admitted,

a faith and fire within us

which common sense cannot explain. Again, in one of the best of his poems, 'The Blinded Bird' Hardy gives a hint which deserves attention, especially as coming from such a

source. The bird, blinded by human cruelty, still sings with zest, 'resenting not such wrong':

Who hath charity? This bird.
 Who suffereth long and is kind,
 Is not provoked, though blind,
 And alive, ensepulchred?
 Who hopeth, endureth all things?
 Who thinketh no evil, but sings?
 Who is divine ? This bird.

The words inevitably recall those in which the Hebrew prophet described the suffering servant of Jehovah, and those high words in which the Apostle sang the first great Christian hymn of love. They suggest a view of the 'divine* very different from that implied in Hardy's better-known sneer at 'The President of the Immortals.'

It will have been noticed that the poet also uses the word 'Faith,' which it may be convenient for us to substitute for the clumsy word non-sense which we have used so long, for it is by faith that we grasp those things of which mere sense can tell us nothing. 'Faith is the evidence of things unseen,' and we have shown reason for our belief that tilings unseen and undemonstrable by reason play a vital part in human life.

The attempt to abolish 'mystery' from the world in which we live is foredoomed to failure: like Nature, we may say, however violently we may expel it, it will still return, and naturally so, for we claim that it is itself an element in the very nature of man, and in all his higher activities.

Two and two are demonstrably four; for the mathematicians have so defined those terms as to make any other conclusion impossible: radar can, no doubt, be explained by those who have sufficient technical knowledge: but what

demonstration can prove or explain the mysteries which lie behind the music of Bach or the canvas of Velasquez or the magic of great poetry? Is there no mystery in that great act of self-surrender by which a man and a woman take one another 'for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health'¹—or, indeed, in

the little nameless unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love

which form

the best portion of a good man's life?

To all these questions the Christian religion offers an answer the nature of which we must now proceed to consider.

But, before we do so, we have a right to ask for a fair hearing and to insist that those who refuse to give it shall make their own position clear. They may, no doubt, hold that there is no purpose in human life, in which case we are like men set to solve anagrams composed of any chance combination of letters—a prospect which is gloomy indeed. They can hardly deny the existence of mystery without, as we have seen, rejecting all the greatest achievements of the human mind: is religion the only sphere in which mystery is to be disallowed?

As I write, there comes into my hands a review of Loisy's account of the *Birth of the Christian Religion* in which the Dean of St. Paul's enumerates the presuppositions which the author makes, of which the first is that 'nothing could ever happen which is outside the normal experience of a sedentary man of the early twentieth century.' I hope it is not impolite to say that any one who approaches the question with such presuppositions as that is not only unfit to 'teach religion*' but very doubtfully qualified to be a teacher at all.

3

GOD

THERE are, it would appear, only three possible sources from which the world can take its origin—the will of a good Power, the will of a malicious Power, or accident (the idea of an incompetent or forgetful Power, though Hardy sometimes toys with it, hardly calls for separate consideration). It is very natural to feel considerable doubt in coming to a conclusion on the point: 'doubt,' as George Macdonald has said, 'must precede every deeper assurance: doubts are the first knock at our door of things that are not yet, but must be, understood'; there is no sin in feeling them: indeed, 'doubts are the messengers of the Living One to the honest.' Christians who are tempted to a harsh judgement on 'unbelievers' would do well to bear in mind another saying of his that 'to deny the existence of God may involve less unbelief than' (for them) 'the smallest yielding to doubt of His goodness' (George Macdonald, *Anthology*, p. 70).

With this preface let us attempt to set out the simplest arguments on which the belief in God is based.

Whatever else 'personality' may mean, it implies the power and the duty of making moral decisions: whenever we blame a dog for what he does, we are implying that there is in him some trace of the 'personal,' and that he is not blindly led by sense or instinct. Can we suppose that this duty, whether we regard it as a privilege or a curse—has been imposed on us by a power incapable of making such decisions itself—that is, an Impersonal Force?

The plain man thinks not, and in so thinking he had the

support of many philosophers in the days when philosophy was still capable of stating a definite opinion. Plato says that a man's duty is 'to become like God, as far as this is possible; and to become like Him is to become holy, just and wise' (*Theaetetus* 176). Aristotle says that 'a man must not be content merely to think as a mortal man, but as far as possible to live an immortal life' (*ἀθανατίζειν*), because 'there is something divine in him' (*Ethics* X). Wisdom, to the Jewish thinker, is sometimes regarded as an attribute of God, and sometimes personified as independently co-operating with Him, 'knowing what is pleasing in His eyes, and what is right according to His commandments' (*Wisdom* ix. 9).

The idea of an impersonal 'Life Force,' encouraging human aspirations after goodness and truth, must seem to most of us an attempt to explain the obscure by the incredible: we turn from it with some relief to consider the Christian conception of God.

Few people are really prepared to face the terrible doubt which Shelley puts into the mouth of Beatrice Cenci:

If there should be
No God, no Heaven, no Earth in the void world—
The wide, grey, lampless, deep, unpeopled world!

It is almost inevitable to insist that life must have a discoverable meaning.

The Christian doctrine of God may be said to rest on the twin pillars of Purpose and Personality. A world in which purpose plays so large a part can hardly itself have no purpose behind it; purpose can only exist in mind, and mind only in what we call a person. To say that the world is a rational place implies that it owes its existence to a rational personality: this is not to say that our conception of personality is adequate, or that a personal God must have the limitations which we

associate with the word: it is merely **that in** calling Him a **Person** we are using **the** highest term we know. An impersonal God could not, we feel, have created persons: if He could, He would have called into existence beings higher than Himself. Every baptized person is given 'a Christian name'; that should remind him that he stands in a personal relationship to God: when he comes into a church, he is in a place where he is no longer known as Brown, Jones, or Robinson, but as Henry, Peter, or Michael, or some such intimate name as that.

We may add that all the achievements of human reason obviously depend on the rationality of the world, so that such a belief, and such a belief alone, 'Venders the universe intelligible in principle': the man of science who does not hold it, and yet continues his researches, is really making 'an act of faith* of the most presumptuous kind—faith in the rationality of inanimate matter. It is no doubt conceivable that the purpose behind the world is not a good one and that the personal God may be malevolent, or incurious—though we need scarcely take seriously a suggestion of Hardy's that He has forgotten all about

some tiny sphere I built long back
Mid millions of such shapes of mine.

The belief that the world owes its existence to two contending powers has failed to satisfy the mind—no less completely than the polytheism which the Greeks and the Egyptians were the first in the Western world to discard. Even Lucretius, that bitter enemy of religion, confesses that 'it is almost impossible to contemplate the heavens and the orderly movement of the heavenly bodies without feeling that there is a divine power which governs them* (C. Bailey, *Lucretius* I, p. 17).

Nor can we seek an explanation of the evil in the world by a belief that matter is inherently evil—a belief which Christianity denounced once for all when it proclaimed that 'the Word became flesh.' It would be pleasant if we could accept Browning's optimistic creed that

Evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound,

but, though it has much truth in it, as we shall see later on, the sins and sorrows of the world call for an explanation before we can accept the belief in the goodness of God the Creator. This explanation Christianity believes itself to supply: for the moment we need only refer again to that persistent belief in goodness, in the sense of self-forgetfulness, which exists in the human heart. Original goodness is no less real a phenomenon than original sin, and it is not unreasonable to ask how goodness could exist in a world which knew no temptation, or how self could ever be forgotten if there were no selfish self to forget.

Many centuries ago, the son of Sirach expounded the Divine relation to men in words on which it is hard to improve, 'He hath set fire and water before thee: thou shalt stretch forth thy hand unto whichsoever thou wilt. Before man is life and death; and whichsoever he liketh, it shall be given him' (*Ecclus.* xv. 16-17). Christianity has much to add to these sayings, but they remain the fundamental basis of our contention that the Power behind the world is both good and just. It is Christianity which gives us the confidence that He is also merciful and that

His Nature and His Name is Love.

But we shall not forget that there are other aspirations besides those which we call 'moral' for which the Christian

doctrine of God, provides the only secure foundation: the search for Truth and the search for Beauty equally demand that there should be a Mind which knows what real truth and true beauty are. The very phrase 'scientific advance' implies that there is such a thing as ultimate truth towards which we are slowly feeling our way: the Christian claims that by his doctrine of a God, 'in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden' [*Col. ii. 3*], he is supplying the essential background which the search after Truth implies: to him all discoveries are parts of that Truth which is known, in its completeness, by the mind of God alone. Similarly, those who in the realm of art seek after perfect Beauty confess that, after all their efforts, still there will

hover in their restless heads
 One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,
 Which into words no virtue can digest.

The Christian holds that wherever we see and welcome beauty we are learning to see that of which God's mind alone can form the assured judgement, and to look, in our mortal measure, with His immortal eyes.

The three quests for Goodness, Truth, and Beauty stand or fall together: if they are all doomed to disappointment, the lot of man is wretched indeed, for nothing can be more miserable than to be gifted with desires which we instinctively feel to be our noblest possession, and yet to know that in the nature of things they can never find satisfaction. Tantalus, in the old story, was thus punished for a crime: is it conceivable that the whole human race was created in mockery, or that inanimate force could have given birth to desires so visionary?

Such are some of the reasons which encourage the belief in a personal God, and in His goodness; we have now to pass

to the self-revelation which, as Christians believe, was made at a certain time in the world's history. r

As I conclude this page, my eye is caught by a sentence written by Mr. Desmond McCarthy in a Sunday paper which I gratefully quote: *I have come to the conclusion, late in life, that faith in absolute standards cannot dispense with faith in God.' I have myself no doubt that he is right.

4

THE INCARNATION

THE Christian belief in the perfection of God's character rests, of course, primarily (though not exclusively) on the doctrine of the Incarnation: the psalmists and prophets of the Jews had declared that He was 'full of compassion and mercy, long-suffering and of great goodness,' that He was 'the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, Whose Name is Holy,' and that He loved His chosen people with a love which their failures could not destroy. The Incarnation, besides revealing His character with all the perfection which an earthly life could display, removed the limitations which Jewish patriotism had imposed, and showed Him as the Father of all mankind, willing 'that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.'

For those who accept this doctrine, it is possible to acquiesce in their ignorance of the answer to many questions which they naturally ask, such as the purpose and destiny of the animal creation, of primitive man, scarcely raised above the animal, or of all those countless myriads who have lived and died in ignorance of the nature of God.¹

¹ Cf. Dryden's lines:

a rule revealed
Is none to those from whom it was concealed.
Then those who followed Reason's dictates right,
Lived up, and lifted high their natural light,
With Socrates may see their Master's face
While thousand rubric-martyrs want a place.

He adds that 'the Egyptian Bishop' (Athanasius) appears to be 'of another mind,' but, whatever the so-called 'Athanasian' creed may suggest, such a belief is no part of the Christian faith.

This is not mere twishful thinking': it is, on the contrary, a logical process from the known to the unknown. If, they would say, the essential nature of God was revealed in Jesus Christ, it is inconceivable that His designs should ever, or in any respect, be inconsistent with the character there displayed: even in earthly affairs we know some characters so clearly as to be able to say with certainty that cruelty or indifference are *impossible* to them, and from the very beginning of Jewish theism it has been the invariable assumption that 'the Judge of all the earth' must necessarily 'do right.' We need not be alarmed or distressed at our ignorance: all that we can say is that 'we believe verily to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living*—and with that all-embracing faith we are content.

It is, therefore, on the Incarnation that the Christian apologist must concentrate his argument. He need not be greatly perturbed by the suggestion that 'Incarnation stories' are to be found elsewhere, for it is far from obvious that the fact that an event has been in some measure foreseen is an argument against its occurrence: the existence of the aeroplane and the submarine is not rendered less probable by the brilliant guesses of a Roger Bacon or a Jules Verne. In any case, as we shall see, the difference between the Christian Incarnation story and the visits of gods to earth told of in other countries is so manifest as to make the comparison negligible. When Apollo, for example, reveals himself in vengeance on those who had failed to recognize his divinity under an earthly form, it is the difference rather than the likeness between that and the Christian story which strikes the reader.

The duty of the honest inquirer is to satisfy himself by a study of the records whether this particular Incarnation story does, in fact, reveal, by what was said and done 2,000 years

ago, a God Whom man can worship, and life which, by His help, he can hope to live.

The second of these questions is naturally the easier to answer, but the first is logically the more important: they are linked together by the fact that Christ places in the forefront of His message the Fatherhood of God, and encourages His hearers to interpret the word by their own knowledge of what a father is: 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give you' what is the best of gifts.

The best conceivable gift must be the knowledge of God, and the power to do His will: put, therefore, in the simplest form, the Christian argument could run somewhat as follows:

'God, as we have seen reason to believe, is good: a good God must wish to make Himself and His purposes known to the men whom He has made: He may speak by the inspired utterance of prophets and of poets, but, if the full truth, or so much of it as they can comprehend, is to be shown, He must speak in His own person and Himself come down to earth. Is your knowledge of possibility so clear, and your conception of Divine power so exact, that you can dismiss the story as obviously untrue without even considering the message which, as we are told, the Son of God came to earth to bring?'

When one is dealing with matters which are clearly beyond human comprehension, in the full sense of the word, it is perhaps desirable, and certainly permissible, to attempt to explain them by the method of fable. Let us see whether, by this method, we can throw some light on the central mystery of the Incarnation.

It is an obvious metaphor to say that the purpose of creation was that there should arise from earth a song of

praise to God the Creator, which should be in tune with the hymn which Cherubim and Seraphim continually utter, in 'the celestial concert* wherein

The bright seraphim (*a burning row*
Their loud uplifted angel trumpets blow:

and we may take this metaphor as the starting-point for our fable.

It is clear that the earthly orchestra fails completely to fulfil its task, for its members fail either to keep time with one another, or to watch for the conductor's beat, and even dispute the rights of any one conductor to direct their efforts.

This failure is not unmarked in heaven, and it inevitably grieves the Son of God, by Whom all things were made. So He, let it be imagined with all reverence, summons His archangels to a conference. 'This continual discord,' He says, 'is intolerable: something must clearly be done about it, for it seems at times as if they hardly so much as know the tune which they are trying to play.'

The archangels naturally agree, and one of them, perhaps Michael, says, 'Yes, sir, the discord is terrible: it sounds to me as if they were all trying to play tunes of their own: I quite agree that something ought to be done.'

And Christ says, 'I think I will go down Myself and teach them.'

At first the archangels are all dismayed, but at last Michael says, 'Yes, sir, I can see that that would impress them. If you came down with thunder and fire, it would be bound to have a great effect. We all saw what an impression was made when that happened on Sinai. And of course you would take with you a great company of angels: how many legions were you thinking of, isir? Twelve at least, I should hope.'

But Christ smiles, and says, 'No, Michael, I was thinking of going alone.'

Michael is startled, as well he might be, but after a moment he says, 'Of course, sir, that would be a very noble gesture, and if you came flying on the wings of the wind it would be very impressive too. You'll remember, sir, that old Jewish song:

On cherubim and seraphim
Full royally He rode,
And on the wings of all the winds
Come flying all abroad.

Oh yes, sir, I think that's a good idea!

But Christ smiles again, and says, 'No, Michael, that wasn't quite what I had in mind. I think I will go down among them just as an ordinary man. You see,' He goes on, 'they seem to have such strange ideas about Kingship, and Power, and Glory. Those Kings of Assyria and Egypt are really terribly stupid: they seem to think that to raise great armies and build great pyramids is the way to show their greatness, and I feel they ought to be taught a lesson. I should like to show them how silly and vulgar their ideas are: so I think I shall go down as a poor man's son.'

And the archangels are terribly shocked, and murmur to one another, and at last one of them, bolder than the rest, says, 'But, forgive my saying it, sir—won't it be a great risk? Perhaps they may not recognize you, and what will happen then?'

'Some, no doubt, will not recognize Me,' answers Christ, 'but others will, and it is on them that I shall rely.'

'But there may not be enough of them, sir,' urges the archangel. 'You might be in real danger of your life!'

'That is a danger which I must face,' says Christ, and He

turns to Gabriel and tells him to go to Nazareth and prepare His coming.

And so, to end our fable, He came:

Enough for Him, whom cherubim
 Worship night and day,
 A breastful of milk
 And a mangerful of hay:
 Enough for Him, Whom angels
 Fall down before,
 The ox and ass and camel
 Which adore.

We know the rest of the story: we know that the fears of the archangels were justified, and that His enemies were strong enough to put Him to a shameful death. But we know also that in a few short years of earthly existence He set a standard for human life which the world has never been able to forget, showing to mankind that true royalty is shown in service, that true glory lies in the most complete self-sacrifice, and that the only ultimate power in the world is the power of Love.

And if you really think that that is a story which selfish men are likely to have invented as the central truth of religion, I can only say that you have a higher opinion of human nature than experience suggests to me.

Let me add a sentence from an author of far greater learning and authority than myself, whose sanity of judgement few will wish to dispute: 'The birth of Christianity is unintelligible unless we believe that the historical Jesus impressed those who lived with Him as God made manifest in the flesh' (W. R. Inge, *The End of an Age*, p. 59).

In so far as the purpose of the Incarnation was to reveal the nature of God, and* thereby to set a goal before human

endeavour, this simple fable throws much light on the truth. Kingdom, power, and glory—such words as these took a new meaning when the Son of God had chosen the Cross for His throne, had revealed His power as the power of Love, and had shown that the highest glory was won by the most complete self-sacrifice. This was so complete a reversal of ordinary mortal judgements that we can understand how truly it was said of the earliest Christian preachers that they were endeavouring to 'turn the world upside down.' It was a true criticism, however absurd it may seem as applied to Paul and Silas, for it implied that the self was not something to be satisfied but to be denied: not a temple to be honoured with the most costly sacrifices, but a prison at all costs to be escaped—only given to us (in George Macdonald's phrase) 'that we, like Christ, may have something to offer.'

If we set this doctrine side by side with a verse of Omar Khayyam, we shall see how great a revolution it would imply in his philosophy of life—and indeed possibly in our own.

We will not go here into the more technically 'theological' aspects of the Incarnation—though it should be remarked that nothing can well be more 'theological' than the discussion of the nature of God. But something must be said of the word Atonement, if only because its essential meaning is so commonly forgotten. At-one-ment means the making two persons to live at unity, and there can be no clearer way in which God and man can be 'at one' than if man is striving, in his measure, to follow the Divine pattern and live the Divine life. Those who require a more technical explanation will find some suggestions in the Appendix (p. 92)—but they should not forget that the only assertion on the subject contained in the Christian creed is that it was 'for us men, and *for our salvation*' that Jesus Christ 'came down from heaven, and was made man, and was crucified also *for us*.'⁹

In case there are any who feel that we are merely substituting one difficult word for another, we must add a few lines about Salvation—a term which has been debased to mean salvation from the consequences of sin, or from a deserved punishment, or sometimes from any inability to sin. Such conceptions are radically false. In the first place no decent man can wish to shirk his responsibility for what he has done, though (as we shall see later) 'punishment' introduces a wrong idea: and, secondly, no one who has read St. Paul's letters to 'the Saints' whom he addresses can doubt that they remained exceedingly fallible people. Salvation does *not* mean that those who are 'saved' can sin no more. It does mean that if they truly repent of their past sins, these will not be reckoned against them and still less 'the offences of their forefathers.'

It does mean that they have been shown how to avoid sin, they have been shown 'the path of life,' and are promised God's help if they will walk in it.

The words of the *Benedictus* express the truth in simple language: men have been given 'knowledge of salvation for the remission of their sins' that they may 'serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of their life': they have been 'delivered' (if they will accept the deliverance) 'out of the hands of their enemies'—and their worst enemy is themselves, for it is their own selfish nature which was symbolically renounced at baptism; it remains alive, but they know both where the danger lies and how it can be met.

5

MIRACLES

THOSE who are inclined, without further discussion, to dismiss the Incarnation story as an 'impossibility,' must be invited to reconsider their language. It is becoming increasingly clear that the only final impossibilities are moral. We may neglect mathematical impossibilities as they are really a matter of mere definition: physical impossibilities are becoming less credible in an age where the inaudible is heard, the invisible seen, and the solid split: 'extreme improbability' is the limit to which scepticism can securely go. But moral impossibilities remain: God, if He exists, cannot contradict Himself: even in the case of what we call a 'really good man,' the possibility of his doing a really wicked or cruel thing is rightly held not to exist.

The limits of what we call credibility are naturally harder to define: it is obviously necessary, however difficult, to believe that our lot is cast on what Stevenson calls a 'rotatory island, scudding through space with unimaginable speed, and turning alternate cheeks to the reverberation of a blazing world ninety million miles away.' This fantastic definition helps us to understand and appreciate some words of Huxley, who once said to Bishop Gore that 'the mysteries of the three creeds are child's play compared to the necessary antinomies of science.'

It is therefore right (and reasonable, if the word may be admitted) to refuse to discuss abstract questions of possibility and to start from what we know. We know the life of Christ: not, of course, as fully as we could wish, but the astonishing

result of these short narratives is to give us the picture of a character which, by the almost unanimous verdict of mankind, is as near perfection as we can conceive. This, quite apart from its attestation by miracle at its beginning and at its earthly end, disposes us to believe that it is indeed the revelation of God in the likeness of man, and the belief is indefinitely strengthened by our knowledge of those who in different centuries, and in very varying conditions, have tried to shape their lives after His example.¹

That miracles should, according to the Christian tradition, have marked His life from the cradle to the tomb, and accompanied His ministry, is either a strength or a stumbling-block according to the frame of mind in which we approach the story, and to our general attitude to what is called 'the miraculous.' Miracle is defined in the dictionary as 'a marvellous event transcending the known powers of nature': if we give due emphasis to the words 'known' and 'nature,' we shall find it difficult to deny the term to some of the works of (let us say) Coleridge or Keats, and may find ourselves saying, as Browning said of a piece of music,

Here is the finger of God, a flash of the Will that can.

From another angle, we may be disposed to echo the words of Walt Whitman:

Why, who makes much of a miracle?
As to me, I know of nothing else but miracles.

Our object is not to justify the miracles of the Gospels, but to ask that they should be fairly judged in relation both to

¹ When Dante, in *Paradise*, was asked by St. Peter why he believed in miracles, he answered that if the Gospel miracles had never happened the conversion of the world without them was a hundred times more miraculous than they.

other Miraculous* happenings and to the personahy of Him to Whom they are attributed. A wise saying of George Macdonald may help our appreciation. 'The miracles of Jesus were the ordinary works of His Father, wrought small and swift that we might take them in.'

The doctrine of the Uniformity of Nature, on which so many rationalists rely, is a 'comfortable one,' in the sense that it seems often to save them the trouble of thought. As far as it goes, it is unquestionably true, but its limitations are, or should be, obvious.

In the first place, science itself is continually enlarging our conception of what 'Nature*' means: the splitting of the atom, for example, though no doubt in the regular line of scientific progress, seems to the ordinary man to suggest possibilities in Nature which were unknown to him, or even to scientists, a few generations ago.

Secondly—and much more important—on what scientific ground is human nature excluded from consideration? Human nature is very far from uniform, whatever tests you may apply: the scientific definition of uniformity is that a similar reaction follows a similar stimulus, and that is demonstrably untrue where human nature is concerned: the reactions of the saint and the sinner, the genius and the dunce, are as different as well can be. By what right is Man not regarded as part of Nature by those who so emphatically deny that he is a child of God? It may, no doubt, be suggested that Man is merely a machine the workings of which are still imperfectly understood, but no attempt has yet been made, with any sort of success, to show that human behaviour can be explained by the laws of physics.

Thirdly, most men of science would agree that the power of mind over matter is very imperfectly understood. No one disputes that it exists—least of all the medical profession:

to put limits to its possibilities in defence of an assumed 'Uniformity of Nature' is, the most 'unscientific' of procedures. Knowledge advances from the known to the unknown, and to rule out possibilities on *a priori* grounds is to betray the whole cause of science.

Since writing this section, I have re-read Bishop Headlam's masterly treatment of the subject in his book *The Miracles of the New Testament*, on which I had no doubt unconsciously relied. Some brief quotations may serve to reinforce the argument.

He says, on the authority of Huxley, that the definition of a miracle as 'a violation of the laws of nature' cannot be justified, for nature means neither more nor less than that which is the sum of phenomena presented to our experience: to call our often-verified experience 'a law of nature' adds nothing to its value. Huxley goes on to say that to declare that what never has happened never can happen is 'a naked absurdity.' Dr. Headlam quotes another scientist as saying, 'We must look on natural laws merely as convenient shorthand statements of the organized information that at present is at our disposal.'

His own conclusion is that for a mechanistic explanation of the plan and development of the universe we have no evidence at all—that at a particular time in human history, a time for which preparation had been made, there occurred something of which there had been no experience and could be no experience . . . and that this change was accompanied by certain events contrary to all human experience.' He urges that we should 'banish clearly from our minds any *a priori* conception of the impossibility of miracles, and ask whether these things did happen, and, if they did happen, what did they mean. The problems of human existence are infinitely

larger than any one branch of science, or one branch of knowledge—whether Science or Metaphysics or Theology—can solve by itself (*The Miracles of the New Testament*, John Murray, Lecture II).

In the Appendix (p. 93 ff.) will be found a more detailed discussion of the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, and the Ascension, and their place in the doctrine of the Church of England.

THE JEWS

BUT Christ was not only born a man, He was born a Jew, and that has always been a stumbling-block to those who regard that nation with disfavour. There are many who have a sneaking sympathy with the view that it was 'odd of God to choose the Jews,' and it is right to make it clear what the 'choice' did and did not mean. It was not a reward of merit, but a call to a service for which they were peculiarly fitted: it is in their failure to grasp this that their tragedy lies. That, if He was to take human form at all, it must be as a member of some particular nationality is so obvious as to need no argument, and a moment's consideration of two other 'possible' nationalities will at least clear the ground. He might conceivably have been born a Greek, have been a teacher like Socrates, and met with the crucifixion which Socrates foretold as the probable fate of the perfectly just man: but there was among the Greeks as a whole nothing of that insistence on the moral character of God which, as a Jew, He was able to assume in His hearers. That the gods of Olympus had failed to inspire respect was no doubt a step forward, but even the great Greek poets had little definite, and certainly nothing personal, to put in their place. A great moral teacher He might well have been in Greece, but a religion needs more than mere morality as its foundation.

That He should have been born a Roman is surely unthinkable: with all their great gifts, the Romans had their eyes too firmly fixed on this world to listen to news of another.

Their religion never rose beyond a devout and practical reverence for the sanctities of the home, which passed into a sublimated form of patriotism, such as we have seen in Japan. Any god whom they were to worship must have a Roman character and speak the language of common sense.

When we pass to Palestine, we find ourselves breathing an entirely different atmosphere: whatever the defects of the Jews—of which we shall have much to say—there is no doubt that from the very beginning of their history they had a firm belief in a personal God by Whom the world was made. We have already seen, from Abraham's famous question, that they soon came to hold a belief in His essential justice. This was reinforced by the teaching of one prophet after another, who stressed His demand that there should be just dealing between man and man, and that the poor should not be forgotten. Hosea went a step further when, by his story of the Prodigal Wife, he revealed that God was a God of Love, and Jonah, one of the latest (and most underrated) of their number, told them that His care extended to the animal creation. It is needless to quote at length the words in which the psalmist spoke of His compassion and His mercy: it is enough to say that the great majority of the Psalms find a fitting place in Christian worship, a thing inconceivable for the hymns of any other ancient nation.

When we turn to speak of their defects we find that one of the qualities which rouses our dislike was itself a reasonable ground for their being the 'chosen people,' while another explains their failure to fulfil their mission: these two qualities, of tenacity and self-absorption, are both admirably illustrated in the case of Jacob, the last of the patriarchs.

It is worth while to dwell at some length on his story because it is so commonly misunderstood: it is a common fallacy that the Bible story deals too g?ntly with his obvious

faults, but no accusation could be more groundless. Let us look at the facts. Jacob was an odious young man who swindled his brother out of his birthright: he did so in the belief that the birthright was, to borrow St. Paul's word, 'a prize worth snatching at'—a " He was bitterly undeceived: from the moment of his successful lying, his life was a series of misfortunes through which he slowly learnt that if he claimed a right he must be made fit to fulfil its responsibilities. The first necessity was to cure him of lying: this was done by sending him to work for Laban, who has been acidly described as the champion liar of Mesopotamia. He changed his wages seven times, robbed him of his promised bride, and, we must believe, taught him that lying is an unsatisfactory basis unless in the hands of a monopolist.

By a fine stroke of poetic justice we find that in his old age his children lie to him, and his final verdict on the life which he had expected to be so happy was that the days of his pilgrimage had been Tew and evil.'

At the same time, knowing as we do that the birthright was a trust for posterity, we can appreciate the reason for entrusting it to the tenacious Jacob rather than to the feckless Esau: a liar can be cured, by painful means, as Jacob was, but complete irresponsibility can have no future: no sane man would appoint an Esau as a trustee. Jacob, with his new character, acquired the new and honest name of Israel: we should not miss the point of Christ's greeting to Nathanael, 'an Israelite in whom is no guile': to have called him 'a Jacobite' would have conveyed a very different suggestion.

But the selfish mistake which Jacob made was repeated by his people as a whole, and was the cause of their failure. Like him, they regarded their position as 'the chosen people' as a prize to be selfishly enjoyed: they despised the Gentile whom it was their duty to serve, and administered their trust

as if it were a reward of merit rather than an opportunity of service.

Their prophets warned them of their mistake. 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth/ says God by the mouth of Amos, 'therefore . . . / — I will forgive and bless? No—'therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities/ It is no light thing to be the chosen servant of God. The Book of Jonah is a parable of the failure of Israel to preach the good news to the heathen: when God sent him to Nineveh he tried to escape to Tarshish, and it took a miracle to change his heart. A greater miracle was wrought for the conversion of the Jews, but they refused to hear, and Christ Who came 'to be the glory of His people Israel' died to be their shame.

We need not necessarily assume that the Jews were more self-centred than other races: unselfishness is, indeed, the last virtue which any nation learns to display; the tragedy of the Jews is that their self-centredness was shown on the greatest conceivable scale, so that by it they missed the greatest conceivable opportunity. It is tragic to reflect how the history of Christendom would have been altered if their matchless tenacity had been thrown into its service: a race which has preserved its identity through such unparalleled maltreatment, with no country on which to base its patriotic hopes, would, if it had only realized its mission, have stood out for ever as the teacher of the world. But it was not to be, and all their powers of loyalty and endurance have been devoted to the preservation of a sterile identity which seems increasingly to be rejecting the religious inspiration which created it.

As we have seen, there is good reason for our continued use of the Jewish Scriptures, which show, at their best, what can only be called 'religious genius/ or, if we prefer the term, the direct inspiration of God. The more we study the Hebrew

prophets, the harder we shall find it to give any other explanation of their message than that which they consistently gave themselves, that 'the word of the Lord' came to them. They were not prophets by profession or by choice. Amos, the first whose message we possess *in writing, explicitly denies it: 'I was no prophet nor a prophet's son/ he says, but 'a herdman.' They sought no popularity: the message they had to give was seldom acceptable, and still more seldom accepted: Jeremiah had to warn them that their holy city was not inviolable: Jonah that their self-absorption was a sin: they never failed to denounce the vices of the powerful or the rich; or to insist that in obedience to God's will lay their only hope of salvation. They claimed to be speaking in His Name, and the final proofs that the claim was justified is that we can see that the messages they gave were, each in its own measure, unmistakably true. The Christian may well hold with Bishop Gore that 'this astonishing series of messages, neither deduced from experience nor reached by process of reasoning, can only be explained, as the prophets themselves explained them, as being 'the voice of the Spirit of God' (*Belief in God*, p. 106).

It is certainly arguable that we read *in church* a disproportionate amount of the Old Testament, and read it with far too little explanation: this is perhaps a greater stumbling-block to the average congregation than the clergy recognize—but that is a domestic matter: what is certain is that in Palestine alone had there been the spiritual preparation for a revelation of the Divine. Though Jerusalem had killed the prophets, the prophetic message had not been stifled: though the High Priests crucified Jesus, the Christian Church had its birth among the Jews.

True to their national character, they still found it hard to believe that the Messiah's message was not for them alone:

but we must never forget that it was the mouth of a Jew which first proclaimed that 'there cannot be Greek and Jew, . . . barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman: but Christ is all, and in all.'

Could any other nation have risen to the height of that sublime avowal?

CRYPTO-LAPTISM

WE have now to consider how it has come about that a religion, founded on so great a conception of God's nature as that revealed by the prophets, illuminated by the tremendous story of the Incarnation, and confirmed by the response of the human conscience to the teaching of Jesus, should be identified by so many English people with the practice of a mild respectability, or even with a selfish desire to escape punishment beyond the grave.

We have already suggested that all morality is opposed to common sense, and this is demonstrably true of the morality taught by Jesus. We shall see this most clearly if we contrast His teaching with that of His forerunner John the Baptist. John's sermons, which had that popularity which always attends the preacher who has the courage to denounce popular sins, were eminently practical and wise. After telling his hearers that they were 'the offspring of vipers,' and warning them of 'the wrath to come,' he told them that if they had two coats they should give one of them to the needy; and should do the same with their superfluous food. He told the publicans to be honest, and the soldiers to refrain from violent extortion. This was admirable doctrine, but it was limited to external matters: save when he told the soldiers to be 'content with their wages,' he made no reference to the things of the heart. He preached a religion of duty, and a duty higher than that which most of us perform, but he went no further. Let us hasten to add that he himself was fully aware of his limitations: if Christ said that 'he that is but little

in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he,' John himself had declared himself unworthy 'to unloose the latchet' of his Master's shoe. We see at once that John's appeal was purely 'sensible,' and it is because the English are a very sensible people that they have too often been content with his sensible moral teaching and remained what may be called unconscious 'Crypto-Baptists' instead of becoming Christians.

For, indeed, the teaching of Christ is on a totally different level both of authority and of inspiration. We see this at a glance if we compare His teaching about coats with that advice of John the Baptist which we have just quoted: His words are, 'If any man would go to law with thee and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also': in place of the sensibly liberal giver to the needy, we have the spectacle of a man hastening to reward his aggressor with an entirely gratuitous gift. Can Non-sense further go?

Perhaps not, unless it be in the injunction which immediately follows—to go two miles in service with the man who has compelled you to go one: but will the champions of sense explain to us why, when we read how the bishop in *Les Misérables* almost literally fulfilled the former of these commands, our heart instinctively leaps up at the news of a noble action—unless it is because it responds to that streak of noble non-sense which lies deep in every human heart?

John's religion was a religion of duty, and duty, 'the stern daughter of the voice of God,' is a noble thing, but, thank God, duty is not the only, nor the favourite, daughter of the divine voice: Wellington did consistently a duty which he often hated; Nelson, when he did his duty (which he did not always do), did it with an enthusiasm which it thrills us to recall, thanking God 'for this great opportunity.' If we could only realize it, all temptations and all troubles are such opportunities: not things to be borne with resignation, as

inscrutable visitations, but indis__able tests of our quality.
Under the alchem of of such a belief

Tears shall take comfort and turn Gems
and wrongs repent to Diadems.¹

Another basic difference is that Christ's teaching was positive while John's was negative—a continual challenge to do something better than our best instead of a continual warning against sinking to our worst. It was the teaching of Love and not of Duty, based on a knowledge of man's capacity to rise rather than of his propensity to fall.

This is clearly illustrated in the famous answer which Christ gave to St. Peter's question about forgiveness. The question implied that to forgive was a disagreeable necessity which any man must desire to escape: Christ told him—and the humorous form of His answer must have fixed it in Peter's mind—that forgiveness is a good and a divine thing: and of a good tiling it is impossible to have too much.

The glorious paradox of the command to love our enemies has a similar purpose: Love is not only a good thing, but the best of all things: is it conceivable that any human being can wish his heart to be full of hate? No, because man has in him something of the divine spark, made as he is in the divine likeness, and not wholly incapable of being made the Son of God. 'Sons of vipers,' said St. John, 'repent in

¹ 'Prudential morality,' which is the only 'sensible' kind, has no real claim to be regarded as morality at all: if I do good to my neighbour in the hope that he will do good to me, it is no more a 'moral' action than is the investment of money: 'What thank have ye?' as our Lord asked. A morality which is ultimately self-regarding is no true morality at all, however beneficial to the community its results may be. Any hymns which appear to represent almsgiving as a form of 'fire insurance' are rightly despised, for, as St. Paul said once for all, 'it profiteth nothing' if the one true motive is lacking: he would have said the same of the most punctilious performance of the more respectable virtues.

fear and trembling*: 'Sons of God,' said Jesus, 'dare to believe in your heavenly calling/ Mercy rejoicetli against judgement—and Non-sense against Sense.

Lest it should be thought that, our Lord took too favourable a view of human nature; let us remind ourselves at once of the definite evidence to the contrary: 'He knew what was in man*—and therefore 'did not trust Himself to man: 'He knew who should betray Him*—though He did not prevent the betrayal: He knew that the disciples would desert Him—and warned them of it: He expressed the doubt whether 'when the Son of Man came, He would find faith on the earth.'

But, with all this knowledge of human frailty, He never ceased to appeal to the good in man. To take but one example, when face to face with Pilate, He appealed to that love of truth and justice which a Roman governor might be expected to feel.

Like John the Baptist, He called for repentance—a word which means much more than sorrow for sin, and implies a complete change of outlook: and offered freely that forgiveness of past sins which make a new life possible. The rite of baptism, as His apostles administered it, was the symbol of this fresh start: when the waters closed over the head of the baptized, it represented a death to the old selfish life of the natural man or 'the old Adam': the white robe in which he was clad symbolized the removal of the handicap of past offences: it carried with it no suggestion that the robe could not be stained again—but (though the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews takes a sterner view) it must at least be held to have established the presumption that the God Whom the baptized undertook to serve was not 'extreme to mark what is done amiss.' The story of St. Peter shows that no stain is necessarily indelible.

That the change at baptism is not *expected* to be permanent, however much thæ; may be *hoped*, is shown by the constant exhortation in our Communion Service that we should 'lead a new life*—it should be *the* new life, for there is only one—and 'walk *from henceforth* in God's holy ways.

Before we endeavour to throw some light on the nature of sin as a whole, it is right to make it plain that when Christ 'forgave' it, He was definitely claiming to do something which, to the Jewish mind, was the prerogative of God alone. Quite apart from any definite assertion, this was quite enough to scandalize the orthodox, for it was a claim both to exercise divine authority and to do so in a way which changed the whole conception of a Messiah. The Jews thought of their Messiah as one who would deliver them from external enemies: Christ showed that His primary aim was to deliver them from the bondage of sin. It can hardly be doubted on which type of deliverance the average citizen of any nation would set the higher value.

It is this repeated claim of His which forces on the reader, as it forced on the hearers, the dilemma, *Aut deus aut homo non bonus*: 'who,' as His critics asked, 'can forgive sins but God only?'

SIN

BUT it is time that we should attempt to deal with the conception of sin itself, and remove, if we can, a general misconception. It is common to find respectable people annoyed to hear themselves described as 'miserable sinners,' and under the impression that sin is an invention of 'religious minded' persons, and particularly of the clergy. Those same people are not ashamed to make the confession, 'I know that I am terribly (or horribly) selfish'—in ignorance of the plain facts not only that selfishness is sinful but that sin is selfishness. Selfishness 'is the root of all evil'—a definition which St. Paul is wrongly supposed to have given of the love of money. (He said it was 'a root of all kinds of evil'—which is obviously true, for it *may* lead to every possible sin.) Is it worse to be described as a sinner whose condition is pitiable—for that is what the word 'miserable' means—or as one whose selfishness is such as to inspire horror or terror?

It is a very foolish thing to suppose that repentance is a miserable thing, or an unhappy thing. 'It is a change from what is bad to what is good, and you cannot have anything happier than that, and if it causes joy among the angels of God, I do not see why it should make us miserable here' (*William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, His Life and Letters*, p. 211). But it certainly does involve facing the truth about oneself, which is not a pleasant process.

'Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,' are admirable qualities, though perhaps undeserving of the high praise

which Tennyson bestows on them, but no Christian can forget that the virtue which Christ preached was self-denial, and that He meant what He said. *

'To know the world and to like it,' said the great Lord Halifax, 'are two things not eakly to be reconciled'; and the same may assuredly be said of the self. To 'revere* it is only possible if it is to be used for purposes which are unselfish, and it is for such purposes that it needs to be 'controlled/

'Self-love is self-destruction, self-centredness is sin,' and again 'self-love is hell,' said the late Archbishop Temple,¹ elaborating His Master's command of self-denial. It is a command so all-embracing that we might apply to it, so far as Christian morality is concerned, the words of William Blake—

I give you a thread of gold in your hand—
 Only wind it into a ball,
 'Twill bring you in at Heaven's gate
 Built in Jerusalem's wall.

In so far as we deny, or forget, ourselves, we are free to concern ourselves with other people, not as mere 'supers' on the stage of our life, but as brothers and sisters of our own in right of our common sonship. We become invulnerable to those fears for our own credit or popularity which occupy so large a portion of our thoughts, and to more material cares as well. In short, we become free—'serving God in perfect freedom' as our Collect so wisely translates the Latin which declares that 'to be the slave of God is to be a king.' If the self-surrender is complete, it will cease even to trouble

¹ A similar use of this quotation, and of that from Tennyson, is made in the author's book, *The Life Everlasting* (Blackwell).

us whether we live or die, for we shall be able to say with Baxter:

*
 If life be long, let me be glad
 That I may long obey,
 If short, what labourer is sad
 To close the toilsome day?

But Baxter is wrong in suggesting that the day must be toilsome: we should be fulfilling our true function as human beings and that is the only true happiness.

We dare not hope that in this life the process will be complete, but if we see the glory of the goal set before us, we shall find it easier to hate the sin which holds us back, and to take, at least, in our daily life, some halting steps upon the road.

Some further reflections on the nature of sin may be of interest, even though the interest be purely academic. Allusion was made on an earlier page (p. 28) to Browning's suggestion that evil is purely negative: those who hold this view can claim some support from St. John, who uses two different words for 'doing' good and 'doing' evil. For the former he employs *ποιεῖν*, the word from which poets take their title, as people who really *make* something—which is why they were called 'Makers' in Scotland: for the latter he uses *πράττειν*, which suggests a somewhat aimless and fruitless activity, with nothing creative about it. It may also be argued that evil resembles darkness, and that no amount of mere darkness can extinguish the smallest match.

On the other hand, it would be generally agreed that hatred has something positive about it, and is not mere absence of good will: to knock a beggar down is a more positive response than to refuse to give him a shilling.

But it would be in the highest degree unsafe to assume that sins 'of commission' are necessarily worse than sins 'of omission': at the end of the 1928 Prayer Book can be found

an Exhortation, compiled by a famous Provost of Eton, which deserves to be more widely known. In it Dr. James introduces the great last parable in St. Matthew with the comment 'wherein is to be remarked that Christ upbraideth not the sinners for that evil which they did, but because they did not that good which they might have done.' This is, for most of us, a very disturbing reflection.

But, whatever conclusions we may reach on such academic points as these, from the Christian point of view the important points are: first, that our sins are real and not imaginary; and secondly, that it is to 'an Almighty and most merciful Father' that we are bidden to confess them.

In a detective story which I happened to be reading to-day, one of the characters says to another, 'Even if you aren't religious, you've got to believe in evil.' I agree, but, if you aren't 'religious,' it must be extremely difficult to do. To believe in evil is to believe that there is a standard of Right and Wrong: a standard can only exist in a mind, and an absolute standard only in a mind which knows what Truth and Goodness are: and to believe in that is 'religion' of a kind, though, of course, not necessarily Christian religion.

That great and good man, William Morris, lived most of his 'full and eager life' with no true consciousness of the reality of evil: consequently in his stories 'none of the people have really any souls—it is even doubtful if their hearts are anything but golden embroideries on a surcoat' (*Portrait of William Morris*, p. 193). When, late in life, his vivid sympathy with the poor made him an ardent Socialist, he was shocked and saddened by the 'anger, jealousy, greed, and misunderstanding* which he met. Having no belief in any future life, he had no answer to give, and died 'cut off from so many things he needed.' His story illustrates the paradoxical truth that a

belief in sin (which implies the belief that it can be cured) is an essential basis for optimism.

In view of the common belief that sin is a theological invention and that Christians are committed to a pessimistic view of human nature, more is said on the subject in the Appendix (p. 96).

POETRY .AND PROSE

IT will have become clear that, as was hinted on p. 13, the distinction which we have been trying to draw between Sense and Non-sense is very closely akin to that between Prose and Poetry. Whether the English nation inclines to one more than the other may no doubt be disputed: on the one side we must set our amazing poetic heritage, and on the other those pictures of the strong, silent, reserved, and unemotional Englishman which are drawn, not without truth, by some well-known and popular authors. We have also to remember that the national hero is not the strong, silent Duke of Wellington, but the emotional Nelson, and that in different generations they have admired the flamboyant Palmerston, hated the inarticulate Castlereagh, and preferred the Celtic charm of a Lloyd George to the cool reasonings of an Arthur Balfour.

These facts make it the more surprising and the more lamentable that in the sphere of religion they have allowed the prosaic element in their nature to prevail. We shall appreciate the difference between the two temperaments if we contrast the lines quoted on p. 35, beginning:

On cherubim and seraphim
Full royally He rode,

with the version of Tate and Brady:

The chariot of the Lord of Hosts,
Which troops of active angels drew,
Upon a tempest's mighty wings
With most amazing swiftness flew.

The meaning is unchanged, but the glory and the mystery have vanished. These latter lines are prose, naked and unashamed—and it would hardly be too much to say that even the noblest prose inevitably fails to do justice to religious faith, or that the Church of 'England has been too often content to proclaim it on that level. The English Prayer Book contains some of the noblest prose in the language: its pre-faces might literally be described as 'inspired common sense,' but several of our Occasional Services leave the matter on that level. A single instance may suffice to illustrate the point: the Order for the Burial of the Dead speaks in stately and restrained language of the Christian hope, but how does it compare with the old form for the Commendation of a Departing Soul? 'Go forth, O Christian soul, from this world in the Name of God the Father, Who created thee, in the Name of Jesus Christ the Son of the living God, Who suffered for thee, in the Name of God the Holy Ghost, Who hath sanctified thee. . . . May thy place be this day in peace and thine abode in Mount Sion, through Christ our Lord.' In such words as these faith speaks the language of poetry, as is done in the words omitted, where angels, archangels, cherubim, and seraphim are called upon to welcome the inestimable treasure of a redeemed soul.

The Church of Rome has been more generous in its concessions to the poetic instinct: in its teaching the saints hold a real place, and this helps to keep alive that sense of the relation between the seen and the unseen which the prosaic mind so easily forgets and so foolishly denies. But here, too, the prosaic instinct has had its victories, and what was a beautiful and helpful thought has at times degenerated into the superstitious allocation of particular functions to particular saints: similarly, the reverence for relics (in itself a poetic instinct) has notoriously led to gross (and very prosaic) abuses.

It was these abuses which led *toe* Church of England at the Reformation to adopt the more 'prosaic' line with a somewhat exaggerated fervour, and to be suspicious of emotion and of mystery: but it should be remembered that it was John Wesley's insistence on the reality of the unseen, and his fearless appeals to emotion which startled the complacency of the eighteenth century. It is at least arguable that it is a similar appeal, based on a similar insistence, which the twentieth century needs.

It is from the happy union of Prose and Poetry that a true theology and a noble worship are born: but it must be regretfully admitted that each has a large and wholly illegitimate offspring: the family name of the one (in religion) is Scepticism and of the other Superstition.

Faced, as all religion must be, by the choice between these two opposing dangers, the Church of England, influenced by the scandals which caused the Reformation, has decided that Superstition is the greater. It has thereby limited its power of 'poetic' appeal, and become chary of handling subjects, such as the life beyond the grave which demand 'poetic' treatment: those who are familiar with the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso* will realize the greatness of our loss, and will appreciate the attraction which the Church of Rome has for men of brilliant literary power.

For that Church, on its part, has chosen to face the very real risk that the language of poetry will be taken by the illiterate as fact and subjected to very prosaic interpretation. The penalty which it pays is that Scepticism, where it exists in Roman Catholic countries, is far more bitter than elsewhere, because those who are merely intelligent, without being 'poetic,' are repelled by what they regard as offences against truth.

Neither school of thought possesses the whole truth: it is

only when 'the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord' that the Hon can He down with the lamb upon 'the holy mountain' of God.

Let us pass to two other characteristics of the average man, or certainly the average English man, which help to explain his religious attitude, or rather his lack of one: they are connected with one another and with the defect we have just been criticizing. He is averse from thinking on difficult subjects, and wishes for definite guidance, which can be followed, if he wishes, without undue intellectual exertion.

This latter demand is one which Jesus emphatically refused to meet: He gave no definite instructions, for the command to 'be perfect' is as indefinite as any command can be. Mahomet, who knew human nature, though not as Jesus knew it, provided the clearest and most definite rules for his followers, which explains his astounding and, in a sense, deserved success: it also explains the unprogressive character of the faith which he so rapidly established: it was, we must hold, the supreme example of a second-rate success. If Christ said nothing about the position of slaves or the position of women, it was because He knew that His teaching, if honestly accepted, would bring about in time those changes which Christianity, and Christianity alone, has secured. The challenge of 'perfection' is one the effect of which can never cease to operate, as it is doing still.

Christ's method was to throw the responsibility on the individual conscience, illuminated by His Spirit, if it seeks His guidance—on the living person, not on the dead pages of a book. That is why Christianity can never cease to 'invade the sanctity of private life,' however disconcerting the process may be.

In the attempt to escape, mankind—not without the connivance of the Church—has drawn up for itself a series of

unwritten rules by observance of which it can feel it is fulfilling its obligations. Sunday, for example, is a day of at least mild obligation: attendance at Church services is an act of merit: some small contribution to religious purposes is necessary—though the mathematical precision of the 'tithes' (which might have been expected to appeal to the desire for certainty) is, with some unanimity, rejected as excessive. When these duties have been fulfilled, it is possible to regard one's obligations as satisfactorily discharged.

How very sensible! how very prosaic! and how amazingly at variance with the teaching of the New Testament! The 'new life' of the Christian bears a lamentable resemblance to the old. The 'old Adam' walks by the banks of Thames as surely as he ever did by the rivers of Paradise, though now clothed in the respectable garments of prosaic or semi-ecclesiastical respectability.

In order to support this monstrous misrepresentation of Christian duty, it has been necessary for man to make himself a picture of God after his own likeness: and in this he has had, not only the connivance, but in some centuries the active support of the Church. He has taken that quality of God which he believes himself best able to appreciate, His justice, and has so dwelt upon that, that he has taken the part for the whole. For long periods of Christian history God has been thought of, and pictured, primarily as a Judge: it is, of course, eminently desirable that man should remember that he will give an account to God for his life, and the Church was naturally anxious that he should never forget it.¹

But the trouble does not end there: men came to think of

¹ I have heard a distinguished bishop maintain that the clergy wear black to remind men of their latter end, and thus account for their preaching 'good news' in the habiliments of woe.

God as resembling the judges with whom they were familiar, and to assimilate the Divine judgement to the procedure of an earthly law court; the result was that it became very difficult indeed to expect a favourable verdict. 'It was practically taken for granted that the majority of mankind would go to hell; upon that point there was greater unanimity among orthodox theologians than on any of those which divide the Roman Church of to-day from other Christian bodies.'¹ In the fourteenth century Raymond Lull was condemned for suggesting that it was possible that more might be saved than damned. The cult of the Virgin Mary probably had its origin in the desire to find some means of mitigating God's righteous and inevitable wrath: this desire certainly explains its growth. It was inevitable that this concentration on one aspect of the Divine character should have a disastrous effect on religion as a whole: it is extremely difficult to love one who is represented as a 'hanging judge,' however just you may feel his condemnation to be.

So there came about a misrepresentation of God almost as gross as the misrepresentation of Christian duty of which we have spoken, and quite as inexcusable: for we have Christ's own authority for believing that it is to Him that 'all judgement has been committed,' and to think thus of Him is sheer insanity. Once more, there is no conceivable justification for likening the Divine judgement to those given on earth: there can be no examination of witnesses, where all the facts are clearly known; there can be no speeches either for prosecution or defence; 'the secrets of all hearts will be disclosed' so that no question of fact can conceivably arise: we shall be judged on what we *are*, which we shall then infallibly know: to speak of a 'verdict' is absurd, for there can be no possible dispute.

¹ Coulton, *Mediaeval Panorama*, p. 180, note *ad hoc*.

This simple statement of undeniable fact should be enough to show the complete difference between the judgements which we know and the Judgement which we expect: it is equally obvious that we are wrong to think of the latter in terms of those examinations in which we hope to succeed by doing better than our neighbour: the test will be absolute not relative.

The question what will happen after the Day of Judgement cannot, with our present knowledge, be answered in detail, and the attempt to give such an answer has had disastrous consequences: the crude picture of the terrors of hell has ceased to appal and that of the joys of heaven to attract: it was a very 'sensible' question to ask, but a very foolish one to try to answer in 'sensible' language.

If we are right in believing that here on earth those who 'deny' themselves in the service of God and of their neighbours have laid hold on 'the life which is life indeed,' it is reasonable to suppose that the 'everlasting life' prepared for them will be of a similar character: they 'will see God as He is,' and the vision, as Dante suggests, will more than satisfy all their desires. It is foolish to attempt to put into language things which 'eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have they entered into the heart of man': these words certainly bear no recognizable relation to eternal hymn-singing. We can only say that in heaven we shall realize fully the purpose of our existence and be enabled to fulfil it.

And hell? The Judgement Day will have shown us what we are and what we might have been, and to any one with imagination no apparatus of torturing devils is needed to emphasize the pain of that sight. It will not be a 'punishment' inflicted, but a realization of the truth. From that vision nothing can save us—but 'in our blame lies our hope': and

it is permissible to believe 'that the God Whose love we shall then first fully learn will not 'despise the work of His own hands,' though we can neither presume to estimate the period nor to define the process through which He may in His mercy save all within us which is capable of salvation.

The Judgement, then, will be just, for it will be securely based on truth fully known: we shall 'go' (to speak in terms of spatial metaphor) to whatever place we are fit for: 'heaven' would not be heaven for those who could not appreciate it. A selfish man could not be happy 'in heaven' even if by some clerical, or angelic, error he were to find himself there: an eighteenth-century Scottish minister warned the loose livers in his congregation not to expect the chance of 'a leap out of Delilah's lap into Abraham's bosom,' and *mutatis mutandis* the warning applies to us all.

And 'hell,' the portion of those who have chosen to reject life and to reject the light, is nothing but the realization of what they have wilfully lost. Marlowe's Mephistopheles is the most pitiable of all creatures, for he knew what he had thrown away:

Think'st thou that I, that saw the face of God
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells
In being deprived of everlasting bliss ?

But lesser sinners must suffer a similar fate, or what hope can there ever be for them?¹

For in the background of our thoughts there mercifully lies the assurance that 'the Lord is full of compassion and mercy,' that He declares His almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity, and that the Son of God came

¹ A note on the doctrine of purgatory will be found in the Appendix, p. 98. e

into the world 'to save sinners' and died upon the Cross for their sake. If such an assurance leads us to relax our efforts, we are self-condemned: no one can be made to 'live,' or perhaps even be kept alive, unless he has 'chosen the path of life'—and what that path is we know. We are bidden to 'be perfect,' and that we know we cannot be: the mere idea is non-sense: but we can all do (and therefore be) our best, and that, for fallible humanity, *is* perfection.

'Give all thou canst' is the Christian command: 'the lore of nicely-calculated less and more' is very sensible, but is fundamentally un-Christian: and it is not our money which God demands from us, but ourselves: and this is a surrender against which Sense, with its five tongues, never ceases to protest.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

To set before man the goal of an impossible perfection would be a cruel act were it not accompanied by the promise of Divine assistance: but that is promised in terms which admit of no mistake—'I will not leave you comfortless: I come unto you'—and so we pass to that vital doctrine of God the Holy Spirit which Christian terminology has so successfully emasculated. 'Ghost, Comforter, Dove'—all these words have associations utterly alien from the true conception of 'the Giver of life' of Whom the Nicene Creed speaks, Whose altars are rightly draped in scarlet, the colour which the blind man likened to 'the blast of a trumpet.' Rare indeed are the composers of *Te Deums* who can refrain from welcoming 'the Holy Ghost, the Comforter' with a *diminuendo*.

And yet He is the Spirit of life, the same Spirit which was breathed into man's nostrils at creation, breathed now into his heart for a nobler purpose still. His is the invigorating power which inspires all the honourable activities of mankind: artist and athlete, scholar and scientist, poet and philosopher owe their gifts to Him. He has no need to choose His company, for like the Son of God, Whose Spirit He is, He consecrates every gathering which He enters: and in spite of Dr. Johnson, His images of the camel swallowed and the gnat strained out can be held to justify 'the merriment of parsons.'

To claim all inspiration as the work of the Holy Spirit is by no means to suggest that it is all on the same level of importance: unquestionably His highest work is to inspire

that self-forgetfulness which we believe to be the mainspring of all true life: and it is painfully obvious that the artists and others whom we have just mentioned, are badly in need of that lesson. But it may be maintained that the fault is not only on their side. If the Church had been more ready to accept a wider doctrine of inspiration, and to remind all 'gifted' persons that it is God Who gives the gift, of whatever kind it may be, we might not have seen that lamentable cleavage between science and art on the one side and religion on the other which marks the present day.

But the Church, unwilling perhaps to believe, and certainly unwilling to practise, the doctrine that 'all wisdom and all knowledge' are gifts of God in Whom all their 'treasures are hidden' was long suspicious of secular learning, and had little use for painters and musicians who did not clearly and definitely contribute to the service of God: He might 'inspire' Botticelli to paint the *Magnificat*, but *Prima Vera* was of more doubtful origin: and so our artists and scientists have been allowed to believe that their 'talents' are their own, and to forget the Parable of the Talents which tells a very different story. 'Gifts' are clearly not our own creation.

Two texts from St. Paul should govern our thinking on the subject. 'There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit,' and—a searching question—'What hast thou that thou didst not *receive*? but if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?'

We declare in the Nicene Creed that the Holy Spirit is 'the Giver of life'—of all life that is worthy of the name—or, as has just been said, 'of all honourable activities.' The adjective 'holy' no doubt implies some limitation: the Christian has to be 'converted,' which means that his head must be turned away from all pursuits which are purely self-regarding: but with that limitation the Holy Spirit of God consecrates

all that it touches, for there is nothing in itself 'common or unclean,' and the honest craftsman, the faithful labourer, and the industrious artisan can be as truly inspired as the artist or the poet. It is not, we often say, the thing we do which matters but 'the spirit in which it is done': we need to remind ourselves that this spirit is, or may be, the Holy Spirit of God. When that is present, 'drudgery' becomes 'divine'; the slave who remembers that he is 'God's freeman' is a nobler being than the master who forgets that he is 'God's bondservant.'

The consecration of the commonplace may be, and often is, a greater gift of the Holy Spirit than any of those achievements which we readily hail as inspired.

'God is the King *of all the earth*: sing ye praises *with understanding*'

THE CHURCH

BASIC Christianity has only two things to say about the Church; the first, that it is obvious that a visible society of Christians must exist, and the second, that it is clearly desirable that it should be a united society. On the first point no words are needed: experience has shown us the need for association by any persons who wish to set ideas, large or small, before their neighbours. Of the second, in view of our 'unhappy divisions,' there is more which must be said.

Our Lord unquestionably founded such a society, but, in accordance with His constant practice, He gave no precise instructions: indeed, the scarcity of His references to the Church is remarkable: and, though He unmistakably pressed the need for unity among His disciples, there is only one occasion (to which we must return) on which He is reported as giving any instructions at all. Consequently, from the days of the Council of Jerusalem to those of the last Lambeth Conference the conditions of unity have been in constant, and often acrimonious, dispute. The Church of Rome, relying on those words to Peter to which we have referred, has, of course, a simple answer: without attempting to argue the case, we must say that the Anglican, like the Orthodox, Church does not accept the Roman interpretation of the text in question, regarding it as at variance with Christ's reticence on matters of organization, as ill-supported by history, and unjustified in practice. In their view, as has already been said (see p. 12), the term Catholic is wrongly applied to those who narrow the Christian Church to those

who accept that particular dogma: they hold that in this the balance of charity, the most Catholic of virtues, is clearly on their side.

It is no part of our purpose to develop this argument, but by a simple analogy to suggest something of a reconciliation.

Let us take as our starting-point the common saying, 'He can't see the wood for the trees/ and set against it the less common, but equally true, saying, 'He can't see the trees for the wood.' Whether the trees or the wood are the more important is a question as insoluble as the priority of the chicken or the egg. In our parable the Church is the wood and the individual Christian the tree, and it is hardly to be denied that some different schools of thought pay an exaggerated attention to one or the other.

In the normal plantation the trees tend to be similar in kind: it is only in the forest that there is room for the diversity of oak and beech, and for the grandeur of some particular giant of the forest, as well as for the trim plantations of a single type. We would suggest that it is the unity of a great forest, the property of one owner, cared for by his appointed verderers, rather than the smaller unity of the plantation, which more truly suggests the unity at which the Church should aim. There have always been great Christians, whose full allegiance no Church could claim—but they have kept 'the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace,' which is the truly Christian goal.

Like all analogies, this cannot be pressed in detail, but it at least suggests that unity in diversity by which mystic and formalist, Catholic and Protestant, may feel that *in* a very real sense they are 'dwelling together in unity,' till the coming of that blessed day when 'we attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.'

Belief in the Church is sometimes made difficult by what

may appear to be extravagant claims made on its behalf, which jar on those conscious of its shortcomings: it should be remembered that those by whom these claims are made see even more clearly than their critics how far the Church falls short of its ideal. When, for example, they speak of the Church as 'the Body of Christ' they are emphasizing the greatness of the calling, not the success with which it is answered. It is primarily through those who accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ that His teaching is brought to bear on human society: in so far as the body of Christians is animated by His Spirit, the 'members' are doing His work, just as the hands and feet of an earthly body carry out the will which directs it. That is what St. Paul meant when he first used the metaphor: 'Ye are the Body of Christ, and severally members thereof: and the lesson which he is there emphasizing (1 Cor. xii) is the obvious absurdity of disunion among Christians—a lesson which they are still very slow to learn.

If we call the Church 'holy,' we do so because of its origin and its possibilities, rather than because of its actual performance at any given moment: it is just in the same way that St. Paul calls his converts 'saints': they had been 'called to be saints,' and the calling remained, however unfaithful to it they might be.

There are moments, no doubt, when we are tempted to envy the clear-cut definitions of Rome. How comfortable it must be to be sure that we are 'the Church' and every one else outside it! How tentative, in comparison, must seem our approaches to the great problem of Christian unity! How sensible to accept a rule which all can understand!

But we may take courage if we remember that 'sense' is a very dangerous guide, and that clear-cut definitions are seldom the road to wisdom. If 'sense' cannot tell us how many good poems qualify a man to be called 'a poet,' or even

assure us what 'poetry' is, we need not be unduly distressed at the difficulty we find in giving an exact definition of membership of the Christian Church. We may be content with the great definition of its requirements as 'in necessary things unity, in doubtful thing; liberty, in all things charity': the Spirit of God will, we believe, guide us to know what things are necessary and what doubtful: in the meantime charity remains an unescapable obligation on all who 'profess and call themselves Christians.'

Our Master prayed to His Father that those who believe on Him should all be one 'that the world may know that Thou didst send Me': until that unity is achieved, the world will remain unconvinced.

Basic Christianity, as has been said, does not involve allegiance to any particular Church: Christ's promise was that His disciples should become 'one flock' not 'one fold.' But it does involve two obligations—the first, that a Christian must never cease to pray and to work, if he can, for the unity of Christendom; and the second, that he should be an active and loyal member of the Church to which he belongs, while remembering that the lesser loyalty must never make him forget the greater.

Lest I should seem to be lacking in loyalty to my own Church, I must take leave to say that I believe that, as the Preface to the Prayer Book (1928) claims, it keeps before it 'the duty of faithfulness to the teaching of Scripture and the godly and decent order of the ancient Fathers': and further, that in its combination of respect for history with liberty of experiment, and in its allowance for diversities of temperament, it holds that middle course which may, in God's providence, provide a basis for Christian unity. This is not the place to sing its praises, or apologize for its mistakes: I will only say that in the *lasf*, one hundred and fifty years it

has had its full share in that wonderful expansion of missionary work and that effort towards a larger unity among Christians which make those years momentous in the history of the Church.

This little book is a study of basic Christianity, made for a particular purpose, and in no sense a defence of it as against a fuller creed: how far it is 'adequate' (a very foolish question) it is not for me to say: 'the day,' in St. Paul's words, 'shall declare it.'

CREEDS

THE widespread unpopularity of creeds is based on various grounds, some of which are reasonable, while some are not.

All societies, of whatever kind, must state their purpose in some form of words to which their members assent, though this need not, of course, be constantly recited. For a religious society the need is abundantly clear, and those who dislike it have not considered the alternative: they say, with much truth, that the mere recitation of a creed is no proof of loyalty, which can only be shown by the life not by the lips; but any attempt to test this in practice would be deeply resented, and would in practice be intolerable: the investigations of Puritans, and *in* particular of Calvinists, into the private lives of their members were not, save in particular times and places, successful. The power of excommunication for gross offences must be retained, but must be sparingly exercised: wheat and the less palpable tares must be allowed to grow together till the harvest.

There is good ground for complaint against the way in which the Church has at times punished sins against orthodoxy, and it cannot be denied that it has often seemed to regard intellectual assent to theological propositions as satisfactory without attempting the impossible task of deciding whether it has been honestly given or not: intellectual honesty is even harder to assess than purely moral qualities, so that the failure is excusable, but its results have been disastrous.

It is difficult to believe that those who, with the highest

motives, pursued, sometimes to the death, those whose Christology was imperfect, had ever reflected on the solemn words of our Lord: 'Every one who shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him, that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven' (*Luke* xii. 10; cf. *Mark* iii. 29).

'The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit,' which so many uneasy consciences have tortured themselves by attempting to define, is the calling evil good and good evil—the saying, 'Evil, be thou my good': and it is reasonable to fear that it was more truly committed by some inquisitors than by many of their unorthodox victims.

Creeds there must be: every one who sings, 'God save the King,' and means what he sings, is in fact making a profession of faith, none the less real because it is not in credal form. That is the justification for basic Christianity in its desire to see the creed simplified: 'Jesus is Lord,' which, as St. Paul tells us, 'no man can say but in the Holy Spirit,' is a good creed, just as the words 'Our Father,' said with reverence and intention, are in themselves a good prayer. No one would maintain that an instructed Christian should limit either his prayers or his profession of faith to a couple of words, but in both cases they form the foundation on which all else must rest.

THE TRINITY

So far as 'basic Christianity' is concerned, the doctrine finds adequate expression in the familiar phrase, 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit': in all these a Christian must believe. They clearly take us into a mystery with which human language, or indeed human thought, is inadequate to deal. The doctrine arose not from any desire on the part of Christians to be 'clever' or to propound an arithmetical puzzle, but simply from their own experience of the Divine love: they found it revealed in three aspects, but they were very certain of its 'one-ness,' and chose the best word they could find to express this double certainty: though the word is not found in the Gospels, they found it in them, and especially in St. John, the support they needed for their belief.

It is easy, and common, to think that the prayer

Teach us to know the Father, Son,
And Thee, of both, to be but one

is a lame and arid climax to a great hymn, and Archbishop Temple has confessed that he once felt it so: it is really nothing of the kind, as he came clearly to see and to demonstrate.

There are, as Christians believe, three aspects in which God reveals Himself to man, and to think of any one in isolation is both inadequate and dangerous.

He is the Creator, the Almighty Monarch; that is the only aspect which the Mohammedan religion knows.

But, as revealed in Jesus Christ, He is the Man of Sorrows, the King of Love, offering forgiveness teaching and showing

that self-sacrifice is Divine: this is the only aspect which Hinduism, at its best, adores, though, of course, without the knowledge of the Incarnation.

But both these aspects taken by themselves are overwhelming: we know that we cannot perfectly obey: we know that our love is in itself very far from perfect and our desires for goodness pitifully weak. And so we need the third aspect of God—revealing Himself in our souls as the stirring of His Holy Spirit, helping us to accomplish, or to attempt, what is beyond our unaided power.

'God from heaven commands: God from Calvary pleads: God in our hearts makes answer.' 'The doctrine is not offered to us as an answer to all our problems, but as a summary of what Christian people have found in practical experience to be true' (William Temple, *Studies in the Spirit and Truth of Christianity*, Chap. XII).

Dante, in Paradise, saw God revealed in three circles of light, of three colours and each an equal whole:

Nella profonda e chiara sussistenza
 Dell' alto lume parvermi tre giri
 Di tre colori e d'una contenenza;
 E l'un dall' altro come iri da iri
 Parea riflesso, e'l terzo parea foco
 Che quinci e quindi igualmente si spiri

One its reflection on the next conferred
 As rainbow upon rainbow, and the two
 Breathed equally the fire that was the third.

(*Paradiso*, xxxiii, 125 ff., Binyon's translation)

That is perhaps as near as language can come to an expression of the mystery.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not, under that name, any concern of basic Christianity, for it has no place in the

creeds: it attempts to safeguard the vital truth that the Son of God Who came to earth was entitled to speak for the Creator of the world, and that He is still active in the human heart. The inmost nature of God cannot be reached by human thought or expressed in human language: the attempt to do so has obvious dangers as soon as we leave, or appear to be leaving, the language of metaphor. Thus to say that Christ is Light of $\phi\acute{\omega}\varsigma \ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa \ \phi\acute{\omega}\tau\omicron\varsigma$, rouses little antagonism, because the words are clearly metaphorical, and we know that the sun can shine on earth while retaining its place in heaven.

But when we use the term 'sonship' we are on more dangerous ground: we know very little about the ultimate nature of light, but we all know enough about sonship to be sure that a son must be younger than his father. Here was the solid rock of common sense on which Arius took his stand—and ever since his day the mathematical absurdity of the Three in One has been a cause of scandal to all those who believe that logic and common sense are adequate guides in such a matter.

We can only repeat our certainty that this last belief is contradicted by all human experience of lesser mysteries, and remind ourselves that logic and common sense are inadequate to explain any of them. No analysis of sentence construction will explain the magic of eloquence, any more than an analysis of tone values can explain the moving power of the *Marseillaise*, or how Abt Vogler was able

out of three sounds to frame hot a fourth sound but a star.

Perhaps he did nothing of the kind: perhaps Browning was entirely mistaken: he certainly was not talking common sense—but therein he erred, if he erred at all, *in company* not with theologians only, but with every poet and artist in the world.

THE CENTRAL MYSTERY

FOR Christianity the central mystery is that God is in touch with man. For the Jews this touch had been established through their prophets, who, each in his degree, threw light both upon His nature and upon His will for the human race.

But for them the question remained unanswered which Solomon asked when he built the Temple: 'Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?' To that question Christians claim to know the answer: it is given, in magnificent language, in the passage which we read as the Epistle for Christmas Day. 'God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.'

How blessed are our eyes
Which see that heavenly light,
Prophets and kings desired it long
But died without the sight!

We believe that at a certain time and a certain place in the world's history there was given a revelation of God in the likeness of man which showed both God's nature and man's duty in a way which human beings could comprehend.

We believe further that the 'truth' thus established is not a mere fact of history, but that, through His Holy Spirit, Christ still does His Father's work in the hearts of men. God does, in very deed, dwell with men: He is not only the mighty Creator but One Whom we are bidden to approach as Our Father.

So much is clearly essential to basic Christianity: it must be allowed to make its own terms with the doctrine of the Cross, which, in one form or another is clearly central to the Christian creed. As 'God fulfils Himself in many ways,' so there are many ways in which men, differing in temperament but united in purpose, can interpret and make fruitful His message to themselves.

The Cross has always been, and must always be, central to Christianity, both morally and theologically: it was unquestionably the supreme manifestation of that love which Christ's earthly life had shown, and a demonstration of the completeness of the self-sacrifice which is demanded of His followers: it is not for their fellow-Christians to criticize those who are content to strive to follow this example without formulating any theories on the theological problems which have their centre on Calvary.

'Redemption' (on which a note will be found in the Appendix) has sometimes been preached in isolation from the earthly life which preceded the Cross and from the triumphant vindication which followed it. Basic Christianity may be content to agree that it was by being 'lifted up' on the Cross that Christ drew, and draws, 'all men' to Himself.

Similarly, while basic Christianity must accept the Sacraments unless it wishes to break with all Christian tradition, there is no one Sacramental theory which it is bound to accept. In the Church of England a wide divergence of views is known to exist among its loyal members.

For our present purpose it will be enough to say that it is no part of the Christian duty to answer questions such as, 'When and how was our redemption achieved?' or, 'When is a Sacrament valid?' Such questions have a perilous attraction for those who seek for legal definitions which the human mind can readily grasp: they must never be allowed

to distract our attention from the one supreme question, 'How can I, being what I am, fulfil the purpose of my existence, which is to show forth the glory of God?'

(A further note on the Sacraments will be found in the Appendix, p. 99.)

THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

WHILE St. John is content to sum up the virtues to be expected of a Christian in the one word Love, St. Paul (pronouncing it to be 'the greatest* of qualities) gives in his Epistles several lists of the forms which love may take.¹ In these perhaps the most striking passage is the verse in the Epistle to the Ephesians in which he bids the thief not only to abandon his thieving, but to do some honest work, and, having done it, to expend some of his earnings on charity. The 'Christian revolution' could no further go!

For ourselves, perhaps the best summary is that suggested by some words of Bishop King when he wrote of his desire so to live his life as 'to prove in his own person that the gospel of Christ was true.' For, however astonishing it may seem, it remains true that in any difficulty of conscience a man who is prepared honestly to ask himself what Christ would have done, or would wish him to do, will not fail to find an answer: should he, after doing so, still remain in doubt, he may rest assured that either course is justifiable.

If this claim can be truly made, we should not fail to notice what it implies: it means that Jesus Christ is in very truth 'the Lord of all good life,' as no mere man could be. The titles given to Him in the Bible suggest the universality of His character: He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, but He is also the Lamb, just as in modern hymnology He is 'meek and

¹ The saying of Erasmus, '*Nihil est Christianismus nisi vera et perfecta amicitia*;' is not wholly inadequate, but only if we give the adjectives their proper weight, and ask ourselves what 'true and perfect friendliness* involves.

gentle' and the 'Loving Shepherd,' but also the 'Judge Eternal': through ~H He remains the 'strong Son of God,' with a strength made perfect in weakness.

It is on the foundation stone of this paradox that the Christian character is based: we are not concerned to maintain that Christ revealed new virtues, but rather that He set a standard by which all virtue should be judged. Nor do we claim that 'the Christian virtues' are a Christian monopoly: they have been, and are, practised by many who do not know, or do not acknowledge, their origin. Nor, of course, do we suggest that all so-called Christians make any attempt to practise them: but only that in every generation those who have been true to their calling have 'out of weakness been made strong' with results which every Christian country has reason to bless.

As I have several times referred to the failure of Christians to practise what they preach, I must, in justice, remind the reader that they have no monopoly in this respect: all who have ideals fail continually to live up to them, and the higher the ideal the more glaring the failure. But we feeble Christians have the right to ask that our religion be judged by its best: one does not judge music by the honest but excruciating efforts of beginners: if one wishes to learn what cricket is, one goes to Lord's, not to watch the game at a preparatory school.

For basic Christianity the question is not whether many Christians succeed in approximating to the perfection which admittedly none attain, but, first, whether the ideal set before them is, in fact, as high as they claim; and secondly, whether it is right to set before weak mortals an unattainable goal. The former question would seem to have been answered by the conscience of mankind which acclaims the character of Jesus as its ideal: it is not for nothing that Mr. Gandhi

declared that he owed more to Him than to any other teacher. The answer to the latter will depend on our estimate of human nature, and it is a striking fact that it is the Christian, affirming the reality and the universality of sin, who affirms with equal assurance that man is the child of God—a final triumph, we may say, of Non-sense over Sense.

And, while we rightly deplore our own failures, we can point to saints in all ages, canonized or not, who have, in the great words of the Prayer Book, been 'lights of the world in their several generations': Ireland is not the only island which can boast its saints, and from Wulfstan to Wilberforce, from Stephen Langton to William Temple, the names of great Christians have been written large in the struggle for social and political righteousness in this country. It was to leaders who were also Christian preachers that the Labour Party owed much of its original inspiration: it will be a bad day for it and for the country should it ever disown its spiritual ancestry.

CONCLUSION

ANY instructed Christian who may have persevered thus far will undoubtedly, when he reads the word 'conclusion,' find himself running over in his mind the many important Christian doctrines of which nothing has been said: I would beg him, in that case, to read the Introduction again and to remind himself of the sub-title of the book.¹ Should any feel that an undue priority has been given to Christian practice over Christian doctrine, I would, with all reverence, refer them to the great saying, 'If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.'

My object has been to encourage the apathetic or the suspicious to make the Christian experiment with some real understanding of what it implies. After all, experiment is the only test which every theory has to face: Blake's advice is sound—

'Never believe without experiment V
Why, that's the very thing that Jesus meant
When He said, 'Only believe—believe and try!'

For the purpose of experiment, a *modicum* of doctrine is clearly necessary, and, if it be sincerely made, it is legitimate to believe that the promise will be fulfilled which was quoted in the first paragraph. It is at least permissible to doubt whether to insist on a conviction of sin as the *first* step may

¹ Lest he should complain, as he very reasonably may, that so little has been said of the Sacraments, an explanation of the omission from the main body of the book has been given in the Appendix, p. 99.

not be a reversion to those methods of **John the Baptist** of which something has already been said.'

The greatest and simplest gift which Christianity offers to man is the assurance of his personal value in the scheme of things. Here again we find it was the Jews who first dared to entertain so great a hope. 'Say not thou,' wrote the author of Ecclesiasticus, 'I shall be hidden from the Lord; and who shall remember me from on high? I shall not be known among so many people; for what is my soul in a boundless creation? . . . He that is wanting in understanding thinketh upon these things; and an unwise and erring man thinketh follies. . . / For the Lord made men 'according to His own image . . . and showed them good and evil. . . . And He said unto them, Beware of all unrighteousness; and He gave them commandment, each man concerning his neighbour' (*Ecclus.* xvi-xvii).

With all their many shortcomings the Jews held fast to this charter of human existence: the Book of Deuteronomy, in its rules for life, enjoins most of the virtues which we are rightly invited to admire *in* the teaching of the Buddha, its contemporary, and bases them on a conception of God's nature and purpose of which he could not dream. The Jews were bidden to believe that they were children of a God Who 'doth execute the judgement of the fatherless and widow,' Who 'regardeth not persons nor taketh reward': it was for that reason that they were to show justice and charity to the fatherless, the widow, and the stranger.

In the present day, to a generation oppressed by immensities even more insistent and overwhelming, Christianity offers the same hope and preaches the same duty. But the God Whom it proclaims is a God Whose nature is truly known and the duty it enjoins is all-embracing: for it tells of a God Whose Name is Love, Whose interpretations of the word was

shown when His Son died upon the Cross, having left to His disciples the new and definite commandment, that they 'should love one another *as He had loved them.*'

The task is far beyond mortal power: but at our baptism, when each of us was given 'a Christian name'—the pledge and token of our unique relationship to God—those present were bidden to 'remember always, that Baptism doth represent unto us our profession; which is, to follow our Saviour Christ, and *be made* like unto Him.'

So we persevere in our impossible task,

still nursing the unconquerable hope

that God will not suffer His purpose for us to fail, will turn our feeble efforts into something not unfit for His acceptance, and will make us not wholly unworthy to be called His sons.

The immensities of Space and Time appal the thought and may even paralyse the will: but they lose their terrors for the Christian who dares to set against them—as he is bound to do—the conception of Infinite Power wielded by Infinite Love. He can trace, under Dr. Toynbee's guidance, the rise and fall of civilizations, but will believe, with him, that 'the successive rises and falls of civilizations may be subsidiary to the growth of religion,' and that 'if we believe in the three words *Dominus illuminatio mea*, we can look forward without dismay to any future that may be coming to us.'¹

This is to echo, with a full knowledge of history and of the failures it records, the sublime assurance of St. John: 'The world passeth away and the desire thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

'Honourable is the enterprise, and the hope is great.'

¹ *Civilization on Trial* (Arnold Toynbee), pp. 234 and 226.

3

O GOD, the God of all goodness and all grace, Who art worthy of a greater love than we can either give or understand, fill our hearts, we beseech Thee, with such love towards Thee that nothing may seem too hard for us to do or to suffer in obedience to Thy will, and grant that, thus loving Thee, we may daily become more like unto Thee and finally receive the crown of life which Thou hast promised to them that love Thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord,

APPENDIX¹

FOR the purposes of this Appendix I have made use of the Report of a Commission appointed in 1922 by the archbishops 'to consider the nature and grounds of Christian doctrine.' I have done so, not because it technically possesses any authority,' but because its members were chosen as 'representing different traditions and points of view,' so that, as far as the Church of England goes, its opinions have a high claim to consideration. I have also made use of *Doctrines of the Creed*, a very valuable work by Professor Quick, who was himself a member of the Commission.

A—*The Atonement*

Four types of Atonement theory are described by Professor Quick: .

- (a) Some have said, 'It is because Christ brought God's message of forgiveness, and His human life revealed God's fatherly love *in* a way which has stirred man's heart to fresh repentance.' This answer leads to what we may call the 'subjective' or 'moral' theory of the Atonement.
- (b) Some have said, 'It is because God in Christ has won the victory over all the forces of evil, sin, and death, and has broken the power of the devil over man.' This answer leads to what we may call the 'classic' or 'dramatic' theory.
- (c) Some have said, 'It is because Christ as man has borne the penalty for sin in man's behalf, and thus made it possible for God to forgive man freely.' This answer leads to what we may call the 'juridical' theory.

¹ All references in the Appendix are to the Report, unless it is otherwise stated.

(d) Some have said; 'It is because Christ, the Son of God, Who is also the sinless man, has offered through death that life of perfect human obedience and self-surrender, which having died, becomes the universal expiation and cleansing power for sin-stained souls.' This answer leads to what we may call the 'sacrificial' theory.

Professor Quick's conclusion is that while no one theory, nor any number of theories, can be sufficient to express the truth, all of these theories make their essential contribution to it and that 'the fullest truth is found in the great principle vindicated by Abelard, that the Cross is the supreme demonstration of God's love for man' (p. 237).

In the words of William Temple (*William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury; His Life and Letters*, p. 102): 'Of course our redemption is achieved, not by contemplation of the Crucifixion, but by assimilation of its spirit.'

B—*The Virgin Birth and the Resurrection*

'The primary evidence for the Resurrection is the existence of the Christian Church. Something is needed to account for the conversion of the dejected followers of a crucified Messiah into the nucleus of the Church Militant. It is clear from the New Testament that this change was due to their conviction that the Lord was risen' (p. 85). It is with the knowledge of this triumphant conclusion of Christ's earthly life that the Christian approaches the story of its beginning.

'The Church's tradition of faith in the Virgin Birth must not be taken in isolation from the totality of Christian beliefs about the Person and work of Christ.' 'Many of us hold that belief in the Word made flesh is integrally bound up with belief in the Virgin Birth, and that this will increasingly be recognized* There are some, however,[^] among us who hold

that a full belief in the historical Incarnation is more consistent with the supposition that our Lord's birth took place under the normal conditions of human generation/ 'Both views are held by members of the Church, as of the Commission, who fully accept the reality of our Lord's Incarnation, which is the central truth of the Christian faith' (p.82f.).

To this statement we may briefly add some considerations from Professor Quick's *Doctrines of the Creed*, chap. XV. He points out that in spite of 'the almost unbroken and universal tradition of the Church from the second century . . . there are strong arguments in favour of the opinion that belief in the Virgin Birth is at least not among the primary essentials of the Christian faith.' He draws attention to the curious fact that no attempt is made in the New Testament to show any connection between this doctrine and saving faith in Christ. This, paradoxically, while it strengthens the belief on historical grounds, as showing that it was not 'invented' for doctrinal reasons, must be held to weaken it on doctrinal grounds. 'There are grave difficulties in affirming as "necessary to salvation" belief in a fact of which St. Paul does not seem to have been aware,' and of which the New Testament makes virtually no doctrinal use at all.

His own conclusion is that it is a subject on which we ought to be especially tender and sympathetic towards the convictions of those who differ from ourselves: he finds it very hard to believe that beliefs so firmly grounded in tradition, and so fruitful in devotion and 'so intimately connected with the historical incarnation have their origin, nevertheless, not in the truth of historical fact but in a pious myth.'

As regards the truth of the Resurrection, 'it is the uniqueness of Jesus which makes it credible': 'the defence of the Christian's convictions about the historical origins of his

faith will always rest mainly upon the principle that effects must have an adequate cause.' 'Christian faith is faith, not simply *in* the teaching of Jesus, but faith-*in* the living Lord Who died and rose again to bring to man the eternal life which is the goal of history' (Quick, op. cit., pp. 150 f. and 155).

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C—*The Empty Tomb*⁹

On the subject of 'the empty tomb' a short summary of the conclusions *in* the Report will show the divergence of Christian opinion, and will suggest that the Commission is not disposed to regard any one view as alone permissible.

'The majority of the Commission are agreed in holding the traditional explanation—viz. that the tomb was empty because the Lord had risen' (p. 84).

'Some of us are inclined to the belief that the connection made in the New Testament between the emptiness of a tomb and the appearances of the Risen Lord belongs rather to the sphere of religious symbolism than to that of historical fact' (p. 86).

But 'to some of us it appears to be of vital importance that the supremacy of spirit should be vindicated in the material creation, and not merely outside and apart from it. . . . The doctrine of a personal but purely spiritual immortality . . . appears to involve a false dualism between spirit and matter' (p. 87). (The Report adds elsewhere that belief in 'the resurrection of the body' involves no belief in the 'resuscitation of our actual physical frame/ p. 209.)

Their conclusion is that, in a case so unique and so momentous 'it is not surprising that opinions should differ when the question is raised how much in the record of it is derived from the sheer occurrence of the fact itself, and how much is due to the primitive interpretation of the fact in the minds

which first perceived its transcendent significance, and expressed it in forms inevitably belonging to their own manner of thoughts and speech' (p. 88).

D—*The Ascension*

'He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God'

If the risen Christ Vanished out of the sight' of the disciples, it was inevitable that they should regard' it as an ascent into heaven, and should so describe it. 'Whatever may have been the nature of the event underlying these narratives, and whatever its relation to the Resurrection, its physical features are to be interpreted symbolically, since they are closely related to the conception of heaven as a place locally fixed beyond the sky.' 'The Ascension marks a definite ending of our Lord's earthly ministry, demonstrating that His Resurrection was not a return to the conditions of this life, but a completion and transformation of this life through the removal of earthly limitations. It thus makes plain that the destiny of completed fellowship with God is possible for human nature, and so illuminates the doctrine of human immortality' (p. 89).

'The metaphor "sitting at the right hand of God" represents the vindication of Christ, and His triumphant exaltation to a share in the sovereignty of God, with all the Divine authority and activity which that implies' (ibid.).

E—*Human Sin*

'It is a fact of experience that man is universally prone to sin. This is not to be understood to mean that man is 'totally depraved' or is not also in many ways 'prone to righteousness' (p. 60). Original righteousness, in other words, is as real as original sin. 'What is affirmed is that every man does in fact

tend, in one respct or another, to be and to do what is other than perfectly good' (ibid.).

This sentence (which the authors of the Report rightly describe as 'a grave iftiderstatement') is sufficient answer to those who believe that Christianity involves a belief in the total depravity of man. No Christian is called upon to believe that, nor that the universal tendency to evil is bound up with the historical truth of any story of a Fall. The Church, in fact, is not committed to any one doctrine with regard to this subject (p. 69).

In an Appendix to the Report (p. 223) there is given 'a possible account of the universal tendency to evil' which may be briefly summarized: though it has not the authority of the whole Commission, it certainly deserves attention.

Man differs from the animals partly by his capacity to choose in the light of general principles between various 'goods' which he might pursue. . . . He has a standard which he consciously applies in making the judgement between good and evil. . . . But he sees the world, and judges it, from his own point of view. But the world is not really centred upon him: it is centred upon God. Only God can see it in true perspective and proportion.

It was not necessary that he should be self-centred, and should not realize from the first his dependence on God, the like dependence of others, and, consequently, his own position as one among others. But such self-centredness was likely to develop, as in fact it did, and thus the moral perspective is lost and moral perception is blurred. Some would see in the self-centredness of a finite being like man the whole account of original sin as we meet it in experience: but it is also a matter of our 'social inheritance': for as soon as any one individual has adopted a self-centred view of life, those influenced by him cannot escape a corresponding distortion.

It is, however, legitimate to suggest, as is done in this Appendix, that the root of human sin lies *in* 'self-centredness.' Man, as a finite being, judges the world from his own point of view, and, in so far as he does so, judges wrong, because the world is not really centred on him, but upon God. It was from this self-centredness that Christ came to save him: this is shown by many sayings such as that 'he who seeks to save his life will lose it,' but also by His own consistent example ('the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister'), and finally by the supreme self-sacrifice of the Cross: man can be bidden to 'deny' himself, when the Incarnate God had shown the final example of self-denial.

Obviously the possibility of sin is involved in the freedom of the will, 'the greatest gift which God in His bounty made in creating, and the most in conformity with His excellence,' as Dante says (*Paradiso*, v. 19). For man to have been created other than free would have been a meaningless act of power: 'the capacity for sin is also the capacity for fellowship with God' (p. 224).

F—*Purgatory*

The doctrine of purgatory came into existence to provide some relief from 'the stark alternatives of heaven and hell' which seem to affront human intelligence. If we *are* to think of the life beyond the grave in terms of time and space, some conception of the kind is obviously necessary. 'The Romish doctrine of purgatory' which is condemned in our Articles had been generally interpreted with a legal precision which was intolerable, and had given rise to gross abuses, so that the faithful were encouraged to believe that a money payment could be applied to secure the limitation of purgatory for those whom they loved, or the mitigation of its pains. The condemnation of this 'Romish' doctrine in no way rules out

'the essential idea of a phase of progressive growth and, it may be, of needed purification of the soul after death' (p. 212). The Report adds that we 'should not fail 'to recognize the manner in which not only pain or sorrow but also joy may minister to spiritual advance.' 'The increasing knowledge of God' could have no other effect.

G—*Redemption*

The word, though rightly dear to Christian devotion, is peculiarly liable to misinterpretation. If it is taken literally, it implies the payment of a price to the person holding the captive in bondage, so that it has, in the past, been held that it was paid to the devil, which is, to Christian thought, absurd. The earliest Christian thought found a parallel in the redemption of Egypt, which, so far from being achieved by payment, was accomplished 'by a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm.' Though there is no doubt a sense in which a 'price' was paid on Calvary, it is difficult so to use the phrase as to keep clearly in mind that 'the God of Redemption is no other than the God of Creation, and that the activities involved in the Creation, Redemption, and Consummation of the world are all activities of the one God' (p. 79).

We may rightly sing:

Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,

so long as we remember that it is the healing and restorative power of forgiving Love by which the 'ransom' or 'redemption' is effected.

H—*The Sacraments*

That the two Sacraments 'ordained by Christ Himself are 'basic' no Christian will deny, but there are two reasons why

it has seemed that any detailed discussion of them would be out of place in the main body of the book.

In the first place, they are rightly described in the Catechism as 'a means whereby we receive' the gift of God, and 'a pledge to assure us there of.' As the purpose of this book is to convince the doubtful that there is in fact such a gift to be received and a God to bestow it, it would seem that a discussion of 'pledges' and 'means' belongs to a later stage.

Secondly, both Sacraments have been so diversely interpreted that any discussion which was full enough to do justice to the views held by good Christians would inevitably be so long as to destroy the balance of the whole.

Of the significance of Baptism something has already been said (see pp. 53 f.): of the other great Sacrament it may be enough to say that, in spite of the different names by which they may call it, and the different theories which they may hold, all loyal Christians would agree that the essential belief is that, through the Sacrament, the life of Christ, with all that that implies of self-sacrifice, is *really* made available to His faithful followers, so that, in their degree and according to their powers to receive the gift, they can indeed 'live in Him and He in them.'

There is nothing superstitious in the belief that 'dead' matter can be the vehicle of spiritual meaning and power—that, as we have seen (see note, p. 15), happens in music, and, perhaps less obviously, in poetry. The danger begins when the 'Real Presence' in the Sacrament is so preached, and so localized, as to seem to belittle the reality of a Divine presence made known in other ways and promised whenever 'two or three are gathered together in the Name of Christ': this is very far from being a necessary result of Sacramentalism, but it sometimes follows from it, and accounts for the alarm with which it is regarded in some Christian circles.

Perhaps I may be allowed to quote a few sentences from a small book of mine called *Christian Out lines* (now published by Eyre & Spottiswoode):

'Christ takes the simplest of ideas and gives it a spiritual meaning; just as every one understands the significance of washing, so every one understands why we eat and drink. We do so to keep our bodies alive; without nourishment they would starve and die. No one feels any difficulty in extending the idea to the brain: if a man's brain is not given nourishment by fresh ideas it will be starved. What Christ does is to extend the metaphor to the soul or spirit, that part of us which matters most, the part in which our real life may be said to lie. And what is the food of the soul? No Christian can doubt of the answer: it is Christ's life, Christ's spirit, Christ's example, or, in one word, Christ Himself. Every time that we come to the Communion we come hoping to receive into ourselves some of that Divine power by which He lived and spoke. We shall not receive it all, because of our inability to receive and to retain, but we shall receive according to the measure of our faith and to the honesty of our seeking.'

The two great Sacraments have a vital part to play in keeping before our eyes what we have called 'the central mystery' of the nearness of God to man: the one marks the entrance into the Christian family, and the other the means by which the life of that family is sustained. This operation is, no doubt, 'mysterious,' but the whole purpose of this book has been to maintain that human life is a mysterious thing and that to deny its mystery is to deny its meaning.

We find here, indeed, a final illustration of our central theme, that 'sense' and 'logic' are not, and cannot be, satisfactory guides in religious matters. Attempts to define clearly the nature of the gift bestowed in the Sacraments are doomed to failure—'we murder to dissect.'

♦

Deus non tenetur sacramentis suL—God is not bound (or limited) by His Sacraments, and efforts to define the precise efficacy of Baptism have often seemed to suggest that He is administering a legal code: *Homines tenemur*—we men *are* bound to observe them, and to accept with humble gratitude the gift which we find them to convey: but we are *not* bound to attempt to define with precision the conditions of the gift or the method of its bestowal. The last, and not the least important, of the requirements laid down in the Catechism for those who 'come to the Lord's Supper' is that they shall 'be in charity with all men'—and that qualification is more fundamental than any accurate knowledge of the Divine economy.

Basic Christianity asks (or should ask) not only 'How little need a Christian believe?' but the deeper question, 'What must a Christian be?'

