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THE CROSS OF CHRIST AS THE MORAL PRINCIPLE OF SOCIETY

At some risk of being misunderstood I will venture to say that the chief of the wider needs in current religion is the moralization of the idea of God through His Kingdom; its translation to experience, and to the central experience—that of the conscience. It is the standing need, indeed, of an atonement—to do justice to the holiness of God in the central human situation. This is the chief interest of the New Testament. And it is the element in any religion that fits it for such a moral crisis as history has reached.

We all feel the impotence of the Christian Church in the national and European situation into which we have come. And the remarks made on it are various—in the image of their makers. We may state the case briefly by noting that the State at its best is a body and an interest mainly ethical, while the Church has become a body with a concern mainly mystic—whether the mysticism take the high and sacramental form or the broad and rational. Both of these mystical forms tend to lose the preeminently moral note, the note of reality, the note of the conscience, and of the guilty conscience; the note of the true catholicism, which is the evangelical. But that note involves a moral restatement of the human problem in its present phase, and of the Christian redemption which solves it. The supreme and central problem ought to be adjusted to the world's actual case, and presented as the problem of man's historic wickedness and God's historic holiness in modern terms, man's public unrighteousness and God's public

kingdom. But both sides of that collision are moral quantities above all else, whatever fashion they take in each age; their adjustment, therefore, is an ethical one. So far it is relevant to the chief interest of the State. But is it relevant to what has become the chief interest of the Church, whether as its piety or its sacraments? Has the mysticism there retained on either side a moral genius in command? Has it risen from being a mysticism of the imagination to be the mysticism of the conscience, and of the conscience on the world-scale, the scale of the Eternal, of the moral Absolute—in a word, of the holy? It handles the holy, does it realize it? There are those who think that in this direction the Church has much failed. It has lost the ethical note in the mysticism either of the sacramentalists, the rationalists, or the pietists. Revelation with its authority has fallen from being moral redemption to be but a deposit of sacred truth. Whereas at its center, the Cross of Christ, we have neither an instruction nor a ceremony, but sublimated moral action—the supreme moral crisis of the soul, of society, of the universe, of eternity; and the creation of the last moral realm, the kingdom of God. (I speak much of notes, much more of notes than of programs, or even doctrines; for in acting on the collective public it is the note that tells most, and most determines influence.) That note of the Cross—ethical, holy, atoning, and redeeming—the Church must recover as its grand dominant. Its mysticism must be moralized at its source, and on the scale of its source, if it is to regain the ethical tone which States can understand and own. That is to say, the Church must become more true to its New Testament genius, where all turns on the Holy One's treatment of sin, or rather of guilt; that is, on the solution of the human problem as the problem of the conscience, man's and God's. All turns on the Kingdom of God in history as in heaven. This is a view of the case which the writers of this world know not, and know the less the more fluent they are, especially in fiction, about the human problem. Did they know they would not treat life as if religion were foreign to it, nor crucify by silence the Lord of glory, or put him off with a mere historic admiration. We may venture to say that the decaying public impotence of the Church coincides (to say the least) with a mystic curiosity

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on the one hand, and, on the other, with a growing shyness of the only moral solution of life by a deep and positive grasp of atonement, or God's own moral adjustment for society. The Cross of Christ was the moral Armageddon of the race. It meant more for God than all the battles of man's history. It meant more for man's moral destiny. And the moral principle of that victory must mystically pass into the fiber of the Christian conscience if it is to speak with divine authority to the peoples as such. The Church's public influence will not return till its apostolic succession recover the great prophetic note which makes saints to be also statesmen of the kingdom of God, the kind of saints that judge the world.

I venture to speak of the bearing on the nature of society of this Cross which crowned the person of Christ. I would indicate how the very structure and course of society carries, and even hurries, us into the theology of the Cross as the one eternal crisis and focus of the moral powers that make society possible. There they all gather to a head. Indeed, that theology, as the first thing it did, created in the Church a new society, which is, with all its faults and crimes, the finest product of history—not to say the final when it is perfected. The Cross, which is central to Christianity, is inseparable from the kingdom of God, and that Kingdom is the truth of society. Yet it is the power chiefly left out of account by the philosophy which would explain history, or the politicians who would repair it.

If the race is an organic whole and not a crude mass, it must have a center of moral power. Authority there must be, and government; and the more so, the more spiritual we are (if there is anything moral in our spirituality). But there are governments many and authorities many, appealing even to our conscience; what is the government for all governments, and the authority for all authorities? What is the last center and authority of the human spirit? Is it something we take to the Cross or something the Cross brings as the kingdom of God? Is there a kingdom of heaven, and is there a King of kings? Is not our very freedom an imperative? We *must* be free. That which creates even freedom is it not an authority?

If mankind is not atomic, and if its organism is not a mere

organization, not merely mechanical, not one of force and empire, then it is in its nature moral. Its foundation (as the family shows) is not a unit, but two at least; it is a relation; and it is a living relation—sympathetic, indeed, but still more, authoritative. Certainly it is a matter of heart, but still more is it of conscience. The moral interest is the ultimate interest of history. The chief problem of the latest form of society—democracy—is its moral control. If mankind is but a mass of units, if there be no society but what these make by a consent or contract, if the ultimate thing is the individual, and if society is but individualism clotted, then it is false to speak of the moral interest as central and supreme. It is not only false but tyrannical and Puritanical. And there are other interests, such as the æsthetic and cultural, which claim control; they repudiate moral control as a usurper, and resent moral considerations as interlopers. They demand independence and equal rights with morality—art for art's sake. The same claim is made by the modern State, which in Germany insists on discarding morality when it interferes with the power of the egoist State. We have then not a society but only a culture, which is concerned not with the whole but with the exploiting of the whole for the development of the individual, the genius, or the State. It issues accordingly in the superman or the super-State, above and beyond good and evil. The æsthetic life, or the life merely national, is an egoist life. And it is the curse of modern life that its very ethic becomes æsthetic for lack of authority. Therefore, it is non-social. But if, on the contrary, mankind (like the Church) is a society by its nature, and not a mere coalition at its choice, if it is not a compilation but an organism, then its very essence and ground is moral and not æsthetic; it rests on what is good and not on what looks well, on what we trust and not what we enjoy; it is made of consciences and not mere atoms; which consciences cohere in a moral reality; so that the individual does not come to himself as a true person except as he finds himself in this moral milieu, and develops a good will there. The State then does not arise simply from individual need. Like the Church, it is not a club where the individual utilizes for his own need similar needs in others.

It is not simply a self-improvement society. It is not a poise of egoisms, a balance of interests. But it exists through the social necessities intrinsic to a moral or spiritual life. The analysis of its phenomena by any psychology, individual or social, which takes account of all the facts arrives at last at something beyond analysis, which forms the ground of these phenomena, and explains their why and wherefore. (This is preeminently so in the greatest society of all—the Church.) The man in his inmost nature is not a unit but a member of his society. His very substance is notched into it. He is built like a house meant to grow into a row, with projecting bricks to tongue into next door. The influence of society on him is not simply regulative but in a sense creative. It makes him what he is. It constitutes him, so that he is not a man if he is not a brother. It is inexplicable but it explains all. It is beyond analysis as the creative synthesis of all. It does not police him merely but develops him, comes out in him—yet by free action on him and not by ideal process. It gives him certain rights, which are valid simply as the conditions under which his moral development to a personality can proceed, and his passage, therewith, into the kingdom of God. That is his true and only liberty. But you ask if I really mean that he has no rights but what society gives, none in whose name he should resist society. I do not mean that. But if he claim any rights as not conferred on him by society, rights which society can only recognize, they are yet not intrinsic to him as sheer individual, but they are given him by God as himself the supreme world in which he lives, moves, and is. And a prompt Trinitarian would say God was the supreme society, where I have just said supreme world.

The final, the ruling, interest of a society supremely moral must be personality. For such a society is itself a quasi-personal thing. It has a corporate personality, a common will, which does not come into existence just by pooling wills. A race of growing persons cannot really cohere in anything which is just put together, or whose nature is lower than indivisible personality. The moral nature of man cannot grow either in a vacuum or under mere compression, whether the squeeze be by force of arms or force of

numbers. Majorities we must work with, but they are only the expression, crude as yet, of the collective personality of the nation. They only give effect to this, they do not produce it. The State which works with them is fundamentally a moral being, and reflects a social *morale* whose education is from moral sources. Where are these sources? Are they within the resources of the State itself? Is the State so self-sufficient morally that it can provide all the moral education its members require? Is it the moral standard, and ultimate for its citizens? That is good German, but it is bad English and fatal ethic. Where, then, shall the individual go to find the chief source of his education into true personality, so as to become the kind of individual that makes majorities beneficent for a nation, or a nation for a world? To his national history? But, even if he had better means than his schools provide of reaching the true genius of his nation, and owning it in his loyalty, he does not thereby become a man. He may only become a patriot, worship nationalism, and sacrifice the whole of humanity to its juvenile egoism. Where is he to find the ethos which is the true nursery and happy climate of his personality as a man. Where at last but in Christ and Christ's kingdom? That kingdom every democracy, every republic, must obey.

The supreme interest of a society essentially moral we should all agree is personality. Is it absurd then to think that a real person (and not the quasi-personality of a race) must be the creative center of society, that it is a person who must educate the unit into the humane personality of membership? It is true the subconscious effect of the State and its atmosphere is great. "The State," says Bosanquet, "is not merely the political fabric. The term State accents, indeed, the political aspect of the whole, and is opposed to the notion of an anarchic society. But it includes the entire hierarchy of institutions by which life is determined, from the family to the trade, and from the trade to the Church and to the university. It includes all of them, not as the mere collection of the growths of the country, but as the structures which give life and meaning to the political whole, while receiving from it mutual adjustment, and therefore expansion, and a more liberal air." Or, take Green: "The State is, for its members, the

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society of societies, the society in which all their claims on each other are mutually adjusted." And, we might add, they are not simply composed but organized in a creative way. It is history crystallized, the past incarnate; and we must include the past in humanity and own the educative influence of the dead especially.

The spirit of such a body, the genius of a nation with a great history, certainly acts upon us very strongly and nobly. But it acts in a way too general and too subconscious to reach the most intimate and influential springs of moral personality. It surely cannot be, as William James says it is, that "in these crepuscular depths of personality the sources of all our deeds and decisions take their rise, and that here is our deepest organ of communication with the nature of things." Surely we do not get out by the cellars. Surely the determinants of our will are more in the open than that, else there is, making us, more of a process than a choice, and more of a pressure from beneath than an intelligence from above. It cannot be that the roots of whatever is most divine in man are in the subconscious rather than in the conscious region of moral vision and decision. For the creation of moral personality we need something more than the subconscious *élan* and gregarious influence of our nation. That is not pointed enough, not personal nor moral enough, and on the other hand not large enough for the race. It is not subtle enough, for by itself it gravitates to material force; and it is not wide enough, for it tends to national egoism. To escape mere nationalism must we not have some incarnation of humanity? But is that possible? It is not if mankind is but a heap of sand. Nor is it if we regard humanity (with Strauss) as but the effectuation of an idea. Ideas do not become persons, they come from persons; they are a person's ideas. Ideas do not incarnate, only wills. But if the essence of human society is more in the nature of an energy, if it is a common will, or a common conscience, then its incarnation is not impossible. The incarnation of an idea, or even of a national history, is not what is offered us historically in Jesus Christ. At this moment I say nothing of him as the incarnation of God; I will only speak of him as the mightiest of the dead and the focus of a humanity which is above all things moral in its nature and

center. And I suggest that the more humane, the more ethical, the more of a unity society grows, the less it finds its account in an egoist culture, the more it presses a freedom of citizenship instead of atomism, the more stress it lays on the moral soul instead of the imaginative or even the sympathetic—so much the more is it driven to rally upon the personality of Christ, whether it interpret it theologically and really or only ideally. Jesus Christ is the historic center of the race, whether we regard him æsthetically, as its ideal figure, or historically, as the cause to which ethical society and modern history owe more than to any other actor in its course. But he is only the center of the race if the race's center is the moral center, if its region is the conscience as the suzerain of every other interest. If the intrinsic value of society is its moral value, if this moral region is really the creative, where men are made and not ideas only, then the most precious and potent factor in society is Jesus Christ. And a faith in him full of ideality takes the lead of all idealism, which by itself is now a social danger. In him both the destiny and the ethic of humanity are gathered up. The common will, the moral core, the spiritual genius of the race, receives in him such a condensed expression and permanent control as no man has ever given to any nation from Caesar to Luther, from Luther to Washington. And he is, therefore, so powerful for humane personality that the reign of his humanity is bound to take the command of all nationality, and to give to it, no less than to the soul, its true and tributary place in the reconciliation of the world.

But will that not put him in front of God—obscuring more of God than he reveals? Must we not take two more steps? He is not dead but alive. How can we speak in any real sense of his taking command if he has himself already been taken into the command of death? A beneficent influence on the race does not necessarily take command of it. How can the quite dead rule the living? Is it possible to regard the first figure of a living race as only dead? His effect would then be but æsthetic; and could an æsthetic influence be a conscience for our moral life? Could it create such a conscience? If Christ deserves the praise of

many doubters who feel his spiritual spell to be supreme for life, can he be but the first of the dead? He is a living Christ and a living King.

But we must go farther still. If Christ be the living center of mankind, what is the center of Christ? Where does his personality have its full and final power? I have tried to suggest that if it is in his person it is in the act in which his whole person took full effect. It is in his Cross. *There* is condensed the moral crisis of the race. (Or, if you object to crisis, I will let that pass, for the moment, and say that there is the grand node so far of the race's moral development.) Now, what was the nature of the moral issue in Christ's Cross? It is no true account of his mind, in so far as the Gospels allow us to reach it at such a time, to say that he was engaged in a tremendous struggle to impress mankind with his Father's love. It was not a struggle merely to *impress* at all. At the great crisis he was not trying to impress the public, even with a gospel, and quite a worthy one. He was engrossed rather with doing something—doing something for that public with God which it takes ages to impress upon it in any adequate way. The very difficulty we have in reaching Christ's mind at this solemn juncture would seem to show that something else was going on there than the effort to impress men. Had that been his principal object it would surely have been much facilitated (especially as the world grew older) by a completer revelation of the interior of the soul that best realized how God loved the world. But the very silence of Jesus on his own inward experience, then and always, would seem to show that it was something else that chiefly engaged him than the effect he was having, or was going to have, on men's conscience and heart. He was certainly not engrossed with his own soul's adventures, his own spiritual pilgrimage. He was engrossed with the conscience of God and his own relation to that as the Son at once of man and God. Here was the crux of the Incarnation—the collision of the Son of man and the Son of God. Here was the paradox, the miracle (far greater than that of man's freedom in God's sovereignty) of the Holy One made sin for us. The supreme moral issue here is the engagement of the representative of sinful mankind with the holi-

ness of God, and the adjustment between them in one personality. The supreme issue of the racial and sinful conscience is its issue with the divine conscience and that perfect sanctity. It is no adjustment of finite and infinite. That is to say, it is a matter of atonement in some real sense as the base of reconciliation, and it makes the final miracle of all we can know. But this we must say: the atonement was only possible by the offering of the perfectly holy to the perfectly holy. That is, the Saviour was not only the living Christ but the living God. God was in Christ atoning the world to himself.

We have plunged some way into theology. But is there any means of avoiding the leap into that buoyant air without discarding our beginning and adopting another than the ethical view of society's foundation? If society is no mere contractual product, no mere compilation, but, if it is, in its essence, an organism, more or less personal, creative of moral personality, then its moral secret is not to be reached by either an analysis or an induction performed on its historic career, neither of which can give its destiny. And it is its destiny that prescribes its ethic; its goal makes its law. But that secret, that destiny, emerges in Christ, where universal personality appears in its classic and normative case. We may differ about the precise interpretation to be put upon both the mind and the action of Christ. But surely we must own that a person morally so complete reveals more of the conditions of personality, and of its last social ethic, than anything so indeterminate as the historic ethos of a nation or a race. We may take the many new studies and disciplines whose rise has given such interest and promise to the last century. Biological analogies, the principles of political economy, the study of jurisprudence, psychology (and especially the psychology of society) together with the vast broadening and deepening of historical science—all these have lighted up the complex nature of the social organism in a unique way. But the real science of society (except to the young) is an ethical study. It is the study in social form of life's last values and powers, of the things that, from the soul's inner castle, make and mold life in its most precious and personal worth. Ethical study is the study of living person-

ality and its relations, not simply of moral laws and their pressure. We have to do not simply with a universal moral order but with a universal moral personality, if such an one can be found. Where look for him? The true universal is not the natural man but the spiritual. It is not elemental personality but moral. It is the man of the conscience, of the universal and absolute conscience, the Holy. The last morality is our relation to the Holy, to the moral absolute, to infinite Love. It is our religion. "The one morality is loving thee." And the religious-moral relation of man in his guilt to God in his holiness must surely be an Atonement. We have run into the Cross of Christ. The form of love is sacrifice, the form of holiness is atonement, the form of holy love is atoning sacrifice. And the Christian revelation is that it was an atonement made by the love of the God we had most reason to fear. If all life runs out into morals, morals culminate in repentance and in confession. But not chiefly in a miserable confession of sin but in a glorious confession of the Saviour, of the holiness that forgave it at his own sole cost and inmost sorrow; in such confession as the Holy alone could make, in such atonement to the Holy as consists in sacrificial holiness alone. Mere suffering is no expiation, only perfect holiness in conditions which involve suffering.

"But Thou giv'st leave, dread Lord, that we
Find shelter from Thyself with Thee." (Crashaw.)

The Cross of Christ is the moral center of society, being especially the creative-center of that society in which morality rises not only to public righteousness but to eternal holiness. It is the center of the Church—the greatest society on earth, the trustee of the New Bond, the consignee for the New Humanity of the righteousness of holiness, so penetrating, commanding, sympathetic. And what is the moral principle of the Cross which satisfied and delighted the absolute conscience of God? Is it not obedience to begin with? But it is not obedience to end with, obedience *per se*. It is not obedience as a subjectivity, not simply a spirit of obedience, which might be but resignation and merely docility, Teutonic and immoral. But it is obedience as action, obedience with a content, obedience moralized, obedience

with a moral value which flows from its object and his demand, obedience to holiness as the nature of the action of the supreme power to which it is due. It is obedience which that power does not exact but inspires. It creates what it requires, *dat quod jubet*. Why have I had so little to say about the love, sympathy, and sorrow of the Cross? Because it did not lie in my direct line of argument, which started from the moral basis of society and the adjustment of consciences. And my line was suggested by the crisis of the time. It is the form of love as righteousness that is the grand concern of the hour. Another line might well be found on these kindly things, whether they carry us to finality or not. Truly the one morality is loving—but loving the holy. We must lay stress on the holy. For a social nexus merely sympathetic will not stand the strain. Mere fraternity will not, nor mere idealism. We must come back to the kingdom of God, round the authority of the atoning Cross. What is to save when love seems to give way? What is the last victory of faith? It is not so hard, nor so triumphant, to conquer when we delight in the joy of God's love and the warmth of his communion. That was always the restoration of Christ's energies—more than nightly sleep. He could sleep in storms because he waked of nights in such prayer. But obedience and trust come to their crucial trial when the comfort of love is felt no more, when the soul is divested of all love's joy and sense of power, and when it holds and lives only to that in love which is truly almighty and eternal—the absoluteness of it, the holiness of it, the power of dominion and finality in it. That was the very crux of the Cross, the spot of final victory. It was to love and trust love where no love was *felt*, where love was doing everything except rejoicing, when all his lovers failed him and things that had long gone from bad to worse reached their worst. It was love as faithful obedience to the holy, love to God when all reason for loving treacherous man had gone, love to God as the hallowing of his faithful name when even he seemed to have gone, love where it was not felt as sympathy, where the sympathetic side of it was beclouded, and the righteous side alone survived in a sacrifice which was a fidelity more than an inspiration. Love as righteousness, when it is on a scale too great, and in a crisis

too deep, to be felt as sympathy—that is the moral principle which is the stay of society when love as a feeling is impossible or unstable. Righteousness, holiness, the kingdom, is the most social form of love. We cannot love all men in the affective sense in which we love those who are our own elect. But we can in the effective sense of righteousness to all. That is the more public and civic form of love. We cannot love all men with all our heart. God alone can do that. But we can so love the God who does it as to love them with our conscience, to behave to others as if we loved them—which in God we do. If the love of Christ do not make us lovers of our kind in a repentance (however reserved) we do not know that love as it is truly revealed—in grace. To whom much is forgiven the same loveth much. If he love but little his forgiveness is small. But the forgiveness of Christ is a full salvation, a final social righteousness.

The Church may live on love as kindness. The State lives on love as righteousness. And both the kind and the stately, both sympathy and righteousness, mercy and holiness, meet in the Cross of a love sacrificial, holy, and, by holiness, atoning to the holy. The Cross of Christ taken at its true moral value is the principle of the State at last, as it was the foundation of the Church at first. Is our type of religion equal to the part we propose to play in a great old world, complex and tragic?

