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# God In Us

*A Liberal Christian Philosophy of Religion  
for the General Reader*



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## Is God Revealed in History?

### PROPHETIC INSIGHT AND RELIGIOUS PROGRESS

WE HAVE seen reason to believe that God, the super-human source and sanction of the moral law, is not only within us, but that we are also in him. He is the supreme Person. His mind is eternally conscious and incomprehensibly complex. It includes in its organized wholeness all finite minds, all finite consciousness, all finite knowledge. The physical universe is a nonmental and nonvoluntary phase of the systematic activity of his being. It and all its changing qualities are an object of his attention. In its orderly but slightly malleable nature it is a medium of expression of his mind. Our minds are the offspring of his, but offspring that remain, as it were, within the parental womb, never leaving to live an entirely independent life, yet having something of the freedom of children. We are branches of the eternal Vine, yet sons of the eternal Father.

It was not through philosophizing about the natural world that men arrived at this conception of God as the True Vine and the Eternal Father. It is not a new conception. It has been gradually hammered into shape by those who have given thought to the moral and spiritual life. It has been developed in a series of deep spiritual insights by the great prophets and teachers of the Hebrew-Christian tradition. And in the best of the non-Christian religions a very similar view of God has been

similarly developed. In the early stages of this development there were errors and inadequacies that have been corrected and filled out at later stages. At every stage the religious interpretation has had to fit itself into the rest of the body of human knowledge — the common-sense knowledge of the environment, together with whatever science and history were available.

Any scientific and historical errors thus creeping into the interpretation have had to be corrected as scientific and historical knowledge increased. False suggestions due to scientific and historical ignorance have even distorted the religious interpretation, as, for example, in the theory of the special creation of every distinct form of life, good and evil. Religion has had to wait for scientific advance to help it free itself from these errors. But the main advance of the religious interpretation itself — the development of the ideas of God, of the moral law, of man's origin, destiny and relation to God — has not come from the logical reasoning of scientifically minded philosophers. It has come from the poetic, passionate and devotional insights of the great religious prophets.

What then is the nature of these prophetic insights? Are they insights of the human spirit, pondering the problems of the spiritual life, fallible, yet progressively seeing the truth more and more clearly? Or are they special communications from the divine and eternal consciousness, given progressively to those who are able to understand and use them?

#### GOD'S REVELATION AND MAN'S DISCOVERY

On the former view, both the degree of progress and the degree of error depend entirely on three human

factors: first, the amount of intelligent thought given to the problems by human beings; second, the historical circumstances and the more or less accurate historical knowledge and scientific ideas that pose the problems and suggest solutions, some true, some false; third, the degree of open-mindedness, or special prejudice, with which the facts are faced and suggested interpretations received. These factors may blind or deceive the thinker, or open up to him great new truths. But errors lead to difficulties. These drive some men to further thought. Thus gradually errors are corrected and progress made. But all the way through, on this view, the advance of religious knowledge is a human achievement. It does not depend on special communications from God.

Yet the absence of special communications does not mean that man's progressive discovery of religious truth is not in any sense a divine revelation. Without the active presence of God within him man could never come to know God. God reveals himself to man's inner consciousness as the sun reveals itself to his eyes. It is a revelation not of words but of deeds, not of ideas but of will. As the activity of the sun in shining impresses itself on our senses, so the activity of the will of God within us impresses itself upon our inner consciousness, convicting us of sin, revealing to us the divine nature as righteousness and love, a power and authority transcending that of man. But, as we must open our eyes to see the sun, and take careful observations in order to understand it and anticipate its movements, so we must open our eyes, spiritually, to see God, and make careful observations in order to understand his will.

It is the *will* of God that is directly revealed to us.

And in the last analysis it is only the will of God that we need to have directly revealed. If we do his will we do right and we can trust him for the rest. And his will is plainly revealed. We have only to rid ourselves of our prejudices to see it — the will to the good of all. Seeing it, and recognizing the obligation to be true to it, presents no intellectual difficulty. It does not require external communication. The difficulty is moral, created by the narrowness and selfishness of our habits, traditions and natural impulses.

#### THE INNER WITNESS

If a truth about God is communicated to us, from whatever source, it can carry justifiable conviction only if it is corroborated by the immediate knowledge of God as he is revealed to us within. If our hearts are closed to the inner revelation the outer also will be rejected. "If they have believed not Moses and the prophets," said Jesus, "neither will they believe, though one should rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31). Even a miracle could not convince people that an idea comes from God unless they felt it confirmed by what they know of God in their own experience. People who can believe in miracles can believe that they are performed by devils as easily as that they are performed by God. So faith comes only when "the witness of the spirit" within, as theologians call it, bears testimony to the truth of a doctrine first heard from without.

As with an external communication that comes from some prophetic teacher, so with any communication that might come from the eternal consciousness directly to the mind of the prophet. How should he know that it comes from God unless God, as directly known to him,

bears witness to it? Dreams, visions, voices and persistent ideas bring all sorts of false and weird thoughts. They are much less reliable than logical inductions from ordinary experience. All the paraphernalia of extraordinary psychological phenomena are entirely lacking in evidential value. The prophets and people of ancient times can be excused for thinking that such experiences indicated the activity of some sort of supernatural beings, whether God, angel or devil. But abnormal psychology has explained these things too fully for us any longer to see in them evidence of special divine communication.

These considerations force upon us the recognition that ultimately the only source of God's revelation of himself to man is the activity of the divine will within us. For no idea, however it comes to us, can be recognized as a communication from God unless it is corroborated by that "witness within." This means, further, that no special communication or special revelation can reveal to us more of the nature of God and his will for us than is revealed to us directly by the presence of God within us.

What then is included in this revelation? We perceive within us a will that seeks equally the good of all. We perceive that this will has rightful authority over all the rest of human will, so that we ought to obey it whether we want to or not. We see that it is a will, first to use human intelligence to *find* what is the greatest good for all concerned, and then to use human effort to *do* that which will produce that greatest good. We learn from others that they too have the experience within them of a will other and higher than their own private individuality. We call it God and know that God is personal,

loving and righteous, the ultimate source of the moral law which requires of each that he should love God and love his neighbor, even though that neighbor should make himself an enemy.

Nothing more of the nature and will of God can we know with the certainty of divine revelation. But this is all the certainty we need for the guidance of the religious and moral life. The rest requires only that we use our intelligence to find the truth which will direct our efforts to produce the greatest good. These are problems of everyday fact, of philosophy, science, history and the understanding of human beings.

#### CRITERIA OF RELIGIOUS INFERENCE

The rest of our religious knowledge, therefore, is inference from our religious experience, interpreted in the light of our practical and scientific knowledge, and tested for its consistency with that which is revealed of God within us. It includes knowledge of the means of spiritual culture, of modes of worship and of religious work. This knowledge of what is good and helpful in the spiritual life of man has been accumulated in the course of history and tested in practical experience of the religious life. It includes also ideas about God that go beyond what is directly revealed within—his unity, transcendence and power, his creative activity, his relation to man and his plan for human destiny. So long as these are consistent with the revelation of God within, and with scientific and historical fact, they are possible. Some knowledge of this sort is implied with a high degree of assurance. (as we have already seen) when we put together our assured religious knowledge and our well tested scientific and historical knowledge.

Still further, our religious knowledge includes inferences about the significance and importance of certain historical persons and institutions and the products of their activity, such as Christ and the prophets and apostles, the church and the Bible. We can form judgments about the relation of these to God — judgments based on observation of the function of these persons and things in what we know to fulfill the will of God. Here the criterion is, first, the consistency of these judgments with the rest of our religious, scientific and historical knowledge. Second, the criterion is practical. "By their fruits ye shall know them." How well do these judgments work in fulfilling the will of God? If a statement about Christ, or the church, or the Bible, or other religious matter, is consistent with all our knowledge, scientific, historical and religious alike, but is not implied by this knowledge, that leaves its truth an open possibility. It is, thus far, probable but neither proved nor disproved. But if, further, it can be shown that to believe this statement is morally wholesome, gives courage and strength, makes a personality glow with love and happiness, and has no harmful consequences, then that statement should rightly be accepted as a matter of *faith*. It can honestly and logically be made a practical, working postulate of daily life.

By such a faith a man may live; and in accord with it a group of people may organize their religious life into a church. But it is very plain to see that in such matters of faith all should be open-minded, undogmatic and tolerant. It does not follow that all people will find the same beliefs equally inspiring and wholesome. Where they do not a man should always remember that it may

be he, not the other person, who is mistaken. The very fact that some do not find the belief convincing and wholesome suggests that it may be only partially true. At least it calls for a good explanation of the other person's error. Further, there is a positive reason for tolerance. Tolerance works well, while intolerance does not. The very practical criterion on which faith rests shows that open-mindedness and tolerance toward the beliefs of others are an excellent principle for the life of faith.

A faith which continues to work well for all who try it, and one which has been tested and accepted by millions of people, acquires something more than a practical justification. It must, to a very large extent, be factually true or it could not work so well over so large an area. A faith that works well must tend to maintain the integrity of personality; it must help in social adjustments; it must keep the individual life in harmony with God within. In so far as a faith is factually false it is apt to be misleading in some way. And this flaw must tend to show up in maladjustment of personalities and in a failure of religion to perform its function in maintaining the wholesome integration of society. Thus we can apply to every doctrine the practical criterion of its effects upon the course of history. If it has stimulated a vital and wholesome moral and religious life, and tended to create and maintain a freely advancing and well integrated social order, then it is probably true in fact as well as justified as a matter of faith. If it has had the reverse effect it is neither. If its effect has been mixed it needs careful re-examination. It is probably a mixture of truth and error.

## THE CUMULATIVE WITNESS OF HISTORY

When we apply these criteria to the belief that there has been a revelation of God in history what do we find? At the beginning of this chapter we presented two theories of the source of religious knowledge. The first affirmed that the essential nature of God is continuously revealed within us so that we have only to shake off the blindness of selfishness and prejudice to see God as he is—to see him as a will that is in us, part of us, yet has authority over us, a will that seeks in and through us the good of all. The rest of our knowledge of God, on this view, is inference based on the experience of trying to live in harmony with the divine will, seeking the truth that will guide us in the effort to do good, and striving ever to realize the greatest good. Where the inferences concern God's relation to physical nature and historical persons they are apt to be more or less mistaken unless the thinker has accurate scientific and historical knowledge. But the most important requirement for insight into further truth is moral.

Only those who have seen God as he is immediately revealed within are competent to judge of his relation to the facts of science and history. And only by overcoming selfishness and prejudice can we see clearly and fully the nature and purpose of God as he is revealed within. "The pure in heart . . . shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God" (John 7:17). These texts recognize that insight into the true nature of God's revelation of himself to man depends primarily on the spiritual attitude of the seeker of truth. It is not that God withholds from any man any essential knowledge of him-

self, but only that because of our selfishness and prejudice we do not want to see. And only when this fundamental insight into the nature and purpose of God is clear and full do we have a sound and sufficient basis for accurate inference concerning his relation to physical nature and human history.

This being the case, some may ask whether it can ever be possible for any person to see the real truth about God, even though he is plainly revealed within us. For are we not all blinded by selfishness and prejudice? How then can any one of us claim to see the true nature of God's will? The answer is that in acquiring this insight we have help from history. Each generation has its character framed more or less thoroughly in accord with the moral insights accumulated by its ancestors. Each begins the search for truth where the other ended. We today know that "God is love," that the moral law is incorporated in the Golden Rule, because these things have been a part of our tradition since the time of Christ.

We have been told these things in our youth but because of our selfishness and prejudice we have found them hard to believe. Yet when in our best moments we have looked within and asked whether these principles really represent the will of God we have found "the witness of the spirit." We have found something within ourselves, higher than our own will and claiming authority over it, demanding of us that we observe these principles. In our selfishness and prejudice we have been false to them, but in subsequent reflection, when passion has died, we have seen clearly that such action is wrong. Thus we have discovered the true nature of God within, in spite of our moral imperfection. But we have been able to overcome the handicap only be-

cause we have been helped by others, because we are heirs to a tradition, and members of a community, in which the true nature and purpose of God were discovered long ago. Only occasionally does some great soul so overcome his selfishness and prejudice as to see God a little more clearly than any who have gone before. These are the prophets and teachers by whom the tradition has been corrected and advanced until it culminated in Christ.

It is this tradition, maintained in the life of the religious community, that preserves the revelation of God in history. It embodies a story of human religious activities and a collection of ideas that interpret the experience of God within and his relation to physical nature and historical persons. Not all these ideas are true in fact. Some of them contain partial truth. Some are clearly true. But they tell us of men's search for God and what they have believed themselves to find. Among these ideas we must sift truth from error by all the criteria of science, history and practical value, but above all by the criterion of our experience of God within.

Though this tradition inevitably contains much error, both as to historical fact and as to religious interpretation, it nevertheless is rightly recognized as also containing a revelation of God. For God is at work in man. He makes himself felt in human experience. Where there is spiritual struggle against difficulty, where critical moral decisions have to be made, there is the divine influence peculiarly felt. These are the occasions when men come face to face with God within themselves — with God in the form of the other and higher will that demands of us that we concern ourselves with the good of others. From such encounters with God lessons are learned by thoughtful, earnest and sensitive souls. New

insights are obtained. New truths are grasped. Elements of falsity in past tradition are exposed and rejected. Thus the tradition is a growing and self-critical movement. It is a record of man's experience with God, always imperfectly understood, but gradually growing clearer, fuller and more accurate in its understanding of the divine will.

Within ourselves we discern God directly, but through the veil of our selfishness and prejudice. So far as his relations to the rest of the world are concerned, we see those relations from our own limited point of view. In the lives and teaching of others we can discern God indirectly, but more objectively, less affected by our own special selfishness, prejudices and point of view. The external and indirect revelation in history stimulates our perception of the revelation within and gives it concrete illustration. The revelation within checks, illuminates and confirms the revelation in history. We need both. We need to feed our minds upon the experience and thought of Christ, the apostles and prophets, and of all the great religious figures of history. For we need their stimulus and suggestion. And we need to give time for communion with God as we find him within.

#### THE BEGINNINGS OF RELIGION

It has been a very slow process by which man has discovered the true nature of God and his own relationship to him. Yet it has not been as slow as that by which man has learned to understand the physical world, for it reached its culmination nineteen centuries ago in the life and thought of Jesus Christ. Since then the problem has been, not that of finding the essential nature and will of God, but that of relating our knowledge of God

to the rest of our knowledge, and of overcoming the selfishness and prejudice of successive generations, which blind them and us to the truth revealed in Christ.

The process of discovery was begun by primitive man, probably by our very first human ancestors. When we understand the conditions of the knowledge of God and the conditions of life of those first human beings we can see how it must have been. Among our prehuman ancestors the group was held together instinctively by the natural impulses of its members. No animal can think for itself. Each follows its instincts. Our prehuman ancestors instinctively clung to the herd and cooperated with it in hunting and fighting. But the dawn of human intelligence made it possible for individuals to think for themselves and of themselves. Each must have begun to desire most strongly his own comfort and security. Instinctive cooperation would tend to be broken down by cunning selfishness. This must have created the first type of moral problem that human beings had to face—the temptation of individuals to shirk discomfort, fatigue and danger in the tasks they had to share in the common interest.

Thus the selfishness made possible by the new intelligence must have threatened to disrupt the first really human society. But religion came to its rescue to become the cement that bound it together. The more thoughtful and sensitive members of the primitive group must have reflected on this tendency to selfish shirking in themselves and others. They must have seen its evil effects and felt it as vaguely wrong—contrary to the peculiar authority they would feel attached to the will to the greater and common good. They would feel the

constraint of the sense of guilt without being able to give it a name. On a subsequent occasion they would resolve to bear their full share of the burden with the tribe. They would express admiration for those that did. This would be echoed by those around, and a tradition of honor would be established.

But the moral tradition would not be easy to maintain. So, on the eve of arduous and dangerous tasks in which all the men of the tribe must join, they would meet together to plan and to give each other mutual support by expressing their intention to be true to the tribe and to quit themselves like men. Within each man there would be the battle between the individual self on the one side and, on the other, that will to the good of all which we have learned to recognize as God in us. This will to the greatest good would support the ideal of the common good of the group; and it would itself be supported by the group's authority and prestige. The constraining power of the divine will, with its sense of authority and obligation, would thus be strongly felt, being reinforced by the knowledge that its demands were supported by the tribe.

Spontaneous expressions of courage and loyalty would be made and cheered. In course of time these would tend to take dramatic and ceremonial form. Dance, drama, gesture, music and shouting would heighten the effect, exerting a psychological power that was mysterious and strong. This would be connected in their thought with the inner moral constraint in response to which the more dramatic ceremonies had originated. Thus the mysterious power of the ceremony would come to be identified in their thought with the power that



gave the moral law. Just such a power, mystical, moral, but impersonal, is believed by all primitive people to reside in their ceremonies. Anthropologists, using the Polynesian name for it, call it "mana." This seems to be the first clearly formed religious idea. It is an interpretation of man's earliest experience of the constraining presence of God within him. And the interpretation is made in the light of his further experience of the sort of ceremonial activity that enabled him to bring himself into harmony with that higher constraining will.

From the beginning, therefore, the practices of religion became a force to bind the group together, constraining and encouraging each member to perform his recognized duties, and helping individuals to maintain their inner personal integration and moral self-respect. And the first religious idea was a mixture of truth and error. But this idea soon blossomed into others, with some new truth but more error. The mysterious moral power was naturally believed to reside in the objects used in the ceremonies, e.g., the totem pole or earlier tribal insignia, the grove where the ceremony was performed, the dress and properties for dramatic parts. The animal badge of the tribe, or totem, being regarded as the chief seat of the mysterious moral power, was personalized and became an animal god. All the mysteries of nature came to be interpreted as due to this same mysterious power. Thus arose nature deities, some good, some bad. Men persuaded themselves that mysterious dramatic rites could control the mysterious power in their own interests. Thus magic came into religion and obscured its moral significance.

#### THE PROGRESS OF RELIGION

As civilization developed some individuals secured leisure for reflection and began to criticize, develop and refine their religious ideas. Very early in Egyptian civilization there arose a priesthood which secured its leisure by its special skill in the practice of religious ceremonies and used this leisure to ponder the problems of life, both religious and practical. The priesthood contributed a great deal to Egyptian knowledge before the year 4000 B.C. It developed land surveying, irrigation, methods of calculation, writing, law, and a lofty type of religious thought in which one personal deity was thought to be supreme above all gods and men, and the source of the moral law. It insisted that even the king must obey the moral law and developed the belief in a future life in which men would be rewarded according to their deeds. Unfortunately the priests also developed a great deal of magic as a means of avoiding dangers in this life and averting punishment in the next, and this eventually undermined the good effect of the rest of their religion.

From the Egyptians the leadership in the development of religious thought passed to the Hebrews. It is impossible; with our present historical knowledge, to decide how much of the stories of Abraham, Moses and other figures in the early Old Testament record is historical. But it is evident that, when the Hebrews conquered Palestine, they had a good many rather primitive religious ideas akin to those of other Semitic tribes of the desert; but they also had some very special and definitely higher ideas connected with the god Yahweh (Jehovah) which they asserted had been taught them by Moses.

The content of this teaching bears out the claim that Moses was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." Yet it indicates, too, that he was a prophet and thinker in his own right, for the teaching (if it can indeed be attributed to him) repudiates idolatry and the cult of the dead and other magical features that disfigured and undetermined the religious life of Egypt.

We reach sound historical ground in the writings of the Hebrew prophets from the eighth to the end of the sixth century B.C. And a magnificent advance in moral and religious ideas they achieve. They teach that there is one supreme deity whose will is eternally righteous and good. He rules sternly, but he loves his children as a father. It is his will that every man should love his neighbor (meaning his own people) as himself. Even to a stranger he should do no injustice. The existing injustices of the Hebrew social system the prophets roundly condemned. The earlier of these prophets even attempted to repudiate the blood sacrifices, with their magical notions of atonement, that the Hebrews had inherited from their Semitic antecedents. But in this they were unsuccessful, on account of priestly opposition, and the later prophets accepted the limitation of the sacrifices to the temple at Jerusalem.

Finally, we come to the consummation of this development in the teaching of Christ. All the limits to the law of love are at last abolished. "Love your neighbor" means even "Love your enemy." Jew and Gentile, master and slave, male and female, all share equally in God's love and concern and must share equally in ours. Death can be faced in confidence of God's eternal love for all his children. To the law of love we must be faithful even unto death — and even unto the death of the cross.

#### THE UNIVERSALITY OF REVELATION

The whole history of religion, with all its human error, passion and frailty, is the story of man's search for God. And those who seek him find him. And those who find him help others to find him. God is found by man because he is actively revealed to man. Not just on special occasions, to selected individuals of selected groups or tribes, in dark and mysterious ways or in dramatic and miraculous form. But *always*, at every waking hour, in every human mind, God is present and his will is *fully* revealed. It is because God is at work in every man, and revealed to every man, that God is at work in history.

But most of us are more or less blinded by our habits and natural impulses, our selfishness, passion, pride and prejudice. We are slow to see, slow to understand, slow to admit the truth. That is why there is a *special* revelation of God in history. It could not be otherwise. For some individuals have sought God with purer hearts and more open minds than others, as well as with greater earnestness and intelligence. These have come to see God's will more clearly than their fellows and have recognized its meaning for their own lives and their own times. They have thus become teachers of new truth about God, prophets with a new insight into his will, writers inspired by the direct vision of God more clearly discerned than by those around them.

The record of this special revelation contains much error, both historical and religious. Yet there is a clearly defined line of advance running through it all. It runs from narrow interest in the welfare of a special group to universal interest in the welfare of all mankind; from reliance upon external forms to emphasis on the inward

spirit of whole-souled devotion; from a few specific moral injunctions to the free and intelligent pursuit of the greatest good of all; from the mysticism of mere magic to that of inner communion with the divine; from a multiplicity of divine beings confined to special times, places and functions to one God who is in all and over all.

This line of advance, more or less complete, is found not only in the Hebrew-Christian tradition but, still earlier, in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, and independently developing in Greece, Persia, India and China. The specific history, and the errors and evils, differ from one place to another. But in each there is the same progressive discovery of religious truth. From the time of the great prophets of the eighth century B.C., if not from Moses or Abraham, the Hebrews are ahead of the rest of the world; and they first attain the full vision, positive, unqualified and unambiguous, in the life and teaching of Christ. But the others are never far behind and their loftiest vision does not fall far short. God is as surely present in the one as the other, inspiring the prophets and revealing himself to the saints of all the world.

Today all the great streams of this process of divine revelation and human insight have come to knowledge of each other. The non-Christian religions are reinterpreting, purifying and enriching their tradition in the light of the Christian vision. The Christian is checking its errors, especially the error of its imagined exclusive possession of a genuine revelation, by what it learns of the mighty working of God in histories other than its own.

This is the Christian doctrine of revelation, reinterpreted in the light of our modern knowledge of natural science, history and psychology, and tested by its con-

sistency with our inner vision of God as illuminated by the life and teaching of Christ. Does it also stand the practical test of value for the spiritual life?

Briefly and emphatically the answer is "Yes." It gives us an authority for the supreme law of love to all mankind — an authority that is above all human law and all individual desires. It therefore answers man's great need, for fulfillment of which he can look to no other source but religion: it gives him an authoritative principle for the unifying of the individual life and the maintenance of a social order concerned equally with the good of all. At the same time it frees us from all specific dogmatism and from the demand of any institutions for unquestioning obedience, for we must seek with all our intelligence the means to the good of all. It sets the scholar free to carry on his investigations in science and history, untrammelled by any dogma. It abolishes all religious exclusiveness, enabling us to welcome light from every source, to recognize the working of God in the history of every religion and every society, and therefore to give the full measure of respect to God's children everywhere. It points us clearly to the central figure of Christ as the consummation of the special revelation of God in history, and enables us to understand, appreciate and cherish that Christian heritage which has meant so much to the world. Finally, it shows that, in nearly every religious tradition, God has led men to the conviction that his eternal love cares, not only for their earthly lives and service, but also for their immortal souls.

#### FALSE CONCEPTIONS OF REVELATION

In most of the great religious traditions, however, we find a belief in a more specific historical revelation than

is here recognized. It is claimed that the eternal consciousness imparts a special communication of ideas to selected persons, verbally or otherwise. These are recorded in sacred books. Their divine origin is believed to be attested by special signs, such as miracles, visions, voices or some strangely convincing inner experience.

The chief difficulty with this belief is the amount of error and contradiction in the messages said to have been received and endorsed in this way. Mohammedan, Buddhist, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christian scriptures all claim that their mutually contradictory doctrines have been thus established. When it is recognized that this cannot be the case it is natural to claim the truth for one's own doctrines and reject the others. This leads to religious arrogance and intolerance; it denies the reality of God's relation to man outside the circle of one religion. It claims the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth for one body of scriptures. But it cannot substantiate this claim.

Even the Hebrew-Christian scriptures are not free from contradiction. For example, it is recorded (Exod. 26:9-11) that Moses and Aaron, with seventy of the elders of Israel, went up on Mount Sinai and "they saw the God of Israel"; yet, with the New Testament's more spiritual conception of deity, we are told (John 1:18) that "no man hath seen God at any time." Again, in connection with the giving of the Ten Commandments, God is presented as endorsing the primitive principle of collective responsibility: "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Exod. 20:5). But later prophets repudiate

this barbarism, preaching individual responsibility: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son" (Ezek. 18:20). This is but one illustration of the great moral advance from the earlier to the later parts of the Hebrew-Christian scriptures. To give just one more example we may point to the law of retribution in Exodus 21:23-24: "Thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth." With this we may compare the Sermon on the Mount: "Love your enemies, bless them that persecute you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44).

If the revelation of God in history were given as a communication of ideas then the eternal consciousness must be accused of first putting wrong ideas into men's minds and later contradicting them. It is not merely a matter of adapting instruction to the level of the minds to receive it, but of giving false instruction. The notions of a visible deity, collective responsibility and the justification of revenge are false ideas and could not have been communicated to men by the eternal consciousness. They are the result of man's imperfect vision of God, seen through the veil of selfishness, passion and prejudice, and distorted in interpretations affected by scientific and historical ignorance.

The claims to endorsement of this type of revelation by miracle, vision and mystic experience carry no weight. Modern psychological investigation of perfectly honest human testimony has shown that eyewitness reports are constantly in error. Rumors can grow and acquire wide belief in a few hours. Visions and mystical experiences

of a sensory and emotional character have a natural psychological explanation. "Miracles" of healing are likewise explained by abnormal psychology. Great religious teachers, living in an age of superstition, inevitably generate an expectation of wonders; and the expectation produces some wonders by the force of suggestion and adds to the report of these by its power to propagate rumors.

Great religious teachers, furthermore, are usually people who have won their new religious insights only after severe spiritual trial and brave conflict with the passions of their own souls and those of others. It is not surprising, therefore, that the insights thus gained are frequently accompanied by the feeling of a heart that is "strangely warmed," the attainment of a wonderful sense of peace and blessedness, and even the seeing of visions and the hearing of voices. These are natural accompaniments of spiritual struggle and triumph. And it is only by spiritual struggle that men triumph over the factors which render them blind to the true nature of the will of God within.

The same objection applies to the claim that the "witness of the spirit" affects individuals in spiritual crises so that they discern the true meaning for themselves of the revelation contained in scriptures. This claim is sound only so far as it refers to a recognition of the harmony of some scriptural teaching with the will of God as found within. If the endorsement of the "inner witness" is alleged to consist of strange feelings of conviction, of enlightenment, of joy and enthusiasm, of assurance, or of visions or voices, it must be recognized as simply a natural psychological effect of the emotional tensions involved in the spiritual crisis. Experiences of this sort may accompany a genuine insight into the will

of God. But they do nothing to enhance the assurance of its accuracy.

The real test of all insights is their harmony with what the long history of man's moral and religious development, culminating in Christ, has shown to be the will of God—that we should love one another as Christ has loved us. This growing agreement and wonderful culmination is the real meaning of the revelation of God in history.

#### THE LIMITATION AND SUFFICIENCY OF REVELATION

One further argument for a specific communication of ideas from God to man is that there must be some such revelation because there *ought* to be. If God loves his children, it is pointed out, then he would wish to communicate with them; and since they need the truths he can give them, then it would not be right that he should neglect to teach them. We may agree that God must be willing to teach us all that he can, so far as it is to our good. But there is much that would be to our good that he has certainly let us slowly discover for ourselves. Has God, though able to give man the knowledge, let him suffer for ages from his ignorance of how to live a healthy physical life and how to organize a free and stable social order? There is no moral value in ignorance. There would be no moral loss in learning these things completely and accurately from a God-given Bible instead of incompletely and never quite accurately from human textbooks.

Since God ought to reveal these things if he can, and yet has not revealed them, the only conclusion is that he cannot do so. And if he cannot communicate specific ideas concerning a sound health program, neither can he

be expected to communicate specific ideas concerning civil law or church organization. So we must ask the reason of such limitation to God's power.

The answer seems clearly to be in the nature of the finite human mind. Ideas, or meanings, are developed by the activity of a specific type of mental organization. Only a mind with a similar type of organization could hold similar ideas. So only similar types of mind can communicate ideas to each other. Our type of mental organization is developed through physical life on earth. So we can expect to have intercommunication of ideas only with other finite personalities developed on earth. God is aware of the ideas in our minds because our minds are a part of his. Each finite mind is a relatively independent interest-process within the universal mind. But the finite mind is not aware of other interests and ideas in the eternal consciousness which is the ultimate source of its life. Nor can these ideas of the eternal consciousness be communicated to finite minds, on account of the different and highly specialized organization of finite minds and their limited means of comprehension. The influence of God's mind upon us is through his will which is ever present in us. We cannot arbitrarily say that it can have no influence upon us in any other way. But it certainly does not seem to include the possibility of any direct communication of ideas from the eternal consciousness to ours.

We must be content, therefore, with the revelation of God's will as it operates within, helped by what we learn from others through the operation of God's will in them. This gives us sufficient assurance for our moral and religious life. And if we look to it alone we shall be saved from the errors into which men have constantly strayed

through seeking more specific revelations of God elsewhere. It is the claim, by individuals and groups, that they have specific revelations concerning the moral and civil law, and concerning the doctrine, worship and organization of the church, that is the chief source of the sectarianism, intolerance, dogmatism and strife which have disgraced the history of Christianity and other religions. Judged by the criterion of its practical effects the doctrine of a revelation in the form of specific ideas or dogmas is condemned one hundredfold. Because of its contradictions and falsities it is condemned, too, by science and history. Religion must shake itself free from this doctrine and its accompanying magic. When it does that, and learns to rely primarily upon the inner witness of the spirit to the eternal validity of the Golden Rule, it will function as it should, as the inspiration to all that is best in life, the buttress of the social order, the support of human liberty, and the savior of souls.

## Is Christianity the Final Religion?

### CHRIST'S PLACE IN WORLD RELIGION

**G**OD is in all men, Christian and non-Christian, and thereby his will is revealed to all who open their eyes to see. Prophets have arisen among all peoples, and truly great prophets in Egypt, India, China, Persia, Greece and Arabia as well as in Palestine. The knowledge of God has grown, in all these countries, from primitive beginnings to lofty spiritual insight. Prophets and teachers in each of the great traditions have learned something from outside their own tradition, and continue to do so. The revelation of God in history has not ceased but is active in all men at all times. The significance of that revelation for special problems of our own day is seen with fresh insight, more or less clear and full, by leaders in every religious tradition still current. None can afford to ignore the insights and teaching of others. None should deny the operation of the divine will in influencing the thoughts of others. None can claim for his own thought the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Every teacher should be a learner with an open mind and a heart humble enough to receive truth from every quarter.

What becomes then of the claim to finality for the Christian religion? What justification is there for the missionary effort to convert the world to Christ? Is it possible that Christ may some day be transcended by a still greater religious teacher?

In answer to these questions it may be definitely stated that, in the most important matter of all, Christianity is final and the place of Christ in God's revelation in history is unique. In Christ we find the culmination of the historic revelation of God's will, as a will to the good of all, to be pursued without exception and without limit. It is true that essentially the same idea finds occasional expression among Stoic philosophers, Jewish rabbis and Oriental sages. Since God is in us, striving to direct our minds to this goal, it would be strange if no glimmering of it were found elsewhere. But no teacher before Christ made it the essential, central and dominant theme of his moral teaching, as Jesus did. No other thinker carried it so clearly to its logical conclusion: "Love your enemies." No other teacher maintained it so consistently in every phase of his discourse, or exemplified it so thoroughly in his life and death. No other leader succeeded in establishing a great religious movement, permeated with the spirit of this ideal and dedicated to its propagation throughout the world.

Because Jesus did these things his position is unique in history. No conception of human duty can be greater or truer than that which demands from each the utmost effort to pursue disinterestedly the good of all. No life can be nobler than one which is daily consecrated to that end and gives to it at length the last full measure of devotion. The best of those who come after him can do no more than follow in his train. Neither the ideal itself, nor the measure of devotion to it, can they ever exceed. And those who follow after cannot, and do not, claim equality with the leader who blazed the trail. The best of them are clearest in their acknowledgment that without his guidance they could not have seen the way and with-

out the inspiration of his example their hearts would often fail. Every age presents new problems, and offers new light on the means to deal with the old. The problems change, new victories are won, and the methods improve, but the end remains the same. It is the goal that is set before all men by the will of God within, and its nature has been clarified, once and for all, by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

Because of what Christ has done for the world the world should know, not only of his teaching, but of him. It is not charity to withhold that teaching from non-Christian peoples. It is not humility to give the teaching without acknowledging the teacher whence we received it. The Christian is not true to his own ideal if he fails to be a missionary in every way he can. But he is not true to his ideal, either, if he performs his mission in a spirit of arrogance and pride. Many have made that mistake. And it has naturally aroused the pride of the non-Christian to resist the new teaching. But the remedy is not to give up the missionary effort, but to perform it in a spirit of humility and love which is alive to all the truth and value in the non-Christian religions. Thus presented Christianity may be more readily received as a fulfillment, purification and consummation of that vision of God which each religion cherishes as its own.

#### THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST

Because of Christ's place in history we can rightly say that we see in him the full and final revelation of God to man. Because his personal life so completely expressed the will of God we can agree with the writer of the Fourth Gospel that in him "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The eternal will

of God, creatively active in the development of life on earth, produced at last in him a complete expression of its own true nature as the will to universal good.

Further, we can speak of him as "the Son of God." God is the source of all life. We are not created things external to his being, but offspring of the divine life. It is more fact than metaphor to speak of God as our Father and of all men as his children. It is therefore perfectly legitimate to speak of Jesus Christ, whose life expressed in its fullness the will of God in finite human form, as *the* Son of God, pre-eminent among all men as an expression of the divine nature.

Here we see the solution of the controversy about the divinity of Christ that has plagued Christian theology for so many centuries. Jesus combined true humanity and true divinity in the only way they could be combined. He was a real person, distinct from the real personality of the eternal consciousness. Yet his personality (like all living things) had its root and source in the eternal consciousness and was (and is) inseparable from it. And (unlike other living things) his personality expressed to the full the essential nature of the eternal consciousness as a will to the good of all. Yet it was at the same time limited in knowledge and power in the same way as other human personalities.

It was by a sound prophetic insight that the early disciples of Christ declared him both fully human and fully divine, though they had no philosophy whereby to explain it. When, a little later, they sought to interpret their faith in terms of Greek philosophy they found themselves enmeshed in difficulties; but they clung to their religious insight. In the course of Christian history the doctrine has proved its value in giving vitality to the



Christian faith. Those sects that have denied it in the effort to make their theology more rational have found their religion devitalized and their numbers and influence have diminished. The recognition that Jesus is the Son of God gives concrete reality and warmth to the abstract statement that "God is love."

Something, however, must be said for those who have rejected the doctrine of Christ's divinity in the name of reason. The failure of theology to do justice to the presence of God in man as the will to the greatest good made it impossible to work out a reasonable understanding of the relation of God and man. It set God off too far from man. And to call Christ divine therefore set him off too far from man. It made his personality something miraculous and encouraged superstition. It led to the conception of the Christian religion as so distinct from other religions that it filled all too many Christians with a spirit of arrogance and pride. This situation will continue until Christian theology can rectify its fundamental error — the failure to recognize fully and clearly the presence of God in every man.

The view that is here presented makes the life and example of Christ no less divine. But it enables us to see more clearly the divine agency also in other religions than our own. And it enables us to contemplate the divinity of Christ without losing the full appreciation of his humanity in feelings of mystification and awe, and without relying on dubious stories of his miraculous birth which would make him only half human and half divine.

Unitarians and atheists err in saying that Jesus was a "mere man." But the root of their error is shared by many "orthodox" persons in assuming that there can be

any such creature as a *mere* man. There is not. God is in all of us. Without the divine will as the foundation of personality human individuality could not exist. But the divine in most of us is largely hidden by the human individuality, our private, individual habits of will running counter to the divine. In Jesus the divine will not merely shines through the human, but is revealed in it; his human, individual will is a direct expression of the divine. God is, in him, manifest in the flesh. The divine is seen expressing itself in a human life, from a finite, limited, human point of view.

Even the apostle Paul, who clearly teaches that "it is God which worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure," was not able to grasp the intimacy of the relation between man and God. Only the modern understanding of personality as an organization of will, which can be organically interconnected with higher and lower organizations of will (higher and lower persons), makes this possible. Before this was explained by modern psychological investigation, personality was generally thought to belong to a unique unit of soul-substance. Therefore, if Jesus was divine, his personality had to be thought of as belonging to an eternal soul-substance. Paul thus thought of him as eternally existing "in the form of God" and voluntarily blotting out his divine consciousness to take on "the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:5-8). This presents an appealing picture of high self-sacrifice which many are loath to surrender. But the self-sacrifice of a divine being, who undertakes a temporary and painful mission of tremendous importance, is really on a much lower plane than that of "the man Christ Jesus," who must walk by faith and not by sight. There is nothing really lost when we give up the Pauline

picture. On the contrary, Jesus is brought much closer to us in both his divinity and his humanity.

#### THE CHRISTIAN IDEA OF SALVATION

Thus far we have considered the claim to finality of the Christian religion as resting on the completeness of the Christian ethic, the place of Jesus in history, and the divinity of his nature. But the claim to finality rests still more emphatically on the significance of Christianity as a way of salvation, both for the individual and for society.

It is certainly a misrepresentation of Christian teaching to say that there is no salvation outside of Christianity. The Epistle to the Hebrews (chap. 11) tells of many Old Testament heroes (not all Hebrews) who were saved by faith without the knowledge of Christ. And the apostle Paul says that the Gentiles are judged of God, not by Hebrew or Christian standards, but by the law endorsed by their own consciences (Rom. 2:13-15). So when Peter in his enthusiasm exclaims, "For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), his statement must be qualified by reference to these other texts. Yet Christianity certainly has claimed, in relation to Christ, a unique divine provision for salvation from sin. In so far as it has suggested that there is no salvation for anyone except by believing in Christian doctrine the claim must be rejected as injurious and false. But in so far as it asserts that faith in Christ gives to man a unique aid in his struggle with sin it is abundantly verified in religious experience.

The Christian claim to finality as a way of salvation should therefore be interpreted as recognizing that salvation means the overcoming of the effects of sin upon the

human soul, both for this life and for eternity. And this is, plainly, a matter of degrees. The claim of Christianity to finality as a way of salvation is therefore simply a claim to completeness. Christ is able to save "to the uttermost" those who put their trust in him, who follow his way. And nothing less than the Christian way can lead to complete salvation. This is the claim which we must investigate. We must inquire into the nature of sin in its effects upon the human soul and see how salvation from these is wrought by faith in Christ.

#### SIN AND MORAL FREEDOM

Sin is not necessarily the same thing as doing wrong or producing evil. A child may do wrong in complete ignorance and innocence. Even an animal or a storm can produce evil, but they cannot sin. To say that an act is sinful is to imply that the person who did it is morally to be blamed for it. This means that he could have avoided committing the wrong or producing the evil, or that he could have produced a greater good. It means that he could have done something better if only he had made the necessary effort. There are sins of omission as well of commission. Sin is a *failure* to produce the greater good or the lesser evil when, by some action of ours, a greater good or lesser evil was possible. It implies that we were free to avoid the evil action or to do something better and yet failed to exercise this freedom. Only in so far as we are free agents is it possible to be guilty of sin.

There are many kinds of freedom, but they all involve one essential condition. The free agent has some power of *self-determination*. It is not entirely controlled by external conditions. Men and animals have a certain

physical freedom, but it is strictly limited by external physical conditions. They also have a certain social freedom, limited by the compulsions imposed by other individuals. Within these limits men and animals are both free. And they produce both good and evil. But man has a further freedom which the animal has not. The animal is a slave to his inherited natural impulses and fixed habits. Man can choose between different goods and evils in a way that the animal cannot. We must examine this difference carefully.

Even the animal has some power of choice. Between two foods he chooses the one he likes better. Between his desire for food and his fear of a whip he chooses the alternative that impresses him less painfully. But in these choices he is still a slave to impulses and habits. He is carried away by the drive that is strongest at the moment. And the strength of that drive is determined by forces beyond his present control. Many of man's choices are on the same level. He can see further ahead than the animal and can see a wider range of distinct possibilities of good and evil. But often he merely responds to whichever of these possibilities makes the strongest appeal to him. And the strength of their various appeals depends upon his natural impulses and his acquired habitual tendencies. At this level of choice man, like the animal, is free to choose what he wants. But *what* he wants is determined by forces beyond his present control. He is still a slave to his own specific natural impulses and habits.

Each one of these impulses and habits is a specific, fixed form of will. It is a tendency to strive for some specific good. Some of these specific drives have been developed in the history of the race and are inherited in

our animal nature, like the drives to satisfy hunger and sex and to escape from pain. Some of these inherited drives have become highly specialized in particular habits, and other habits have been developed that cannot easily be traced to any one particular animal drive. Each of them begins as a response to some particular feeling or anticipation of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Thus they are all, at first, purely egoistic. They aim at something felt as good, but only at private, personal satisfactions. The infant is unaware of any good but his own and the habits formed in infancy are therefore purely selfish.

These infantile tendencies are modified somewhat, and an important additional set of habits is developed, by social training. Each social group to which the individual belongs — the family, the local community, the nation, the school, etc. — has its own special set of interests, and trains the individual to serve those interests. This training modifies selfishness but creates new evils. For the interests of one group are often antagonistic to those of another and the individual is trained to hate, fear and despise, as well as to love, admire and obey. And nearly always the group trains the individual to put the interests of his own group before those of other groups. Thus arise the narrow loyalties that tear human society into conflicting groups.

Every specific tendency of will, whether inherited or acquired, is an impulsion to seek some good. But because these specific tendencies, which constitute our individuality, are narrow and limited in their aims they drive us again and again to destroy the greater good or produce some balance of evil in our pursuit of the lesser goods toward which they impel us. When we do this in

spite of an awareness of the balance of evil, or loss of greater good, it is sin.

Thus sin often has the appearance of a positive effort to produce evil, because goods are destroyed and positive evils produced in the effort to produce a lesser good. Yet there is no such thing as a will to evil for its own sake. Anger is an impulse to destroy that which creates fear or impedes satisfaction of some desire. Hatred is an attitude of mind developed by such strong and frequent anger that the hater identifies any evil to the person hated with a good to himself. Thus the evil and the tragedy grow out of our limitations, our finitude, not out of the essential nature and aim of human will.

It is a mistake to think that there must be some demonic tendency, some positive love of evil in man, to explain the horrors of human cruelty. Perverted minds, abnormally twisted, obtain a gratifying sense of power and other devious satisfactions from inflicting pain on others. The selfish drives of the infantile ego have a long start over the altruistic tendencies in the development of the child. And the narrow family and tribal loyalties have a long start in the history of the race. The wonder is, not that man is so careless of the good of others, but that these selfish and narrow impulses can ever be overcome. If the will to the good of others were just another one of the many specific forms of will, developed in the history of the race and the individual, it never could triumph over the others as it does.

How does this will to the greater good exert any control over the established forces of the narrow special interests? It is here that we approach the question of the operation of man's higher freedom. The need and the opportunity for its exercise arise when there is conflict

within the personality. For example, specific habits and impulses direct a man's attention to a goal wherein is found the satisfaction of some special interest. It is *his* good or the good of *his* group. But there is another possibility of a greater good of some other person at stake. The situation is such that he must choose between them. The will to the *greatest* good makes itself felt, but it lacks the drive and the emotional force of the personal or group interest; though perhaps it is supported by some specific interests, such as self-respect. There is tension and conflict within the self. The personal or group interest has the stronger driving force, but the idea of the greater good has attached to it that peculiar constraining influence which we call the sense of obligation. In response to this the self, torn by conflicting purposes, makes a unique effort. It pulls itself together, integrates itself, by subjecting the special habitual impulses to the prior claim of the will to the greatest good, as indicated by the sense of obligation.

Because the self, when threatened with disintegration, has this unique power of reintegrating itself by special effort of will it is able to maintain some degree of freedom from the enslaving power of specialized natural impulses and habits. It can pursue what appears to it as the greatest good for itself or others, even against the strong drive of long established habits and deep-rooted natural impulses. Its freedom is limited. It may find impulse and habit sometimes too strong for it. But it is often aided by other specific impulses, especially self-respect and special affections for family and friends. Thus gradually it can modify the personality and build a character which, in general, conforms to the will to the greatest good.

## SIN AS SPIRITUAL INERTIA

The will to the greatest good is God within us, making his presence and authority known in the sense of obligation. Our specific impulses and habits (or specific interests) are our own individuality. When the self pulls itself together, reintegrates itself, it reintegrates its specific individuality in harmony with the divine within. It is the surrender of the private, finite self to God. But it is at the same time man's assertion of his own highest freedom, whereby he makes himself at one with God. To fail thus to assert our moral freedom is sin. Sin is a spiritual inertia that leaves us enslaved to impulse and habit, to special interest and particular passion. We sin, not in our freedom, but in our slavery. And in sinning we cut ourselves off from God. In striving for what we see as right we assert our true freedom and enter into closer communion with the divine.

This is the secret of the challenging teaching of Jesus concerning sin. For him it is not the overt act that is sin, but the failure to quell the evil desire — the lust and the anger that, when harbored in the heart, blind us to the divine will within, put us out of touch with God. And it is not the overt act that constitutes righteousness, but rather the *striving* to do right. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matt. 5:6). "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). The publican, who could only beat his breast and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner," was justified rather than the Pharisee who kept the law strictly but was blind to his own faults and so never strove to do better (Luke 18).

This last example shows that there can be spiritual inertia at a high level of overt action as well as at a low. And spiritual inertia is sin. It is easy for some people to be righteous, as the world counts righteousness, for they have had everything in their favor in home environment and training. It is hard for others, who have had to fight against bad environment and special temptations. But every man can *try*. He can "hunger and thirst after righteousness." So long as he keeps on striving to do right he is spiritually alive and growing. Progress is being made and heaven rejoices over it. His conscience keeps him aware of God and his effort saves him from falling away.

But spiritual stagnation sets in when a person becomes self-righteous, content with his own goodness, blind to his own imperfection. Whether his habits are predominantly good or bad such a person is "dead in trespasses and sin." He is spiritually inert. He makes no further progress but inevitably slips backward, finding excuses for himself. He becomes blind to the higher will, the will to the greatest good, which is God within him. He pays no attention to it because he does not want to be accused by it, to be called on to make an effort to do something more for his fellows than his easy and comfortable habits lead him to do. He is out of touch with God.

The problem of overcoming sin is thus the problem of overcoming spiritual inertia, at whatever level it may be found, high or low. And this is the function of Christ in the world. For our salvation from sin we need to be made conscious of our shortcomings, not only of the avoidable wrongs we have committed but of the good we might have done and have not. Salvation from sin requires that we be constantly stirred from our tendency

to lapse into spiritual inertia. We must come under "conviction of sin." Only thereby do we awaken to the presence within of a will that is other and higher than our own—the will of God. Only thus can we be moved to strive for a closer harmony with him. Only thus is spiritual effort aroused. And without spiritual effort man is a creature of impulse and habit, living on the training imparted to him by others. Without spiritual effort each generation must slip back below the moral attainment of the last until man is demoralized, animalized, and civilization sinks into chaos. Only if spiritual effort can be kept alive, even on the highest levels of human moral attainment, can moral progress and the progress of civilization go on.

#### THE OVERCOMING OF SIN

Can anyone who really knows Christ be content with himself? Can we read the Gospel story, listen to his teaching, walk with him from Galilee to Calvary, then measure ourselves by his moral stature and still be smugly self-satisfied—"just persons who need no repentance"? However good a man is, if he will honestly compare himself with Christ it must shake him from any tendency to spiritual inertia—which is sin, and spiritual death. However bad a man is, and insensitive to his badness, if he really gives attention to the life and teaching of Jesus it can scarcely fail to impress him with a sense of his shortcomings and stir him to some effort to raise the level of his conduct.

It is not merely the life and teaching of Jesus that is needed to have this effect, but also his death. The lofty teaching, above the level of any continuous human attainment, is necessary to keep before us an ideal that

forever calls for our utmost effort. But the precept would be of little avail without the example. And the example of high courage, unquenchable loving-kindness and complete devotion could be given only under conditions of supreme trial. Without that terrible testing ordeal the manifestation of God in man would have been incomplete. Jesus did not seek a martyr's death. But he could not continue his mission and avoid it. To give up teaching and go into retirement would have been the end of the movement he had started. He chose to be true to his high calling. He endured the cross and it became the crown and completion of his mission to men. Once and for all it was made manifest that a man may walk with God, may *be divine*. And none of us can look on him and honestly deny our insufficiency. He convicts us of sin. He penetrates even that wall of spiritual pride which is the last defense of the sinning self against God. It is our part then to confess to God our sinfulness, to repent, which means to *strive* to overcome it; and in that very effort we find ourselves entering again into harmony with God.

This is the atonement, the making of man *at one* with God. It is wrought within us by the recognition and confession to God of our sinfulness and by the repentance whereby we strive to live in harmony with God. And both of these are the results of faith. Faith includes some form of belief, but its basis is a moral attitude, the product of moral judgment, decision and effort, especially effort. The essence of faith is faithfulness. Faith in God means faithfulness to God. It results in maintaining that clear recognition of our insufficiency, that awareness of the reality of God as author of the moral law within, which issue in the effort that maintains our

harmony with God — our at-one-ment. And this faith in God, whereby we are made at one with him, is wrought in the Christian by the knowledge of Christ and the working of the divine will within.

This does not mean that faith and salvation from sin can be brought about in no other way save through the knowledge of Christ. We have already seen that Christianity must not, and the New Testament does not, claim any such thing. God's power and means of grace are not so limited as that. But it does mean that Christ is abundantly able to save, can save to the uttermost. And nothing less than Christ — his lofty teaching, his life, his sacrifice — can do it completely, breaking the last barriers of spiritual pride. And since Christ has done it there is no need that it should be done again; nor has any other done the same. Thus, in the work of Christ in saving men from sin Christianity is seen, once again, to be the final religion.

#### THEORIES OF ATONEMENT

It was very difficult for the early Christian church to understand the atoning work of Christ. They felt its power in freeing them from the fear of divine condemnation because of sin, and creating in their hearts the assurance of the divine presence. They preached it as a fact of spiritual experience. But at first they made little attempt to explain it. The difficulty lay in the traditional conception of sin. For though they recorded Christ's teaching on sin in the Gospels it was too revolutionary to be fully grasped at first. In the traditional conception, sin was the overt act of breaking the divinely given moral law; and this involved penalties. The Hebrews had long sought divine forgiveness by making special sacrifices.

#### IS CHRISTIANITY THE FINAL RELIGION?

The prophets from Amos to Jeremiah had protested against the idea that spilling the blood of animals could atone for the sin of a man's soul. They called for repentance as the only true way of salvation. But repentance is hard and the people continued, with the encouragement of the priests, to save their consciences at the altars.

To those who thought about it the practice of sacrificial atonement seemed logical so long as sin was regarded as simply a breaking of certain specific laws. One could keep most of the law most of the time, and could make up for the occasional lapses by taking the trouble to perform some special act of beneficence to man, or honor and worship toward God, over and above the duties imposed by the moral law. But this comfortable theory breaks down when the moral law is conceived as demanding the utmost possible effort in the service of God and man. There can be no making up for sins of omission and commission by doing good to man or honor to God that it would, in any case, be sin to neglect — and we owe all possible good to man and honor to God. So there is no possibility of special atonement by special services to God or man.

St. Paul saw this clearly. And he knew the impossibility of any man's attaining perfection in this life. The animal impulses, egoistic habits and narrow group interests which drive us to be false to the divine will within he spoke of as "the law of sin which is in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin" (Rom. 7:23). Yet he felt the power of that spiritual awakening, and that more intimate awareness of the precious but awesome presence of God within, which had been wrought in his complacent Pharisaic heart by the knowledge of Christ. He

felt himself convicted of sin, yet saved from its power and accepted by God, at one with him. And this he rightly attributed to the new faith in God which he had found through Christ, with its resultant penitence and spiritual effort. "A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 6:28).

Thus Paul understood, in part at least, the meaning of the beatitude, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). Not by the overt act of obedience to a law, which may be easy for some and psychologically impossible for others, do we overcome the spiritual inertia which is sin, but by that holy discontent with our lesser selves and that striving after the ideal which are the life of faith. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (I John, 5:4).

But Paul's mind was obsessed with another problem. He rightly saw that God's problem with man is to awaken him from the spiritual inertia into which he is apt to fall, and that this can be done for all men by the power of the gospel of Christ if they will but attend to it. But he could not help thinking of the moral law on the familiar analogy of the laws made by man. Every law of the state requires a penalty attached to it so that it can be enforced. Otherwise it is useless. And a just ruler must always enforce the law. So Paul concluded that God's laws must have penalties attached to them which he could not justly omit. Yet in forgiving man's sin God was remitting the penalties. How could he justly do so? Paul's answer was ingenious. The sacrifice of Christ, who had incurred no penalty of sin, must have paid the penalty for all mankind. And this was possible because the sinfulness of all mankind was ultimately due to the

original sin of Adam, which introduced the taint into originally perfect human nature. God had sent his Son to die as a propitiation for our sins "that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).

This legalistic theory of the atonement has always been a source of doubt and difficulty in Christian theology for it suffers from two serious ethical defects. We cannot shuffle off all the blame for our sin upon Adam; and in so far as our sin *is* due to a taint in our nature we should not be punished for what is not our fault. Second, it is not justice to allow an innocent person to accept the punishment of a guilty one, even if he volunteers to do so. The theory of an atonement through vicarious punishment of the innocent in place of the guilty is therefore morally unsound and must be rejected.

Fortunately, the whole theory is unnecessary. It is a false answer to a false problem. There is no analogy between the divine moral law and the law of the state. Man's laws and their penalties are mere human devices to force people to behave in certain ways that the civil authorities desire. The moral law of God is a natural law of the spiritual life of man. Its sanctions (or penalties) are not deliberately imposed to support the law but are the natural consequences of certain lines of action. The loving father, in the parable, can forgive his penitent prodigal son without demanding that the innocent elder brother pay any penalty. And God can forgive us the suffering we cause him through our sin without inflicting an undeserved punishment upon Jesus. But sins, though forgiven, still have their natural consequences.

God's problem is not to justify his loving desire to



forgive us, but to save us from the grip of sin. That sin is not the breaking of specific rules but the failure to keep on actively striving after higher and higher ideals. The consequences of this spiritual inertia (which is sin) are loss of the awareness of the presence of God within us as source of the moral law, failure to make any further progress in development of a higher spiritual life, the hardening of spiritual pride with consequent insensitivity to new problems and new opportunities, a growing tendency to excuse our own failures and thus slip backward to lower and lower moral levels as subtle temptations present themselves. And as sin spreads in society, society must morally stagnate and decay. God's problem is to keep the human race spiritually active, growing in grace and in the knowledge of God. The same problem is present at every level of the advance of civilization and culture, and at every stage in the moral progress of the individual. At the lower levels spiritual inertia is disturbed by the obvious effects of evil. At the higher levels nothing less than the knowledge of the life and death of Christ can solve the problem.

#### SALVATION FOR TIME AND ETERNITY

The salvation from sin that is thus wrought in human lives by the power of the gospel of Christ, and by the example of lesser servants of God, saves the individual from the effects of sin in this life and saves society from the cumulative effects of the sin of its members. The condition of the world today thus brings home to us how much we need the working of these religious forces among us.

But the salvation wrought in the individual is not only for time. It is for eternity. When spiritual inertia sets

in, the soul ceases to grow and even begins to lose its gains. We have seen, in our earlier discussion of the structure and development of the soul, that what can be expected to survive bodily death is that part of our specific individuality which is concerned with those forms and expressions of beauty, goodness and truth that are independent of the physical life. We have seen, too, that the happiness of a soul depends upon the harmony of its developed individuality with the will to the greatest good—with God within. We thus see that the significance of salvation from sin is not merely temporal but eternal.

It is not the case that a soul which relapses into spiritual inertia is thereby eternally and completely lost, or that all those who do not come to the knowledge of Christ are eternally and completely lost. Such doctrines are monstrous. The beginnings of the development of the eternal part of a personality are wrought in it under the stimulus of the divine will within. Every normal human being in the course of his growth to maturity feels the operation of that higher will and comes under conviction of sin, even though he does not recognize the constraining influence within as divine. But he can cultivate the habit of ignoring its promptings—which is sin. The stronger this habit grows the more is the grip of sin fixed upon him. If it is not checked his spiritual development is eventually strangled. His personality grows out of harmony with the divine will. Such a personality we have no right to assume is eternally lost or eternally distorted and stunted. Reawakening and readjustment can take place in this life. There is good reason to suppose, therefore, that the same may be possible in the society that will exist hereafter. But that future life cannot but be the poorer for

the opportunities of spiritual development which are lost in this.

#### THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Our examination of the function of Christ in history has shown us that his work was not completed by his life and teaching. It required also his death. But was it completed with his death? It is natural to say "Yes." But all the force of Christian history says "No." According to their own testimony—and we cannot doubt its honesty—his disciples relapsed into despair after the crucifixion. They believed it was the end of all their hopes. And then on the third day he appeared to them—to individuals and to groups. He enjoined them to go out and preach the things he had taught them, adding the promise of eternal life attested by his resurrection. The whole tenor of their story is that without this experience they would not have had the faith and courage to carry on. They made it the central feature of their preaching. Certainly something very remarkable happened to cause this change in their outlook and create this conviction that he had appeared to them. Was it merely a succession of hallucinations or was it something more?

One feature of the story which cannot be explained as a vision is that of the empty tomb. It is mentioned by all four Gospel writers, and Paul's references to the resurrection of the body show that he too believed it. We can discount a lot of the details, such as angelic appearances, as due to embellishment by rumor, for they are not without discrepancies. But the core of the story must be historical. On the morning of the third day, after observing the Sabbath in proper seclusion, a number of women

went to the tomb and found it empty. There is nothing incredible about this. The women supposed at first that his enemies had had the body removed. Anyone the least inclined to be skeptical will agree as to the probability. The priests would naturally want to dispose of it in some less honorable way, lest his disciples make the tomb a martyr's shrine and cause further trouble. By the time the resurrection stories began to worry them the body would have been too far gone to produce as evidence.

Many critics of the stories believe that it was the empty tomb that led to the subsequent developments. It suggested the idea of the resurrection, and dwelling on this idea produced hallucinations which were later embellished in the Easter stories.

But even when one has made all due allowance for the easy growth of rumor and embellishment, even among honest witnesses, it is not easy to dismiss these stories as based on mere hallucination. There was no atmosphere of expectation in the disciples' minds such as is necessary to produce hallucinations, no wild excitement in their meetings such as is required for a whole group to become subject to the same hallucination at the same time.

There is no reasonable historical doubt that the apostles *believed* they had seen him, together, as a group, on two occasions after his death, that a great crowd of several hundreds believed they saw him on another occasion, and that several individuals believed he had appeared to them privately. Paul's statement in I Corinthians 15 is sufficient in itself to prove this, for the authenticity of this letter and the reliability of Paul's witness are recognized by scholars as beyond question. Coupled with the stories in the Gospels and the subsequent history of

the movement, which shows the tremendous conviction with which they preached the resurrection, one fact is placed beyond doubt—these individuals and groups of people certainly had visual (and probably auditory) experiences which convinced them thoroughly that Jesus had in some way risen from the dead.

It was natural and inevitable for those who had these experiences to believe they had seen a miracle. It was an age in which almost everybody believed in miracles. The ministry of Jesus had been marked by many remarkable cases of healing. These we can understand as due to psychological causes. But the psychological explanation was not understood in those days and the witnesses could not help believing that Jesus somehow possessed miraculous powers. Rumor, of course, exaggerated the stories with additions that are psychologically and physically impossible. So the followers of Jesus, believing that miracles had happened before in the life of Jesus, believed another and greater miracle had happened when they had the strange experience of his visual appearance before them. Coupled with the disappearance of the body from the tomb it made them believe he had been physically raised from the dead—although he appeared and disappeared in a way no physical body could do.

The belief in a physical miracle must, however, be rejected. If it were possible for God to work such miracles it would place on him the whole responsibility for allowing physical disease and suffering to continue in the world. Further, all our scientific knowledge unites to reject the notion that mind can interfere to this extent with physical nature.

Yet, as already shown, the evidence seems too strong to dismiss these appearances as mere hallucinations. So

we are driven to ask whether they could in some way be real without being miraculous. Here we must face phenomena that are on the border line of human knowledge. The Society for Psychological Research has for many years been investigating cases of this sort with inconclusive results. They have exposed much fraud and found much honest error and self-deception; but there is a residue of evidence which convinces many capable investigators that the power of one mind to influence another, and even affect its sensory experience, is not limited to the ordinary channels of communication. Psychologists at Duke University have gathered a great deal of experimental evidence confirming this view, though others have performed similar experiments with negative results. It seems to be only in conditions of exceptional strain and excitement that normal minds become so shaken out of their habitual modes of operation as to exercise this influence upon others with any great strength or clarity. With somewhat abnormal minds it appears to be commoner, but still is rare and spasmodic, difficult to demonstrate experimentally and to control.

It must be admitted that the evidence is as yet inconclusive. But the prevailing skepticism seems to be due to philosophical prejudice rather than to empirical tests. We have seen reason in earlier chapters to believe in the survival of the mind after the death of the body. If it is possible, therefore, for one mind to influence the experience of another mind directly, then the risen soul of Jesus may have given the Easter experiences to his disciples without the miracle of a risen body. The essential point in the resurrection stories would then be true. We should have to regard the belief in the physical resurrection as merely an unfortunate addition due to the

removal of the body from the tomb. If the disciples had gone forth to preach that the spirit of Jesus, rather than the body, had appeared to them they would have found many more people ready to believe them, both in the Greco-Roman world and in the world of the present day.

The most important objection to this explanation of the appearances is that we do not have other well authenticated cases of the same thing. If Jesus could appear to his loved ones after his death why do not others do so? The only answer to this is that Jesus was a most exceptional person and it may well be that he succeeded in doing what the souls of others have not the power of will to carry through. Even though the mind survives the shock of bodily death it must be very much shaken and temporarily incomplete. Mind is a system of interests and our interests are so much involved with the body as their means of expression, so much wrapped up with lowly and temporal desires, that we cannot but anticipate the necessity for a considerable period of adjustment before we again become capable of decisive action. And the fact that the dead do not normally communicate with us would indicate that in the adjustment the capacity for direct influence on earthly minds is normally lost. If the risen Jesus really succeeded in impressing upon his followers such a vivid experience of his presence as they undoubtedly had it is just one further indication of the power of his will to free itself from the concerns of the flesh and devote itself to the good of those he loved.

This explanation of the central doctrine of historic Christianity cannot be regarded as proved. No form of resurrection doctrine is sufficiently well established to be put into a creed and made a test of religious fellowship. The power of Christ to save from sin does not re-

quire belief in the resurrection of his body. But the theory here advanced seems to be the most reasonable explanation of the historical record. And the doctrine of the risen Lord is one that has proved its value in the life of the church. In the form here given it may therefore be accepted as part of a rational faith, helping to confirm that hope of eternity which rounds out the meaning of our life and gives us courage to face its darkest phases.

## Must Religion Be Institutionalized?

### FUNCTIONS AND FAULTS OF INSTITUTIONS

INSTITUTIONS are the recognized forms of orderly social relations, the instruments of group action. A community or association of people without institutions would be an unorganized crowd. But this ordering of our lives by institutions is always somewhat galling and restrictive of our freedom. An institution is like the yoke that is put across a span of oxen. It is the means whereby they tug their load and work together in a common service, but it is burdensome and binding and apt to gall their shoulders. Or, to change the figure slightly, an institution is like the yoke used by water-carriers to fit across their shoulders and hang a bucket at either end. It gives them power to lift a heavier load, but it restricts the freedom of their arms and presses painfully where it does not perfectly fit.

Need our religion be a yoke upon us? The religious life is a tender plant, a growth within the innermost recesses of the soul. Must it submit to external regulation? Need it conform to the instruments of public action? Can it not be cherished and cultivated in the privacy of the inner life and express itself in the freedom of the individual without incurring the restrictions and dangers of institutionalization? Institutions create vested interests. They hamper freedom of thought and expression. They press us into a common mold and gall the

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exceptional individual by their failure to fit his special needs. Religious institutions manifest these evils no less than others. Cannot religion be one area of life left free from the burden of them?

We must admit the truth of these charges. But still the plea for freedom from institutionalization of religion must be denied. The central lesson of religion is that "no man liveth to himself." Least of any phase of our lives can religion be cut off from society. Its most fundamental root is the inner demand that we concern ourselves with the good of others. And there is little good that we can do alone. Our religious faith is the most precious thing that we possess and we cannot will another's good and keep it from him. To spread the faith and carry out its program of good will we must work with others. And there can be no cooperative social action without those recognized forms and instrumentalities which we call institutions.

Yet religion can be, and commonly is, overinstitutionalized. Without constant vigilance and critical self-appraisalment its institutions become distorted and burdened by the vested interests of officeholders, rigid and ill-adapted to new knowledge and new conditions, inefficient and restrictive. Jesus came to preach to a people whose religion was heavily overinstitutionalized, burdened with the vested interests of priests, distorted by crude and outworn ceremonies. He cleansed the temple of the money changers and sellers of sacrificial animals, repudiated the senseless prohibitions on various foods ("Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out" [Matt. 15:11]), and preached a simple religion of faith and love. His followers were to have a religion that should not be a burden — should not

be overinstitutionalized. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29).

Yet he did not leave his followers as a group devoid of institutions to bind them together and express their faith. From the beginning of his ministry he endorsed the act of baptism as a symbol of repentance and adoption of the "gospel" he preached. And on his last night with his disciples he instituted the communion supper as a memorial and symbol of fellowship. Apart from these practices he set up no formal system of worship, but he taught his followers to pray, joined with them in reading scriptures and singing hymns, and sent them forth to preach. He established no officialdom, but left to his followers the task of organizing the church. The authority he is alleged by Catholic writers to have conferred upon Peter (Matt. 16:18-19) was not intended for Peter alone, for in precisely the same words it is said (Matt. 18:17-18) to be the function of any particular local church. The plain inference is that he left to his followers the task of developing their own church organization in whatever form they found most efficient.

Christ, therefore, sought to leave behind him a religious society, not devoid of institutions, but cherishing those he gave them and developing others as they were found to be necessary or useful, without allowing any institution to become burdensome. Even "the sabbath," he said, "was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). The test of Christian institutions, as developed and practiced by the church, must therefore be their value for Christian life and work. The institu-

tions established by Jesus himself should be practiced in the same spirit, and in a form which preserves the same symbolism, as he gave to them. But it is not in accord with the spirit of Christ to create bitterness and division by insisting on detailed agreement in the observation of ceremonies. We should remember the Pauline injunction, "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (II Cor. 3:6).

#### THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

All who recognize the central place of Jesus Christ in the revelation of God in history, by that very fact form one body. This is not merely a historical and mystical dogma. It is an inevitable psychological necessity. A psychological group is created by the recognition of a common leadership. The whole Christian church, therefore, forms one spiritual body, of which Christ is the head and functional center. There are disorders and lesions (or breaks) within that body, but these cannot destroy its essential spiritual unity. Yet these disorders and lesions cripple its power and destroy its influence. The hope of human society lies in the development by the church of a set of institutions which can become effective instruments of its underlying unity of spirit while remaining sufficiently flexible to express that spirit in all its multifarious forms.

The great mistake of the church in the past has been an exaggeration of the importance of agreement in matters of belief and ceremonial form. Very early in the history of the church, when teachings arose which the majority felt were false, they thought it necessary, in defense of the truth, to thrust the false teachers and their followers out from their fellowship. Yet all human his-

tory shows that the best defense of the truth is freedom of discussion in an atmosphere of mutual respect and love. The churches should cease to make their creeds tests of fellowship. At most, creeds should be brief statements of general belief for the guidance of inquirers, and constantly subject to reformulation. It is impossible for a man to coerce his mind to believe what does not appear to him consistent with fact and logically reasonable. But any person who is sufficiently at one with the spirit of Christ to wish to work and fellowship in common cause with those who find in him the supreme revelation of God in history is, in spirit, a member of the body of Christ and should not be turned away.

Such a person, even though he has intellectual difficulty in believing that God is a superhuman personal being, still should be admitted. God is in him and has joined him to Christ, even though he cannot believe that the psychological force which does this is part of a conscious power transcending all human nature. Fortunately it is only a very few of those who really desire to honor and serve Christ as their spiritual leader who cannot follow him in belief in a personal and superhuman God. And unfortunately those with these intellectual difficulties are usually restrained by them from seeking full fellowship with the Christian church. If the church should open its doors to these "humanists," as they often call themselves, it will not be swamped or adversely influenced by them. For humanism is an emasculated form of religious belief. It lacks vitality and the power to weather crises. It is a half-way stage in which few people are likely to remain long. And those who enter upon it are more likely to come out on the side of a full Christian faith if spiritually nourished in the fellowship

of the church than if thrust out to form some small fellowship of their own.

But if the church is to provide a spiritual home and sphere of religious service for all types of human minds it must allow different congregations to develop different institutional forms for their work and worship. Differences of temperament, tradition, education and individuality create differences of personality which cannot find adequate help and expression in the same way. Further, groups of people with special interests and distinctive beliefs and ideas should be free to organize distinct congregations for their cultivation and propagation. The measure of disunity thus developed is the inevitable counterpart of that freedom of conscience and freedom of thought in the search for truth which is so vital to the religious life. Fortunately, most denominations of Christendom have already learned to make room for these special varieties of religious thought and experience.

In cities it is comparatively easy for almost any person to find a congregation with which he can work and worship in mutual helpfulness. But in small towns and country areas it is often difficult. Here there is great need for the spirit of Christian charity and mutual accommodation. Each individual should recognize that the creation of an efficient instrument of religious service to the community is more important than the cultivation of the preferred practices, and propagation of the special ideas, of any small group. If freedom of conscience be granted on matters of belief and individual practice, then, for those religious institutions in which the practice of the congregation must needs be uniform, the principle of majority rule would seem to be in accord with

the spirit of Christ. We can put our trust in the hope that, with such freedom of conscience and belief, truth and the higher values will in the long run prevail. Meantime the community as a whole would be receiving the sort of religious service that the majority felt best suited to their needs.

The same trust, that truth and the higher values will prevail where freedom is allowed, should enable us also to adopt the principle of majority rule as a solution of the problem of creating institutions to serve the larger functions of the church, beyond those of the local congregation. Home and foreign missions, social action, the training of the ministry, services of advice, aid and oversight, and other matters, require an organization of the church on a much larger scale than that of the local congregation. At present our exaggerated emphasis upon differences of creed and institution has created a disastrous state of division in this area of the church's life. We are organized and divided into a multitude of denominations, and our denominational institutions have become vested interests that tend to perpetuate the spirit of disunity.

The combination of individual and congregational freedom with democratic majority rule for the larger cooperative enterprises of the church could probably be successfully worked out were it not hindered by the dogma of specific historical revelations, giving alleged authoritative form to creedal beliefs and institutions. If there are specific, divinely given instructions in the Bible as to what Christians must believe about God, Christ and man, and how they must organize the church and conduct its worship, then where there is conflict of opinion and practice one or more of the conflicting parties is not

merely less wise than the other, but is positively wrong. No party feels that it can compromise on something which it believes to be specifically ordained by divine revelation. Thus all Christians who hold the dogma of specific revealed ideas feel they must stand rigidly for their principles.

Those, on the other hand, who reject this dogma of specific revealed ideas find it much easier to come to agreement on what constitute the best institutional forms for the life of the church. These liberal-minded leaders in nearly all the denominations of Christendom are gradually drawing their divided groups together into closer and closer cooperation. And as the dogma of specific revelation fades into oblivion we can expect to see the unity, freedom and power of the church increase. We probably shall not see precisely the same form of government adopted in every area, nor a precise similarity of other institutions in any area; but we shall see a development of that unity amid difference whereby alone social organizations can combine freedom with efficiency.

#### THE CHURCH AND SECULAR INSTITUTIONS

The need for institutions and for unity receives special emphasis when we consider the function of the church in relation to political and economic institutions. Human welfare and human sin are inextricably wrapped up with the secular institutions of society. And religious ideas can make little impact upon these secular institutions until they themselves take on institutional form.

Jesus did not concern himself directly with the political and economic institutions of his day. It was beyond his power and that of his followers at the time to make any impact upon them. And he wisely taught no theory



as to how they should be organized if and when his followers had the power. For no one type of organization of political and economic life is suitable for every people in every stage of development. Christian ethics in these spheres can only set up the guiding principle of the Golden Rule, the greatest good of all concerned. Jesus turned his back upon the futile and dangerous political movements of his day which set themselves in opposition to the tyrannous but comparatively orderly and efficient government of Rome. He endorsed the institution of the state in principle by telling his hearers to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Mark 12:17). But he also established a new institution, which he called "the kingdom of heaven," which was to work gradually in its contact with secular society until, like the yeast in a batch of dough, it should at length transform the whole lump. This is the meaning of the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13:33). And the "kingdom of heaven" is another name for the Christian society, the "body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27).

Jesus' mission on earth was the saving of men from sin. His instrument was the "kingdom of heaven," which takes an organized form as the Christian church. His first task was to establish that instrument. But he clearly recognized that in performing its task the church could not help but influence, and must undertake to transform, the institutions of secular society. As soon as the church attained a position of influence in the Roman state it proceeded to attempt this. The chief of its triumphs were the abolition of the gladiatorial games, the securing of some improvements in the treatment of slaves, the introduction of some elementary provision for the poor, and the elevation of the conception of marriage. But

Christianity began to exercise influence in the Roman state only when that state was already crumbling before the barbarian invasion. The Dark Ages came upon Europe and the Greco-Roman-Christian culture was almost lost beneath the avalanche.

Three great things the church strove to do for secular society in the period that followed, two of which were entirely good and the third a well intentioned but badly executed failure. The church kept alight the lamp of learning in its monasteries. It established great institutions for the care of the poor and needy. It made a bold attempt to secure the political unity and peace of Europe in the only way that at the time seemed possible, by getting the unruly kings and feudal lords to accept the ultimate authority of the pope in the political system of Christendom. But the opposition was too strong, and the church itself too corrupt, to carry through this grandiose, mistaken, but originally well intentioned scheme. The resistance to it gave political support to the rise of Protestantism. And Protestantism, in reaction from the papal effort to secure temporal power, either subjected the church to the state or decreed their complete separation. Thus Protestantism at the beginning conceived the task of the church as that of saving individual souls, leaving to the state the shaping of secular institutions.

But more and more in recent decades Christians of all denominations have awakened to the fact that the sin and suffering of the individual are due in large part to the institutions of our political and economic life. The task of saving souls from sin and doing good to our fellow man is wrapped up with that of reshaping some of our institutions. Economic conditions create slums, raise children in disease and ignorance, enforce poverty in the

midst of plenty, encourage trickery in business and the hoarding of wealth to gratify pride and the lust for power. And these things generate sin and suffering faster than Christian truth and charity can overcome them. The Christian principles of love and justice demand that these conditions shall be changed. And our religious institutions must be fashioned and used in a way that will meet this challenge.

There are many movements within the church today which show that it is awake to this need. The great difficulty felt by Christian leaders is to know what to do. Ministers of religion are not experts on economics and other problems of state; and good will is futile without knowledge. It may even cause harm.

Here there are two broad principles to guide us. First, where the issue is clear, the need and the remedy apparent but only the will to apply it lacking, there the church should cast its full weight in support of the reform. Second, where there is real doubt as to the right means to cure an evil, there the church should be active in demanding that a cure be found. Vested interests will tolerate evils and claim that nothing can be done. Cures can be found only by thought and experiment. If the community is not fully aware of the extent of an evil it will tolerate the "do nothing, try nothing" policy of vested interests. The church should be the most sensitive part of the community's social conscience, discovering the things that are wrong, pointing out the evils, and crying aloud that a remedy be found. Only thus can the wheels of democratic machinery be moved to mend the wrongs of those who are too feeble to exert enough pressure to secure a remedy for themselves.

#### INSTITUTIONS AND THE THEORY OF HUMAN NATURE

In regard to both religious and secular institutions we find a tendency for people to adopt one or other of two types of thought, liberal or conservative. Liberals are ready to make changes and to give increased freedom to individuals and groups. Conservatives are loath to make changes or remove restrictions. The motives for these attitudes, of course, are mixed. In part the motive is self-interest. Those who profit by the existing situation want to maintain it, while those whose advancement is hampered by it want to change it. In part the motive is restlessness and love of variety on the one hand, and inertia and fondness for familiar ways on the other.

But the most important motive goes deeper. The conservative has a relatively low view of human nature. He does not want change because he fears the results. He wants to keep up restrictions because he believes increased liberty will be abused. The liberal, on the other hand, has a relatively high view of human nature. He trusts his fellow men and is ready to enlarge their liberties. The blame for existing evils he places on existing institutions rather than on human beings and so he wants to change the institutions.

Now any frank review of history will show that both sides have made mistakes. Disorder, chaos and war may come through unwise change or the failure to maintain necessary restrictions. But progress is impossible unless we are willing to make experimental changes and take some risks in enlargement of liberties. The balance of power usually lies with those who wish to maintain existing institutions with their present restrictions; and the strong selfish motivation of vested interests supports the

doubts and fears of the conservatives. Society is therefore much more inclined to err on the side of conservatism than on that of liberalism. Hence, if progress is to be made, we need to strengthen the liberal philosophy of human nature, the philosophy that trusts human nature enough to seek to expand human freedom and experimentally change our institutions to seek improvement. At the same time this liberal philosophy must be sufficiently realistic to avoid serious errors and be alert to rectify mistakes.

It is an interesting study to observe how various philosophies of human nature have affected the attitude to the state and the church of those who held them. Plato, at the time he wrote the *Republic*, believed the ordinary man to be quite incapable of a true insight into right and wrong. That was possible only for the philosopher. Therefore the ideal state must be governed by a specially trained philosopher king, and the common people must be deprived of all political power. The Stoics believed that the human mind partakes of a universal reason which runs through all things. They therefore advocated the abolition of all distinctions of class and race and persuaded some of the early Roman emperors to ameliorate the condition of slaves and extend Roman citizenship to the subject peoples.

St. Augustine believed that man is a fallen creature incapable of any real good unless specially redeemed by God. He therefore despaired of human institutions and urged the strengthening of the central authority of the pope and the bishops within the church. Martin Luther adopted Augustine's view of man, but believed that the spirit of God would enlighten the mind of the Christian to understand the scriptures. He therefore rejected au-

thoritarianism within the church but supported a conservative and authoritarian policy in the state.

Thomas Hobbes believed that man is motivated only by selfish drives to his own satisfactions. He therefore argued that all power in church and state must be vested absolutely in a single sovereign authority. Later generations of British moralists, such as Locke, Shaftesbury, Butler, Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, utterly rejected Hobbes and taught an optimistic view of human nature which has greatly assisted the development of Anglo-American liberalism and democracy in church and state. This optimism has even gone so far as to blind many people to the evils inherent in the industrial system and the danger of militarism in certain states that have not yet outgrown their feudalism. Karl Marx, on the other hand, believed that economic motives are the real drives that shape the course of history. He therefore refused to believe that a just distribution of wealth could be obtained without violence and taught the doctrine of the class war.

The analysis of human nature developed in this book gives us a balanced and yet hopeful view. We have seen that it is inevitable that the early development of personality in every child is egoistic and that the main force of habit consists of these infantile egoisms and the narrow social interests inculcated by the narrow social groups (family, class, race, nation, etc.) with which the individual is associated in his growing years. We must therefore recognize that we will always have to reckon with the forces of selfishness and special group interests. Further, we have seen that, even at a high level of character development, these habits can stifle further spiritual aspirations, especially when they take the form of

a pride of the individual in his own moral achievements. But we have also seen that God is in every man as a will to the good of all which condemns the individual's selfishness and narrowness whenever he can be brought to think clearly enough.

We thus see that, though individuals may become impervious to the moral demand within, the group as a whole cannot. There will always be some sensitive souls among the adults to whom an appeal can be made on higher moral grounds. Further, there will always be a period in the life of the youth of each generation when the will to the good of all breaks through their infantile egoisms and the group prejudices and adult selfishness are not yet set hard. At this period youth responds to idealism. Thus each new generation may be brought to set before itself higher and more generous goals, broader freedom and greater respect for the dignity of man.

It is thus that progress has been made in the past. And there is no reason why progress should not go on. Temporary reactions there may be, such as have occurred in the last forty years. It is even possible that a great civilization may stagnate and decline. But reaction and decline are not inevitable. Neither is progress. There is a battle to be fought against inertia and reaction. But with wisdom, zeal and faith it can be won. Indeed, because God is in men, it can never be finally lost.

#### THE CHURCH AND WAR

What shall we say of the relation of the church to the terrible secular institution of war? Can the church ever rightly give its moral support to the state in the conduct of war? Many Christians, remembering the injunction to "love your enemies," and thinking of the horrors of

wholesale slaughter, have emphatically concluded that it cannot. They make the mistake, however, either of setting up the principle, "Thou shalt not kill," as a specific absolute to which no exception can ever be allowed, or of thinking that the greatest evil that can befall any man is to lose his life. But both ideas are false. To love our neighbors and our enemies is to do to all the greatest possible good. If that involves killing, then, at whatever risk to ourselves, we must be prepared to kill. And Jesus clearly recognized that this might be necessary: "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:6).

There can be no law without a readiness to use force to uphold it. And the law cannot be upheld by force unless the servants of the state are ready to take life if necessary. The primary function of the state is to protect the community in life and limb and in possession of its means of livelihood. Jesus was not preaching anarchy when he urged his hearers to be ready to turn the other cheek rather than offer resistance to unjust attack. He was talking to people who lived under the law and urging that they should avoid all attempt at private vengeance. His "doctrine of nonresistance" presupposes the existence of the state to protect the innocent and restrain the violent. He did not mean that if any king or governor should become a disciple of his he should refuse any longer to carry out the primary duty of his office—to protect his people from armed violence arising from within the state or from without.

The state then must perform its function of internal justice and external defense. And the church must give

it moral support in the performance of those duties. It is tremendously important, however, that the church should critically scrutinize the conduct of the state in the performance of all its functions—most of all the terrible duty of war. It must demand that all the dealings of the state with other states be made public as soon as possible, so that moral judgment can be pronounced upon them. It must demand justice and good will in international relations. It must demand cooperation of all states in the maintenance of peace, the protection of the weak, the upholding of international justice, law and order. And the church in each state must demand that its own state be ready to use force where necessary, or combine in the use of an international force, to help any neighbor state to perform that essential function for which the state exists—to protect its people from armed attack on their lives and means of livelihood, whether from tyranny within or from aggressors from without. This is the only true application of the principle of love to neighbors on the level of international relations.

#### THE NEED OF PRIVATE DEVOTIONS

We cannot, then, escape the institutionalization of religion. Religion needs institutions because it has a function to perform in relation to the institutions of society; also because it involves social relations, and institutions are the ordering principles of all society. We can do our best to improve our religious and secular institutions, but, because human beings are so different, they cannot be made perfectly fitting for all. Our social relations, both secular and religious, must therefore always occasionally gall us. Man cannot always find rest and solace for his soul in his fellow man. It is then that there arises

most poignantly our need for the other side of the religious life, beyond the institutional and social—the life of private devotion, meditation and prayer.

But the spirit must have practice in the art of private devotion if it is to avail us in our times of need. Both public and private devotions are a spiritual preparation for the problems and crises of practical life. But private prayer is also a refuge and source of strength in the very midst of the crisis, if we are accustomed to its practice. Prayer is communion with God, a talking over our problems with him. In prayer we come face to face with God, for God is within us. We become sensitive to the nature and purpose of his will and find guidance from him. We reintegrate our torn and divided selves with him and find peace, strength and calm.

It is a good thing to make our desires known to God in petition. We can there and then examine them in his presence and reject those that are unworthy. But it is a terrible mistake to regard prayer as a means of getting God to do for us what we can and ought to do for ourselves. It is also a bad mistake to regard prayer as a means of getting God on our side. Prayer is rather a means of getting ourselves on his side.

The question of what we may rightly expect from God in answer to prayer is not an easy one to answer. Spiritual help we certainly can and do receive. But can we pray for God's influence on others or for physical blessings? Here we must remember what we have already learned to recognize as the limits of God's opportunity to intervene in the course of nature on our behalf. Much harm is done by religious teachers in creating expectations of answers to prayer that cannot be fulfilled.

If we examine the model prayer given by Jesus to his

disciples we find that it contains only one request for a physical good, and that for merely the essential basis of the physical life — "Give us this day our daily bread." And this is a prayer which he and his hearers would expect to be answered through God's influence on *human* activity. The same applies to the one other occasion on which he prayed concerning a physical need — the prayer for escape from his persecutors. And this contains the significant phrase that recognizes limitations to what God can do, even in his influence on human beings: "Father, *if it be possible*, let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39).

From the practice of Jesus we therefore get little encouragement to engage in prayers for physical benefits, but much encouragement in the practice of prayer for its spiritual value. Jesus apparently believed (and there seems no reason why we also should not believe) that God may have ways unknown to us of influencing human behavior in answer to our prayers — though he recognized that this power must have its limitations. In the same tentative and humble spirit of his "Father, if it be possible" we may well pray for God to exert his influence upon ourselves and others. And this may include prayer for those spiritual influences which can help in the healing of the body. We do not know the limits of the power of prayer in these things and so we must pray in faith. But the prayer of faith does not mean a belief that God can and will fulfill our wishes, even if what we wish is purely good. It means rather the faith that God will work with us in the effort to produce the good and that, even though the goal be something we cannot attain and he cannot give us, yet the effort thus to work with God, in itself, is abundantly worth while.

## CONCLUSION

This book has sought to interpret the religious experience of mankind in harmony with our knowledge of science and history. It has sought to show man's need of God and his need of religious truth. The task of interpretation must be done again and again in the light of new religious experience and new scientific and historical knowledge. And many minds must work over the same facts, checking the interpretations. We must expect some hesitation and disagreement in detail. But from the analysis of all the material at our disposal there emerge two great complementary truths, which form the central thesis of this interpretation and which are abundantly supported by the evidence. The first is affirmative: The one true God is revealed in every man as a will that demands of him that he seek the greatest good of all. The second is negative: We have no right to assert that any man has any revelation of the will of God, other than that which he receives through this operation of the will of God within him and other men.

It is from the denial of one or other of these two truths that nearly all our religious troubles arise. From the denial of the first proceed irreligion, agnosticism and secularism. From the denial of the second proceed unjustified dogmatism, most of our sectarianism, and a great deal of the blindness to the first great truth, with its evil results. From the acceptance of the first truth arise faith in the reality of a God of love, within us and above us, and assurance of the knowledge of his will for our lives. From the acceptance of the second arise liberty and tolerance, the mind that is open to new truth and the clear recognition as to where it is to be found — i.e., in our

religious and moral experience as we walk with God, in the insights of others who have walked still more closely with him, and through the testing of all our conclusions in the light of science and history.

It has been the aim of this book, first to establish these two great truths, next to use the method thus indicated to inquire into further truth. In this process we have found it necessary to reject as error some features of traditional Christian belief. But we have also found a great central body of that belief which can be accepted as sound and true. We have added nothing new except as recent science and discovery have cast new light on old truths; and most of the changes of thought thus introduced have merely been changes of emphasis. But the results are such as to give us new confidence in that mode of religious life and thought which we owe to Jesus Christ. That religion has established a great tradition of which we can rejoice to be a part. The evils Christianity has wrought are due to errors that are not essential to it. The great body of truth that remains is the power responsible for the enormous good it has done. The essential thought and practice of the religion of Jesus Christ must remain forever the hope of the world.

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