

THE LORD OF LIFE

A Fresh Approach to the Incarnation

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CHAPTER X

CHRIST'S RIGHT TO OUR WORSHIP

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I

THE CHRISTIAN CONVICTION ABOUT CHRIST AND THE
THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

THE distinctively Christian conviction about Jesus Christ is that He is unique among men, unique in such a way that we are impelled, and rightly surrender to the impulse, to give Him the obedience and worship and finality for our thought which we should give to God. To affirm in some sense the divinity of Jesus is essential to the Christian message, and whatever else we may mean by divinity, we at least mean that we accord to Him an attitude of mind and spirit which is appropriate to a man's relation to God and not to his relation to anybody else. The question we are to discuss in this chapter is whether there are adequate grounds in these days for thoughtful people to take up this attitude to Jesus and, if so, what they are. The previous chapters are meant in part to be preparatory to this question, which must ever be the crucial one for the Christian faith.

Such an inquiry must begin with some fundamental and, at first sight, remote considerations. If we are asked to say why we are certain of so tremendous a truth, if it be a truth, as the divinity of Jesus Christ, then we must ask leave first to indicate why we are certain of any truth in any department of human experience whatsoever. A great deal of religious discussion, and not least discussion about the Person of Jesus Christ, is vitiated

SYNOPSIS

I. THE CHRISTIAN CONVICTION ABOUT CHRIST AND THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE.

II. THE COERCIVE ELEMENT IN THE CHRISTIAN CONVICTION ABOUT CHRIST.

(a) The coercive element in all experience of the Divine is the sense of absolute or sacred value. Other theories of the sacred stated and examined. (b) Christ the Incarnation of absolute value. (c) Difficulty of Christ's distance from us in time and of the scanty records.

III. THE PRAGMATIC ELEMENT IN THE CHRISTIAN CONVICTION ABOUT CHRIST.

IV. CONFIRMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN CONVICTION ABOUT CHRIST IN OTHER LINES OF THOUGHT.

APPENDIX.

The Christian Faith and History.

Note.—Since this paper was first written, nearly three years ago, I have developed much of the argument sketched in it in greater detail in my book *Experience of God* (S.C.M. 5s.) to which the reader is referred.—
H.H.F.

as analysed by the psychologist, the person judging himself makes the judgment because it has to him the hall-mark of all truth, namely, coerciveness. He believes because in some sense he cannot help doing so. The word truth, in fact, has no meaning except in a world where we are not permitted to believe what we like or do what we like. Even a very crude pragmatic definition of truth as that which works, presupposes that there is a world of fact which is given once and for all and demands a working adjustment to itself.

The "pragmatic" element in conviction seems to have two different roots and to be capable, correspondingly, of two different formulations, negative and positive. Negatively, the pragmatic element may be described as the instinctive feeling men have that falsehood is on the whole dangerous and less desirable in its consequences than truth, and that therefore no proposition, however plausible and pleasant it may be in itself, is worth very much which is not backed by honest experimental handling of the facts. This is so even in regard to facts which cut right across the well-being of life and demand acceptance in defiance of every instinct and every value, such as, for example, the fact that a friend is suffering from cancer; the normal mind knows deep down that the first step towards making such facts more tolerable is to face the truth of them.

It is doubtful, however, whether this merely negative conviction exhausts the pragmatic instincts of the normal mind. There is a far more positive element in it. If the root of the negative element above described be practical experience, the root of this more positive element might be correctly described as faith, if that were not such an ambiguous term. It is, of course, a bold thing to make universal assertions about what men believe as distinct from what they may all learn from experience. None the less it seems clear that if men reflect at all about truth and about its relation to themselves, and above all, if they give themselves to any kind of search for truth, the

because there has been no preliminary inquiry how and on what grounds we know anything to be real or true, because there has been no clearly thought-out theory of knowledge. To attempt anything like an adequate discussion of the theory of knowledge, which is perhaps the most difficult of all the departments of philosophy, within the limits of a single chapter would be absurd and in this book out of place, but at least enough must be said to make the grounds of our certainty about Jesus clear and intelligibly related to modern thought.

No discussion of the general grounds of certainty can be adequate which does not take into account the fact that into every conviction of truth there enter two elements, a coercive or compelling element and a pragmatic element. If one or other of these two elements is lacking the mind is restless and refuses that typical reaction which we call conviction and which has a peculiar satisfaction of its own. We will consider these two elements in turn.

By the "coercive"¹ element is signified the fact that in any genuine apprehension of truth the percipient is conscious of being compelled to apprehend what he does apprehend by a reality which in some sense stands over against him, and is independent of his mind and the satisfaction of his desires. The fact or truth has to impress him so that he has no option but to say "that is so"; it must shine in its own light and be there in its own right. Even when judgment coincides with desire and phantasy-thinking is therefore most probable, this coercive element is never entirely lacking; for, on the one hand, the stimulus to make any judgment at all is never merely desire, but always some given external fact in relation to desire, and, on the other hand, whatever be the internal psychical determinants of the judgment

¹ The word "coercive" should not be misinterpreted. It should be taken in conjunction with the pragmatic element yet to be discussed. Truth compels the mind, convicts it, but the latter is not always, though it may be sometimes in some degree, an unwilling captive.

its congeniality to his whole nature. Neither cogency nor satisfactoriness is by itself sufficient as a test of truth; the two together are.¹

This analysis of the mind's movement to conviction into coercive and pragmatic elements suffers from the inevitable defect of all such analysis, namely, that it is forced to simplify and to divide unduly what is always in reality a very complex and continuous process. In actual experience our convictions are, as it were, deposited out of a stream of experience in which at any given moment the inescapable compulsions of truth and fact and the experimental ventures of "pragmatic faith" are in continual eddying interplay with one another. There are some propositions which are so coercive in themselves that we cannot even suspend judgment in regard to them. There are others which carry an enormous constraint with them, but which are apparently challenged at once by something within us, or by some other proposition carrying a similar constraining power. There are others again which carry very little constraint in themselves, but acquire a great deal after years of experience and reflection and of interplay with other truths. In all minds in some degree, in thoughtful minds in a very large degree, reflection plays a large part in this process of depositing conviction out of experience.²

We will now consider these two elements in relation to the Christian conviction about Jesus Christ.

II

THE COERCIVE ELEMENT IN THE CHRISTIAN CONVICTION ABOUT CHRIST

The rendering of worship to Jesus as to a Divine Person cannot be anything but a half-hearted pose unless there be that in Him which compels or constrains the

¹ The argument may be summed up in another way by saying that the whole urge of life implies the principle that every living creature in some sense believes itself to be harmonisable with its environment; yet the environment is given. Cf. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, p. 222.

² See D. Miall Edwards' paper, p. 193.

conviction inevitably takes possession of their minds with greater or less explicitness that truth is good for men to know. And even if they do not reflect, the same judgment declares itself in the spontaneous admiration they accord to those who manifestly love truth and accept it even when it is discomforting to themselves.

Human nature is, indeed, incurably pragmatic in its outlook, and no analysis of the grounds of certainty can be satisfactory which does not take this into account. Man cannot but believe that the Universe in which he finds himself is in its real nature a suitable stage for the fullest realisation of himself on all sides of his being, conative and emotional as well as intellectual. But, we repeat, neither can such an analysis be satisfactory if it does not take into account also the compulsive element above referred to. The mistake has often been made of emphasising one element at the expense of the other. The attack of the pragmatists upon rationalism was well founded in that it asserted that pure reason is an abstraction, and that, however logically cogent a theory might seem in itself, it inevitably loses some of that cogency directly it is felt to leave the rest of man's nature in the air with no kind of satisfaction for its needs. On the other hand, the criticism of the pragmatists by their opponents was well founded in that it pointed out that, whilst it is doubtless true that in the long run whatever is true works, such a statement can only be made into a practical criterion of truth by an illicit conversion of it into "whatever works is true." And in any case, such a criterion is apt to leave the intellect in the air and the demand for "coercion" in the apprehension of truth unsatisfied. Somehow the two sides must be combined. Man's nature is such that it can never be satisfied by any doctrine which is merely successful; the doctrine must also lay hold of him by its inherent cogency and force. On the other hand, his nature is such that it can never be entirely satisfied by a doctrine which merely lays hold of him by coercive force. Sooner or later it must reveal

martyr hanging head downwards over a fire "for Jesus' sake" can hardly be said to be there because he finds that Jesus "works," and because such a violent end somehow unifies his experience. He is there because Jesus somehow has "laid hold on" his allegiance absolutely, by some self-evidencing, coercive quality of His own nature. The distinctive Christian attitude to Jesus cannot be reached in any living way *merely* on pragmatic grounds. Indeed, the reason why so many Christians are so unconvinced and unconvincing in their Christianity, the reason why there are not more martyrs, is that they try to maintain faith in Christ *merely* on the basis of a pragmatic test. Life seems to triumph over Christ at so many points that faith in Him on these grounds becomes a continuous effort in the end too burdensome to sustain. Christianity has survived and transformed the world, not by men laboriously sustaining faith in Jesus, but by the power of Jesus to sustain coercively man's faith in Himself.

Jesus, then, we maintain, has the power to lay hold of the human spirit coercively with a sense of being Divine.

(a) *The coercive element in all experience of the Divine derives from the sense of absolute value.*

In order to see that Jesus has this power, and to avoid the otherwise legitimate criticism that we are taking refuge in a mere "faculty-psychology," it is necessary to inquire what exactly is this coercive touch of the Divine in human experience, and how it is related to the constitution of the human mind.

Such an inquiry introduces us at once into the vast and infinitely debatable subjects of the philosophy of religion, the history of religions, the psychology of religious experience, upon which so much has been written in the last half-century. It is not possible to do more here than indicate a general point of view.

Our view is, in brief, that at the heart of every manifestation of religion, from the most primitive to the highest, there is in some degree a consciousness of the

mind into that attitude. No amount of pragmatic proof of His adequacy to human need will make up for the absence of that compulsion. But if this is to be the impression He makes upon us, we must postulate in man a capacity to identify immediately the presence of God in human life—worship being the instinctive and proper response to such an identification when it takes place. Now Christian faith, indeed all vital religion of any kind, affirms the existence of such a capacity in man. The enormous vitality of religion all down the ages is, indeed, only explicable on the ground that in religion something comes into life and strikes the apprehension of men with a coerciveness comparable in its own sphere to the way in which the scarlet of a geranium strikes the senses. Those who seek to give a purely pragmatic account of man's religious propensity, and regard it as a merely useful illusion which nature or society imposes upon man to help him in the struggle to exist, merely betray their ignorance of the facts they are trying to explain. The tremendous hold of religion upon the religious mind, its power to make successfully the most exacting demands in face of the most powerful natural instincts that run counter to those demands, its capacity to inspire men to martyrdom and to the most rigorous self-denial, cannot be explained if religion be what some assert it to be, namely, a form of merely pragmatical phantasy-thinking whereby weak creatures create for themselves the comfortable paradise of a fool. Religion never is, and never has been, merely an expedient. It is always a pungent stimulus to activity, and one of the most coercive factors in human life. At the heart of it is the peculiar sting of the real. God lays hold of the mind with the coerciveness of the truly objective. He is "a consuming fire." This capacity to apprehend immediately the presence of God in life we affirm to be at work in all vital religion, and the point we make here is, that it must also be at work in any vital apprehension of the Divine in Jesus. Certainly the facts of Christian experience go to support this contention. A

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presence of absolute values in human life. By the word "absolute" in this connection is meant that such values are apprehended, however dimly, as requiring of man that he seek them at all costs, even at the cost of life itself. They are so incomparable in worth that nothing else whatever must be allowed to enter into competition with them. In and through his sense, however mixed with superstition and error, that Someone or Something in life confronts him and demands, and has a right to, absolute surrender and obedience, man thrills to the touch of God. This is the supreme differentiating quality of the religious fact, and enables us to identify its presence in the midst of all the other (strictly speaking) non-religious elements, like magic, ritual, belief in demons, which historically have been closely associated with it. And it is this which all down the ages has preserved religion amidst all the developments and changes of civilisation as one of the most powerful and formative factors in human life. Man cannot escape for long the sense that there are sacred values in life, values, that is, with which he dare not trifle, and to which even life must, if necessary, be surrendered; and he cannot avoid for long using the term God in relation to these sacred values and calling their constitutive principle the Will of God. The coercive touch of the Divine on the human spirit comes through man's sense of sacred values.

In thus finding the differentia of religion in the sense of the sacred we are adopting, at least verbally, the position of most modern writers on the subject. It is astonishing that it took students so long to give proper weight to the fact that the universal and quite peculiar feature of religion is to put the category of the sacred at the centre of all its experience, thought and ritual. But unanimity on this point has very quickly broken up into differences of opinion as to what exactly the sense of the sacred is.

There is, for example, the view of Durkheim and his school, according to which the sense of the sacred is merely the disguised pressure of society upon its members. When

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man apprehends the sacred he thinks he is in relationship with God, but actually he is not; the only reality he is in contact with is his society, which, in order to preserve and develop itself, adopts this disguised method of laying hold of its members. The voice of God is the voice of the people heavily disguised. The argument appears to be that a human society is inconceivable which does not impose upon its members some sort of ideal of its own organisation and of the purpose which that organisation is meant to serve. "A society can neither create or re-create itself without at the same time creating an ideal." Morals are collective sentiments indispensable to any society which is going to survive. What, then, is religion? It is the reinforcement of the individual by attaching special sanction to the social demands in order that he may the better serve social ends. In morals society holds up its exacting ideals to the individual; in religion through the sense of the sacred and through the cult of which the sacred is the centre, it gives him the necessary spiritual incentive to pursue those ideals. Durkheim is anxious to grant that by religious exercises a man's powers are quickened and his personality enhanced, but this he attributes to the man soaking himself, so to say, in social stimuli and encouragements which the idea of the sacred and the cults which surround it bring to bear upon him in an unusually concentrated form. In the last resort, however, society is the only reality involved other than the individual. God is non-existent save as a powerful symbol for society.

Many criticisms of this theory might be offered,¹ but

¹ Thus it might be pointed out that Durkheim starts his inquiry with an entirely gratuitous and question-begging assumption, namely, that the ideal is something "added to the real." (*Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, English translation, p. 421), and that the sacred is a property attributed to objects which they do not possess (*ibid.*, p. 422). There is behind this assumption a very debatable philosophical position, *but it is not debated*. Again, no matter how much Durkheim may insist that to regard a tremendous force like religion as pure illusion is absurd, that is after all very nearly what he does. For the sacred *is* the central category of religion.

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one alone is sufficient, namely, that it is not adequate to the facts of the moral and religious history of mankind. If religion is merely society's way of vitalising the individual on his ethical side in order to promote its own progress and stability, then it could hardly happen that the ethical sense as played upon and developed by religion should at any one time be far in advance of the average ethical sense of contemporary society. Yet it has frequently happened that moral insight under the influence of religion has climbed to a height so transcendently beyond normal social standards that it is impossible not to suspect that religion contains in it a principle of moral growth which is quite peculiar to itself. Society's ideals and religious ideals have not, as a matter of fact, always advanced *pari passu* or even with only a small gap between them. On the contrary, the disproportion between them has sometimes been so enormous as to take all plausibility from the theory that they are both effects of the same cause. The outstanding example of this is the Hebrew prophets, culminating in Jesus Christ. It is undeniable that the ethical insight of the Hebrew prophets and of Jesus was bound up in the most intimate way conceivable with their consciousness of God; and further, it is undeniable that both the ethical insight and the religious life which nourished it were so far in advance of the standards of contemporary society that they give the impression at times of working in an entirely different world. If this is granted, then according to the theory under discussion we have to suppose that a society whose average moral and religious level is (say) 10, can produce an individual whose religious and moral level is (say) 1000, entirely out of itself without any outside factor intervening at all. To take the case of Jesus, we have to suppose that an intensely nationalistic and exclusive society, as the Jews were in the time of Jesus, for its own and if men when they deal with the sacred think they are dealing with God when in reality they are only dealing with society, what is that but illusion right in the heart of the whole business?

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purposes of "construction and reconstruction" contrived to disguise and present itself to one individual within it as a Divine Father of all the children of men, and in and through that deception to impress upon that individual an ethic of love to enemies and service to mankind which was at the time and has been ever since as far beyond the current standards of morality as anything could well be; having achieved this miracle for its own purpose, we are to suppose that the society in question promptly slew the prodigy it had produced. This is, to say the least, a very mysterious proceeding, and the only way of explaining it is either to repudiate Jesus and the prophets as moral and religious freaks, or to attribute to society an unconscious insight into its own requirements and a secret capacity for achieving those requirements which it is quite impossible to analyse or trace. Both of these alternatives are really a confession of the bankruptcy of the theory, and show that to attribute both religion and morals to the working of society is merely to make one of those plausible generalisations which carries the mind over a gap by using a familiar word. If it is said that to explain the evolution of religion by referring it to the operation of a Holy Divine Spirit on the human mind is also to cover gaps with a word, the answer is a simple denial that it is so. Our quarrel with the theory under discussion is that it can point to no force or disguised process in society which is at all capable of producing the transcendent moral and religious life of Isaiah or Jesus. It leaves a gap between the known effect and the alleged cause which makes the theory as an explanation very nearly useless. But to introduce the working of God's Holy Spirit upon men's minds is to introduce a factor which, while not denying the influence of society in the evolution of religion, suggests a cause really adequate to its effect, and one which has the added merit of not turning the religious experience of mankind into illusion.

Another theory of the sacred is that advocated by Otto. According to this view man's experience of the

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sacred is absolutely *sui generis*, and requires to be designated by a specially coined term, the "numinous." The numinous for Otto means a Divine Somewhat which lays hold of man's spirit in the first instance altogether apart from any apprehension of moral values. Only later in religion does the sense of the ethically sacred enter in, and that by virtue of a connection which Otto does not analyse but designates in a very question-begging way "*a priori*." "We are forced," he says, "to assume an obscure, *a priori* knowledge of the necessity of this synthesis combining rational and non-rational"¹ (combining, that is, the numinous and the ethical elements into the full category of the sacred). But is this really any other than an admission that the cleavage between the ethically and the non-ethically sacred is not so profound as has been made to appear; that, indeed, they ought never to have been separated at all? It is difficult to see why this obscure *a priori* knowledge of the necessity of the synthesis should not have been operative from the earliest beginning of religion, and if it were so operative, that would be tantamount to saying that there never was a stage in the evolution of religion when the sense of the sacred was not essentially ethical, essentially bound up with the apprehension of value, whatever other things it may have been associated with at the same time.

This last view is the one advocated here. It is that from the very beginning and in all its manifestations man's sense of God's touch in what he calls the sacred has had a "value" content, and that this has been the central and distinctive thing in it. This does not mean that we reduce religious experience to the bare apprehension of a moral ideal of conduct. The term "value" or "ethical" in this connection we should define very widely to include the sense of beauty and of the sublime; moreover, in religious experience there is always some apprehension, however dim, of what may be called in a clumsy phrase "existential depth," that is to say, the

¹ *The Holy*, English translation, p. 140.

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spirit is conscious that the call of absolute value comes from an ultimate Divine reality from which it draws its life and is sustained in being. Many different thoughts and apprehensions and desires can enter into a religious experience, and much valuable work has been done by psychologists and others in analysing them out from the infinite varieties of religious experience that exist; but our contention is that none of these thoughts and aspirations and desires are religious *apart from their association in the religious experience with the sense of ultimate value*. The latter is always the essential, though not the only constituent of a religious experience properly so-called. If the sense of a Divine Holiness requiring our conformity to itself were withdrawn, even the least analytically-minded religious person would be conscious at once that the heart of the thing had been plucked out. According to this view the history of the development of religion is very largely the history of the release of this central sense of God as absolute moral holiness, not from all other associated and implied thoughts, but from those which are merely clogging and false, and not least from those "spooky" associations which Otto calls numinous and regards as the fundamental thing in man's awareness of God.

It would take too long to set forth all the arguments which might be adduced in support of this position. In general we believe that it covers more of the facts of the history of religion and of our own religious life, and sets them in more orderly perspective with one another than any other formulation.

We may, however, mention four things.

First. The view we have propounded helps us to understand the curious fact that historically religion and sacrifice always appear in the closest connection with one another. In the highest religions the idea of sacrifice appears in the form of a demand for self-sacrifice, but in the majority it expresses itself in some sort of ritual sacrifice at an altar. The rite of sacrifice, moreover, is

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always regarded as the focal point of the religious life, the consummation as well as the basis of all men's dealings with God and with sacred things.¹ If sacrifice is thus co-extensive with and central in all religion, and if the identification we have made between the coercive element in religion and the sense of absolute values be correct, then it is not difficult to see the connection between these two things. They are expressions, the one concrete and historical, the other abstract and analytical, of the same fact.

The gross superstition and cruelty which have so often been mixed up with sacrificial rites should not blind us to the presence in them of the sense of absolute value. The bloody rites of some pagan religions, such as the infant holocausts to Moloch, may have had in them something of decadence and something of merely superstitious dread. But we affirm that there is also in them, and this is what makes them really religious phenomena, a sense of Divine powers which are apprehended, dimly, yet with a certain immediacy, as having the right to demand through their essential nature the sacrifice of the dearest possessions of the heart. The emergence of a higher religion is simply the emergence of a clearer idea of what the absolute demands of the sacred Divine Will are. We can thus trace a continuous line of development from, say, a mother casting her babe to Moloch and Damien giving up all to tend the lepers. They stand in a direct line of succession with one another; they are both bowing their heads, the one primitively, fearfully, superstitiously, the other with the fuller light of knowledge which has come through Christ, to a haunting Divine presence in their hearts which reveals itself chiefly through its insistence on an absolute surrender of this life to itself.

¹ Even in those religions in which the element of sacrifice is not immediately discernible, it can usually be detected in a disguised or perverted form. The beginnings of Islam, for example, can hardly be understood apart from the call to the Holy War, and to-day Islam centres very much in and around the demand for a pilgrimage to Mecca at whatever cost.

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It has often been pointed out that the red streak of sacrifice runs through all religion. But we set the matter in better perspective when we thus see that the more fundamental "streak" running through religion is the streak of sacred obligation. Sacrifice need not always be red. Even in the joyous feasting of much primitive religion the element of obligation to the Deity, the sense of an almost contractual relationship to Him, involving the rigid rendering of certain dues, was never lacking. It is the value of the line of thought we are following that it lays bare the wider connotation of the element of sacrifice so universal in the religious consciousness of man, and thus relates primitive religion directly to our own higher Christian experience, from which, at first sight, the whole complex of ideas surrounding ritual sacrifice would seem at times almost entirely to disappear.

Second. Following on from this, we have in this analysis of the religious consciousness a criterion by which to judge various religions and compare them with one another. The standpoint of these essays, needless to say, is that Christianity in essence is the crown and flower of the religious evolution of mankind. It is the final religion for mankind, and it is this because in Jesus a full revelation of the ethically sacred or, in other words, of the holy character of God and its claims upon us has been made. Such a standpoint does not involve any disparagement of the worth of other religions or any refusal to learn from them where our own apprehensions have been partial or erroneous, but it does involve a refusal to regard even the higher religions as on a level, or to allow men and women to take their choice between them, according to their own temperament and inclination. Not the least weighty indictment which can be brought against Otto's conception of the numinous is that, however much the author may insist on the pre-eminence of Christianity, it does in point of fact tend to open the door to almost any type of religious experience. In the twilight of numinous feelings differences tend to

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disappear. A man who is accustomed to enjoy very profound numinous feelings will find it difficult to see why he should change his religion for one which gives him higher ethics but less of the numinous, and he will appeal to the authorities that, after all, the numinous is the essential thing in religion. But if we identify the sacred touch of God with the ethically holy, we are in a position to claim that Christianity is the last term of a religious evolution, and to ask men to advance to it from other religions, which, however beautiful and valuable, are not the highest. Ultimately, of course, each individual must decide for himself whether the claim so made for Christianity is true, but the point now is, that the claim is a perfectly reasonable one in view of what we believe to be a correct understanding of the essence of the religious life. Christ, we believe, can lay hold of men and convince them that they are in the presence of the utterly sacred, of that perfect holiness through which alone we can identify the presence of God in life. If He cannot, our whole position falls to the ground.

Third. The view we have set forth gives us a religious outlook which is expressible in terms of a sound and up-to-date philosophy, a fact which is not only very satisfactory for our own minds, but also provides a cogent apologetic in presenting our faith to the world. The reality of God and the validity of religious experience can only be supported rationally on the basis of an idealist philosophy and theory of knowledge, which regard values as being as real as electrons and vibrations. Students of modern philosophy will know how impressive a case for the reality of values has been built up. The case rests mainly on the necessity on the one hand, of getting a theory of knowledge which shall save the human mind from being condemned to everlasting and incurable subjectivity, and on the other, of doing justice to the full-orbed richness of human experience. But the step from the reality of unseen values to the reality of God as the ultimate Holy Will behind them is not a difficult one

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even to the pure metaphysician. To the religious mind the step is inevitable, especially if its reading of religious history and of the facts of its own religious experience has already led it to the conclusion that God touches the human heart in a living and coercive way through its sense of absolute value. Religious experience and philosophical inquiry are thus seen to converge to the same focus.

Fourth. The line of thought we have been following gives us an adequate coercive basis for the place Jesus has always been accorded in the Christian consciousness. This brings us back to our main theme.

(b) *Christ the Incarnation of absolute value.*

We discern in Jesus the perfection of personal life, the altogether holy will, the altogether sacred. The only means we have of identifying God immediately in life is through such discernment; when we meet that altogether holy will, we know that we meet God. We know it intuitively, inevitably, coercively. It is sometimes urged against certain types of Christological theory that they affirm of Jesus nothing more than that He has the value of God. But is there real force in this objection? There is surely an inadequate analysis of the religious consciousness behind the criticism. God confronts us through *absolute* value. That haunting presence which man has felt right from the dimmest and most superstitious beginnings of religion, often misconceived, often clouded by ignorance and irrelevance and disobedience, yet always calling to dedication to a holier and higher way of life, shines out at length in the personal holiness of Jesus, and in His presence man knows at once that he is in the presence of the holy spiritual life of God Himself, that holy spiritual life which has been seeking him all down the ages. It is not that man has any standard of the Divine apart from Jesus, by which he can measure Jesus and adjudge Him to be Divine. It is man's immediate recognition of the fulness of Divine Holiness even though

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such a vision of Divine Holiness has never come to him before. So Jesus gives us a new vision of God, but, though new, we can recognise it to be of God through that faculty of discernment which has been operative all down the ages in man's developing religious experience. It is a manifestation of God which, like all such manifestations, shines in its own light.

The position, then, is that at the basis of a living conviction of the Divinity of Jesus Christ there must be the same kind of immediate response of our personalities as that which lies at the basis of all experience of God; further that such a response is possible, and with many people actual, because God always does break in upon consciousness through the sense of the absolute value of the true, the beautiful and the good, realised in personal life. It should be pointed out that such a response is not possible if we conceive the sacred as "numinous," and this is another count in the criticism of Otto's treatment. *The latter fails to give any coercive basis for the Christian conviction about Christ.* For where is there any sign of the numinous in the impression Jesus made upon men? If He ever made such an impression, it must have been very rarely, for otherwise the attitude which the bulk of the people took up to Him and their ultimate rejection of Him are inexplicable. Such an attitude does not look like the reaction of men's minds to the "numen" as it is analysed by Otto. And in any case, it is certain that Jesus cannot make a numinous impression upon men now after the lapse of so many years, so that one of the main nerves of Christian discipleship in these days would seem to be cut.

It may be urged, however, that no less does Jesus fail to make any very pronounced impression upon men of being the realisation in a person of morally perfect spiritual life; and that therefore the basis of worship of Jesus is equally insecure, whether we define the sacred as "numinous" or in strictly ethical terms. This is a criticism which must now be faced, and the facing of it

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will enable us to say something of how man's perception of the sacred is related to the constitution of his mind.

(c) *The difficulty of Christ's distance from us.*

It is a very real difficulty with many folk that Jesus lived so very long ago and that we can only get into touch with Him through a few exceedingly scanty and not always mutually consistent records. Is it not asking too much, they say, is it not more than a trifle unreal, to tell us to look at Jesus and feel the coercive impression of perfect holiness in Him? There is all the mistiness of distance about Him, and we have the merest outline sketch of His life. The first disciples were in a different position.

The answer to these difficulties in the first instance is to point out the very subtle but significant fallacy which is wrapped up in them. The fallacy is that their force largely depends upon the unconscious assumption that Jesus is only a very ordinary human figure after all. But that is precisely the question at issue. These difficulties would certainly hold in respect of any ordinary human figure in the past, but is it certain that there is not that in Jesus which can lay hold of us and impress us, despite the lapse of two thousand years and despite the scantiness of the records? May not His power to do that be precisely part of the evidence that He does stand apart, that quite uniquely in Him God has manifested Himself to mankind?

Let us assume for the moment that what Christianity asserts about Christ is true, and that in Him there is a complete and adequate unveiling of the Divine character and purpose, in which everything has its being and from which in the end everything derives its meaning. What would follow from that?

First, it would follow that the lapse of time and the changes which that lapse has brought about are quite irrelevant to the abiding and verifiable significance of Christ. In proportion as a spiritual fact is true and

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charged with the mind of God it becomes independent of time and change. Man has to deal with the same Divine purpose whether he rides on mules or in motor-cars; whether he lives in the year one or the year two thousand. If Christ were only a very partial vehicle of the truth, then the argument that the lapse of two millenniums puts Him out of date and beyond comprehension would have considerable force. But then it is precisely the Christian assertion that Jesus is not partially, but wholly, the vehicle of God's character and purpose; therefore it is illogical to urge in advance against that assertion precisely that which its truth, if it be truth, makes irrelevant, namely, the lapse of time.

Again and along the same lines, in proportion as Christ is what Christianity asserts Him to be, so in that proportion will He of necessity persist in human life as a kind of grain or pattern of it, and so will be directly observable in varying degrees by those who care to look for Him, even in these days and in the midst of this civilisation. This is not to be vaguely mystical. It seems to follow alike in logic and experience, if Christ be all that we claim for Him. The point is that it is most emphatically not a question of making a supreme effort of mind and leaping right out of twentieth-century England over two thousand years into first-century Palestine, and sitting at the feet of One who, however delightful and impressive, is really deeply alien to our nature and our life. That is the kind of idea people have in their minds when they shrug their shoulders at the suggestion of looking at Jesus and feeling the presence of God in Him. It would be a right idea if Jesus were but a historical individual with no unique significance. But Christianity says that He has a unique significance, that He carries in Him the very Divine character and purpose which are behind all history. And from this it follows, if it be true, that He is a clear and focused revelation of that of which the whole of life, as we have to meet it to-day, is a clouded and diffused one. If we are

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fronting modern life with any sincerity of purpose, and if Jesus be what we claim Him to be, then we must be continually getting blurred impressions of Him one way or another, for all life ultimately expresses God's mind and purpose. To go, therefore, and observe the figure of Christ in the Gospel stories is not to attempt to build up from the beginning out of nothing that which has no prior affinity to us. All sorts of vague impressions, fleeting glimpses of the highest and best way to meet life, half-solved problems waiting for exactly the solution He indicates, joys which we could not quite understand, moral aspirations which we could not quite satisfy, will be already as it were in solution in our minds waiting to assume crystalline form on His figure. For example, no one, one may suggest, can study the problems of modern industry or the history of the rise of it, or can come into any kind of close personal contact either with the difficulties in the way of the solution of industrial troubles or with the kind of employer who has occasionally succeeded in overcoming those difficulties, without having his mind prepared, consciously or unconsciously, for the living realisation that Jesus does sum up the eternal structure and grain of life, that He is the way through. Or again, no one can think at all seriously about the problem of suffering and its relation to sin without having his mind and spirit prepared for the Cross of Christ and for an electric and irresistible revelation, which may come quite late in life, that that Cross is the revelation of the very heart of God. If Jesus be what Christianity says of Him, then we have in every modern problem something which in the end must help to annihilate rather than accentuate the intervening two thousand years.

Similarly with the difficulty of the scanty records. That, too, falls to the ground if Jesus be what Christianity claims. For if He be that, then His relationship to every human personality must be of a very peculiar kind. He must be in some sense the norm, the ideal, that completed

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and balanced maturity which every human being by the essential law of his being is, amidst so many frustrations and failures, striving to achieve. Obviously there is something in every human personality which governs its growth from its first conception and determines that it shall grow into a man and not into a bird or a tiger. This hidden urge which carries the child through all the stages of childhood and fashions him into an adult man, this certain specific normality which must be given its appropriate treatment or the whole personality is thrown out of gear and is unhappy, is God's idea of what a man should be. It is hidden in the heart of every human organism and is the most important thing in it. So also at the heart of every animal organism there is the specific principle of its distinctive nature. The question then is, what is that principle for the human organism, its governing idea. If Christianity be true, it is Christ. Christ is perfectly what we are meant to be. In other words, there is at the heart of every human being, more or less frustrated and dammed back, but restlessly pressing upward all the time to a full expression and achievement, a latent Christ, a Christ within, a life after the type of the "Son of Man."

But if that be so, consider what it involves. It means that anything like a full-length portrait of Jesus is not necessary. So long as there is enough material for His personality to shine through, the deepest instinct of our nature, the whole law of our being, does the rest. Something leaps out to meet Him, seizes upon Him through the scanty records and fills up the picture from within, saying, "This is perfect spirit, this is the living completion and fulfilment of every dim vision and motion towards the highest that my soul has ever had." Spirit answers spirit, deep calls unto deep, for in both is God as Spirit.¹

¹ Even if we accept this view that the Gospels only give us a portrait of Jesus according to Christian faith, and that any attempt to get behind that portrait of faith is foredoomed to failure, the line of argument set forth above is not invalidated. For the substantial historicity of the Gospels

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If this be a valid line of thought it means that by identifying the coercive touch of God upon men's spirits with the sense of the ethically sacred we are given a permanent basis upon which to ground a living conviction about Jesus. But if we identify it with the numinous, then we have no such permanent basis, for by definition the numinous has no place in the constitution of our own nature. It is the "wholly other."

It should be noted that the position outlined above is based upon a tacit assumption, namely, that the Divine perfection is somehow the law of human nature. We are to be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect. We shall come back to this point later.

III

THE PRAGMATIC ELEMENT IN THE CHRISTIAN CONVICTION ABOUT CHRIST

This also, as we have seen, is essential to a full conviction of truth. It is necessary, however, to be careful in stating in what exactly it consists.

It is an element in all vital religion that God comes to us not only as coercive holiness, or Divine ideal, but also as succouring power ("my refuge and my strength"). But in what sense does He succour us? Not, obviously, by smoothing out difficulties and making things easy. Surely Ritschl is right when he says that the primary succour of God is that He guarantees to us that we are,

being granted (as it must be), it remains true that the first Christians at least had to seize upon the inner significance of Christ's personal life in the way we have indicated. That they have told the story of Christ in the Gospels in the light of their perception of the religious significance of it does not prevent us from receiving the total impression of Christ (historical fact plus interpretation) for ourselves and endorsing the Evangelists' presentation of it. In a similar way I can never look at some of Turner's pictures except in the light of Ruskin's comments on them, yet I am quite sure that the latter are not a fictitious addition to but a truthful explication of the whole reality of the picture as it stands before me.

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as personalities, the vehicles of permanent values in the midst of the natural forces which surround us and in the end seem to destroy us. In other words, the primary pragmatic test of God's transactions with us is the extent to which they result in an ever-increasing poise and triumph of spirit which no challenge from the world about us can overthrow. If a man responds to the coercive touch of God loyally, and finds that so responding he receives more and more an indefinable sense of spiritual power and conquest over his world, then he has the fullest conviction possible that he is basing himself on truth, and that God is the reality which he has instinctively all through taken Him to be.

Note, however, once again, that this pragmatic test involves the same tacit assumption which we noticed above in dealing with the coercive element, namely, that the holy will of God is somehow the deepest law of our own being. In His service is our perfect freedom. Also it involves that our highest life is not ultimately opposed by the natural environment in which we live. In response to its challenges and through the succour of God we achieve ourselves and at the same time win the victory over our world.

The application of this to Christology is obvious. If, in addition to making an immediate, coercive impression of the Divine upon us, Christ can in practice produce health of soul and triumph over the world, then, granting the tacit assumption above mentioned and granting the correctness of our analysis of the ordinary bases of conviction in human experience, the affirmation of His Divinity is as soundly grounded as anything could well be.

That Jesus can and does in practice produce health of soul and triumph over the world, it has been the main theme of previous chapters to maintain. This is a side of Christian apologetic which cannot be emphasised too much, and it is one which will always carry most force with ordinary men. So long as Jesus can enable men to triumph in life His hold upon humanity is assured.

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Yet before He can enable any individual so to triumph, that individual must be laid hold of in some degree by the inherent beauty and power of the Divine in Christ. The coercive element can never be entirely left out. The fullest conviction of the Divinity of Christ is only attainable by making the experiment of living as though He were Divine, and going through the whole of life in discipleship to Him. When He has been put to all tests, including the last test of death, then the conviction will be utterly and finally impregnable. The Christian life is, therefore, an experiment, and the way of full Christian conviction experimental. Yet the experiment is almost bound to fail unless it begin with the inspiration of a unique vision of God in Jesus, the beauty of which we cannot resist and the right of which to our utmost reverence and allegiance we cannot deny.

IV

CONFIRMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN CONVICTION ABOUT CHRIST IN OTHER LINES OF THOUGHT

Our conclusion is, then, that given a proper analysis of religious consciousness and given the general grounds upon which we know anything to be real and true, the ascription of Divinity to Jesus is reasonable and proper. No other term would be adequate to the fact it is intended to describe, when that fact is seen in all its real relationships. Is it necessary to go further than this? For the purposes of Christian discipleship it is not, perhaps, necessary to go further, but for those who are seeking to make the strongest presentation possible of what is after all a very tremendous assertion, further confirmatory lines of argument and experience are possible and are of great value.

Thus we should naturally seek confirmation of our judgment concerning Christ in the consciousness of Christ Himself as revealed in the Gospels. Something has been

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said to this effect in earlier chapters. The Gospels clearly imply that Jesus felt Himself to stand in unique relations both with God, as the "Son of God," and with man as the "Son of Man."

Again, to call Jesus Divine implies a philosophy of the Universe which must be related to science and philosophical thought generally. Something was said above about this in discussing the philosophy of value, and a further word may not be out of place here. The Christian consciousness has all along interpreted the Universe of men and things in the light of Jesus and of God as manifest in Him. But while the effect of this effort has been very illuminative, it has been so only in a relative degree, owing partly to the imperfect state of science and philosophy at each epoch of such creative activity, and partly also to imperfect methods of viewing the portrait of Christ Himself in the Gospels. To-day a Christian philosophy can make a very strong case for itself, both in relation to current philosophical thought and to current science. Its relation to a philosophy of value has already been pointed out. Along the same line is the modern insistence upon the category of personality, an insistence entirely congenial to the Christian outlook. As for science, the conflict between it and religion is, if not quite a dead issue, on a very different footing from what it was some years ago. It is now coming to be seen on both sides that the scientific and the religious approach to reality are different and complementary. Science analyses the grammar of events, religion intuites synthetically and more after the manner of art their Divine meaning and purpose.¹

This, however, brings us in sight of a criticism of the Christian affirmation about Christ, which comes from the side of science and philosophy and which must be met. It is that implied by the doctrine of *relativity*, using that phrase in its most general significance. Put without any attempt at precision the criticism is, first,

¹ Cf. Streeter, *Reality, passim*.

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that the conception of the Absolute and Eternal God manifesting Himself within the limitations of history is self-contradictory and absurd; and second, that as a matter of historical fact, Jesus presents Himself to us subject to all the limitations of finite human personality and of His own age, and therefore cannot in the nature of the case be final. We have, therefore, to meet on the one hand a philosophical argument, and on the other an argument from the results of modern critical inquiry into the Gospels. But the answer to both attacks is the same, and springs directly from the fundamental position of this paper; and that the answer does spring so directly from it is perhaps further evidence that that fundamental position is along sound lines. In brief, the answer is that the religious consciousness is never and, if it rightly understands itself, never claims to be, a so-to-say naked contact with the absolute metaphysical being of God. It is fundamentally an intuition of a personal purpose, a certain Divine intention or Character behind and within phenomena.¹ It has to do, we repeat, with value and meaning, and with a Divine Will which, whatever it may be in its absolute nature, may be known by the values it seeks and the meaning it utters in human life. Religion deals with the absolute Being, but only through its apprehension of absolute character. To say that such an absolute character cannot impinge upon us and reveal itself to us through the finitude and relativity of historical facts is to say something which is not justifiable. It is a very commonplace function of our minds to discern final and universal values through finite particulars. We exercise that function in art, in our personal dealings with one another, and in other ways. To discern a perfect spiritual life in a Jew of the first century is no more mysterious and impossible than to discern the indefinable individuality of my neighbour in his casual

¹ Cf. A. N. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, p. 26. "It (religion) consists of a certain widespread apprehension of a character exemplified in the actual universe."

remarks in the train. Indeed, if God did desire to make a full revelation of His character to us, it is difficult to see how He could have done it save through the finite particularity of some one age of human history. The modern insistence then on the human finitude of Jesus does not touch our main contention. And if it be said that there is still an incoherency in the idea of the Absolute manifesting itself in the relative, the answer is that the denial of its possibility leads to a greater incoherency, which is the sundering of the universe into two irreconcilable and unrelated divisions, the absolute and the contingent, the eternal and the historical.

This leads us to say a word concerning the metaphysical relation of Jesus to the Godhead. Can anything worth while really be said on this subject? Opinions doubtless will differ, yet having minds we must use them upon every problem which presents itself to our thought. The previous chapter has dealt with this exceedingly difficult subject, but it should be pointed out that, even if we are among those who are sceptical of the value of such inquiries, the strength and cogency of the position outlined in this chapter, if it has any strength and cogency, remain. The validity of the Christian attitude to Jesus remains, even though we are content that His ultimate relation to the Godhead should, for our minds, remain veiled in impenetrable mystery.

In conclusion, let us return for a moment to the tacit assumption which, we saw, was involved in our consideration both of the coercive and pragmatic elements in the Christian attitude to Christ, the assumption, that is, that the Divine Holiness is the norm of our own human nature. There is no means of proving this assumption. The whole argument of this chapter is that it is given in the essential nature of religion. Without it religion would never have come into existence. Behind all man's religious life there has been a groping after fellowship with God, and progress in religion has been progress in understanding what God is like and what the conditions

of that fellowship are. But all groping and striving in man is groping and striving after self-fulfilment. Unless we are able to say that man's self-fulfilment is in fellowship with God, religion becomes merely a tale told by an idiot signifying nothing. But we cannot prove it. Neither religion nor anything else can begin in a vacuum. Deny this assumption, and we cannot get a start with religion at all. But grant it, and we can see at least the beginnings of a rational account of religion from the earliest times, and in particular of the culmination of it in our love and reverence and obedience to Jesus Christ as unto God Himself.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER X

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND HISTORY

In this paper on Christ's right to our worship we have been largely concerned with meeting some of the difficulties which have been felt, both from the side of practical piety and from the side of philosophical thought, in the fact that Christian faith is essentially rooted in past historical events. It is perhaps worth while devoting some space to point out that this historical basis, so often regarded as a weakness, in reality constitutes part of the unique strength of Christianity as a *Gospel for human life*.

It has been argued that the basis of the Christian conviction about Christ is, first, an intuitive apprehension of absolute Divine character in Him, and, second, a pragmatic confirmation of that apprehension in the increasing victory over the world which it brings. These two elements must not be separated. Only a vision of God which lays hold of us by its own inherent and irresistible light can carry us to "victory" in face of the many dire challenges which life offers; yet only so far as it thus carries us to victory can it progressively become the master-light of all our seeing. Now, if it be asked

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what is that vision of God which comes to us through Christ, and which gives us the victory, we might be disposed to answer that it is a vision of God as love. Yet to say that, true as it is, would be at once to become aware that it is quite inadequate to the uniqueness of the Christian message. For in many other religions the conception of God as love, of God as in some sense the friend "behind phenomena" appears, and finds often both moving and beautiful expression in prayer and ceremony and myth. All over the world, we are told—among the Bantus, the Pygmies, the Australian aborigines, the Indians of North America, the Chinese, the peoples of India, the Greeks, the Jews—the belief in father-gods or a father-god is to be found. It is true that in many cases this belief is now only dimly discernible behind a welter and chaos of other beliefs of a lower and often contradictory character—polytheistic beliefs, demonistic beliefs, beliefs in magic, and so on. It is true also that the conception of the Divine favour and love, if it is present at all, is often very shallow and on a low moral plane. None the less it remains a fact that belief in One behind life who is the friend of man is in some form or other so universal that it seems almost to be part of the original constitution of the human mind.

Wherein then does Christianity differ from these other religions in its message of the love of God? We might say in reply to this that Christianity, or rather let us say Christ, has decisively released the thought of the love of God from other beliefs about God, which are on a lower level, and contradicted and obscured it. Christ's message is wholly comprised within the one idea of the Divine fatherhood. This would be true and importantly true. We might say further that Christ has given the idea of Divine love a depth and a passion and a moral purity such as it never had before. This also would be true and importantly true. Yet neither of these differences really goes to the root of the matter. There is a deeper and more fundamental difference, which underlies these other

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differences, and without which they would count for very little, the difference, namely, that the vision of the love of God which Christ brings is given through certain historical events.

In order to appreciate this difference it is necessary to start from what is the most crucial, one might call it the infinitely pathetic, feature of man's belief in a "friend behind phenomena," in whatever form or in whatever setting that belief may appear—its continual failure to tally with the facts of life. We read of the primitive Congo negro refusing to worship Nsambi, the Good Creator, because "He does not trouble Himself about us. He does not love us. No doubt He created all things, but then He went away and asks no more about us." We read of Job crying "Let the day perish wherein I was born." The problem is the same in both cases, and runs in varying form and degree through the whole range of religious faith, from the primitive African up to the cultured and reflective Hebrew. Man dreams of a God who really cares for him, but sooner or later the dream seems to crash on the stark and undeniable facts of human history. This is still the central problem of religion to many earnest minds in our own day. A belief in the fundamental goodness of things, in a God of love, is still, for the most part, native to the human heart. It rises spontaneously out of the soul of man, even as does the belief in the orderliness of nature and the reliability of her laws. It is fed, too, by much in life which is good and beautiful and full of joy. But continually it has to settle accounts with ghastly and undeniable facts which apparently cut right across it. It is impossible for a sincere and open mind to take belief in the holy love of God right into the midst of life without encountering there facts which give it the lie. Across the cherished belief there presently falls the chill shadow of a doubt, the doubt whether maybe, after all, the whole thing is but a phantasy and a dream.

It is instructive to observe the different ways in

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which the religious mind has reacted to this disillusionment of facts. The reaction varies with the stage of cultural development which has been reached. The primitive mind had an easy mitigation of the problem at hand in its beliefs in deities of a less beneficent character, and in its technique of magic whereby some control at least of the evil happenings of life was guaranteed; the belief in a father-god, lacking practical relevance, fell into the background and was preserved only in the vague invocations of the traditional tribal ceremonies and prayers. So the chaos of life was reflected in the chaos of religious belief. A further alleviation of the problem was provided by the natural tendency of the primitive mind to project into the deity its own capricious emotional life; the Divine favour was regarded as a matter of incalculable and unreliable favouritisms, and thus, by being given a very low ethical content, was roughly squared with the harshness of facts. A more developed religious mind avoids these crudities, and tends to take refuge in a theory of rewards and punishments; it tries to see in every calamity which takes place, not the denial of Divine love, but the just reward of those who have ceased to deserve it. When that theory also seems to break up on the facts a further refuge is often found in some sort of apocalyptic hope of better things about to be brought to pass. At a still higher point of reflection the religious mind, failing to find its belief in God's love verified in historical facts, strives to maintain that belief by a continuous and unsuccessful energy of hope and faith. The frequent consequence of this is that either the belief becomes merely conventional, exercising little or no real determinative influence upon the life, or, in the end, it is surrendered as an unworthy phantasy construction of the mind, a myth in the bad sense of that term. This last attitude is particularly common in these days, when psychology has emphasised the frequency and laid bare the sources of the phantasy processes of the mind.

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It would seem that as long as belief in the love of God is something which man first constructs in his own mind and then seeks to impose on history, there is little chance of his escaping one or other of the developments above sketched. Either the belief must remain dim, unethic, superstitious, crudely anthropomorphic; or it must take refuge in an impossible theory of rewards and punishments, eked out by unverifiable apocalyptic hopes; or it must be maintained by an effort which in the end only makes it an added burden to the overburdened mind; or it must be surrendered as a mere figment of the imagination. Now, if this be so, then the crucial question for Christianity is whether the vision of the love of God which Christ brings comes to us *in some other way*, and so is able to escape the otherwise inevitable consequence. Christ's conception of the love of God lifts it, of course, as we have seen, above the unethical and anthropomorphic, and above crude theories of rewards and punishments; but is it really more credible for that reason? Its very loftiness and purity might make it in some ways even more difficult to square with the facts. Is it only another, the best and the last, of the tender dreams and imaginings of man's soul, or, we repeat, has it come to us in some other way?

This raises the question, What other way is there? How could the truth of the love of God be mediated to men, so that it is proof against the worst contradictions and challenges which history has to offer to it? Obviously there is only one way, and that is for it to be mediated in and through precisely those historical facts which seem to deny it. The revealing medium must be history itself, and it must be history, so to say, at its worst. Faith is truly succoured when it is enabled to grasp its object out of the heart of those things which have hitherto smitten it in the face, when it is no longer compelled by a tiresome effort to "read itself into" the evil of life, but, so to say, can "read itself out" of that evil with all the cogency of truth. This alone can reduce the

doubt whether faith is merely subjective phantasy, sufficiently to make it both proper and possible to ignore it, even though it cannot in strict logic eliminate and destroy it.

It is the claim of Christianity that Christ thus succours faith through His Cross. In this the climax of His conflict with evil, both these indispensable conditions of any real solution of the problem of the possible subjectivity of man's faith in the love of God are fulfilled; the Cross is historical and it is evil, very evil. We are here confronted with what is at one and the same time the supreme paradox and the supreme rationality of the Christian conviction about the Cross. From one point of view the Crucifixion of Jesus might seem to be the last and worst count in the indictment which history brings against the love of God. It might seem the darkest event of all the dark events of man's life, that one so good and true and so utterly full of faith should meet such a ghastly and monstrous fate. Yet from another point of view, as we have seen, the opposite is true; for only by first being an indictment of God's love could it ever become its justification. In order to become full of light to man in his peculiar need, it had first to be full of darkness, and we repeat, it had to be a real, historical event, and not merely a tragical imagining. It is in this paradox of the Cross that Christianity differs *toto cælo* from other religions. Christianity like them talks about the love of God; but it has at the heart of it a dark historical event, yet also an event that is full of light, full of light both because it is so dark and because it is historical.

In His Crucifixion Christ, by some unique, creative, spiritual originality, takes a horribly dark *fact*, a fact in which is included something of every evil of life—its sin, its physical pain, its premature death, its frustration of hopes and ideals—and transfigures it with light. He does this by thrusting into the centre of it all His own perfect love and goodness and faith. One sees in the

Crucifixion of Jesus pure goodness going deliberately to the place of its worst denial; one sees sin assaulting it in malignancy and hate, defeat threatening it, pain endeavouring to shake it, death mocking it, shame overwhelming it; and yet one sees it, as it were, winning all the time, for it takes these things and makes them but new opportunities for love to reveal the fathomless depths of its own nature. And then one sees that, though the sin and the premature death and the pain and the shame, taken by themselves, are evil, ugly things, yet with that love rising out of their centre, grasping them, accepting them, and transmuting them, the final spectacle is intensely beautiful and satisfying and good. And suddenly also this further perception comes to the soul, that that is what the love of God is really like. It is not so much something which is denied by the dark things, as something which finds in them its supreme opportunity to reveal its depth and glory and win its victory.

How exactly this perception comes to the soul it is in the last resort impossible to say. All that can be done is to analyse the conditions of its coming, and of its remaining a permanent possession of the spirit in spite of all challenges. Given the fulfilment of those conditions, then, for the rest, the matter must be committed to the inborn capacity of the soul to discern religious truth in and through events. In the end all religious argument and reflection have to conclude with the appeal to the native perceptiveness of the soul. The main purpose of this argument has been to show that one condition at least which must be fulfilled is that the religious truth of the love of God must be mediated through historical facts of a certain kind; and that, if this be so, then it is part of the unique strength of Christianity that the revelation it claims to bring to men is precisely through historical events of that kind. If the historicity of the events of Christ's life and the capacity of the soul to discern in the personality of Christ the perfection of love be denied, then, of course, the whole argument

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breaks down. But the substantial historicity of the events recorded in the Gospels is here assumed, and the capacity of the soul to discern in the personality of Christ a Divine perfection of love has been discussed at length in the paper to which this is an appendix.

We conclude, then, that it is not the weakness of Christianity but its strength that it is rooted in history. Not the least important article in the Creed from the point of view of faith is "*sub Pontio Pilato crucifixus.*"

It may be worth while in closing to refer briefly to Lessing's famous dictum that "a necessary truth for thought cannot be proved from a contingent fact of history," since this is sometimes quoted as though it raised a demurrer to the claim of Christianity to base its affirmations about God upon historical events. Such a thought, however, rests upon a misconception of the scope of Lessing's dictum and of the nature of religious truth. It is not claimed that the truth of the love of God is a necessary truth either in the sense that its opposite is inconceivable or in the sense that it can be demonstrated by a sort of mathematical cogency from given premises. The apprehension of God as Love is fundamentally a value-judgment, an intuition of character and meaning; and nobody would claim that such judgments are ever necessary in the sense above indicated. They may have a peculiar coerciveness of their own, yet by their very nature they require events to bring them home to the soul. We might use the analogy of the diagrams which seem to be an essential part of a geometrical demonstration. Such diagrams do not make Euclid's propositions true, but they bring home their truth to minds which apart from them would not be able to realise their truth at all. So it is with the events of the life of Jesus and above all with His death upon the Cross.