

# The Distinctive Thing in Christian Experience

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1908

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## I.

OUR present Protestantism is historically composed from the union of two streams, which take their rise in two different sources. They still flow alongside with a fusion so far very incomplete, and they react on each other with an amount of irritation somewhat inexplicable till we perceive that the streams *are* two, distinct in their origin and direction. They are the Reformation and the Illumination: the Reformation from the sixteenth century, and the diversified movement which marked the eighteenth century, and which is compendiously known as

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\*"The Distinctive Thing in Christian Experience," *The Hibbert Journal* 6, no. 3 (1907-1908): 481-99. Original version available on the Internet Archive. This version updated May 1, 2017.

482 the Illumination or the Aufklärung.<sup>1</sup> They are the old Protestantism and the new—the one resting on the objectivity of a given revelation, the other on the subjectivity of human nature or thought; the one finding its standard in a divine intervention, the other in immanent human reason more or less generously construed; the one emphasising a divine redemption, the other human goodness and its substantial sufficiency. The face of the one movement is towards the Church and the Bible, the face of the other is towards civilisation and culture. The one falls back upon historic humanity, upon the history and the revelation there; the other on intrinsic humanity and the revelation there. It is a distinction much more penetrating than the somewhat vulgar antithesis of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy. It is not so much two theologies as two methods—if not two religions. And neither is pure. The one, the Reformation stream, carries down with it much of the debris of mediaeval doctrine;

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<sup>1</sup> For a full account of the situation we should really have to recognise three streams. We should have to distinguish within Protestantism the old objective tendency, resting on history as the authoritative source (in the Bible), and the newer subjective tendency, resting on Christian experience, originating in Anabaptism, revised in Pietism, and rewritten in Schleiermacher. The one represents classic Protestantism, the other romantic. But for the present purpose it will be better to confine our attention mainly to the two currents named in the text. Of course, the subjectivity of human nature, which I mention immediately, becomes in Pietism the subjectivity of Christianised human nature.

because at its source, in the monk Luther, it was mainly a religious and ethical change rather than a theological. The other, the Illumination, carries with it much of the pagan debris of the older Renaissance and of classic ambiguity; since its element was not so much religion as thought, and its achievement is not faith but culture, and especially science. It was really directed at first not against religion, but against what it thought a false basis of religion. It sought to replace imagination by induction as the foundation of our conception of the world. It asserted the intrinsic divinity of nature, and it would make the spiritual life but the highest of natural phenomena. While, therefore, the direct legacy of the Reformation laid fundamental stress upon the sense of guilt, and the action of grace, the legacy of the Illumination laid stress on native goodness, the sense of rational sympathy, and the sufficiency of human love spiritualised. For the one, man was the lost thing in the universe, and the greatness of his ruin was the index of the dignity of his nature; for the other, man was the one saving thing in the universe, and the greatness of his success in subduing the world to his thought and will was the badge of his heroic divinity, soiled perhaps, but indelible. The one lived by redemption and regeneration, the other by evolution and education. For the one forgiveness was essential, and it was identical with the new eternal life; it put life on a quite new track, it was a redemption, a revolution. For the other forgiveness was incidental, and simply removed

obstacles or redressed lapses in man's developing career; it put the train on the old track, after some derailment by accident, or some loop-line by error. It was a restoration. The one cultivated theology and sanctity, the other science and sentiment, criticism and romance. The one saw the new Jerusalem descending from God, the other saw it rise "like an exhalation" from earth. The heaven of the one was in the blue sky, for the other it was in the growing grass. For the one the great matter was God's transcendence over the world, for the other it was His immanence in it. The one degenerated to Deism, the other to Pantheism. For the one the Incarnation was nothing but miracle, inexplicable but sure; for the other it was nothing but universal immanence. For the one redemption was an interference, for the other it was an evolution. For the one Christ was absolute, for the other He was but relative to the history from which He arose. For the one He closes the old series totally in the new creation of another, for the other He but mightily prolongs it. In the one case we believe *in* Christ, in the other we believe *like* Christ. For the one Christ is the object of our faith, for the other He is the Captain of our faith, its greatest instance. In the one we trust our whole selves to Christ for ever, in the other we imitate Him. In the one He is our God, in the other our brother. It is well that the issue should be clear, if our choice is to be as intelligent and effectual as a faith should be.

These are the two streams whose junction forms current Protestantism, and can you wonder that the

situation is complicated and even confused? We should trivialise the whole subject if we saw in the serious religious differences of the day no more than orthodoxy and heterodoxy—the propriety of certain individuals on the one hand, faced by the perversity of certain others on the other. The conflicting views of Messrs X and Y are but the points where old opposing forces for the moment emerge and meet.

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And we must own each movement has its relative justification. The old Protestantism had come to have great need of the Illumination. It was becoming cumbrous, hard and shallow. It needed especially to be trimmed down and cleared up from the critical side of the Illumination, and to be deepened and humanised from its romantic side. In just the same way mediævalism had called for the Renaissance. But all the same it was not the Renaissance that really took Europe in hand at that crisis. It was no Paganism that could save Europe for the true Church, or the Church for Christianity. That was done by the self-recuperative power of Christianity itself. It was done by the self-reformation of the Church, by the restoration of faith, and not the renaissance of culture. Remember, the Reformation was not something done *to* the Church, but *by* it, and therefore by its faith. And so to-day it is not to the Illumination, it is not to any culture, theological, æsthetic, or scientific, that we are to look for our salvation from the Protestant scholasticism which choked faith by orthodoxy in the seventeenth century and still survives in the popular levels. That deliverance

can only come by a movement from the interior of faith itself. I know it would be untrue to say that all the liberalising influence in the Protestantism of to-day is due to the direct action of the Reformation spirit of faith or religion. In so far as that liberality is a correction of our views about God in the cosmos, it is due quite as much, if not more, to the Illumination, which was quite independent of the reformers and rose rather from the philosophers. But the real matter is not the correction of views but the correction of real religion, of practical relations between God and the soul. And that is due, not to the action of either reason or romance, but to the renovation of faith by the piety and genius of men like Spener, Francke, 485 Schleiermacher, and Wesley.<sup>2</sup>

It is not here a question whether each tendency must ban the other, for we need both; but it is a question which of them must be dominant for Christianity, and especially for original, essential Christianity. I mean for Christianity as first preached, the Christianity of the Bible and the apostle. In proportion as it ceases to be a *κήρυγμα*, Christianity ceases to be Christianity, whether it die in the direction of a sacramentalism or a humanism. It seems to me that this is constantly overlooked by the spokesmen of a Christianity which is liberal or nothing. They become as much the doctrinaire victims of a specula-

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<sup>2</sup> I do not forget the influence of the romantic movement on Schleiermacher, but it was perhaps upon his weaker and less permanent side.

tive theology as our forefathers were the victims of an orthodox theology. The experimental Gospel in each case ceases to be life, and evaporates to a *caput mortuum* of certain views broad or narrow. I read a criticism of a positive theologian by a Liberal of the academic stamp in which occurred this naïve saying: "It looks as if the problems of theology were here confused with the practical declaration of the Gospel by preacher or pastor." There is not one of the apostles that would not be hit by the remark. And it applies with even more force to our Lord Himself. Where are we to go for our Christian theology except to their practical declaration of the Gospel? The New Testament is no collection of theological loci. And how are we to test a theology at last but by its service for the purposes of the Gospel? Of course, if it is not a theology we are after but a theosophy, if our interest is in the philosophy or psychology of religion as a product of the human spirit, the case is altered. But with that the Gospel and the preacher have little directly to do. It is very interesting, but it is not vital. It belongs to the Schools, to the interpretive efforts of man upon the world; it has little to do with the Church and its interpretive message of man's destiny and its Gospel of God's reality in His redemptive work.

When the question is forced, therefore, whether the positive or the liberal movement must rule in a historic Gospel, we have no hesitation about our choice. We take the Reformation side of our Protestantism for a stand, and not the Illuminist.

486 We may even go so far, when the issue is forced, as to say that Illuminationism or Rationalism is not Protestantism. We find our charter in history, and not in human nature; in the Word, and not the world. The seat of revelation is in the cross, and not in the heart. The precious thing is something given, and not evolved. Our best goodness is presented to us rather than achieved by us. The Kingdom of God is not a final goal, but an initial boon. You will say, perhaps, the one does not exclude the other. But for the practical issue on which all turns (except to a doctrinaire intellectualism), for the last reality, it is more true at this juncture to press the antithesis than to slur it. The Gospel stands with the predominance of intervention, and it falls with the predominance of evolution. Grace is essentially miraculous. Christ is more precious to us by what distinguishes Him from us than by what identifies Him with us. The Gospel turns entirely upon redemptive forgiveness; and if evolution explain all, there is no sin, and therefore no forgiveness. The Gospel turns on the finality of Christ; but on an evolutionary idea there is no finality except at the close; it is therefore inaccessible, for the end is not yet. There can be no finality on that basis, in anyone who appeared in a middle point of the chain. So far, therefore, Christ is provisional and tentative till a greater arise. The positive Gospel, we say, is the dominant thing by which modern thought must be gauged and its permanence tested. We may take from the modern mind and its results so much only as is compatible

with a real, historic, redeeming, final Gospel. That Gospel is the preamble, and the subsequent clauses that contradict it must go out.

We shall not be foolish enough, sectarian enough, to make a sweeping condemnation of modern thought in advance. For one thing, it is very hard to know what is meant by it. Does it mean the mental world of Kant, and Goethe, and Browning, or of Spencer, Fiske, and James, or of Nietzsche, Tolstoi, and Ibsen? Because they are in many respects as incompatible with each other, and hated by each other, as they are opposed to evangelical Christianity. And, for another thing, we have already accepted many of the results of modern civilisation. It has thrust back the frontier of the Church, and given a mandate to the State to take up province after province which the Church used to control in art, science, philanthropy, education, and the like. Well, we largely agree. We accept the emancipation of these from religious dictation. Church discipline gives way to civic rights and police protection. The number of public subjects on which the preacher is entitled to a respectable opinion grows fewer, while at the same time there are more aspects than ever of his own subject opened to his study and demanding his official attention. We accept the modern repudiation of an external authority in the forms of belief and uniformity of confession. We accept the essential inwardness of faith even when we press its objective. We accept the modern freedom of the individual. We accept

the modern passion for reality, which owes so much to science. We accept the methods of the Higher Criticism, and only differ as to its results. We accept the modern primacy of the moral, and the modern view of a positive moral destiny for the world. And we repudiate imagination, whether æsthetic or speculative, as the ruling factor in the religious life. We have assigned another place and function to the miraculous in connection with faith. We accept the modern place claimed for experience in connection with truth; we recognise that the real certainty of Christian truth can only come with the experience of personal salvation. In these and other respects we have already accepted much which would have scared even the stout reformers.

## II.

488 I would single out for particular stress the place now given to experience in religion in consequence of the Reformation view of faith, co-operating with the inductive method of science—our experience of Christ especially. What Nature is to science, that is Christ to positive faith. I would direct notice to the form of the great issue presented in the question: Are we to believe *in* Christ or *like* Christ? Are we to trust ourselves to Him, or to the type of religion He represents?

I am struck with the absence of any sign of an experience distinctively Christian in many of those who discuss the sanctuaries of the Christian faith—such as the nature of the Cross, or of the

self-consciousness of Christ. To them Christ's first relation is to human power, or love, and not to sin. They cultivate not trust in Christ, but the "religion of Jesus." We are driven from pillar to post, and left with no rest for the sole of our foot. Can we rest on the Gospels? No. Criticism will not allow that. Can we on the Epistles? No. Protestantism will not allow that. It would be taking the external authority of an apostle for our base, and that ends in Rome. But is there no such thing any more as the *testimonium Sancti Spiritus*? No. These scholars, to judge from their writings alone, do not seem even so much as to have heard of a Holy Ghost. And they have a fatal dread of pietism, and methodism, and most forms of intensely personal evangelical faith. They are, like Haeckel, in their own way, the victims of an intellectualism which means spiritual atrophy to Christianity at last. No, they say, if you fall back on your experience, you may land anywhere.

But am I really forbidden to make any use of my personal experience of Christ for the purposes even of scientific theology? Should it make no difference to the evidence for Christ's resurrection that I have had personal dealings with the risen Christ as my Saviour, nearer and dearer than my own flesh and blood? In His personal gift of forgiveness to me, in the central experience of my life, of no value in settling the objective value of His cross and person? My personal contact with Christ, our commerce together, may I find nothing on these? "No," it is said, "nothing of scientific objective value. These ex-

periences may be of great personal value to you, but they give you no warrant for stepping outside your own feelings. They may be useful illusions in their place, but you must outgrow them. You can never be quite sure that the Saviour you meet is a personal reality. You can never make it certain to any that He is a continuous personality with the historic Jesus. And it is even laid upon us to make it doubtful for yourself." "In your so-called communion with Christ you have no more real right," we are told, "to build on the objective personal reality of your *vis à vis* than the Roman Catholic girl had to believe in the real presence and speech of the Virgin at Lourdes. If it is Christ who visits you, it were the Virgin that visited her. Of so little worth is the fact of the experience in vouching for the content of experience. If you commune with Christ, do not gird at those who traffic with the saints."

Now, might I have leave to say that I had to meet that problem for myself several years ago? And the answer I thought satisfactory was twofold. First, it was personal; second, it was historical.

I take the first first. There is, and can be, nothing so certain to me as that which is involved in the most crucial and classic experience of my moral self, my conscience, my real, surest me. A vision might be a phantom, and a colloquy an hallucination. But if I am not to be an absolute Pyrrhonist, doubt everything, and renounce my own reality, I must find my practical certainty in that which founds my moral life, and especially my new moral life. The test of all

philosophy is ethical conviction. That is where we touch reality—in moral action, (God as Spirit is God *in actu*), and especially in that action of the moral nature which renews it in Christ. Now, my contention is that my contact with Christ is not merely visionary, it is moral, personal and mutual. Nor is it merely personal, in the same sense in which I might have personal intercourse from time to time with a man in whom I am little concerned between whiles. Because what I have in Christ is not an impression, but a life change; not an impression of personal influence, which might evaporate, but a faith of central personal change. I do not merely feel changes; I am changed. Another becomes my moral life. He has done more than deeply influence me. He has possessed me. I am not His loyal subject, but His absolute property. I have rights against King Edward, however loyal I am, but against Christ I have none. He has not merely passed into my life as even a wife might do, but He has given me a new life, a new moral self, a new consciousness of moral reality. In Him alone I have forgiveness, reconciliation, the grace of God and therefore the very God (since neither love nor grace is a mere attribute of God). There has been what I can only call a new creation, using the strongest word in my reach. I owe Him my total self. He has not merely healed me, in passing, of an old trouble, but He has given me eternal life. He has not only impressed me as a vision might—even one projected from my own interior—but He has done a permanent work on me at my moral cen-

tre. He has made a moral change in me which, for years and years, has worked outwards from the very core of my moral self, and subdued everything else to its obedience. In my inmost experience, tested by years of life, He has brought me God. It is not merely that He spoke to me of God or God's doings, but in Him God directly spoke to me; and more, He did in me, and for me, the thing that only God's real presence could do. Who can forgive sin but God only, against whom it was done? Thus the real Catholic analogy to His action on me and in me is not visions of the Virgin, or the ecstasies of saints, but it is the Sacraments. In the Catholic view these are objective and effective upon the inmost substantial self; so is Christ objective, effective, creative, upon my moral, my real self, upon me as a conscience, on sinful me. He is the author not of my piety merely but of my regeneration. My experience of Him is that of one who does a vital, revolutionary work in that moral region where the last certainty lies. And in that region it is an experience of a change so total that I could not bring it to pass by any resource of my own. Nor could any man effect it in me. And any faith I have at all is faith in Christ not merely as its content nor merely as its point of origin, but as its creator. The Christ I believe in I believe in as the creator of the belief, and not merely its object. I know Him as the *author* as well as object of my faith. The great change was not a somersault I succeeded in turning, with some divine help; it was a revolution effected in me and by Him. The very fact that in its nature it

was forgiveness and regeneration makes it a moral certainty, the kind of certainty that rises from contact with my Judge, with the last moral and personal reality, who has power even to break me, and with my Redeemer, who has power to remake me as His own.

If certainty do not lie there, where can it be found in life? If He is not real, moral reality has no meaning. There are hallucinations in religious experience, but not here. They might be connected with the affections but not with the conscience at its one life-crisis. They might be as impressive as a *revenant*, but not creative, redemptive. If you claim the right to challenge the validity of my experience, you must do it on the ground of some experience surer, deeper, getting nearer moral reality than mine. What is it? Does the last criterion lie in sense, or even in thought? Is it not in conscience? If life at its centre is moral, then the supreme certainty lies there. It must be associated, not with a feeling nor with a philosophic process, but with the last moral experience of life, which we find to be a life morally changed from the centre and for ever. To challenge that means rationalism, intellectualism, and the merest theosophy. Do not forget that philosophy is but a method, while faith, which is at the root of theology, presents us with a new datum, a new reality.

You refuse the mere dictum of an apostle. But if we may not rest upon the mere dictum of an apostle, may we not upon our own repetition of the apos-

492 tolic experience, the experience which made them apostles? I say repetition, but might I not say prolongation? We rest on our own participation in the ageless action of the same redemption in the Cross as changed them, after many waverings, for good and all. Is it not the same act, the same spirit, the same real personality acting on us both, in the same moral world? And, expanding my own experience by the aid of theirs, may I not say this: I am not saved by the apostle or his experience, nor by the Church and its experience, but by what saved the apostle and the Church. When Christ did for me what I have described, was it not the standing crisis of the moral macrocosm acting in its triumphant way at the centre of my microcosm? Was not the moral crisis of the race's destiny on Christ's cross not merely echoed but in some sense re-enacted at my moral centre, and the great conquest re-achieved on the outpost scale of my single crisis? The experience has not only a moral nature, as a phase of conscience, but an objective moral content, as is shown by the absolute rest and decisive finality of its moral effect in my life and conduct. If it be not so, then we are asked to believe that men can produce in themselves these changes which permanently break the self in two, or can lift themselves to eternal moral heights by their own waistband. But, if so, what need is there for a God at all? Do not even the positivists likewise?

There is no *rational* certainty by which this *moral* certainty *could* be challenged; for there is no rational certainty more sure, or so sure, and none that goes

where this goes, to the self-disposing centres of life. This moral certainty is the truly rational certainty. Christ approves Himself as a reality by His revolutionary causal creative action on that inmost reality whereby man is man. That centre from which I act (and therefore am real) meets, in a way decisive for all life, with Christ in His act on the Cross. If this contact represent no real activity on me, if it be but impressionist influence, then the whole and central activity of my life, whereby I confront it in kind, is unreal. If the Saviour be unreal and my communion an unreality, a mere mystic or moody mingling of being, then there is no reality, and everything is dissolved into cloud and darkness and vapour of smoke.

I do not wish to say anything disrespectful of these academic critics to whom we owe so very much in the way of laboratory theology, but they are the second, not the first. A higher hand must make them mild. A deeper insight must enlarge their truth. And I much wish they had more of that ethical realism of Carlyle or Ibsen, only turning it upon the conscience at the Cross. But so often (just as a vast memory may impair the power of judgment) you find the finest critical faculty, and the most powerful scholarly apparatus, conjoined with a moral nature singularly naïve and beautifully simple and unequal to the actual world. Their experience of life and conscience has no record of lapse or shame. Their world is a study of still-life; it has not the drama, the fury, the pang, the tragedy, the crisis of the actual world at large, with its horrible

guilt and its terror of judgment. It opens to them none of the crevasses where glow the nether fires. They inhabit, morally, the West End. They are in no touch with damned souls. They have lived in an unworldly purity, and have never been drawn from the jaws of hell, or taken from the fearful pit and its miry clay. They have been reared, many of them, in the sacred and pious atmosphere of the German manse, and cradled in the godliness of the most Christian of homes. The paradox is this, that if purity be the test of truth, and obedience the organ of theological knowledge, if that be the meaning of "will do, shall know" (as it is not), if they are as right in their views as they are of heart, then evangelical Christianity would be dying of its own moral success.

### III.

494 The second part of my answer to the suggested analogy between communion with a saint and communion with Christ is this. It would enlarge what I have been saying to the scale of history. Christ has entered actual history, with piercing, crucial, moral effect, in a way the Virgin never has, nor any saint. He has entered it not only profoundly, but centrally and creatively; she is adjutorial at most. By His effect upon human experience He created that Church within which the worship and contact of the Saints arose. The Church arose as a product of something which Christ produced. And it is not only the effect of Christ on the Church that I speak of, but, through

the Church, His effect on history at large. Christ affects the moral springs of history as no saint has done. They but colour the stream; He struck from the rock. I make all allowance for the fact that, by the Church's fault, He has affected history less than He might have done. But it remains true that all we have and hope in the new humanity owes to Christ what it owes to no other. And it owes it to a Christ felt and believed to be generically different from every rival or every believer. What we owe to Christendom, or to great Christians, they owe to a Christ who owed Himself to no man. He has entered the history of the Church at least as He has entered my history—not as the mere postulate, nor even as the spring, but as the Creator of the new life, the new self, while He Himself needed no new self or new life. I make all allowance for the reasonable results of historic criticism, yet He stands in history as a defined consciousness and a creative person, who is powerful not in the degree in which He is appreciated by our experience, but in a way which creates experience and which can only be appreciated by something greater than our experience—by our faith. We know Him by faith to be much more than He has ever been to our experience. I know Him, and the Church knows Him, as a person of infinite power to create fresh experience of Himself. My contact with Him by faith is continually deepening my experience of Him. And as my experience deepens it brings home a Christ objective in history, and creative of the experience, and the life, and the deeds of a whole vast Church

meant, and moving, to subdue mankind not to itself, but to the faith of the Gospel.

495 But how can an individual experience give an absolute truth? How can an experience (which is a thing personal to me in, say, my own forgiveness) assure me of the world? How can my experience, my forgiveness, assure me of the world's redemption? How can it assure me of the final and absolute establishment of the Kingdom of God? I may experience my salvation, but how can I experience the salvation of the world which is for all (and is so felt by some) a greater concern than their own?

The answer is this. My experienced salvation is not a passing impression but a life faith. It is not a subjective frame but an objective relation, and even transaction. The peace of God is not glassy calm but mighty confidence. My experience here is the consciousness not of an impression on me, but of an act in me, on me, and by me. It is not an afferent but an efferent consciousness, as the psychologists would say, like the muscular sense, the sense not of rheumatism but of energy. And, to go on, it is the sense not only of myself as acting in the experience called faith, but it is the sense that that act is not perfectly spontaneous but evoked, nay, created by its content. And, still to go on, it is the sense that it is created by another and parent act—which is the one eternal decisive act of an eternal person saving a world. I am forgiven and saved by an act which saves the world. For it not only gives me moral power to confront the whole world and surmount it, but it unites me in a

new sympathy with all mankind, and it empowers me not only to face but to hail eternity. And this it does not for me, but for whosoever will. This is the report of my faith and of the Church's faith upon the act to which it owes its own existence as an act. Is it amenable to unfaith? *Actor sequitur forum rei*, said Roman law. The venue of criticism is in the court of the challenged faith. That is, the true and fruitful criticism is that within the believing Church. It is a part of that self-criticism of the Church whose classic case is the Reformation.

What Christ has done for me has become possible only by what He did even more powerfully for others whose faith and experience have been deeper and richer than mine, but who reflect my experience all the same, even while they diversify and enlarge it mightily. Standing over my experience is the experience of the whole evangelical succession. And standing over that is the historic fact of Christ's own person, and His consciousness of Himself ("All things are delivered to me of the Father") as Lord of the world, Lord of nature in miracle, of the soul in redemption, and of the future in judgment. When I meet Him in my inmost soul, I meet one whose own inmost soul felt itself to be that, and who has convinced the moral power of the race in the whole historic Church that He is what He knew Himself to be. And in that conviction the Church has become the mightiest power that ever entered and changed the course of history from its moral centre.

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Our experience of Christ is therefore an abso-

lutely different thing from our experience of saint or Virgin. In their case, granting it were actual, the visitation might be but my experience; in His case it is my faith, which concerns not a phase of me whereof I am conscious, but the whole of my moral self and destiny whereof I am but poorly conscious. We may respond to a saint, but to Christ we belong.

#### IV.

The third part of my answer would expand what I have touched on, a few words back, in regard to the consciousness of Christ.

I have referred to the individual experience, and to its expansion in the experience of the Church. But is this enough to give us the reality of a supernatural (or rather a superhistoric) Christ? If it were, then we should be in this difficulty, that the experience of believers would be the seat of God's revelation to us. And fresh difficulties arise out of that. If it be so, then do we not give the Church (as the collective experience) a prerogative which, even if it does not rise to the claim of Rome, yet puts the individual conscience too much at its mercy, and obtrudes the Church between it and Christ? And, again, if it be so, what was the seat of God's revelation to the very first Church of all, to the first believers with no Church behind them? And what place is left for the Bible, the record, at all except a mere subsidiary one in support of the supreme experience of a Church? Whereas the Bible, no less than the Church, was a parallel result of the Gospel, and part of the revelatory purpose

of God. The gift of the Spirit<sup>3</sup> to the Apostles was not simply to confirm personal faith but to equip them efficiently for their apostolic, preaching, witnessing work.

We must pass within the circle of the first Church's experience and testimony, and find a means of stepping off the last verge of its direct documentation on to sure moral ground where the documents cease. We must pass by faith from the field of the first faith certificated in the documents to the historic reality behind the wall of documents, and within the ring fence of the testifying Church.

And we are compelled to do so by the very nature of that faith and those documents themselves. If we are not to stultify the first Church and all its history, we must recognise a point on which critics so antagonistic to each other as Schaefer and Lobstein agree,<sup>4</sup> that the Gospel about Jesus in the first Church truly reflected Jesus' Gospel of Himself, and grew inevitably out of it. We could not speak of Jesus with any respect if His influence not only could not protect His first followers from idolatry in placing Him where they did beside God in their worship but actually promoted that idolatry. If *they* included Christ in His own Gospel, then *He* did. It was not in the teeth of Him that they made Him an object

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<sup>3</sup> The difficult question as to the relation between Christ and the Spirit (especially for St Paul) is too large for side treatment. I only note that our communion is not with the Spirit, but in the Spirit, with Father and Son.

<sup>4</sup> See *Die christliche Welt*, 1907, No. 19, Sp. 529.

of faith and worship along with the Father. They could never have treated Him, those disciples who had been with Him, in a way which would have horrified Him as much as some apostles were horrified at the attempt to worship them at Lystra. If they  
 498 found Him Saviour through death from sin, found Him the Son of God and the Eternal Christ, then He offered Himself as such.

Accordingly the question becomes one of the interpretation of His self-consciousness as the Gospels offer it upon the whole. We are borne onward by the experience of the Church upon the experience of Christ in so far as He revealed it. The Church's first thought of Him was substantially one with His own thought of Himself. What was that? Was it a thought which placed Him with men, facing God and moving towards God, or with God facing men and moving to them? Was He not always with men, but from beside God? Can our relation to Him, if we take His construction of it, be parallel to our relation to any apostle, saint, virgin, or hero? Into the self-consciousness of Christ I cannot here go. I can only refer to all the passages of the Gospels which have their focus in Matt. xi. 25 ff.,<sup>5</sup> and which reveal the sense of His complete mastery of the world of nature, of the soul, and of the future. He forgave the soul and claimed to judge it. He determined our eternal relation to God. And He used nature at will

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<sup>5</sup> Surely the criticism which dissolves this passage leaves us with little but dissolving views of anything.

for the supreme purposes of grace and eternity.

But we must here take another step which replaces us where we set out, though on a higher plane. This power of which Jesus was so sure was not there simply to make a vast and placid self-consciousness. He was not there simply as a reservoir of moral power instead of its agent. If He had the power it was not as a miser of power, to enjoy the satisfaction of possessing it in self-poised and self-sufficient reserve, not to be a quiescent character reposing in God. He was there to exercise the power in historic action. And as it was moral power, it could only go out in moral achievement. He was there for a task in which the whole of it should be expended. He was there to do something which only His power could do. If He had power more than all the world's, it was to overcome the world in another than the individualist and ascetic sense. It was to subdue it to Himself. The Son was not only to affect it, but to regain it for the Father. He was not simply to rule, but to redeem. He was there for action; and it was action commensurate both with His person, and with the world, and with the world's moral extremity. He was there to do that which all the accounts declare was done in the Cross—to conquer for mankind their eternal life. It was not simply to fill men's souls at His as from a fountain, but to achieve for them and in them a victory whose prolonged action (and not mere echo) should be their eternal life. With all His power He was there for one vast eternal deed, which can only

be described as the Redemption, the new Creation, of the race. Nothing less could afford scope for the exercise of such power as His, if it was a power that must work to an active head, and could not be held in mere benignant self-possession, in quiescent, massive, brimming Goethean calm. The moral personality must all be put into a corresponding deed. What is the deed which gives effect to the whole tremendous moral resource of Jesus? There is not one except His death. If we reduce that simply to His life's violent and premature close, then we are without any adequate expression in action of so vast a moral personality. And it becomes but an æsthetic quantity, an object of moral and spiritual admiration, and the source of profound religious influences and impressions, but not of living faith and of eternal life. It is a grand piece of still-life, spectacular but not dramatic, with spell but not power. It can refine but not regenerate, cultivate but not recreate. And had Jesus not found in His death the regenerative outlet for the infinite moral power in His person, He would have been rent with the unrest and distraction of prisoned genius. He would have been no expression of the peace that goes with the saving power of God, peace which He then could neither have nor give.

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