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THE CATHOLICITY OF CHRIST.

BY REV. WILLIAM RUSSELL OWEN, BALTIMORE, MD.

There is real ground to-day for the serious question, "Has Christianity ever been fairly tried?" or perhaps, "Do Christians accept seriously the teachings of Jesus?" The cry of to-day is, "back to Jesus", "a return to Christ", and these phrases are retrospective. It has occurred to the writer that it is of sufficient dignity to inquire whether the real ground of Christianity rests upon either retrospective or prospective ideals. Christianity is Christ, and the basis of Christianity is a tenseless ideal which must needs be constructed by the apologists of each day out of the preserved sayings of Jesus himself. Is there not a universal plan, a programme for the Christian state for all time in the sermon of Jesus, termed by us the Sermon on the Mount? Platitudinal treatises and exegetical studies have been exhaustless on this sermon, but consider this analysis of the Sermon on the Mount in the light of the Catholic teaching of Jesus, in short, the Catholicity of the Christ. I believe the Sermon on the Mount to have been a single deliverance, previously prepared, perchance written, and spoken by the great Christian Teacher to the multitudes on the Kurn of Hattin.

Christ first appeared in the temple. Now, from this seat on the hills, under God's open sky, Christ utters thirty years of calm, transcendent thinking to the multitudes who had gathered to hear.

In a wise, this sermon is the Magna Charta of the Kingdom of God, yet no demands were wrested from a reluctant John. And, too, we might say this is the manifesto of the King, the speech from the throne, but I am persuaded that there is set forth in this sermon as reported by Matthew the Catholic teaching of Jesus—the setting forth of such abiding principles that here is the universal constitution of a

kingdom eternal. Says William Burnett Wright: "Of all teachers, dead or living, of all friends, visible or invisible, not excepting the Apostle Paul among the departed and those who are dearest to me among the living, none has ever helped me to find sight for my mind or rest for my spirit except in such proportion as he has helped me to understand the Sermon on the Mount. I believe it contains the true solution of every problem which has troubled mankind in the past or troubles men in the present; the key to every perplexity; the weapon against every danger; the balm for every wound; the assurance against every anxiety which any man can meet; the setting forth, I am led to believe, of a final and satisfactory meaning of the atonement of Jesus the Christ."

The Sermon on the Mount is the setting forth of a final philosophy which, if you please, I shall term the philosophy of the affections. This is set forth in the two pre-eminent ideas which Jesus Christ came to teach man, namely: the idea of the Kingdom of God and the idea expressed by the term, "My Father"—the Kingdom of God and the Father. The corollary of the idea of the Kingdom of God is the perfected system of Christ's ethics; the corollary of the idea of the Father is the universal principle of love. You will find in the Sermon on the Mount these two ideas, ethics and love, running on in parallel lines, each necessary to the other, equidistant from the other, tantamount one to the other, but signally bearing in themselves enough knowledge in the complex relation of man to God and God to man, as to satisfy man in his ceaseless quest after God. The Sermon on the Mount then is the end of the quest for God. The supreme quest of man is the quest after God, the conquest of man is made when man finds the Father whom he has not sought. So then here is a study in concomitance in which the love of the Father is set forth as the principle of all action, in the expression of which man and God are brought under the harmony of reconciliation.

This is a broad claim for the Sermon on the Mount, yet I ask that you follow with me the historical search of man

after God and thus discover a philosophical basis for this paper.

It has ever been thus—the blind search of man after God. There is something pathetic, I think, in the anxiety which everyone shows to rediscover himself. Carlyle wrote nearly seventy years ago: “Into how many strange shapes of superstition and fanaticism does the silent searching of man tentatively and errantly cast itself! The higher enthusiasm of man’s nature is for the while without exponent, yet does it continue indestructible, unwearily active, and work blindly in the great chaotic deep; thus sect after sect and church after church, bodies itself forth and melts again into new metamorphosis.” Carlyle was right, for whether we find the historical origin of the religious principle, which means the struggle out of torpor and discord into unity and light, in the theanthropic conception of a co-equality in man and God, or to the theocratic conception of a sovereign God, or else to the Polyzoic deification of the nature principle, the struggle has been that of man in search of God—the harmonizing, if you please, of the undiscoverable qualities which man knows reside in himself with the existing of a sublime reality which man calls God—the search in a bewildering labyrinth for Him and from the maze there is no escape.

In the world at present there are but six great religious ideas: The great Chinese ethical system of Confucius, the older non-resistance simplicity of Laotsze, the cynicism of Brahma, the speculation of Buddha, the Jewish fanatical sacerdotalism, and the Christian declaration of love. Count Leo Tolstoy, in an article in *La Revue* of Paris, declares that “Christianity unites, explains and defines all the older religions, but after Christianity no religion appears, no prophet explains and defines his doctrine. All that appears in this sense is only the elaboration and application of Christianity. Indeed, all the systems of religious teachings that now exist, in so far as they contain any truth, are included in Christianity.”

So man has been searching after God, but, oh, the little

faith of blind generations, who were left to be shown by this Teacher of Nazareth that the good woman of the house had been the while searching the silver, that the shepherd of the sheep had been searching the lost, that the Father had been missing the son.

Many seminary days I wrestled much with the theology which obtains in the dry places of the earth, and I wrote at the completion of the study upon the margin of my text book: "I have studied this matter faithfully and I think satisfactorily to my teacher, and I am convinced that we cannot reach God through reason. But I know God I am sure, and am persuaded that it is true, because long, long ago He has reached me with love."

"Religious experience," says Dr. Adolph Harnack, "is to be measured, not by any transcendency of feeling, but by the joy and peace which are diffused through the soul that can say, 'My Father'." "Thou hadst not sought me hadst thou not known me", is the trite saying of Pascal, and the great joy of man comes in the conscious finding of the Father.

There are two realms of knowledge—the realm of science and the realm of the soul's experiences; the one we prove by demonstration, the other we do not prove at all. The one is worthless without the laboratory, the other is worthless when its fingers feel the nail prints of its Messiah. The soul's experiences become transcendently real when demonstration is proven futile and the unblossomed sprig of faith gives promise of a fragrant fidelity in the cry from the truant disciple: "My Lord and my God."

All ethnic study of religions reveals the fact that previously to Christianity there was no religion which was free from the objective element. Idolatry substantizes its ideal; Greek and Roman mythology bodies its ideas in sacred things. Judaism must objectize its monotheism in the tabernacle idea. The American Indian is neither idolater nor the worshiper of the Invisible Mystery, except as he holds sacred the game that he shoots and the wild plants that he plucks. Moses endured as seeing Him who is invisible, but the least in the

Kingdom of Christ is greater than Moses, because he believes better than Moses, yet without the Sinaitic vision. Christianity, on the side of appeal and response in worship, is wholly subjective.

The credo of the realm of science is, I believe what I see; I believe what I feel; I believe what I taste, what I smell, what I hear. The creed of the soul's experience is: "Blessed are they who believe yet have not seen." Evolution as a science is undoubtedly true, but must needs spend sleepless nights in the laboratory. The Old Testament speaks of the heart as being the seat of the issues of life. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he." The heart is not only then the seat of the affections, but of the mind, and indeed in the proverbs, of the will, since the Scripture saith: "My heart trusted in Him." This idea is expressed in the Greek word, *splanchnon*—"bowels of mercy and compassion". So Jesus Christ came and made his religious appeal to the heart-seat of the Old Testament, to the bowels-seat of the New. This is the realm of the soul's experiences of religious appeal, and the soul's response. Jesus came then with a message to the inner ear of man which alone might hear; He came to appeal to the realm of the appreciations. Now in the realm of the appreciations there lie the universe of ethics, the universe of aesthetics, and the universe of religion. The universe of ethics discerns that there is an oughtness and oughtnotness in this world of ours—a right and a wrong—and has to do with reason. The universe of the aesthetic observes the quality of love and hate, and has to do with the feelings, while the universe of religion realizes out of its pre-eminent consciousness that the harmony of these two, ethics and worship, lies in the submission of the self to the control of a sovereign guide, wherein lies the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus Christ sets forth the ideal character of the ethical kingdom in what we commonly call the Beatitudes, then consistently, unswervingly, he pursues this idea with its concomitant thought that love to the Father

is the motive of all action, then with the appeal to submission he sets himself up as the one foundation of life, and characterizes the man who builds not upon himself as building his hopes on sand.

Sociologically, Christianity is a life—Christian ethics; philosophically, Christianity is an acquaintance—a devotion to the Father; religiously, Christianity is a response—the answer of man to God.

What then shall be the final test of Christianity? It shall be the test of the principles set down in this Sermon on the Mount. Tolstoy declares this Sermon on the Mount to be his rule of conduct in life, and the wise find fun in his folly, but it must be even so. Dr. Charles D. Williams, dean of Trinity Cathedral, Cleveland, in an article in McClure's Magazine for December, says: "The great problem before Christianity to-day is the integration of the common conscience." In other words, the understanding that ethics cannot be divorced of love, nor love of ethics.

"There are stories of our gigantic business enterprises which have climbed to dizzy heights of unprecedented financial power." By indirect evasion and overt fractures of both moral and statute law, men have iniquitously prostituted brilliant abilities and strong purposes. And yet who are they who do such things? They are often gentlemen who are scrupulously correct in their personal behavior, sober, chaste, temperate. They are good husbands, kind fathers; their home life is above reproach. They are even orthodox, pious and devoted in their religious life. Where is the flaw? "It seems to me", says Dr. Williams, "to lie in a lack of moral co-ordination, a divided and disintegrated conscience. These men have attained and fulfilled their ideals of morality in their personal conduct and relationships and their technically religious life. In these regions they exhaust their conscience, but in their commercial relations and business life they have no standards whatsoever. They are here morally blind." So then the real test of Christianity, the final test is the test of this sermon of our Lord. Love prompting life is the word.

There is no holier or higher sphere of life to-day than the mayoralty of a great city, which calls for this higher gospel. Opportunities are bare for the mutest heroism and the manliest sainthood in the field of commerce, governments and religion. "There are new quests for the new knights of to-day, infinitely better than a crusade for the rescue of the Holy Sepulchre from the hands of the infidel", and that Christian citizen who lives the Christian life, who has learned this catholic thought of Christ, love and life—worship and ethics co-ordinated—will become the character who shall eventually inherit the earth. The idea of the Father and the Kingdom of God eventuates in a perfect life normalizing out of a God-like heart.

I have now come to that part of our discussion where I feel I must succinctly lay down the principles of the Sermon on the Mount; that is all I can hope for in the brief compass of this paper. The Sermon on the Mount is the constitution upon which the Christian State is builded. It is a sermon of constructive principles, and the illustrations for these principles, genetically annunciated, are so abundant that to choose the best were a task well nigh impossible. Jesus proceeds, above everything, logically. The character of the constituents of the Kingdom of God is set forth in the Beatitudes, then this new creature is compared in his flowering life to the religious standard of Phariseeism at that time existent, after which the Christ sets forth a positive religion, in the perfected relationship of man to God.

Will you follow me in this brief analysis with the two ideas of an ethical kingdom and the love of the Father in full view?

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|--------------|---|---|
| I. The Ideal | { | 1. Seven Beatitudes, Matt. 5:3-9. |
| Citizen: | | 2. An ethical preserver, Matt. 5:13. |
| | | 3. A way shower of love, Matt. 5:14-16. |

II. The appeal to:	}	1. Ethical appreciations:	{ State, Matt. 5:21-26. Home, Matt. 5:27-32. Individual, Matt. 5:33-37.
		2. Aesthetical appreciations:	{ Almsgiving, Matt. 6:1-4. Prayer, Matt. 6:5-15. Fasting, Matt. 6:16-18.
		3. Religious appreciations:	{ Mind, Matt. 7:1-6. Affections, Matt. 7:7-13. Will, Matt. 7:14-20.

If you will examine later Jewish literature, which is closely akin in thought to many of the Psalms of the Old Testament, you will find that the word "poor" directly denotes those who have their hearts open and are waiting for the consolation of Israel. Jesus found this usage of speech in existence, and his first beatitude was meant straight to those poor in spirit whose hearts were open to God: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." An open heart is the first step which one must take to enter the kingdom—the member of the kingdom who deplores his poor attempt at acquaintance with God is happy because a personal relationship is promised him through a comforter—"Blessed are they that mourn." Meekness finds itself in the ideal character which expresses perfectly the superior ethics of the kingdom and the meek thus become the pre-eminent swayers of affairs. It is the affections which hunger and thirst and yearn to appropriate the qualities of God and these four characteristics: desire for God—poor in spirit; a personal relationship to God—the mourner and comforter; an ethical likeness to God—meekness; and a yearning after God—hunger and thirst, form the four characteristics of the perfect character of the kingdom on the manward side. Blessed are the merciful, blessed the pure in heart, blessed the peacemakers, are the Godward characteristics of the members of the kingdom.

The parallel still is preserved in these last three, the merciful love of the Father and ethical purity which has for its prototype the holiness of God. There is a splendid

progress in these seven beatitudes from the narrow gate of entrance along the way of the rough ascent which leads to a cross. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." Here in this early sermon is the foreshadowing of it all. The peacemaker has ever been earth's divinest emblem. The peacemaker, whether it be the lowly disciple treading the *via dolorosa*, the martyred monk in the Piazza della Signoria, or Jesus, the poor man's minister on the Hill of Golgotha. The peacemaker is he who brings God and man to meet together, who maketh mercy and morals kiss each other, and peace only cometh after war.

Ye are the salt of the earth—ethical preservers. Why did you write your "Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire", they asked of Gibbon. "To prove that Christianity is a failure", he answered. "Then why do you commune at the church on every Sunday?" was the next question. "Because the common people could not be controlled without Christianity." Ye are the salt which is to make savory the vapid, inane undercrust of life, and to be the preserver of putrescent society. "Ye are the light of the world." He who came to be the light of the world becomes to be formed in His disciples, and that light which has shone neither on land nor sea is transmitted downwards through the centuries and outwards to the uttermost part of the earth to the end of all that Christ wrought and said the glorifying of the Father who is in the heavens. The light of the world is the love of the Father.

You will then notice in this chapter those marvelous plays at contrast of the Christian teachings with current conceptions: The contrast of the Mosaic murder law with the anger of the heart; the contrast of the Mosaic adultery law with the lust of the sense; the statute limitation in foreswearing to the sober control of the individual. These are the three partitions of any society—the State, the home, the individual. The State, from the nature of facts, must be the governor of the personal safety of the citizens; the home is concretely the sphere of adulteries aspersions, while the in-

dividual is the unit of personal and undelegated approach by Christ. "If thy brother compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." The principle of love is laid down in these succeeding illustrations as the motive which controls the ethicizing of the State, the home, the individual. This represents Christ's Kingdom of ethics.

All worship, or better the aesthetics of religion, I think, is compassed in the threefold divisions of Jesus in the sixth chapter of Matthew—alms giving or eleemosynary activity; prayer or aesthetical communion and fasting or an asceticism of self renunciation—work, worship, sacrifice are the principles. So the motive for all worship Christ sets forth in the love principle of the added words: "If God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, oh, ye of little faith? Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

Then comes the appeal of Christ for men to submit to Him as their controller, fitly divided into the seventh chapter.

There are three ways of approach to God: First, through the mind, which is set forth in the discriminative presentment of Christ to cast not your pearls before swine; second, through the affections, which is set forth in the simple declaration, "If thy son ask a fish, will ye give him a stone? If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him." The third, and necessary, approach is through the will, which is an act of submission. "Enter ye in at the strait gate." That is it—the call of the centuries through Christ to find God through the person Jesus. "For not every one that saith to me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven, but he that fruits and produces the will of my Father which is in heaven." "Every one that heareth these sayings of mine and fruits and produces them, shall be likened unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock, and the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it

fell not, for it was founded upon a rock." This is the Sermon on the Mount, beginning at the baptismal drama at the Jordan, ending at the tomb of the Arimathean. Beginning at the birth of the new spirit in our own experience, ending at the cross of service. Oh, there is such a catholic span bridging the eternal silences, over mortal time, to the great and heart-revealing day of the Lord!

So you have gotten my thought I hope—that the end of the quest of man lies in the catholic teaching of Jesus. No theory of the atonement has taken hold upon me with lasting grip or even with satisfaction. The ransom idea of the Fathers is a fundamentally true idea, but it is fundamentally wrong in the thought that Christ was compelled to pay the price. The Federalist idea of the headships of Adam and Christ is true, but wrong when it makes the ordained headships the arbitrary act of God. The Governmental theorist says that the law of God was broken and justice demands a fitting punishment to annul the sin. That is true partially, but this view looks upon God as capricious, as imposing penalty and punishment at his will. And so with all the theories. They have filled searching students with inglorious despair and the insane wards with pious theologians. There is but one point of universal agreement in the atonement of Christ, namely, that God is a sovereign. I am finding at last that this peroration of the Sermon on the Mount has in it the answer to my own unrest, and I am prone to style it the atonement of submission to the Person of Christ. The way of life lies through submission of Jesus to His Father and of man to Christ. The principles of Christianity, as here defined by Christ and exponentiated by the martyred apostles, inevitably lead to a cross. The Sermon on the Mount does not make mention of the atonement, but the life it sets forth leads to the submissive cross life. It is taught by Christ, "Blessed are ye when men shall persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely—Rejoice and be exceeding glad." The apostles, Peter and Paul, insist upon the necessary death element of the cross in the atonement and rightly, for the apostles were but expositors of the principles

of this Sermon on the Mount. Jesus taught this at the temple feast when the Greeks came to inquire, "Father, glorify thy name", and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." That is it, the atonement by submission of Christ to the Father, by submission of man to Christ. "I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."

Ritschlianism is not all wrong in laying heavy stress on the Person of Christ. "The certainty of faith", they hold, "springs immediately out of the experience of the revelation of God in Christ. It is the direct result of the impression which Christ makes upon the soul historically confronted with Him. You come into the presence of Christ as He meets you in the Gospel page. The impression He irresistibly makes on you is that in Him God is drawing near to you. It is no reasoned conclusion, is connected with no metaphysical view of the Person of Christ, but is simply a *faith*, the result of the irresistible compulsion exercised by Christ over those brought spiritually into contact with Him." (James Orr.)

Somehow in Christ comes the call for control, the plea to submit. Jesus in this Sermon on the Mount answers all the great questions that have troubled man. He answers the question of origin. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow—Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Love clothes them. The source of all life is love—love in action is the lily of the field, the infinite, tender sky; cosmos sprung out of the touch of love. The question of society, what shall preserve it? Jesus answers the problem of the law courts and ecclesiastical contortionists about the divorce question with the simple answer that the unifying principle of all society is love, and it is true. The question of man's freedom? Man is sovereign in his own sphere, and God is sovereign in his own sphere. Man is limited in God's sphere and God is limited in man's. Submission to the person Jesus answers to the sovereignty of God in desire for control and

declares the freedom of man in his voluntary submission. The supreme question of all, the question where lies the seat of religious authority, is answered by Jesus in the clear phrase, "Whosoever hears these *words of mine* and produceth them". There is the question answered—submission to Jesus, the person—not to the Scripture ultimately, not to the intimations of man's spirit, but to Jesus Christ Himself.

When Jesus sent out his disciples and they had come back weary and sick, and forespent and discouraged men—Jesus answered and said, "Come unto me and learn of me, for I am submissive and lowly at heart and ye shall find rest for your souls". That is the call to every poor soul, to every one who bears a human face; it is the plea of the Father for control, of Jesus, the Son, for submission.

Jesus the Christ, born of mystery, reared in obscurity, suddenly came to maturity; among teachers a teacher, among philosophers a philosopher, among religionists a religionist! But we do not think of him as greater than Socrates or Plato, or Mohammed, but we think of him as a man head and shoulders above all men. And he speaks for submission as one having authority, not as the scribes. Jesus, by virtue of his own sinlessness, speaks with authority. The greatness of Jesus Christ lay, not in the princely genealogy, but in the wooden shoe of the peasant, not in rising above men, but by descending beneath the crust of life. Hence his silent greatness. He sought no will but His Father's. He had no thought but to submit. His soul was still before God, content in the possession of quiet submission. His life was a perfect self-possession and serene self-reliance—all gentleness and joy because "of myself I do nothing, except the things which my Father shows me".

Jesus loved the Father, and out of the perfect love there normalized the quiet life which went out among men to live sinlessly and effect their common good. "This fruitful work fell to his share, not because he secularized religion, but because he took it so seriously, so profoundly, that while in his view it was to pervade all things, it was itself to be freed from everything external to it." (Harnack)

Jesus Christ is the catholic man—the contemporary of the ages, and his teachings are the aorist tense, the same yesterday, to-day and forever. Christendom has never understood its Christ. We are beginning to see. You and I know better the catholicity of the Christ than did the apostles. The world was not ready for the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount, so it cast him out. It is not ready yet. The preacher of the Sermon was led out to die, and so we, for the servant is not greater than his lord.

They have said that the Sermon on the Mount is not so important as is the Sermon on the Cross. I assert that the Sermon on the Mount is the Sermon on the Cross; and the Kurn of Hattin foreshadowed the Mount of Olives.

His mission was the fulfilling of a vision of humanity, sinning and sinned upon, and the great soul saw and understood.

It is a great gospel we preach, a triumphant truth, a catholic Christ. Sidney Lanier, the master musician poet, whose rhyme-melody has long been all too poorly valued, puts it thus in his "Marshes of Glynn":

"Ye marshes, how candid and simple and nothing withholding
and free,
Ye publish yourselves to the sky and offer yourselves to the
sea!
Tolerant plains that suffer the sea and the rains and the sun,
Ye spread and span like the catholic man who hath mightily
won,
God out of knowledge and good out of infinite pain,
And sight out of blindness and purity out of stain."