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THE FAITH WE PREACH

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by

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Dedication:
TO MY WIFE

FOREWORD

THIS little book is an attempt to set forth a rough outline of the Christian faith. It has in view the needs of Lay Preachers, and therefore does not presume that its readers will be trained in theology. It does, however, invite serious thought, and does not suggest that all is simple and capable of popular exposition. In spite of many omissions it is hoped that some idea is conveyed of the *wholeness* of Christian faith and thought; of Christianity, that is, not as a series of beliefs about this or that, plus a mainly negative ethic, but as an articulated system of belief, which contains within itself the motives of moral endeavour. We are here concerned with what Professor Farmer, in his book *God and Men*, calls "the unity and consistency" of the Christian view of life. Some worthy Christians make do with but one or two aspects of the historic faith—pacifism, for example, or some conception of the after-life—without realizing that these have meaning only as parts of a larger coherent foundation of "things most surely believed".

The chapter on belief in God had logically to stand first: how could it come anywhere else in a book of Christian theology? But it will be advisable for many to start with Chapter II, because, in fact, we all do start there in our awareness of ourselves and our problems.

E. C. B.

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INTRODUCTION

The Urgency of the Present Task in Preaching.

UNDERSTANDING of the faith and ability to impart it do not necessarily go hand in hand. It is, of course, presupposed that faith is never imparted without the action of the Holy Spirit. That theme, however, is not our present concern; we are now considering the human factor in the commending of the faith. Preaching, in the true sense of making men without faith see their need of it and ask for it, requires more than a simple exposition of faith's content. The appetite must be stimulated, the heart opened, and a point of contact discovered. A man will normally have some grasp of the faith before he offers himself to be a preacher. His period of study and further preparation should be designed in the first place to strengthen that hold. One hears occasionally of men who during a college course lose their hold. If that happens it is dire tragedy, and it is almost unthinkable when a man has once really entered into Christian faith; but the Devil seeketh whom he may devour and we are not ignorant of his devices. But even if a man maintains his knowledge of the Gospel during reflection and study, he still needs extra training if he is to become adept at passing that faith on to others. A very great responsibility is laid upon this generation of Christian preachers. They must have the right urgency, and they must truly discern the need. They will know that the Gospel is man's most priceless possession, but men will not take it merely because they are told so, however loud or often; they must be made to see that they need it and are ill-equipped without it. It is not sufficient to quote the Bible; the Bible's message must be translated and expounded and restated, and its relevance to our modern situation pleaded and made plain. To this end the preacher's cunning must be directed. He is firm in the faith and harmless as a dove; but

has he the wisdom of the serpent which our Lord desiderates? (Matt. x. 16). He must find a point of contact with modern man, who, though a decent chap and a good sport and not without brotherly affection, is in the last analysis godless and without hope in the world (Eph. ii. 12). How can he be made to realize this deep need? There is a call for resource and experiment. The advocate of Christian truth must become all things to all men. He is offering to needy men nothing less than the Gospel of God's power and grace, and he must exercise care that he is not offering a fashionable modern substitute for it; at the same time he must have complete freedom in his expression of this Gospel.

This age is not irreligious. The 1944 Education Act with its demand for religious teaching in all schools should be sufficient evidence of that so far at least as England is concerned. But its religious need is not being met. Those who have given up, or have never known Christianity are worshipping idols, whether old ones like Luck, or new ones like the State. Many who are too cultured or critical to descend to this idolatry are even more to be pitied. It is the mistake of the Fundamentalist to be content with quoting the Bible. Merely to ask the Agnostic to come to church is the height of futility. Neither the Parish Church with its dignified beauty, nor the "Central Hall" type of church with its cinema seats and bright singing, is ministering to the need of today. Not all maybe will attain to faith; but many could do who are not getting a chance of it because it is not being presented to them in a form in which they can assimilate it. These are missed opportunities for which the Church is to blame. The Church must go into the market place with its message. And market-place does not mean the place where vegetables or cattle are sold, but where men do their business and spend their leisure morning, noon and night. There is substance in Priestley's criticism (referred to on p. 108); the criticism recurs in other modern writers of distinction, such as Cronin and Howard Spring. People will not come to

church; therefore the apostle of today must go where they are, in their pubs and clubs, race meetings, etc.; that is to say, must make contact with those whose normal resort is to such places. If they cannot understand the language of the Bible or Christian worship then the preacher must speak their language. If we consider Paul, whose Gospel conviction together with his restless energy made him the greatest advocate of the Gospel to all sorts and conditions of men, we see that his language reveals great freedom and colloquialism, even though he can use the technical language of the theologian when he has theologians in mind.¹ And Peter did not preach in classical Hebrew, nor did our Lord Himself.

The Reformers made a momentous claim when they asserted that the preaching of the Word of God *is* the Word of God. Secular man does not see the point of this, and the Roman Catholic thinks it a quite undue emphasis on the sermon. But we must maintain the emphasis, realizing however that it is harder for the preacher today than it was for the Reformer, because people will not come to church to hear the preacher. Conditions are more like those in which Paul proclaimed his Gospel. He did not know the opposition of secularism as we know it, but he was up against the humanism to which his message was simply ridiculous, not making sense.² He knew also what it was to clash with religious vested interest.³ He even knew the opposition which is a canker within: fellow Christians trying to put the brakes on. In more than one way he experienced the hindrances of Satan.⁴ But urgency spurred him on and he took his message where men were and made them hear it, Jew and Gentile, slave and philosopher, at home and abroad.⁵ What a traveller and Roman citizen he was! What

¹ e.g., Gal. iii-iv, Rom. i-xi.

² Cf. I Cor. i. 18.

³ Cf. II Cor. x-xi, Gal. ii-iii, Acts xiii, xv, xxi. 17-xxiv. 27. The parallel between Paul *vis-à-vis* Judaism and the Reformers *vis-à-vis* Roman Catholicism is worth pondering.

⁴ Cf. I Thess. ii. 14-18.

⁵ Cf. I Cor. ix. 19-27, II Cor. xi. 21-33.

ambition, not for self but for Christ! What energy! Right to the limit of the Roman world he must go.¹ John Williams, the missionary of the South Seas, soon after his arrival there wrote back to the directors of the London Missionary Society that he could not confine his activity within the limits of a single reef: that was the authentic Pauline energy and vision.

This thing can be done in our day. It must be done. Each generation throws up peculiar difficulties, but also corresponding opportunities. But how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? The preaching of the Word is always necessary, always difficult, but never, in a world whose Redeemer is also its Creator, impossible.

¹ Cf. Rom. xv. 14-29.

CHAPTER I

GOD AND HIS SOVEREIGNTY

God's eternal power and divinity, invisible though they are, have been open to observation and study in the created world from the beginning.

ROM. i. 20.

*Wide as the world is Thy command,
Vast as eternity Thy love.*

*Thy voice produced the sea of spheres,
Bade the waves roar, the planets shine;
But nothing like Thyself appears
Through all these spacious works of Thine.*

ISAAC WATTS.

Scripture passages of special relevance for the following chapter:
Gen. i-iii. Job xxxvii-xli. Ps. xix, xxiii, cxxxix. Isa. xl. Rom. i-xi.

“PREACH about God, and preach about twenty minutes,” said Bishop Stubbs to an ordinand who had ventured to ask what he should preach about. The Bishop’s flippancy is excused by its underlying wisdom. It insists that Christianity thinks first of God; not first of man, either in his successes or his sins. Christianity has indeed much to say about man, body and soul, his Divine gifts and his devilish blunders; but it does not begin there. To start with man would be, as it were, to step off on the wrong foot. The first word of the Bible is concerning the initiative of God. In the technical language of the theologian the Christian faith is theocentric, that is, centred on God. Without His initiative nothing would exist, and all things depend on His providence for their continued existence. God alone is truly and absolutely; all other being, including man, is derivative, dependent, relative. Man may be the crown of creation, but he is not the Lord of Creation, for that is the pre-

rogative of God alone. Thus Christianity is not man-centred, humanistic, like much modern thinking; it sets God, not man, at the centre, and ascribes the highest honour to Him. Nothing is conceivable apart from God's willing and permission. God is the first and the last, "Of him and through him and unto him are all things." This deliberate sentence (Rom. xi. 36) with its precise use of prepositions is designed to assert that the universe and all that it contains originates from God (of him); is as it is by His agency and arrangement (through him); and exists to serve His purpose (to him). God is creator and preserver. God is sovereign Lord.

But Christian thinking is concerned with God as much more than a principle of causation. For theology is more than—though not indifferent to—physics. The task of expounding the Christian Faith is not simply that of explaining the origin of things, as in philosophy, even when the philosophy is an avowedly religious one. It is the setting forth of what the world and man, life and its purpose, are in the light of God without Whom they would not be at all; Who has made Himself known in the world and to man as man's rightful Master to Whom he can and must offer homage. To be aware of God is to feel dependence upon Him, and this without any feeling that human dignity is affronted, but rather in the conviction that man attains his dignity when he looks up to God with humble recognition and worship. This is the truth which is set with proper sense of its importance at the head of the Presbyterian Shorter Catechism: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever." Faith is not merely thinking about God; it is that awareness of Him which is prior to thinking, the recognition of Him with heart as well as mind; the opening up of the whole personality to His being and His claim upon man. This is an experience which creates thinking, indeed makes possible the truest and most relevant thinking of which man is capable. But it is not in itself thinking or reasoning, and is to be distinguished from it as the primary from the second.

dary. Some modern thinkers are emphatic that knowledge of truth is attainable not only, if at all, by metaphysical thinking about the nature of reality, but by serious contact with reality as presented in everyday life and particularly in personal relationships. There need be no aversion to reason in Christian theology. Theology, which is ordered thinking about God, obviously makes use of reason as much as any philosophy or science does. The opportunity and privilege of the Christian theologian is to direct reason to worthy objects, and especially to the most important of all objects, man's contact with his Maker, that quite fundamental experience wherein man begins to become himself, namely in his apprehension that God's hand is upon him and that he is confronted by God, and life suddenly has meaning: "Whereas I was blind now I see." This experience awaits, nay more demands, the best reason of the most highly-gifted minds for its interpretation. It has mystery in it. It is miracle. There is even a sense in which it prompts the same reaction as that of Moses at a turning point in his religious development: "Put thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Nevertheless the sense of mystery and awe need not deflect serious thinking from itself. It should rather welcome it. Moses' original impulse on the occasion just referred to was not wrong: "and Moses said, 'I will now turn aside and see this great sight why the bush is not burnt.'" For reason can be reverent as well as prejudiced or scurrilous; both religious and scientific books provide evidence of each type! The provocative dictum of the old Christian writer Tertullian (A.D. 200): "I believe, because it is absurd" is an absurd over-statement, tolerable only because of its defiance of scepticism. Anselm's (A.D. 1080) "I believe, in order that I may understand" is much more apposite to our present consideration; our only comment need be that his "I believe" does not mean blind credulity. When Abelard (A.D. 1120) objected with the antithetical catch-phrase, "I understand in order that I may believe", he was making a plea

for the place of reason in theology, but at the same time betraying that his conception of faith was not so deep as that of Anselm. Faith for Abelard is a kind of knowledge made possible after rational enquiry, and not, as in the true Christian conception of it, an outgoing of the personality toward God which provides a basis for rational enquiry; a primary movement of the soul toward God in the belief "that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" and without which "it is impossible to please him" (Heb. xi. 6).

NOTE: The question of miracle cannot be taken up here for adequate discussion, important and in fact inescapable as it is. All that can be said at this stage is that the subject should always be considered with reference to the conception of God. Christianity is essentially miraculous and this must be faced by enquirers at the outset. The miraculous element cannot be left to the last for examination like an appendix to a book; it crops up on the very first page. For it is not a question of certain stories in the Gospels, which may or may not be rationalized and which for the convenience of twentieth-century people can be dismissed as due merely to the mentality of first-century writers. The miraculous element is rooted in the character of God. This must be recognized frankly. But it should not be long before it stands clear that the old conception of miracle as interference with the order of nature, or the abnormal, bizarre, or "what never happens in ordinary life", must be given up. Rather, miracle is what God does, what is characteristic of God as distinct from man; certainly not the normal, but equally not the abnormal, and preferably the supernormal or superhuman (granting that this is never taken as tantamount to impossible). We need an adequate view of the nature of personality as the basis of a proper discussion of miracle; for personality, while normally expressing itself in uniform behaviour, may on occasion prompt action which transcends that uniformity. Such action in the case of God is rightly termed miraculous, God being in a theistic view of the universe conceived as personal. On a non-theistic world view, which does not conceive of God as personal, the question of miracle does not arise. The point about personality, whether divine or human, is that a single unchanging purpose is not inconsistent with varied reactions to circumstances. Here the writer would refer to Temple's *Nature, Man, and God*, pp. 256-270 and 301-307, for full philosophic justification of this argument.

God then, not as thought or idea but as primary reality laid hold of by faith, is the subject matter of theology. This God is not simply First Cause, or immanent principle; He is no impersonal power or influence, but God. Here language breaks down, just as thought breaks down. Here indeed faith calls reason to its aid, the best of human reason, more and more reason. But it appears that the highest human mental capacity will forever prove inadequate to the task of discerning who or what God is; or of devising terminology in any human language capable of stating this for ordinary men to grasp. It is an attempt that must be made, yet in the consciousness that in one sense it can attain no success. "Can man by searching find out God?" asks the book of Job, posing the perennial question which has both baffled man's mind and called forth his noblest reasoning and sublimest poetry. The answer implied is "no". If it depended upon man's ingenuity or diligence in the searching God would never be found. And yet God is found, or rather He lets Himself be found. That is the paradox of revelation. This impossibility of attainment is recognized by religious thinkers, but strangely enough this is no discouragement. For it constitutes an impressive witness to the essential majesty of God, and to refuse to make the attempt, to refuse to set foot on this ladder which leads upwards but never ends, would be for any man who has felt the touch of God on his life a shameless capitulation, a lowering of himself to the level of the beasts that perish: "Thou canst not find Me, yet in seeking thou hast found". "Where reason fails with all her powers, There faith prevails and love adores."¹

Theologians are accustomed to speak in this connection of the Divine transcendence. Recently the word "otherness" has been coined and pressed into service for this purpose: God is the "wholly other". The expression, particularly the adverb

¹ "God can be known . . . only through the fact that He makes Himself known through His own action. He is not at our disposal as an object of knowledge" (E. Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, p. 24).

“wholly”, is open to objection, but it does emphasize one aspect of God’s being which is an essential element in man’s awareness of Him. Much popular thinking, proceeding on the assumption that God and man are in some sense akin, or that there is a “Divine spark” in man, has obscured this and is to be deprecated. It is essentially pagan thinking and has no support in the Biblical affirmations about God and man; not even the famous verse in the Creation Story: “and God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. i. 26) can be pressed into the justification of this heresy. Acts xvii. 28, “For we are also his offspring”, is admittedly a quotation of a pagan poet, and Paul’s alleged approval of it on that single occasion does not really bring it into the main line of Biblical understanding of human nature, with which it is, in fact, irreconcilable. When he most truly sees himself in relation to God man’s judgment is not “How like I am to my Maker”, but rather “How unlike”! The abiding impression the Divine makes on the human is one of difference rather than of affinity, and as a reassertion of this, in the teeth of that superficial thinking which flatters man and degrades God, the application of the term “otherness” to God is not unwelcome. It has to be qualified before the full story of God’s redeeming approach to man can be told, but it is quite basic in its importance and must not be overlooked.

The theology of Karl Barth, which is so influential today, has done good service in drawing attention to this, even though it has emphasized it overmuch. But Archbishop Temple also, who was not inclined to Barthianism, was aware how essential this point is in truly Christian thought about God; to quote from his Gifford lectures: “In so far as God and man are spiritual they are of one kind; in so far as God and man are rational they are of one kind. But in so far as God creates, redeems and sanctifies while man is created, redeemed and sanctified, they are of two kinds. God is not creature; man is not creator. God is not redeemed sinner; man is not redeemer

from sin. At this point the Otherness is complete."¹ The classic expression of this Divine otherness or transcendence is the following passage from a prophet who had much to say of God's nearness to His people in the dejection of exile: "My thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. lv. 8, 9). To which we may add the almost lyrical outburst of the Christian apostle at the conclusion of a tortuous discussion of the ways in which sovereign providence ultimately overcomes man's recalcitrance: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?" (Rom. xi. 33, 34).

In laying so much stress on transcendence our intention has not been to deny that God is immanent in His universe. The question is to decide where the main emphasis is to be laid, and in this matter, as so often, truth requires a due consideration of both extremes. British theology on the whole is in no danger of ignoring immanence, and Temple's Gifford lectures which we have already quoted are typical of British theology in this respect. Continental theology, on the other hand, particularly that associated with the great name of Karl Barth, emphasizes divine transcendence to the extent of denying divine immanence and the possibility of natural theology altogether. Temple realizes, as is shown by the quotation from his work in our last paragraph, that transcendence as well as immanence must be fully recognized.

The Biblical teaching about God's holiness makes the same correct emphasis. For holiness means essentially separateness from ordinary usages. The priest is a holy man, "set apart" from other men for a special work in relation to God, who is the Holy One *par excellence*, and as it were the fount of holiness.

¹ Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, p. 396.

The first thing man needs to learn about God is His holiness, and fitness to have dealings with God implies a partaking of that holiness. "Be ye holy, for I am holy, saith the Lord."

R. Otto has drawn attention to this in his book, *The Idea of the Holy*, which has left a permanent mark on the theology of our time. The Holy is a crude primitive conception which underwent progressive moralization. It is in itself a pre-moral or a-moral notion, and it is this distinctiveness, this fact that holiness is in a class of its own and not synonymous with the familiar categories of goodness, truth or beauty, which Otto has underlined. What we need to remember is that it does witness, even in its crudity, to an attribute of the divine nature which is essential to it, that is, which is typical of God as distinct from man, and which if ignored in religious experience and thinking, transforms a religion which could have authority over its devotees into a mere ethical or theosophical amalgam.

The distinctiveness of this Biblical apprehension of God is well shown up by a contrast with Hinduism which denies God's objective reality over against the universe. To quote a modern authority: "Basic Hindu-naturalistic monism really—and in doing this it is loyal to its nature—treats God-ideas as ideas, that is to say, as ways in which the human mind conceives the divine. They never are pointers to an objective living reality, who in full earnest is the Lord and the God of man. In the religious philosophy of the Vedanta all conceptions of the divine, however moving they may be, belong to the sphere of *maya* (the delusion by which man takes the unreal world as real). . . . The sole theocentric apprehension of existence is given in the prophetic religion of Biblical realism, because there any trace of naturalistic monism is entirely absent. There not the womb of nature but the hand of God is the cause of all things. . . . The personal God of authentic theism is the real, sole, objective, divine being, or He is nothing."¹

Without prejudice to this axiomatic conception of God's

¹ Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, pp. 163, 167, 164.

difference from us we must venture to conceive of Him as personal. Since personality is the highest category of being known to us we must rely on our knowledge of it to direct our thinking about God, and we dare not conceive of God as less than personal. Great thinkers have indeed done so, and it was a mark of Greek religious philosophy to speak of *to theion*, the divine, rather than of *ho theos*, God. The idea of the divine as distinct from the human is not dispensed with, be it noted, but there is a curious inability among the ancient Greeks to elucidate the divine in the light of what is known of human personality. Probably the reason for this was a defective conception of human personality. Be that how it may, Christian thought about God, controlled by the Biblical revelation, has no hesitation in speaking of God as at least personal. Some would qualify this by calling Him supra-personal. The objection to this is not so much that the idea in itself is wrong, but that it does not really contribute anything to the development of our thought because it requires definition itself. The prefix "supra" does, it is true, preclude any confusion of divine and human personality, but that distinction is presupposed anyhow, and the term is better left on one side as otiose. It is better not to get involved in an attempt to explain the obscure by the more obscure.

It would be convenient if English had a word expressing knowledge of persons as contrasted with knowledge of things. Unfortunately the English language is defective here, and French and German are better equipped in this respect. The vital thing is to remember that our apprehension of God is of a living reality. He is not an object of knowledge in the ordinary sense, in which knowledge is a kind of possession, neatly defined and parcelled up, as it were, and laid on the appropriate shelf of the mind. God is too wonderful to be possessed and under human control in such a way as that.

We may also venture to assume that God's knowledge of us is of us as persons, not as mere objects. He respects human

personality. Is not this the meaning of our freedom to make the wrong choice as well as the right? Certainly we abuse this freedom and are afterwards ashamed: that fact of experience has some relation to the kind of being God has made us to be. Incidentally, if a doctrine of Hell is to be essentially Christian it must avoid any suggestion that human beings are less than persons, so much junk which can be thrown on the refuse heap if it does not serve the purpose intended.

God is personal; that at least must be asserted. But an objection arises in the minds of some, and it is allied to the type of thought which tries to make something of super-personality, that this is to conceive God too much on the analogy of ourselves, which is in effect to degrade Him. This is man making God in his image! It is an old objection. The Greek philosopher, Xenophanes (500 B.C.), urged it devastatingly against the popular Greek religion of his time which had Homer for its Bible. He would have found an equal amount to criticize and mock at if he had known the Christian Scriptures. For our Bible, particularly the Old Testament, is unashamedly anthropomorphic, that is to say, it does not hesitate to speak of God as acting like a man. And justifiably. For the answer to this objection is that if we are not to conceive divine experience as in some degree parallel to human experience, we are prevented from thinking about God at all, and are shut up to an agnosticism that is timid to the point of barrenness. The risk must be taken. Anthropomorphism¹ may deceive, but if the alternative is to make no progress at all we must try to advance that way, exercising all caution lest we are led off the main track. Is it entirely inappropriate to speak of the divine anger, for example? (Here the Hebrew is even more daring than our English version because the original word for anger means "nostrils"!). We are not necessarily thereby perpetuating a primitive conception of the caprice or unaccountability of the Gods, but

¹ This term is built up from the Greek *anthropos*, man and *morphe*, form, and signifies conceiving God in the light of human experience.

affirming that certain actions are not acceptable to God and must at all costs be avoided. It makes a difference what conduct is referred to as hateful to God. Anthropomorphism may be unworthy, and there are some passages of the Old Testament which come under this condemnation.¹ But there can be no serious objection to the metaphor of anger being used to indicate what is abhorrent to God, i.e. essentially wrong, untrue, ugly; incompatible with the true nature of Reality.² Conversely, it may be mere pedantry to cavil at such expressions as "The Lord was pleased". Again, almost every page of the Old Testament has reference to God speaking. That could be described as the most childish of anthropomorphisms, but it does not necessarily indicate childish thought, and it is to be defended as a justifiable description of God's self-communication. That is the very heart of religion; without it there is no religion that can uplift and redeem. And is there to be no comparison between human self-communication and divine? Are we to be allowed to speak of man's thoughts, words, lips, but not of God's? This is a risk which must be taken, and can safely be taken by those who are aware of the distinction between plain statement and metaphor, fact and fancy. Those who are not so aware should not venture on anthropomorphisms, but neither should they condemn others who do. The Bible is itself aware that God, who is so consistently spoken of in human terms, is not a man, but eternally distinct from man, transcending both man and the world. It is not deceived by its anthropomorphisms,

¹ e.g. Ex. iv. 24, Gen. xi. 6-9. In connection with the divine anger, there are differing applications; a much nobler use of the conception in Ex. xxxii, for example, than in II Sam. xxiv. Within a single chapter the anthropomorphisms may have a very varied effectiveness: in Exod. xxxiii, e.g. verses 9-11 are meaningful enough for all their naiveté, but verse 5 is hardly so impressive; and who will contend unreservedly for verses 21-23? See also, Ps. lxxiv. 1, 11, 22; lxxviii. 65, 66; xc. 7-11; Num. xi. 1-3, 10, 33.

² This should be clear even in such grim contexts as Ezek. ix or Rev. xv-xvi, though there is no necessity to uphold all the implications of these chapters. In this Christian book of Revelation one cannot but feel that the phrase "the wrath of the Lamb" (vi. 16-17, cf. xvii. 14) is a confusion not of metaphor only, but of essential Christian values.

numerous as they are. The danger that man may exalt himself, forgetting that the God who is so realistically conceived is other than he, is guarded against. Human presumption is known only to be rebuffed: "Thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself" (Ps. l. 21). "Moderns have only themselves to blame," says Dr. Elmslie,¹ "if they misconceive such language as naïve. When the Prophetic Faith ascribes moral qualities to God, that does not signify that God is conceived as a collection of abstract attributes or as 'A Person', but as *no less than personal*—personal not humanly, but transcendently."

The idea that God is personal is a mark of the type of religious philosophy generally known as theism, in contrast with deism which affirms the existence and causality of God without rising above a merely mechanical and impersonal conception of Him. But even theism must not be regarded as the last word of Christian theology. For in the light of the Christian revelation, of which the Bible is the record, it is not enough to say that God is personal. Something greater than bare personality, something more wonderful than theism, is here. The Bible makes us aware of a God who is so actively and dynamically personal (or supra-personal!) that man can hardly bear His claim. This living God of the Bible and Christian experience is far from being merely an impersonal force, an *IT*, nor is He simply a person, *HE*; He must be *THOU*, making His claim upon each individual who is thereby caught up into a duologue which may at first be more than he can endure. "Thou hast beset me behind and before and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me" (Ps. cxxxix. 5, 6). Biblical religion presupposes this *I-THOU* relationship between man and God. An *I-IT* relationship is that of the pagan philosopher, objectively contemplating reality. The *I-HE* relationship may be that of the theistic philosopher, but it is still objective. It is

¹ *How Came our Faith*, p. 380. Dr. Elmslie also quotes Matthews: *Studies in Christian Philosophy*, p. 193: "To find terms that are not in some sense human is like trying to jump out of one's skin."

too detached and uncommitted to be the true Christian relationship with God which is not calmly contemplative, but responsive. It does not attempt to describe God, for He is more than the object of thought. It is moved to speak to Him, to reach out after Him, to go upon His errands; for God is not He but Thou. This is Biblical realism, which presents God as confronting man, rather than waiting for man to begin looking for Him, or thinking about Him. This is the full measure of the Biblical anthropomorphism.

The traditional arguments for the existence of God have a similar inadequacy to that which has just been attributed to theistic philosophy when compared with the full Biblical presentation of God. No serious Christian thinker will despise these arguments; indeed even the non-Christian philosopher has to appraise their merits and test their logic. But their real function is not to awake or inform faith, but to buttress a faith that is already there. They are not the stock troops, but useful allies. Faith's actual awakening is the work of God who is active through the Scriptures or through testimony based on the Scriptures. The Bible does not offer arguments about the existence of God, such as modern agnosticism craves and rejects, for in the Bible that seems superfluous. Its writers are so immediately aware of God that a query whether there is a God appears to them nonsense; it belongs in another thought-world, to the philosophers of the Academy and Stoa rather than to the prophets and redeemer of Israel. The man who says in his heart there is no God can be written off as a fool (Ps. liii). This is not the shallowness of evasion, but arises from the Biblical concentration on its proper religious function, which is not stage debate on: God or no God, One God or Many? but invitation to all who feel their need of God to listen humbly to what the one true God is saying. Blessed are they that hear the word of God and do it.

There may be truth in Whitehead's famous definition of religion as "what a man does with his own solitariness", but if

we are to be on the level of Biblical religion we must define it rather as what God does with man's solitariness. As Professor C. H. Dodd has somewhere said, "Religion is rooted in a moment of passivity when God acts." God as the Bible proclaims Him is such as to seek out the individual and with frightening persistence of love "nail him down" to this intimate personal encounter wherein he can have dealings with God only as THOU. Francis Thompson has given moving expression to this divine seeking in his poem "The Hound of Heaven". One noteworthy Biblical passage on this theme is Ps. cxxxix.

In Christian theology then we have to do with this living active God whose classic revelation of Himself was in those significant events of ancient Jewish history of which the Bible is the only record. The Bible is authoritative for us, and rightly called Holy Scripture in a unique sense, not because of its supposed inerrancy, but simply because of those events which stand out in relief above the ordinary contours of history because in them God Himself was at work. This is not to deny that in a general sense all history, as well as all natural processes, reveal God at work as sustainer of the universe. Nevertheless, some events are more revelatory than others of His nature. Such events are the main subject matter of the Bible.¹ With the Bible as our source-book we can make bold to say we hear God speak and discern His activity, in our world and on behalf of mankind.

God at work in our world, in history, in relation to man and on his behalf. We know God only in these connections:

¹ On this whole subject the interested reader may be advised to consult the chapter on Revelation and its Mode in Temple's *Nature, Man and God*, where it is argued: "Either all occurrences are in some degree revelation of God, or else there is no such revelation at all. . . . Only if God is revealed in the rising of the sun in the sky can He be revealed in the rising of the Son of man from the dead . . . only if nothing is profane can anything be sacred. . . . If all existence is a revelation of God, as it must be if He is the ground of its existence, and if the God thus revealed is personal, then there is more ground in reason for expecting particular revelations than for denying them" (pp. 306-7).

“touching us”, as the old theologians put it. That is enough, of course, and man needs no more. But in view of the apparent implication of the loose thinking of some, or of certain hymns whose piety overreaches itself, we should make ourselves clear that our knowledge of God is not of His essential being and eternal majesty, but only of that which He has seen fit to reveal of Himself to human beings needing redemption. God “in Himself”—to adopt again the phraseology of the older theologians—is not known to us, and it is not a mark of true piety to profess to have this knowledge. God “in His home life”—to quote the more homely phrase of a modern writer who has managed to set out much good theology in non-technical language¹—is beyond our ken and there is no irreverence in admitting this. There is such a thing as proper and reverent agnosticism. What God has vouchsafed to give us is contact with Him as he has, so to speak, left His heavenly home and come to meet us in our home life. This same distinction, and it is an inevitable one, was expressed by the Reformers, following Luther, as the contrast between the “hidden” and the “revealed” God.

Speculation about the nature of God is therefore profitless, for it is not given to man to penetrate these mysteries. This is a Holy of Holies which may not be entered except by Him whom we call the Son of God. The doctrine of the Trinity constitutes as much as human theorizing is able to set down of the “home life of God”. The dogma itself, as distinct from the doctrine, i.e. before explication of what the bare dogma involves, does not go very far; moreover, it is not an attempt to lift the veil which shrouds the Divine Glory, but is really an inference from what is given in Christian experience and the Bible as God’s activity in relation to man; His going abroad rather than His staying at home, so to speak; His incarnation as Son and Saviour, and his “proceeding” as Spirit and Sanctifier. Thus the dogma of the Trinity, while presupposing an

¹ John Hadham in his Penguin Book, *Good God*.

existence and mutual relationship of the Three "Persons" in the heavenly realm, is in the main dictated by what has been observed of their impact on the realm of time and space where man finds himself. The heavenly places is a dimension of existence not proper to man and he has no map of it.

This is not the place for the full discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, which is here referred to only in so far as it illustrates our emphasis on the doctrine of God as One who is not content to remain aloof on the Godward side of reality, like Aristotle's unmoved Mover of the Universe, but who Himself moves manward. The history of the dogma shows that many theologians have ignored this and given rein to a speculative interest which is quite alien to the affirmations of the Bible. It is the New Testament which provides the data for the later doctrine of the Trinity. The Old Testament is a prior stage to that. But it is interesting to note the way in which the Old Testament distinguishes the glory of the Lord (i.e. His inmost being) from its manifestation or revelation.¹

This Eternal God who dwells in light unapproachable has given light to man. The Lord of eternity is also the Lord of history. He has intervened in the events of earth. He has made Himself incarnate in a human life. There are points at which the eternal and the temporal intersect. However challenging, and indeed annoying, this is to the logic of the philosopher, the Christian theologian can assert no less if he is to discharge the commission laid on him by God as Christian experience knows Him. Such a God is indeed not a "God of the philosophers", not a philosophic abstraction, not static perfection, but dynamic activity, the Living One. Pascal understood this well when he wrote, after his conversion: "God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob! God of Jesus Christ, not of the philosophers and savants. Certitude. Joy. Peace." The words were

¹ Moses asks to see God's glory, Ex. xxxiii. 18, but this cannot be granted even to him, privileged intermediary as he is. See also John i. 14, ii. 11, xvii. 5. There is a good exposition of the meaning of "glory" in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*.

found on a paper in his doublet after he was dead, as if he regarded them as the quintessence of his faith, and his only comfort at the hour of his death. Pascal knew the living God, to know Whom is to have not knowledge only, but life and health and peace. To be in contact with Him is to be in contact with reality. To think about Him is not to think merely but to pray and praise, and the outcome of that prayer and praise is a new direction of life and conduct. He is the Creator, the absolute Sovereign Lord of man, and as such demands everything from man His creature; but also He gives everything to man that man needs for living a full life, and thus His "absolute demand" becomes "final succour".¹ He is content with nothing less than man's full surrender of his loyalty because He has a right to demand this, and because it is only in thus surrendering that man finds freedom and begins to discern the meaning of life, attaining a balance of tensions within himself, the integration of his personality, through the forgiveness of sins and liberation from the downward drag of sin. His service is not servitude but perfect freedom. He is the author and giver of life, i.e. not mere physical existence, but life that is spiritual, life that makes man capable of communion with his Maker. The New Testament calls this Life Eternal, signifying thereby not simply endless duration, but a new quality of life which is the gift of the Redeeming God and which means that man is being uplifted and made fit to share God's life. This is the grand hope which grows naturally out of the religious experiences to which the New Testament witnesses. It is all part of the purpose of the God and Father Who is in a superlative degree the Living One, Holy and Loving, Sovereign and Saviour, Judge and Redeemer.

The characteristic language of the Bible is not the logical argument we are led to expect in other books, including books of theology. In the Bible we find not philosophy or theology, but story, declaration; not argument, but witness; not good

¹ Professor H. H. Farmer's phrase in his book *The World and God*.

advice so much as good news; "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul" (Ps. lxxvi. 16): that is the proud invitation of an individual man of God. "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke ii. 30-32). That is the glad testimony of the whole redeemed people. And it is testimony not to what God is like, His nature and His attributes, but to what He has done, His wonders and mighty acts for man's salvation. This is the dominant theme of the Bible's manifold affirmations concerning God. Upon the first witnesses of the crowning mercies of God in the life of Christ a solemn blessing was pronounced: "Blessed are the eyes that see the things which ye see, and the ears which hear the things which ye hear; many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear and have not heard them" (Luke x. 23, 24).

That blessing remains for all who subsequently enter into the same privilege of knowing the true God who is ever active in holy and redeeming love.

CHAPTER II

MAN AND HIS NEED

What is man that thou art mindful of him?—Ps. viii.

What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet, to me what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me.—SHAKESPEARE.

What a chimera man is! What a novelty, what a monster, how chaotic, how full of contradictions, what a marvel! Judge of all things, a stupid earthworm, a depository of truth, a sewer of uncertainty and error, the glory and refuse of the universe.—PASCAL.

History is full of warnings that the most secure civilization is built on reclaimed ground, and that the flood is waiting to rush in as soon as the barriers are weakened. So in man's life on earth there are limitations which can never be overcome, and for any true fulfilment we must look beyond.—E. F. SCOTT

WHAT is man? That is the question of perennial significance to which it is to be hoped every generation can give an adequate answer, attained after proper thought. A system of education must throw light on this, however much or little it may go beyond it in academic and technical excellence. The doctrine of man, of his place in the universe, and of the purpose of human life, is fundamental. It is, of course, a moral and religious question but there need be no hesitation in asserting that it takes precedence of the economic and political questions with which man is confronted, and also of his intellectual pursuits. For it is more existential (to use the fashionable word), that is, it is directed to the radical issues of man's existence itself; it goes to the roots of reality, and is not concerned with man's interests only, with things which are, as

it were, extras, and may or may not play a part in a normal human life. A philosophy—if it is worthy of the name—is existential; so is the Bible; a novel also may be, but most novels are not worthy of this epithet. A conception of the essential nature of man is implied (though not, of course explicit) in every political creed, not least in the political ideologies now advertising themselves to the world, in every novel, and in the way in which even the simplest and most ignorant or primitive people live their lives.

Here is a point of contact for Christianity, because Christianity has its doctrine of man, and this much at least of its teaching can be understood and be so presented as to shake even the militant outsider out of his opinion that Christian teaching is irrelevant to the ordinary concerns of mankind and to the world of mean streets outside the Church. The man in the street and the man in the church—predominantly elderly or female as he may be—are both man. It is the task of Christian preachers, and not least of lay preachers, to draw attention to this aspect of Christian doctrine, and to make it understood. Hardly a beginning has been made of this approach in this post-war situation, and yet it must be made and can be made with success, for it is not addressed to strangers, denizens of another planet, but to men and women of like passions and needs with Christian believers, all alike needing the guidance of a faith and hope in which to live and die, just as upon all alike the catastrophe of 1939-45 was visited. This generation of ours has lived through a judgment of God and is still staggering under the impact, reeling in bewilderment, not yet renewed in faith either in God, or even in itself. It can give meaning to the apostolic phrase "upon whom the ends of the world are come," and what it needs, like the generation for whom Paul plied his apostleship, is "things written for our admonition" (cf. I Cor. x. 11). The great need of mankind at this juncture is to have light thrown on the purpose of human life and the rights both of community and of individual. The root failure of our educa-

tion is here; it is too academic, too scientific, too technical. It directs attention to every aspect of life, but not to the meaning of life itself.¹ And the Churches have failed too.

What then are we to say about the conditions and end of our human life? First, let us record the greatness of man and give full marks for man's achievements; and incidentally take the criticism out of the mouths of those who regard Christian teaching on this subject as entirely negative, arising from a soured inability to allow that man has ever performed great and good acts or thought wise and noble thoughts. It is no part of a Christian theologian's concern to minimise man's successes. The presentation of the Gospel of man's salvation does not need to have the way prepared for it by misinterpretation of what stands to man's everlasting credit. For Christianity is concerned with truth and its message cannot be understood if the truth is distorted. Thus in its consideration of man, Christianity does not present a niggardly estimation of all man's doings in order that his need of redemption may be the more evident. It is true that some theologians, some Puritans, some passages of Paul and the Hebrew prophets have contributed to this false impression of what the Christian gospel is and how it urges its claim. But this is not an adequate statement of the gospel. And it was not a Christian theologian who spoke of human life as "poor, nasty, brutish and short". Nor was it the Church who produced Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Karl Marx and Adolf Hitler.

What a story there is to be told—or sung—of human heroism! It was a right instinct which moved the bards to record it in the old sagas, and as long as man lives there will be stories of bravery to be told and listened to, the rôle of ancient bard being played now by modern historian and poet. And fortunately it is not fighting alone which provides a setting in which man can be brave. The motive may not always be the

¹ Cf. Sir Richard Livingstone's two little books, *The Future in Education* and *Education for a World Adrift*.

highest: heroic effort is often made for monetary reward, but the quality of the heroism is the same; it defies the analysis of less heroic minds and deserves the respect of all—even of the theologian who is seeking to understand this enigmatic creature of God who is called man.

Consider what is daily being done through devotion to some ideal, love of freedom, loyalty to one's country, honour. Why do men climb mountains at the risk of their lives? Or penetrate the darkest jungle of tropical lands and the icy wastes of the Arctic and Antarctic? Not simply to open up new air routes for political or scientific reasons. Those motives play a large part of course, but we must also allow for the outreaching spirit of man that constantly seeks fresh fields to conquer and is never satisfied with what is mean and ordinary. Even if the resultant endeavour is to "o'erleap itself and land on the other", the endeavour is in itself noble. And what of man as builder and engineer? From the tower of Babel and the ancient pyramids to the Parthenon and the mediaeval cathedral, from massive Roman roads and aqueducts to the modern skyscraper and the bridge of Sydney Harbour we have an impressive monument to the skill of man's hands and the ingenuity of his mind. And if we think also of the modern aircraft and all the preliminary experiments that have gone to make it possible we must add: the intrepidity of his heart; for here again we are reminded of man's dauntless courage. The work of the scientist opens up a chapter of its own, and nothing adequate to it can be said here. Consider only what has gone to the discovery and release of atomic energy. Here we are reminded not only of the knowledge and ingenuity of the original researchers in the Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge, but of the intrepid patience and craftsmanship of the engineers and others who handle this dangerous invention and prepare it for a more general usefulness than has yet been made known. Words are too poor to do justice to all this, but Hamlet's outburst serves to express something of what needs saying at this point:

"What a piece of work is man!" How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! . . . In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god!" A Sophoclean chorus expresses the same thought with simple dignity: "Many wondrous things there be, and nought more wonderful than man." We are reminded by Shakespeare's Cleopatra, too, of another aspect of man, those "immortal longings" he feels within himself. God has set eternity in his heart. This does not always make him happy; indeed, it has been called a "divine discontent"; but unless this is taken account of, man is not fully understood.

Thus we can describe man as the crown of creation, bestriding this narrow world like a Colossus, bringing all his powers of mind and will and hand to the overcoming of his many dangers and difficulties, and succeeding in dominating his environment. In view of all this we can find depth of meaning in that classic statement of the Bible: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth" (Gen. i. 26). And to the question: What is man, that thou art mindful of him? we can answer with the Psalmist that God has indeed "made him but little lower than God, and crownest him with glory and honour" (Ps. viii. 5, R.V.).

There is, however, another aspect of this matter. We must see the whole picture. There is man in his degradation to be considered, as well as man in his exaltation. The evidence of human history and experience is not all on one side. Shakespeare knew of Iagos as well as Desdemonas; of Gonerils and Regans as well as Cordelias. In the Bible we have Genesis iii in close juxtaposition to Genesis i-ii, describing man still in a perfect environment but unhappy, marred by inward disharmony and shame. And that is not an old-fashioned Biblical notion, belonging to a sphere remote from that of everyday. It is not theological jaundice, a pessimism peculiar to only a minority of observers of the human scene. It is not pessimism,

but sober realism. There are solid facts of history and experience to justify it. To take one example, and that the most pertinent because belonging to our own time and referring to our present day life on a world-wide scale. At the end of the 1914-18 war there was a widespread feeling that it might be called in retrospect a "war to end war" and thereby given a partial justification. There was talk of making this country a land fit for heroes to live in. There were vows that war should never occur again: we were caught napping in 1914, but we had now been warned and the lesson had been taken to heart. The League of Nations was now in existence and would see to all that!

"These things shall be! A loftier race
Than e'er the world hath known shall rise."

Give the nations a few years to settle down, disarmament would come and everything would straighten out and all would be friends together. "All shall be well, and all God's will be done."

Alas for the vanity of human wishes! Cruel disappointment was in store for those aspirations. Their hopefulness was pathetic in its lack of understanding of the human aspect of that national situation. It was not fortified by knowledge of human nature. It imagined that consciousness of having committed crimes on such a vast scale would be sufficient to deter nations from committing the same crimes again, at any rate on the same scale. "Shall crime bring crime for ever? . . . No, say thy mountains, no, thy skies." Such flimsy supports were washed away when the deluge came again. Less than a generation after 1918 the same nations were again in conflict, and the sons of one generation of fighters had to address themselves to the same dehumanising business. Thus the sins of the parents were visited on the children, not for the first time in human experience, nor perhaps for the last, and it is a phrase from the Bible which proves to be the most apposite for a solemn occasion. And now, after that holocaust is over and greedy Mars

has once more been sated, in these new post-war years there is still uncertainty abroad. It deters men from the hopefulness and relief and vow-making characteristic of the 1920's. People dare not yet assure themselves that it is over for good, that the horror called war, with the fear that precedes it and the material and moral devastation that accompanies it and lies as a crushing load on the survivors, will be known no more upon earth. In one sense this is a gain, this refusal to breathe freely and talk confidently. For this marks the difference of spirit between people generally in 1950 as compared with people in 1920. It means that the magnitude of the problem is more truly assessed now than then, and gives hope that the future will be faced with cautious realism rather than uninformed optimism. Moreover, there is more realization now than there was then that the problem is a moral and spiritual one rather than a political and economic one. It is about souls, not simply bodies. Consider two illustrations of this perception in recent books. One is a religious book, written about Papuan Christians conscripted to serve with American forces landed in Papua with the task of dislodging the Japanese from their hold on the north shore of that island. These Papuans did their best as non-combatants day after day till there came a Sunday. War conditions did not seem to permit Sabbath rest. But these Papuans were Christians and accustomed to worship on Sunday. Their spokesman approached the American Colonel with a request for time to have a service. The thing to note is the way in which the request was phrased: "Could we have some time for our souls to catch up with our bodies?" Quaint language, and not perhaps the most apt description of what Christian worship aims at. But those words were evidence of true perception of man's need, of the fact that man, even the primitive Papuan who is not much more than one generation in advance of cannibalism, is something more than a body to be fed and housed and defended from war, pestilence and sudden death.

The second illustration is from a war-time novel by an

author whose general outlook does not appear to be a Christian one, but who has true feeling for man's need in the present situation. He puts the following words into the mouth of a scientist: "We must rediscover a purpose, a direction, in our living. We must allow our—forgive the word—souls to catch up with the things our hands and brains have accomplished. To know a little less and to understand a little more: that, it seems to me, is our greatest need. It may be faith that I'm talking about."¹

In our reference to atomic energy above, we took it as evidence of man's competence as scientist and daring as inventor. Without retracting that we now have to put the moral question: Is man *good* enough to make the proper use of this new acquisition? There is no doubt about man's cleverness and efficiency, but is his moral competence of an equally high order? Are we able and prepared to see that this marvellous new power shall never again be used destructively, but devoted only to beneficent uses? Are we so weak that we will let the Devil decide what is to be done with it? Is the splitting of the atom to prove to be curse or blessing? Is there no common purpose determining the use of our inventions, or is this but the most striking example of how much moral progress lags behind technical progress? To quote a recent and important work: "Men have made use of reason with results that although thrilling have in the past century become desperately perilous, because they do not make a similar good use of conscience. The nations persist in being as stupid about conduct as they are clever about mechanics."²

But this being the need, where is the necessary dynamic? Whence cometh our help? Some have placed their faith in schemes to change the environment on the assumption that man cannot be good or attain happiness because his environment puts too many limitations in his way. Bare existence is

¹ J. R. Ullman, *The White Tower*, p. 237.

² Elmslie, *How Came our Faith*, p. 350.

too much of a struggle, earning his daily bread and keeping a roof over his head takes all a man's energies, and he has no energy or time to cultivate his mental or moral life. Therefore remove these limitations: see that there are better wages and more amenities: create external conditions that are easier and then all will be well. Man in himself is all right. As soon as he is freed from material anxieties he can be trusted to be satisfied, to use the material in the service of the spiritual, to enrich the community of which he is a member; in short, to love and serve his fellowman and to grow in goodness, truth and grace. That was the hope that inspired many social reformers of two and three generations ago and nothing is to be said or implied here in criticism of their zeal. All honour to them. They laboured devotedly and selflessly and other men have entered thankfully into their labours, and it ill becomes us of the later generation who have benefited by their work and witness to be niggardly in our praise. Much has by now been accomplished, and the social problem is not what it was. But the relevant question for us now is: What is the outcome on the personal side? Are people happier, better citizens, more good, because material conditions are so much ameliorated?¹ That is the overriding question, and if it cannot be answered affirmatively then we must report that the assumptions underlying those plans for ameliorating the environment were not large or true enough to be the complete explanation of man's predicament. Our contention is that the answer is not affirmative, and therefore the assumptions must be pronounced inadequate, not matched to

¹ As Mr. Howard Spring's character, Pen Muff, aptly puts it: "It's not a perfect world for children that matters, or that you'll ever get; it's children to work for a perfect world. No, no, Alice, believe me, there's going to be no harps and wings here below . . . but when we stop working for 'em God help us" (*Fame is the Spur*, p. 545). That judgment is in line with the deep insights of Christian ethics, viz. the paradox that though perfection will never be realized on earth, but only in the divinely prepared consummation we call Heaven, the moral energies of the Christian should be directed to the attainment of as much social justice and personal happiness as possible during his earthly life. Human life may be a wilderness, nevertheless the Christian is under obligation to do his utmost to make it "blossom as the rose".

the depth of human need. The social reformers, for all their faith and hope and labour of love, have not solved, nor even fully understood, the problem of man and society. We turn from them to others who flourish their master keys and advance confidently to open the locks of man's prison house.

It was proclaimed by Rousseau that man is born free, but everywhere finds himself in chains—chains of social convention, religion, established authority, government. Let him therefore break free, and see to it that his precious birthright is restored. Let education in a new age reassert the rights of the individual against society. A prophet of individualism may be a real servant of his generation and later generations, and perhaps Rousseau's work is not yet finished. He has certainly been influential, especially among educationalists. But let us be sober against the influence of his heady wine. It must be remembered that it is not enough to free man from tyranny; he may use his freedom to enslave himself anew and to forge new chains for himself. The last state may be worse than the first even if an evil spirit has been cast out, as Jesus said. Thus it is important that man should not only be liberated, but taught what to do with his liberation. How great really was the change, considered from the point of view of the ordinary man, the persecuted peasant who became a *citoyen*, between France after 1815 and France before 1789? Underneath the obvious material improvement is there not much similarity between the Russia of the Soviets and the old Russia under the Tsars? Neither the social reformers nor Rousseau had the whole truth, though to be sure they saw part of it.

The men of the Renaissance, like the ancient Greeks, were apostles of man's freedom. They were right, but they were also wrong. They have their descendants influential among us still, and theirs is a noble heritage, but if it is regarded as the whole truth it becomes a corrupting delusion. The Renaissance was an understandable protest against the mediaeval orthodoxy of Roman Catholicism. In rebelling against that tyranny which

prescribed what man should believe and think it was asserting man's right to freedom, and the system whose hard crust it was breaking was an unjustifiable tutelage of the human spirit. But the Renaissance spirit has not always rightly distinguished liberty and licence, and has not been an unmixed blessing in modern Europe. Its first ripe products included not only the great painters and Leonardo da Vinci and William Shakespeare, but also Machiavelli with his contempt for human values. The modern scientific spirit is its descendant, and the story of its achievements is most impressive. Man's life is transformed, almost unimaginably as compared with the Middle Ages and earlier.¹ But how much can the scientist do to enable man to know the right use of the blessings he showers upon him with his medicine and mechanics and wireless and all his new knowledge? Science has transformed man's environment and will go on transforming it, but it is not its business to teach man his place in that environment. For that man must look elsewhere than to the scientist. Scientific humanism is a not unworthy creed, but its moral power is not commensurate to the need of man in an atomic age. It makes a wide appeal, understandably enough, because of the marvellous things science has done. Its ever-increasing knowledge and command over nature's resources creates a presumption that all the mysteries of the universe will sooner or later be made to yield their secrets and so establish man in complete mastery of his environment. Nothing is beyond the reach of his knowledge and power and all shall be made to minister to him. Man is therefore the rightful lord of creation and if he is inclined to worship he is entitled to worship himself, for there is nothing greater or more worshipful. He can bestride his narrow world like a Colossus. He is the measure of all things. He is the master of his fate and the captain of his soul. So it has seemed and so it still seems to some. But of late many are finding it more diffi-

¹ On the Renaissance and its effects, see R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, pp. 64-68, 317 f; Vol. II, pp. 163-190.

cult to rest content with this humanism. The atomic bomb has begun its devastation in the minds of discerning people, as well as on the two hapless Japanese cities. Man has this new power at his disposal, but can he see that it is worthily used, and is it really under his control? Is he big enough, wise enough, good enough, to ensure its application for the enriching of life, and not again for destruction? Is man really master of his fate? Science has put at our disposal vast knowledge and power; that has long been obvious. What is now also becoming obvious is that there is involved in the possession of these endowments a grave moral responsibility. Who is sufficient for these things? The interest shown by some scientists in ethics is significant.¹

There are also to be considered the idealists, whose ancestry is more Christian than that of the humanists (with some of whom they are intermarried). These too are right as far as they go, but they do not go far enough, and they do not always realize how far they stop short of the full truth. They believe that man is essentially good and only needs time to create an environment in which the good life is possible for all. Part of man's innate goodness is a heroism which will in the end overcome all obstacles presented by man's environment. "We needs must love the highest when we see it." Ralph Waldo Emerson and his admirers could believe that. It was perhaps easier to believe it in the nineteenth century, the century of progress. Our twentieth century, which has seen the emblems of progress used as instruments of destruction, finds it more difficult to believe that dogma of inevitable progress. In the disillusion begotten of world wars it seems more obvious that the highest often goes to the wall, and much that is loved gets destroyed. This is a generation evil enough to murder its Gandhi, and it is easy to remember that there was once a generation evil and adulterous enough to see the highest and crucify it.

¹ Cf. *Science and Ethics*, edited by C. H. Waddington (1942).

“Step by step since time began
We see the steady gain of man.”

So it seemed to the Quaker poet, Whittier, and in his day he doubtless found many to share his optimism. The events of a later day, however, have obscured that steady gain, shown that it is in fact incredible. Optimism is not enough. It may be a dangerous falsification of the truth, in particular the truth about what man can do. He ought to love the highest, but in actual fact he often tramples on it, even hates it. This complexity in human nature is fact enough, however little an idealistic creed can make room for it.

Walt Whitman was the poet of a naturalism that looked askance at religion, seeing it only as a repressive force that took joy out of life and forbade men to taste their privilege of living according to nature. He envies the animals because they do not lie awake at night weeping over their sins. Confession of sin was for him a morbid fancy, popularised by religious teachers, but corresponding to nothing real. Whitman could be a bracing tonic and he did well in so far as he persuaded people to turn away from gloomy conventionalism claiming the authority of true religion. But there are fewer today who would hail him as a prophet, and many more who see how much there is to weep over and in consequence are prepared to listen attentively to preaching about sin, whether it be natural to do so or not. Man is not just an animal. He cannot for long regard himself as no more than the beasts that perish. That way madness lies. It is no help towards the solution of his problems to throw off all restraints and try to live in a supposedly “natural” way, tempting as this sometimes is in periods of conventionality. There is a restraint he cannot for long ignore or deny, for it is within him, part of his nature. For he is not simply a body with natural appetites; he is a soul, a personality. He has a conscience, a sense of right and wrong which bids him do this and not that, which tells him he must

not follow the easy, natural, way, but the hard way. Sometimes he must not give in to nature but deny it, look upon it as "lower" nature which is dragging him down, whereas he must rise if he would be free and able to respect himself. And often this inward sense makes him aware that he has *not* done the right thing, the thing which ennobles and gives satisfaction, and because of that he experiences shame and inward turmoil. This is the state of man, knowing shame as well as joy, elated by success and also confused in failure; good on occasion, but also bad. This duality of human experience is the aspect of it most demanding the attention of serious thinkers. Let poets like Whitman blink at the sadder side if they will, and let them persuade whom they can: they are deceivers more than illuminators. For that grimmer aspect is real and to overlook it is to suppress truth. Sin is fact, not pious fiction. The "natural" man is a fiction. Man's life cannot be one of harmony with nature, but is experience of tragic disharmony. He is uneasily poised between animality and godlikeness, and the truest teaching is that which keeps him aware of this and enables him to seek and put himself under the influence of a force that can lead him away from animality towards God, restoring the intolerable antinomy and so bestowing salvation. Thus religion has the sanest diagnosis of man's need and the only remedy for it.

It is time to look more closely at the diagnosis which the Bible offers. Our survey of history and experience should have prepared us for it. This tension which we have referred to as the true summary of the human heart is described by Kraemer in his great theological study of missionary principles as a "fundamental and demonic disharmony". He comments: "This fundamental disharmony is manifested in all the spheres of life in which man moves, and in his cultural and religious achievements. . . . Man's dangerous condition is that he is a dual being. He is of divine origin and he is corrupted by sin and constantly prone to assert his self-centred and disordered

will against the divine will.”¹ Kraemer appositely quotes Pascal’s *Pensées* as evidence of this deep perception: “What a chimera man is! What a novelty, what a monster, how chaotic, how full of contradictions, what a marvell Judge of all things, a stupid earthworm, a depository of truth, a sewer of uncertainty and error, the glory and refuse of the universe.”² This weighty judgment is worthy to be set beside those words of Pascal’s contemporary Shakespeare which we quoted above.³ Shakespeare saw deeply into the human heart, but he lacked the religious insight of Pascal and so failed to appreciate the intensity of man’s spiritual problem. He can record and describe man’s condition, but without confidence that there is any remedy. To go on from description to the announcing of a remedy is the function of a religion of redemption.

What then is the teaching of the book of redemption, the Bible? It is not long in coming to grips with the problem. Its very opening chapters make it clear that man is essentially a creature; i.e. man was created by God and thus he is dependent. High as his position in the scheme of things is, he is not the lord of creation. Such rights and such authority as he possesses are derivative, not self-achieved. They are endowments and he must acknowledge them as such, as the gifts of his Maker. True, he has a special position in God’s design. He and he alone is declared to be in the divine image and likeness. He is thus in one sense distinguished from the creation and entitled to regard himself as set in privilege over against it. But he is not divine; he is not on the Godward side of reality. Over against God he is definitely a part of creation. God alone is creation’s Lord. These are the important implications of the first two chapters of the Bible with reference to human nature. We are immediately carried on to the third chapter and invited to learn that man is unwilling to acknowledge his creaturehood and dependence; and this refusal is regarded by the Biblical

¹ *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*, p. 112.

² *Ibid.*, p. 112.

³ p. 37.

writer as fatal, in fact, as the source of all man's crime, failure and personal unhappiness. The root of sin is man's refusal or inability to accept the conditions of life which God offers; rebellion against what he clearly understands as the divine commandment, which it is quite within his power to obey. Incidentally, Gen. iii is to be interpreted not as a particular mistake, with serious consequences for posterity, made by a married couple on a dateable occasion (not Ussher's date 4004 B.C. made familiar in the margins of many of our Bibles, but some astronomical figure representing more accurately the time of the beginning of human life on this planet). That is the traditional way of interpreting this famous chapter and it is still maintained by fundamentalists. It is to be set aside, however, because it can hardly avoid contradictions concerning the details of the chapter (e.g. the symbolism of the tree and the serpent, the pain of childbirth (v. 16), the necessity of work (v. 19), the origin of clothing (v. 21)), and because it does not do justice to the depth of moral and religious truth which is concentrated in this unforgettable chapter. For the theme of the chapter is not the misfortune of the first man and the first woman, but of man and woman, of Everyman, child of God and toy of Satan, capable of good but often enticed to evil, endowed with moral perception and free to choose right or wrong, but actually choosing the wrong as often as the right, and in consequence plunged into shame and self-loathing. In short, the chapter is a study of the pricking conscience and its implication is that man is nowhere found without a pricking conscience, however much or little he may be sensitive to it. The *fact* of conscience is universal, though the *content* of it varies from age to age and race to race. It need not be denied that men differ individually and according to their national traditions, in what they look upon as their duties and obligations; but underneath all this variety we must not overlook the impressive truth that all do have some sense of moral obligation. The Bible insists that this moral sense or conscience

is always a bad, accusing, guilty one. That is what this classic chapter puts before our attention. Even in a perfect environment man is capable of conduct that involves him in inner tension and shame. Actually, man does not find himself in a perfect environment—that is allowed for in the last two verses of the chapter—but the grimness of the human tragedy is underlined by the way in which it is suggested that even in the midst of perfection, when outward conditions are altogether favourable, man can fall into sin which disrupts everything. Sin is a fact of human experience from the very beginning. There is a problem of evil. Dark and enigmatic and defiant of God's providence as it is, it must be recorded in this unique Book which is concerned to present the truth and nothing but the truth concerning man and his lot upon earth.

Essential man, then, according to the Bible, is man vainly denying his dependence upon God and haughtily ignoring the fact of his creaturehood. He says in his heart, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (cf. Deut. viii, 17-18, Ezek. xxviii, 1-9). He is far from admitting the Psalmist's claim: "Know ye that the Lord he is God; it is he that hath made us and not we ourselves (Ps. c. 3). He boasts of a freedom which he does not in fact possess. He imagines he was born free and he sets himself to see to it that no chains shall fetter that freedom; the serpentine suggestion comes to him that there is a way to secure himself against falling into chains. The divine injunction "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it" is a limitation of that freedom, a fetter that he must break forthwith. He can think out his own commandments, forsooth; and if he so please he can also break them. He will acquire that knowledge. He will make himself as God.

Niebuhr has appropriated this Biblical emphasis in his powerful exposition of the nature and destiny of man, and has described it in terms of finitude. Man cannot or will not admit that his being is finite, but claims infinity. Denying the

claim of God upon him he imagines himself to be in the place of God. Niebuhr also analyses this as pride and takes this to be the root of all sin.¹

This Biblical doctrine, be it noted, is not one of man's *total* depravity. Some Protestant theologians have so developed it, but that is a regrettable over-statement, and has alienated many from the Bible as a whole. The assertion (Gen. i. 26) that man was made in God's image is nowhere retracted in the Bible. In the most forthright prophetic passages denouncing man's sin it is presupposed that he is in this special relationship to God, which cannot be predicated of any other creature; and, in fact, it is this which makes his rebellion so heinous.² Thus the possibility of man's goodness is always recognized as open; man could do good, but so often chooses the evil course. That is the heart of the dilemma. The Bible does not treat man as an automaton; his will is free, and therefore he is responsible for his wrong choices. A doctrine of total depravity cannot consistently regard man as culpable for his wrongdoing; it is incompatible with free will, and on this view there is no moral problem—which is absurd.

We must notice a further point in the Biblical analysis of man's sinful condition. It is not implied that man is simply hardened in repeated wrongdoing, with dulled moral sensibility. The moral problem is seen as fundamentally a religious one. For sin cannot be defined exclusively in moral terms; it can only be defined with reference to God. Thus the stabbing of conscience is thought of as a dialogue with God (Gen. iii. 9-13). In his sin, even while still unrepentant, man cannot shake himself free of his awareness of God. This is a most important insight into the moral situation, for it means that it is sifted to the very depth, and, moreover, through this perception of the divine factor in the situation is revealed the possi-

¹ Cf. *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, pp. 198-220.

² There has been much dispute among theologians as to whether the image of God was lost at the Fall, or only marred. Cf. Niebuhr, *op. cit.* I, pp. 282-286, 292-296. On total depravity, see *Calvin's Institutes*, Bk. II, Chs. I-III.

bility of a way out. Dimly the light of the Gospel is beginning to shimmer through. For the Bible announces not moral condemnation, but moral renewal. It is a book of hope and salvation. It finds the solution of moral problems in religion. Man's experience of sin is at the same time experience of God. When he begins to hate his sin and see it in its true horror, then his feet are being turned into the way of peace and his redemption is drawing nigh. His experience of God, even as sinner, is an awareness not merely of judgment but of mercy and restoration.

Other classic chapters in the Biblical narrative must be briefly looked at. Exodus contains the account of Israel's redemption from Egypt which then becomes symbolic of God's redemption generally. Israel's (=mankind's, whether as nation or individual) need is great and cries to heaven. God hears and takes the initiative in doing for man what man cannot do for himself. That is a point which is stressed repeatedly: the initiative is with God. There are many subordinate features worth noting, but there is no place here for detailed treatment. A theological commentary which will bring out the full significance of the book of Exodus in its relevance to man's perennial need of deliverance from bondage is much to be desired.

Before we pass on from the book of Exodus we may notice one thing more, apart from the dramatic story of the redemption itself. The writer had no illusions. He was well aware that to experience redemption is not to be happy ever after, as the older novelists were wont to suggest about marriage. Man is quite capable of taking divine benefits and squandering them; of saying, as it were, Thank You, and straightway forgetting the Giver and returning to sinful habits. In this connection Exodus xvi. 3, xvii. 3, and the whole moving narrative of chapter xxxii repay careful reading.¹ Redemption for man needs to be not one act but a series of acts of God on his behalf. It must be a redeeming *process*. And this indeed is what

¹ Cf. also Jer. vii. 22-27; Num. xiv; Deut. ix; Ps. lxxxvi, cvi.

the Bible proclaims as its drama unfolds. God is constantly watching the course of human history, observing man's need, hearing his cry, awaiting the opportunity of intervening to greatest effect for man's good, taking infinite pains¹ and showing infinite patience in His concern that mankind shall in the end find the way to righteousness.

Attention must be given to the idea of the covenant, which runs like a thread through the whole Bible, from Old Testament on into the New. The idea is often implied (e.g. in the prophets) even where the actual word covenant does not occur. The book of Deuteronomy is fundamental for the understanding of this. For an explanation of what the covenant relationship means, see below, pp. 95-104.² Here it must suffice to point out that Israel's experience of God's covenant was experience of it as broken and needing to be re-established. But could a broken covenant be re-made? That was the dilemma. In law and ordinary life a contract is null and void if one of the committed parties defaults from his engagement. So, in this religious covenant, Israel has no right to expect that the covenant relationship, strained to breaking point and beyond by her failure to "keep the statutes and judgments" which were her obligation under the covenant, can possibly be renewed. By her own action she has turned from her security with God. She is morally bankrupt. She can do nothing to put herself right. It appears "that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. vi. 5), or, in the words of Jeremiah: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jer. xiii. 23). Here again is the frank recognition of mankind's desperate moral need. In bare justice man has no

¹ Jeremiah's expressive phrase is noteworthy in this regard: "I have sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them." (vii. 25; cf. xi. 7.)

² Cf. also article "Covenant" in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* and A. B. Davidson's *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 235-289.

further claim on God, no right to expect further help from God. God is, as it were, quit of His obligation under the covenant because it is the other partner who has failed to fulfil his obligation. But—here is the unexpected hope, and here is where Biblical religion stands revealed as a religion of redemption matched to man's moral need and not simply the true diagnosis of that need—God does not take that easy way out. He does not leave man in his sin. He is too much concerned that man shall be educated and uplifted to the way of goodness. It depends on God entirely whether the covenant shall be persisted with or not, and His decision is that it must and shall. The life and work, death and resurrection of Christ is the supreme example of this saving activity of God.

We come to the New Testament, to which this covenant idea provides a bridge. The human problem in a nutshell may be stated thus: Man knows what he ought to do, but yet does not do it. It was precisely this problem to which the Saviour Christ addressed himself. It was his proper work, and in his successful dealing with it his divinity is manifested. "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, *and for sin*, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom. viii, 3-4). It does not appear to have been typical of Jesus to give long disquisitions on the nature of sin, though he did on occasion denounce sinful men with bitter indignation: the Pharisees, his chief critics, for example (cf. Matt. xxiii). In this He is to be distinguished both from the prophets who preceded Him, in particular John the Baptist; and from the rabbinically trained Pharisee who became His greatest interpreter. Jesus perhaps did not talk much about sin. Our Gospel records at any rate give no ground for supposing this, and therein they are very different from Paul's epistle to the Romans. But He had no illusions about sin and never made light of it. He was aware of it as the chief plague-spot in the life of Israel and Rome, and in the hearts of individual Israelites and Gentiles, and He understood His own divinely-appointed

task to be that of liberating men from it. He was to be the healer of body and soul. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners. His mission was to seek and to save the lost. The implications of "lostness" are very far-reaching, and it seems to have been a term often on Jesus' lips as He contemplated the need of those around Him for whose sake He was willing to spend and be spent. Luke xv is one of the most significant chapters of the Gospels in this connection, and its varied applications are worth serious study. Some are lost and do nothing to call attention to their lostness or to make easier their being found (like the lost coin which rolls into a dark corner and does nothing toward getting found by the anxious housewife). That is one aspect of man's lost condition: inability to provide a way out. Others are like the sheep: fearful and frantic and making it increasingly difficult for the shepherd to find it; or like the prodigal son, to the picture of whose "lostness" human self-centredness, love of pleasure and disregard of the claim of others has contributed. This and much more is implied in these pregnant parables.

It is clear that Jesus made the same assumptions about man's sin and need as did His prophetic forerunners in their own radical diagnosis. It was not flattering to human nature, but it was true, and Jesus endorsed it with silent approval. He stands on the shoulders of those prophets. He does not Himself need to repeat their analysis of the human situation. He can proceed forthwith to deal with that situation. He refers to his contemporaries as "an evil and adulterous generation" (perhaps then actually quoting John the Baptist). John the Baptist had called his hearers with stern warning to repentance. Jesus also called to repentance. The new thing with Him was that He made it His business to lead to repentance, to make men *feel* penitent. We need not be deceived by those like Rénan who have seen in Jesus the sunny optimist of the fair green hills of Galilee. Jesus, like the prophets, is neither optimist nor pessimist, but realist in his judgment of human nature. "He knew all men, and

needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man" (John ii. 24-25).

One more significant parable may be referred to here, the parable of the great supper in its Lucan form (Luke xiv. 15-24).¹ The main point here is the marvel of God's free invitation. All are acceptable; no one need stay away from His table through a feeling of shame or unfitness. The kingdom is for all. But the corollary is almost as important as the main emphasis. There are some who make excuse. Men are capable of saying No to divine invitations, just as much as they are of refusing to obey divine commands. Jesus was cognisant of this factor in human recalcitrance. Man's perversity is as deep as that, and he who would minister to man dare not shut his eyes to it. There is a sin "that hath never forgiveness".² (Mark iii. 29). So far from always loving the highest when they see it, men are found sometimes hating it, fighting against it, yea crucifying it. For these sterner sayings of Jesus are the result not only of His observation of human behaviour, but of His own experience, which was one of criticism, mockery and finally rejection. Nor was this a surprise to Him. He clearly discerned to what lengths He would be driven if He adhered to His purpose of facing human malignity to the full. "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected of the elders and of the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again"³ (Mark viii, 31). The depth of the tragedy is that men do say: Evil, be thou my good; for there were those whose comment on Jesus' works of healing was: "He hath Beelzebub, and by the Prince of the devils casteth he out devils" (Mark iii. 22). Such is the measure of the problem in our Lord's own estimation of it. So bitter was His cup, but

¹ The Matthaean form (Matt. xxii. 1-14) is developed differently and is less important theologically.

² A notorious stumbling-block. How final is this pronouncement of Jesus? Does it mean that there are some things in man too hard for even God to put right? Or is this but an example of Semitic hyperbole and not to be pressed to a literal interpretation?

³ Cf. also Mark ix. 31, x. 33-34. The reiteration is significant.

He drank of it, in obedience to the will of His Father, and for the sake of us men and our salvation.¹

In varied Rabbinic phraseology and with impetuous logic the Apostle Paul re-stated these presuppositions as he expounded the Gospel of the Lord Jesus to his converts and critics. Upon the background of man's exceeding sinfulness Paul knew how to throw the searchlight of that Gospel. The classic passage in his epistles is Romans i-iii, where he argues the moral bankruptcy of man. All without exception, Jew and Gentile, nation and individual, privileged and unprivileged, slave and freeman, educated and ignorant, fail to live up to the moral standards they acknowledge. No human achievement is perfect. None has attained righteousness. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." The whole world is guilty before God. The accumulated argument of these three chapters is as relevant to our world as it was to that Roman world of the first century A.D. It is not a pleasant picture but it is a true one, and as a preliminary to our preaching of the Gospel we have to plead with people to face true facts. A summons to do one's duty and optimistic talk about progress are not adequate to the situation. But in spite of the magnitude of man's failure to achieve either the perfect society or individual rectitude, the situation is not hopeless. For Paul is able to declare that God is at work in this situation. Through what Christ was and did, there are being made available new resources of moral power. A righteousness of God is being revealed.

Man's patent lack of righteousness after generations of striving constituted a task which Christ has undertaken. In him God is intervening to provide a new way. Man can find no way out of the predicament wherein his achievements are vitiated by his pride and self-regard. No moral code, not even the Mosaic, can give guarantee of moral victory. There is no power available which can keep man morally on a level with what he is intellectually and outwardly. No exhortation or

¹ Cf. Mark xiv. 35-36.

warning, not even the pleadings of tender and lonely Jeremiah nor the intellectual integrity of Socrates, have proved potent enough to deter their hearers from walking into the consequences of their folly.

Because of this Christ was born. To deal with this was, and eternally is, His God-given task.

CHAPTER III

CHRIST AND HIS SUCCOUR

God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.—
Ps. lxxiv, 12.

*Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under
heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.—*ACTS iv. 12.

*There is a way for man to rise
To that sublime abode;
An offering and a sacrifice,
A Holy Spirit's energies,
An Advocate with God.*

T. BINNEY.

WE are now in a position to consider what it is that God through Christ does for man. What is Salvation and how is it appropriated? What does the Bible say and mean, and what is the actual experience of "those who are being saved" of whom we read that the Lord added them daily to the Church (Acts ii. 47)?

We must be on guard, while we use the great words which have loomed large in theological discussion of this, words like justification, regeneration and atonement, against falling into the confusion of those angelic beings whom Milton describes, who

" . . . reasoned high
Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,
Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,
And found no end, in wandering mazes lost."

What does Christ do for us? How does He make all the difference to life that Christian experience professes; all the difference, that is, between being in the way of goodness and

giving up the hope of being good, between having a sense of purpose and living in despair? There are two ways of finding an answer to this question. The first and obvious way is to ask Christian people—preferably not parsons or church workers, but any whose membership of a Christian Church is manifestly sincere and has meant something creative in their lives. The other way is to seek the correct interpretation of the main New Testament affirmations about the power of faith and the influence of Christ on the lives of those who believe in Him.

The first way recommends itself as the obvious starting point. It is of course related to the second because no Christian can speak of the radical redirection of his life without sooner or later referring to the New Testament. There is a difficulty, however, arising from the understandable shyness of most people in speaking of the things that move them most deeply.

The Oxford Group Movement may come to mind in this connection. The criticism may be permitted that their testimony in a large number of cases was not really to the power of Christ among them so much as to their own efforts, their new moralism, and the effectiveness of the discipline of the Quiet Time. If we are to speak as they do of moral rearmament—a splendid battle cry—we must put the question to them in this way: Do you mean that you demand moral rearmament or that Christ offers it? Probably their answer is, Both, but in the last analysis the element of demand preponderates, and our verdict must be that this is not quite the authentic Christian experience of saving Gospel, but a doctrine of self-help and strenuous endeavour. It can be salutary as a counter-balance to sentimentality about the grace of God and the experience of conversion, or to the kind of argument one sometimes hears about the superiority of the Gospel to “mere ethics”, argument that may be supported by false exegesis of such Biblical passages as Isa. lxiv. 6 (“all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags”). But taken by itself this emphasis on the importance of morals is no substitute for the Gospel. It puts

the centre of gravity elsewhere than where the New Testament puts it.

We proceed then along a different road in our consideration of the ordinary Christian's experience of Christ's significance for him, supplementing such personal testimony as we can obtain with self-examination, and, let us add, imagination.¹

The Christian life begins, if not with conversion, at least with some decision, some response to the Gospel; or, in the case of those who have had the privilege of being brought up in a Christian home, recognition of the worth of that influence and a fuller appropriation and evaluation of it. The question: Conversion or Education? cannot be dealt with here. It is not germane to our present subject, which is not the origin, but the content, of Christian experience.

The Christian affirms that somehow he has come to know Christ and has been brought to see in Him the main directing influence in his life, and he has then committed himself to Christ. He has "surrendered", to use the time-honoured word; or to quote Paul's expressive phrase, he has been "apprehended" by Christ (Phil. iii. 12). Notice this: the passive voice will often seem more appropriate for describing Christian experience than the active; whether it was the original decision, or our later conduct, or a particular act, it seems to be not simply our doing but Christ's doing in and for us.² And how is it from day to day in the ordinary routine of life? What is it that differentiates the Christian from the non-Christian? Nothing, says the cynic. The social ineffectiveness of the former, jeers the Marxist. The wiser critic may murmur: Time will tell; await the unprejudiced verdict of mankind as a whole. The Christian himself had best not try to answer his critics in words, but get on with his daily living under the guidance of Christ. The final judgment is the prerogative of God, and we shall not know how much, if at all, Christians are more

¹ These pages are not written as the result of a Gallup poll sort of enquiry!

² Cf. especially Phil. ii. 12, 13 on this twofold aspect of the Christian life.

worthy than non-Christians until that great day when the sheep are separated from the goats.

The Christian thinks about Christ ("meditation" used to be considered the correct word); reads about Him in the Bible, especially the Gospels which more directly bring the figure of Christ before the mind; prays to Him, if possible every day. And there can be genuine prayer and concentration without any spoken word or bending of the knee. Out of this inward contact comes a sense of Christ as present and an understanding of what He wishes His trusting servant to do: a general preparedness to do Christian actions. Christian conduct is thus the natural outflow of devotion or personal worship of the Lord. In a particular opportunity or temptation, particular guidance is sometimes felt. It is presupposed that Christ is alive, a real presence, and that the believer's contact with Him is not to be analysed as veneration of a dead teacher, or a great figure of the past who makes a continuing impression in virtue of having been martyred for a noble cause. The worshipper's sense of the reality of the unseen Lord is not always very vivid. His moods vary a great deal. On occasion he may know unbelief. Even the great Christian mystics have spoken of "a dark night of the soul". That however is but a mark of our humanity and of the dulling effect of environment; and psychology has a ready explanation of it. But the objective reality of Christ is not in question. Many may disbelieve this, in which case they will not call themselves Christians, and the privilege of Christian faith has not yet been granted them. But we are concerned at the moment with the Christian believer, and for him in the interpretation of his experience the reality of the risen Lord is axiomatic. However vividly or otherwise he apprehends Him he knows that Christ controls his life, encouraging him in success, causing him shame in failure, but always leading. Moral power is His enabling. Apart from Him life seems inconceivable, for He alone makes life have purpose and meaning.

We have next to consider Christian experience as contained in the writings of great saints and scholars, and stored up in creeds and statements of faith; for these latter are ultimately rooted in experience. In so far as creeds are the deposit of mature reflection upon Christian experience, and not mere speculation, they merit respect and there is no need to be suspicious of them.¹ All that can be attempted here is a summary of some of the main convictions of Christian tradition, especially the "pure and reformed part of it", about the power of Christ in the believer. We are dealing with what is generally called the work of Christ.

Axiomatic is the assumption that the believer needs Christ as an ever present help; of himself he can do nothing; all his righteousness is as filthy rags. The Gospel is not a gospel of self-help, but of God's intervention. This is the heart of what is known in the somewhat forbidding Rabbinical terminology of Paul as justification by faith, to which the Reformers were wont to add the emphatic adjective "alone": by faith alone, as Luther insisted. Fundamentally man cannot do anything towards attaining personal goodness and living up to his moral standards. Only by divine enabling can he make progress here. The perception of this—and how loath human self-respect is to admit it!—marks the beginning of genuine Christian experience and distinguishes the Christian from the non-Christian. All is of grace, grace being that willingness on God's part to help man, and faith being its correlative on man's part. Faith is thus essentially a response, rather than an act of man's own independent volition. "By grace are ye saved, through faith;

¹ Even Congregationalists have felt it proper on occasion to issue agreed statements of what they believed, as in the famous Savoy Declaration of 1658, or in the less known Declaration adopted in 1833 as one of the first things to which the newly-formed Congregational Union of England and Wales gave its attention. I quote from the Preliminary Notes of that Declaration: "Disallowing the utility of creeds and articles of religion as a bond of union, and protesting against subscription to any human formularies as a term of communion, Congregationalists are yet willing to declare, for general information, what is commonly believed among them, reserving to everyone the most perfect liberty of conscience" (Peel, *These Hundred Years*, p. 70).

and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. ii. 8, 9). This is, of course, intolerable to humanistic presuppositions. There is that in all of us, particularly us westerners, which demands that we be allowed to paddle our own canoe. If our soul is to be saved we ourselves will be its saviours. If our fate is to be mastered only we can achieve that mastery. Why should we look elsewhere for help? The saviour can only be the resources of our own personality, and it is both useless and abject to pray for divine help: "Lord Jesus, who by Thy cross and precious blood hast redeemed us, save us and help us we humbly beseech Thee." This is the spirit of activism and moralism, and no one who takes moral living seriously is a stranger to it. Ancient Jewish legalism, as exemplified in the Pharisees of our Lord's day, was largely motivated by it; and the most notable advocate of it in modern times was the philosopher Kant who has introduced modern ethics to the concept of the Categorical Imperative, the elemental sense of right and wrong which carries with it the obligation to do the right at all costs: You must because you can. Kant thought he had grounded this conception in religion, but not all subsequent thinkers agree that he has done this satisfactorily. Kant's religion must be pronounced in the light of the New Testament and of the insights of Reformed Theology a religion of works and not of grace. Nevertheless all may be grateful for what Kant did to reassert the centrality of morals rather than metaphysics in religion, and for his illumination of the nature and importance of conscience (for that is what we simpler minds may be content to make of what the great philosopher called the Categorical Imperative). The Irish monk, Pelagius, in the late fourth century drew attention to this issue by his insistence that all Christians should strive earnestly after goodness, and not excuse themselves, as apparently was the tendency of that time, by saying that Adam's sin vitiated human nature permanently and made goodness unattainable for his posterity.

It was a notable protest against the doctrine of the double standard which was then being adopted: one standard of conduct for the Church's officials and another, lower, standard for the ordinary Church member.¹ The monastic movement was a protest against the declining moral temperature within the church which was caused by the increasing number of adherents, especially since the last great persecution under Diocletian in the years A.D. 302-304. Monks were those who in order to practise the commands of Christ went out of the world and out of the church. It is important to remember that Pelagius was among them. His protest was timely, both because it reasserted the inescapability for the Christian of the obligation to moral endeavour, and also because it drew forth from his chief critic, St. Augustine, classic expositions of its inadequacy as a full statement of the Christian faith, and of the fact that in Christian experience there is something prior even to the resolution to strive after goodness, namely, humble recognition of the grace of God. Augustine may conceivably not have been such a good man as Pelagius; nevertheless, his teaching was a more balanced setting out of what essential Christianity was, for he perceived, as Pelagius did not, that the centre of gravity was not the need to strive after goodness, but man's inability to do so apart from divine succour; Christianity is therefore a religion of grace. Understandably enough, Pelagianism has come to be used in the sense of the misinterpretation of the Gospel as simply the demand for good deeds and the assertion of the claim of duty; and Augustinianism stands for the antithesis of this, namely, the recognition that the Gospel is primarily concerned not with man's deeds, but with God's grace, whereby man is made capable of doing his duty, or, in Pauline phrase, of "fulfilling the works of the Law".

This so-called Pelagian controversy is thus of long standing

¹ On all this see the discussions in the text books of the history of Doctrine; especially Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Vol. V, pp. 168-221, and Kirk, *Vision of God*, p. 240-257, 517-534.

and it deals with the central moral issue.¹ No Christian but must recognize the importance of Pelagius's emphasis. But that is not to be allowed to stand as the essence of Christianity. The balance comes down on the side of the Augustinian emphasis. The primary thing is not what men have to do, but what God has done, and is constantly doing, in His dealings with believers through Christ. The Christian's ground of hope is in this divine action, and in the fact that God has made man's problem His problem.

The authority for believing this miracle—for it is no common everyday matter—is, as has been said, the fact that it is the experience of Christian people, today as in previous generations, with whatever eloquence or lack of eloquence they are able to testify to it, and in spite of the timidity of many in so testifying at all. But there is another reason. This miracle is not an imaginary one, not just a comforting thought, but is connected with certain events, certain particular things that actually happened in ancient Israel and eventually found their culmination in the life and work of Jesus Christ. The life of the Christian Church since then is the continuation of those events, and there is truth in the statement that the Church is the extension of the Incarnation. Of that we must speak more in the next chapter. The present point is that the events which constitute the life of Jesus are the sheet anchor of the Christian conviction that God is active in the world for the salvation of man.

Those events were not bare events, of course. A bare event finds a place in no history, for history is selection of events that have significance. They were events that had meaning given to them by Christ Himself, and by the Apostles who were the first witnesses of them and were actually commissioned by Christ to make their significance known throughout Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. What interpretation did they, following the Lord's own guidance in the

¹ It has analogies outside Christianity, e.g. in the Bhakti sects of India. On this see Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*, pp. 166-173.

matter as well as His command, place upon those basic events?

The answer is a varied one. The creative act wrought by Christ for man's good has many aspects, five of which will be briefly considered here. First, Christ established the Kingdom of God; secondly, He inaugurated the New Covenant between God and man (Israel); thirdly, He overthrew the powers of evil; fourthly, He caused the Holy Spirit to be poured out; fifthly, He manifested God's righteousness.

(1) Christ's establishment of the Kingdom of God is now seen in the light of recent New Testament scholarship¹ to have been His dominating achievement. God's kingship or sovereignty (the true meaning of the word rendered "kingdom" in the New Testament) was never in doubt, but in Israel's history before the coming of Christ it had been obscured, flouted by the fury of the heathen and by Israel's own rebelliousness, and thus to some extent limited as far as its manifestation on earth was concerned.² It remained the object of prayer and hope, and the utmost that the most fervent piety could profess was that it was "at hand". This imminence of the Kingdom was the main burden of John the Baptist's message. Jesus proclaimed not merely this, but that it had actually come and was present, so that men and women could be living in it here and now. His own ministry in fact was being made by the overruling power of God to have this effect, and His teaching was, as it were, both the conditions of entrance and the laws of the Kingdom. This emphasis on the Kingdom as present experience, not simply the end of history, is the distinguishing feature of Jesus' teaching as compared with that of all the prophets before Him. The age to come—to use Rabbinic terminology with which Jesus must have been familiar³—had somehow actually come and was in some sense

¹ Particularly the work of Professor Dodd. See his books, *The Parables of the Kingdom* and *History and the Gospel*.

² Cf. Ps. xcvi. 1, xcix. 1, cxlv. 10-13, which assert the divine sovereignty, but cf. Ps. lxxiv.

³ Cf. Gal. i. 4, I Cor. x. 11.

contemporaneous with this age. It was Jesus' doing and it was marvellous in men's eyes. Where He was the Kingdom of God was realized; the Kingdom of God came because the will of God was done; the second and third petitions in the Lord's Prayer mean practically the same thing. Jesus was, in fact, the embodiment of the Kingdom, as the great scholar Origen (A.D. 185-254) later perceived, neatly coining a new Greek word to express it; or, as Tertullian (A.D. 200) put it, the Kingdom of God is Christ Himself. In the Jewish terminology of Jesus' own time this meant that He was Messiah, that being the obvious expression to use for one who was the inaugurator of God's Kingdom on earth. Owing to the alien ideas attached to Messiahship in the minds of many of His contemporaries, ideas of a political Messiah who would lead revolt against Rome, for example, Jesus was uneasy about the application of the term to Himself, but in a more spiritual sense He could hardly deny His Messiahship. We may affirm that He did think of Himself as Messiah¹ and would permit His disciples to attribute Messiahship to Him with two provisos; (a) that the Messiah-ideal is to be combined with the Servant of the Lord ideal,² (b) that the Kingdom is given precedence over the Messiah. Jesus' main concern was to persuade His hearers that God's Kingdom was open to them, if only they would in penitence open their hearts to His teaching and order their lives in accordance with it. Then if they go on to ask who He is they might answer: The Messiah, the nature of His teaching and activity being sufficient evidence that He was not a false Messiah or a mere political agitator. But to think of His Messiahship first and His Kingdom second was to put the cart before the horse. Jesus' prime work then was to make it possible and attractive for men so to take their God seriously, and so to let Him have His way with them and rule through

¹ Professor Duncan's important study *The Son of Man* urges caution here.

² This is the point of the rebuke to Peter and the teaching given on that occasion: Mark viii. 27-38.

them, that God's sovereignty would be actualized on earth to a hitherto unprecedented degree; His will would, in fact, be done, and His Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

The following are the most important passages in the Gospels on this subject of the Kingdom as not merely future but present: Mark iii. 22-27; iv. 11, 12, 21-32; ix. 1-13; x. 14-15, 23-25, with the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke; Luke iv. 16-21; vii. 19-23, 28; x. 17-24; xi. 20; xvi. 16 (cf. Matt. xi. 12); xvii. 20-21. There are many passages where Jesus speaks of the future consummation of the Kingdom. He had not abandoned that idea; but it is not distinctive of His teaching.

(2) Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant. Israel's experience had been one of repeated inability to live up to the standards which her conscience accepted and which she had been taught to regard as revealed at an early crisis in her history when the great leader, Moses, was organizing her life on a new basis after the miracle of the escape from Egypt. That deliverance was interpreted by Moses as a signal act of divine favour, and as an indication that God looked upon Israel with peculiar interest and wanted to have her in an intimate relation with Himself which would impregnate her national life with such possibilities of moral and religious progress as would give her a unique place amongst the nations. If Israel could respond to that appeal and accept the obligation of obedience to what was known as the Will of God, a covenant relationship would be established. In theory this is what took place under Moses' leadership. But subsequently Israel had constantly failed to fulfil her obligation and the Covenant was broken. Only the tender mercy of God made possible new beginnings. The function of the prophets was to plead God's mercy and summon the recalcitrant nation to repentance. One of them considered the religious condition of his contemporaries so hopeless that an entirely new start in religion was the only thing that could be desired; and he had enough faith to believe that God would somehow bring this about. This was Jere-

miah's famous prophecy of the New Covenant (Jer. xxxi. 31-34). Jesus must have had this passage much in mind, and He interpreted His own mission in the light of it. For on the last night of His life, at supper with His disciples, while His mind is solemn at the thought of His approaching death which He gladly offers to God as the means of ushering in a new order of life, He interprets that death in terms of Jeremiah's prophecy (Mark xiv. 24, reading "covenant", which is a more correct rendering of the Greek here than "testament"). He made the supreme sacrifice trusting that in the divine economy it would be effective in bringing men into the right relationship with God their Redeemer. That certainly was the main object of His ministry: to establish a new order, a new possibility of living for His nation and ultimately for all mankind, whereby it could see its divinely-appointed destiny in a new light and throw itself with new determination into the realization of it. On this fresh basis the harmony between man and God, hitherto always broken or partial, would at last have a chance of achievement. His teaching had demonstrated what that harmony would involve. The giving of His life would be the sign of His complete conviction about this, and His final pleading with men. How death could be the means of bringing about such a result, inaugurating the New Covenant, it is difficult for us to say, and perhaps He Himself could have given no explanation. He, no doubt, shared the belief of the Jews in the efficacy of sacrifice, and it would be natural to Him to think of a covenant as needing blood-sacrifice to ratify it.¹ Nowhere in the Old Testament do we find a rationale of sacrifice; it seems to have been accepted without query as the divinely ordained ritual for man's approach to God. The crude practice does, however, hint at realities in the moral and religious realm, and there is an outstanding passage in the Old Testament which is pregnant with a suggestion of this kind: Isaiah liii. There is no limit to what God may bring to pass through a human life

¹ Cf. Exod. xxiv. 1-8.

so fully dedicated and surrendered as to be poured out in death. It is not a question of the sacrificial act itself, but of the God Who is almighty redeeming love, and of what He can do with such quality of life when it is freely offered to Him. We may well assume that thoughts such as these were present to the mind of Jesus and determined His resolve concerning His own sacrificial death. The outcome is a fact of history open for all to see.¹

(3) *Jesus' authority over demons*: Those passages in the Gospels—and they are frequent—which describe Jesus casting out devils probably create an impression of unreality in many people, and suggest that we are in the realm of mythology rather than of history. We must admit that the attribution of inexplicable disease² to the indwelling of evil spirits is not tenable in these days of psychotherapy; we may also admit that Jesus was a child of His age in holding that belief. But we still have to come to grips with the question of the real significance of these exorcism stories. Even if we think a modern nerve specialist or psychiatrist would effect the cures here described by the use of other methods, we shall be prepared to allow that Jesus did work marvellous healings; and we shall overlook the crudity of His diagnosis! But here we are dealing with more than healings, whether of mind or body, and our comparison of ancient and modern methods is beside the point. We are up against the irrational factor: the problem of evil, which is more sinister and less patent of precise formulation than the problem of pain. Who can be confident here? The question which Macbeth asked so frantically: "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased?" is a question in face of which modern medical science is no more confident than the practitioners of the ancient world. It is the expression of man's

¹ For fuller discussion of this difficult question consult, beside the commentaries, Vincent Taylor's thorough and illuminating study *Jesus and His Sacrifice*.

² Fits and epilepsy and mental disorders of all kinds seem to have been the maladies which demanded devils for their explanation. Mark clearly distinguishes them from the more normal troubles, fever, paralysis, and even leprosy.

haunting malaise before radical Evil; just as, in Shakespeare's play, Macbeth is under the increasing pressure of that evil to which his own wrong ambitions opened the door, and which is now mastering him; his question implies more than: "Can you not heal my wife of her strange phobia?", and is not unrelated to the outburst of St. Paul tormented by his inability to live up to what he knew to be right: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 24).

In representing Jesus, therefore, as the great exorciser of demons, the Gospels are really affirming that He ministers to the mind diseased of humanity. He can confront victoriously the power of Evil, whatever form it may assume. The sinister influences that prey on human life are, as it were, drawn to action by Him, and in the ensuing conflict robbed of their sting. These malign powers are real enough, but not so real as the power of His healing and liberation. This is what is implied when Mark characterizes Jesus' ministry as one of teaching and healing. The teaching is the challenge to the evil powers; the healings are the actual assaults upon their strongholds. Let Satan look to his laurels! He has been hitherto the strong man armed, holding mankind in thralldom; but now a mightier than he is present, seeking to liberate mankind from that thralldom.¹ The issue is joined. The powers of evil are on the run. Christ is Victor. God's kingdom is being established, and Satan's hath an end. So Jesus was known in the days of His flesh; and in the subsequent experience of His Church His victory has continued to be made known, with the result that it has a dominant place in the Church's proclamation.

(4) *Christ and the Spirit*: There is remarkably little in the teaching of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, about the Holy Spirit.² Our main source is the Johannine teaching embodied

¹ See Mark iii. 22-29 and parallels, the most instructive passage of the Gospels in this connection; for the implications in the Christian life, cf. Eph. vi. 10-17. Aulen's book *Christus Victor* is a notable study of the doctrine.

² An excellent recent study is C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel tradition*.

in the Farewell Discourses.¹ But there is also that clear pre-supposition of the earliest Christian preaching, as exemplified in Acts, that this new development which was the Christian Church, with its new awareness that God was in action for the salvation of man, and all the hope and confidence and moral dynamic that resulted from that conviction, had been made possible by the Risen Lord's gift of the Holy Spirit.² Further, we have the important Pauline development of thought about the Spirit which is a progressive moralization of it. Paul emphasized that every Church member, not gifted leaders and preachers only, is to be regarded as possessing the Spirit; and that the evidence of the presence of the Spirit was not showy gifts like eloquent speech, nor abnormal experiences like ecstasy or "speaking with tongues", but the growth of Christian character and willingness to serve the brethren and build up the church—in short, *agape*, love.³ The Spirit is not impersonal, but is to be understood in terms of the character of Jesus, for "the Lord is the Spirit".⁴

Paul would have agreed with the Johannine writer that the Spirit is Christ's "other self", the mode of His continuing presence among his own. And this for us is the sum of the matter. The Spirit is divine power still available in the Church, for illumination, guidance and moral dynamic. It is the outcome of Christ's life and ministry and is, in fact, the continuation of His ministry under new conditions. As He had a body of human flesh, so now He has a new body in the community which He founded. The church is His body and He by the Spirit is its true life. Through it He mediates the higher life and it is His instrument for the redemption of man.

(5) *Christ as revealer of a new righteousness of God:* Our main source passages for this are Rom. i. 17 (in its whole context of

¹ John xiv. 16-26, xv. 26-7, xvi. 7-15.

² Acts ii. 4, 16-18, 33, x. 44-47.

³ On which he wrote the famous passage I Cor. xiii. This is part of the wide discussion of spirit gifts, I Cor. xii-xiv. Cf. also Rom. viii. 1-17 and Gal. v. 16-26.

⁴ II Cor. iii. 17.

Rom. i-iii) and the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. v-vii). In his survey of the spread of the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire, Paul sees it as a process which restores moral power to a generation that had lost it. Consciously or unconsciously, they were holding down the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. i. 18); even those who made profession of righteous living were nevertheless involved in the common guilt (Rom. iii. 9-12). But the Gospel brings a new promise, The Kingdom of God has come. Paul is translating that phrase into terms more easily intelligible to non-Jews when he writes that "the righteousness of God is being revealed" (Rom. i. 17; note the present tense of the verb, indicating a continuing operation), "has been manifested" (Rom. iii. 21). We should follow Anderson Scott¹ in taking revelation here in the sense of communication to man. This is the outcome, far beyond the bounds of Judaism, of the mighty work of Jesus for righteousness' sake.

One aspect of the teaching of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, is an exposition of this new righteousness, the moral ideal, the kind of life God has a right to expect from his creatures. It is not a systematic exposition, but it has the depth of insight and the crystal clarity typical of Semitic wisdom, and, moreover, it bears the stamp of the mind of Jesus. Semitic, too, is its mode of expression, in aphorism and parable. Most of it that matters for our present purpose is contained in the careful compilation of the evangelist Matthew, which we know as the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew's object in referring to the mountain (Matt. v. 1) may well have been to hint at the parallelism with the law-giving to Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. xxiv. 9-18); for Christ is a second and greater Moses, and His teaching is God's new law, not for Israel only but for all mankind.

What are we to make of these mighty imperatives? Who has not felt sympathy with the reference to them as "merciless

¹ *Christianity according to St. Paul*, p. 63.

moral demands"?¹ Or with the wisecrack of one of Rose Macaulay's characters:² "All this Sermon-on-the-Mount-but-no-miracle business is most saddening, because it's about impossibilities. You can receive a sacrament, and you can find salvation, but you can't live the Sermon on the Mount." That remark indicates the centre of the problem: Unless there is a miracle of help, how can anybody attain or even dream of attaining these high standards? Are they not in their effect like some peerless performance, say of Leon Goossens on the oboe or of Don Bradman at cricket; instead of stimulating the observer to harder practice on his own account, they induce despair of ever attaining such perfection.

The answer to this setting of the challenge raised by the Sermon is that the teaching of Jesus is not perfectionism, an ideal that cannot be taken seriously, a moral rigorism too frightening to be productive of good living. For He who makes these demands is not aloof and remote upon His mountain-top. We who are expected to take Him seriously are gathered round Him as He teaches. It must be remembered in the interpretation of the Sermon that it was addressed to disciples (Matt. v. 1), that is to say, to those who are in a living relationship to the Teacher, and know what His personal encouragement is, and, more than that, His presence with them as they strive to obey His precepts. The Sermon on the Mount is not intended to be taken as his ethical norm by the non-Christian who as yet knows nothing of the love and power of Christ. It is addressed to those who have committed themselves to Him in humble dependance, for whom His regal "But I say unto you . . ." carries the undertone: "I who am not a policeman watching for your transgressions, but your Saviour, waiting to inspire you and to aid you when you fail."

In the practice of Christ's commandments, the Christian

¹ A. M. Hunter, *The Unity of the New Testament*, p. 85. R. Niebuhr characterizes the Christian ethic as an "impossible possibility" (*Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p. 129-131).

² Grandmamma in *Dangerous Ages*.

knows failure often enough, but failure is not the end of discipleship, but a fresh realization of Christ's mercy:

"To those who fall how kind Thou art,
How good to those who seek."

The Christian may not presume on that mercy. The attitude of "God will forgive me; that's his job"¹ is unthinkable for him. There can be no trifling and no self-excuse for the Christian in the matter of his moral obligation.

God demands goodness; the law must be fulfilled; Christ restated it with that end in view. But in so far as He is not simply Lawgiver but Redeemer, He has made moral resources available for those who take His yoke upon their backs, and this makes His yoke an easy one and His burden light (Matt. xi. 30). The moral resources are what we have already described (p. 72 above) as the endowment of the Holy Spirit.²

The distinctiveness of Jesus as a moralist is that He not only demonstrated what true morality was, but made it appear in a fresh light. He made it attractive. As He made His sternest demands, were His features always unrelaxed and stern? May we not dare to picture His face relaxed into a smile of reassurance? No artist may dare to try to represent such a smile; but surely it would show on a photograph, if a photograph were available. Among the most instructive passages of the Gospels in this connection are Luke vii. 36-50 and Luke xix. 1-10.³ They testify not so much to His high moral demands as to His way of helping individual people to face up to those demands. They teach us much about His method and the power of His personality.

There was in Him a personal magnetism which without denunciation was able to make people ashamed of their short-

¹ Attributed to the sceptic Heine on his death-bed.

² Cf. Rom. viii. 1-4 and, more in detail on the Christian's moral obligation, Rom. vi. 11-23.

³ And how much did Paul mean by the "gentleness" of Christ (II Cor. x. 1)? The Greek word is more expressive than our English rendering.

coming and at the same time ready for renewed moral endeavour. This needs to be kept in mind in all consideration of the ethic of Jesus, and not least in the case of the Sermon on the Mount.¹

Our exposition so far has kept close to the New Testament fundamentals with reference to the power of Christ. But its relevance to the needs of modern man also should be clear. The introduction of God's new order, making available new moral and spiritual resources which bring goodness within reach, and the provision of a new basis of hope and confidence, is good news for our generation as for all its predecessors. What Christ offers is far more than the forgiveness of sins. To cleanse the troubled conscience is certainly part, but it is no more than a part, of His work. Human need as He understands it is wider than personal guilt. If we think of Him as saviour from sin we must take sin in its Pauline sense of the total of man's frustration and disharmony, the inability to make a straight course toward goodness which affects both society and individuals. Professor Dodd has called it a "corporate racial wrongness".² Guilt is a much less inclusive thing, real as it is; but there is to be included also in the human predicament the whole of our social malaise, our uncertain grasp of absolute standards, our loss of a sense of the supernatural, together with all man's anxieties and fears and phobias, including the fear of death.³ For all this genuine Christian experience—the life lived under the influence and lordship of Christ—knows

¹ The best elucidation of the Sermon is the commentary by T. W. Manson in *The Mission and Message of Jesus*. Much light is thrown on the problem of Jesus' ethic generally in T. E. Jessop's *Law and Love* and R. Niebuhr's *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*.

² See his commentary on Romans, p. 80: "The wrongdoing of an individual is not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a corporate racial wrongness which infects human society as we know it, and affects the individual through heredity and environment."

³ A recent writer commenting on this sees a responsibility resting on the university: "The function of the university is to provide an antidote to fear" (R. S. K. Seeley, *The Function of the University*, p. 78). How much more is this the function of the Church!

the remedy. The resources that flow from Christ are available, and this is "the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith". For Christ did more than rebuke people for their shortcomings. There were Pharisees in plenty who made that their business. He rebuked men's worry¹ which is really lack of faith, and shared with them His own bigger faith, thus making His disciple secure against that which destroys the inner peace. In human life both ancient and modern that peace is constantly being threatened, but there is a reality underlying the story of the Stilling of the Tempest (Mark iv. 35-41) which the modern as well as the primitive Christian can prove true for himself: "With Christ in the vessel I smile at the storm."

What we have to say about forgiveness must be said at this point. The new covenant is a covenant of forgiven people; that is always presupposed (cf. Deut. iv. 31; Ps. ciii. 7-18). Forgiveness is certainly one of the blessings of the Gospel and Christ offers it and assures men that however troubled they may be by consciousness of sin their sin does not bar them from acceptance with God. We cannot claim much goodness, still less sinlessness. We dare not ask God to forgive us our trespasses, except as we ourselves forgive. And often we are very unforgiving. Yet as we become aware of God in Christ we learn with increasing awe that God is like Christ (cf. II Cor. iv. 6) seeking sinners and even enduring death for them, even the death of a cross with all that meant of torture and ignominy. Sin does not dam up the divine resources of love and restoration, for "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us". Forgiveness is thus a miracle in which Christian experience begins, and it is also a daily repeated miracle in the life of the believer. It is a constant new impulse to obedient service. Moreover, it is creative and forward-looking; to regard it as simply the removal of past sins would be far too negative a way of looking at it. It must always be seen in the context of the new order of

¹ This is the meaning of the Greek word used in Mark iv. 19 (cares) and Matt. vi. 25 (be not anxious). It signifies a lack of the sense of God's care.

things which Christ prepares and offers: the forgiven and morally re-equipped community. The agony of contrition over sin is relieved by the knowledge that one is grafted into a new society and in touch with Him Who broke sin's hold upon man and as it were exhausted its curse or drew its sting (cf. Gal. iii. 13, I Cor. xv. 55-57). This new security is comparable to resurrection from the dead: "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. ii. 1-10). It may be described as a new humanity.

This idea of a new humanity fairly represents what is implied in the Biblical concepts of new covenant and Kingdom of God which we have already considered. And apart from that it is set forth in two important passages of the New Testament, Rom. v. 12-21 and I Cor. xv. 24, 46-50. Here we find Christ introduced as the characteristic figure of a new humanity and set in contrast with Adam who represents an old humanity, "old" in the sense not of "pre-christian" but of "unredeemed". And Christ means much more to the redeemed than Adam did to the old, ordinary, natural humanity; for He is not merely the typical figure, but the pioneer and controller. In New Testament language He is the Head, and here other passages become significant: Eph. i. 20-23, iv. 13-16; Col. i. 15-18, ii. 10, 19. There is a headship or pre-eminence of Christ in the natural order and this is extended to headship in the redeemed order.

Can we say anything concerning the end of this Christ-controlled operation which brings men into the way of goodness? This process constitutes the moral core of the life of mankind. What is the goal? What consummation has Christ in view as He presides over this process? It is perhaps a slow process; certainly we do not yet see all men gathered in by it. The Lord is rich unto all that call upon Him, but what of those who do not call upon Him? But shall not all be gathered in ultimately? Does not an experience of Christ in moral logic imply that? We may dare to hope no less. If we discern in the work of Christ the fulfilment of the prophetic word: "He shall see of

the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied" (Isa. liii. 11), we may surely not limit His satisfaction to the redemption of that minority of mankind who through the centuries have been known and will in future be known as Christians.

Christ will not be finally satisfied until the fulness of all the non-Christians of all generations from Adam to the last trump is gathered in. In the light of our experience of Christ's power, how can we think less, if we venture to think about this at all? We dare not think meanly of what Christ can accomplish. The range and scope of His salvation go far beyond our powers or our imagination. God will have mercy on all, says the Apostle (Rom. xi. 32); we must take that "all" seriously and literally, otherwise we deny the power of the seeking love of Christ. For that love is the love of the Almighty God, the Creator, Who fainteth not, neither is weary, in His purposes toward man. Redemption and creation are the work of the same God, and this God is our God for ever and ever. "The voice that rolls the stars along Speaks all the promises."

In considering this issue we must work out the full logic of the Biblical insights into the character and purpose of God. The love of God which we discern most manifestly in Christ is also the "love which moves the sun and the other stars".¹

When that faith is held, it cannot be assumed that as long as one man, were he even Judas Iscariot, remains in hell unredeemed, the work of Christ is complete; for His work is the redemption of all. To deny it is to deny that God is Almighty; for "the all-great is the all-loving too".² The objection may be made to our present argument that it substitutes mere optimism for the true Christian teaching about moral responsibility; but our answer is that while we take seriously both the

¹ The moving words with which Dante closes his great poem *The Divine Comedy*.

² "How can there be Paradise for any while there is Hell, conceived as unending torment, for some?" Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, p. 454. "At long last we may hope every sinner—even Judas Iscariot and every traitor with him . . . will thank God that his villainy has become a further occasion of the divine triumph" (Op. cit., p. 472).

heinousness of sin and the inevitability of its consequences we are also endeavouring to draw out the full implications of the fundamental Biblical teaching about the power and the love of God. There is an element of paradox: As sinners we may not make light of our sin or excuse ourselves, but only pray to be brought to a deeper and truer penitence; "who can understand his errors; cleanse thou me from secret faults" (Ps. xix. 12). On the other hand, as believers we are aware of the upward pull of the divine mercy as well as of the downward drag of our guilt. The paradox is unavoidable, but it is rooted in our moral experience as Christians. Though we dare not consider ourselves as having any claim on the mercy of God, equally we may not deny its action upon us, an action that is somehow concurrent with our guilt and penitence. We deserve God's wrath; but are made recipients of His renewing mercy. God's wrath is as real as our sin; but neither is as real or as final in its effect as God's redeeming love.

The doctrine of Hell expresses the reality of sin and its consequences and of God's judgment upon it. There is a sense in which man's moral consciousness demands a doctrine of Hell. Ethics can define the distinction between right and wrong, determine a scale of values, and in the light of that pronounce certain lines of conduct wrong. Religion goes further in its pronouncement about wrong conduct, which it defines, with reference not merely to man but to God, as sin. Sin is violation of God's laws, and that way of conceiving it leads on to the thought of the appropriate penalty. This is the main presupposition of Christian thinking about Hell. Hell means punishment for sin recognized as justly inflicted by God. So far we can go with a minimum of figurative language. It must be remembered that detailed description of Hell, as equally of Heaven, is necessarily figurative, and the temptation to take it literally has constantly to be resisted.

It is not our business now to consider any particular conception of Hell, or to devise a new one, but to concentrate atten-

tion upon the basic idea, viz. that Hell is the penalty of sin visited upon one who has learned to regard his wrongdoing: not simply as vice or crime but as *sin*, i.e. as requiring definition not by reference to man and society only, but by reference to God, who is the supreme Moral Governor. There is not the least reason to think of Hell as punishment experienced only after death. The consequences of our sin are seldom delayed as long as that; we are often aware of them immediately after the sinful act, though there is much difference in men's sensibility here, and even a David needed Nathan to open his eyes to the baseness of what he had done (II Sam. xii). There may, or there may not, be material consequences. The cry of a penitent sinner may be: "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." But there is a state of consciousness of sin, call it remorse or what you will, which is, properly speaking, Hell. This may be conceived as continuing after death; or indeed in the case of non-Christians, i.e. those who have not had their moral sensibility fully awakened during earthly life, as first beginning after death. Such is the traditional and popular notion. There is no reason, however, for regarding it as infinitely prolonged.

Hell is a state of mind or soul; not a place, not a span of time; a state of shame and torment. But it is not an ultimate state. All who have sinned must experience such a state, because God is a moral Being, and sin is a frustration of His purpose. We must further presume that this experience is prolonged and intensified until the sinner hates his sin as God does and turns in revulsion from it. Since, therefore, God is not simply the punisher of sin, a sort of divine policeman seeing that no sin goes unpunished (what a travesty of Biblical teaching about God that is, and yet how many do dimly entertain such thoughts about Him!), but the restorer of sinners to the way of righteousness—and surely the Bible means that or it means nothing at all—then Hell is not His final dealing with man, but a temporary dealing, intermediate between earthly failure and final restoration.

Thus, not Hell, but only Heaven can reasonably be regarded as an ultimate state, describing the consummation of God's work of redemption. All deserve Hell, and all experience it. But by the ineffable mercy of God we shall all be brought to heaven and "presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy". The divine judgment *is* the divine mercy. "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy". (Rom. ix. 16.)¹

It may be objected that this affirmation of Christ's uniqueness as Redeemer does less than justice to other religions. We reply that not only the New Testament but Christian experience is confident that Christ is Saviour of mankind to a supreme degree, but this does not imply that there is no good in other religions which speak of Saviours. To insist on uniqueness as such need provoke no objection. Every human life is unique in a sense, though on the basis of similarity with other human lives without which it could not be called human. Every event is unique in one sense, though part of the stream of history. A battle or revolution takes place and the effect is what it is, incomparably and unalterably so, and has to be accepted as fact. Similarly in Christian conviction the events which make up the life of Christ were unrepeatable and of supreme significance. If philosophers find difficulty over this "scandal of the particular"; we must admit that there is a problem for the mind to tackle; nevertheless the Christian testimony to Christ's redeeming work must be maintained.

The apostolic conviction was that this hope, this surety of a redemptive process moving to a final consummation, derives from Christ, who alone satisfies the deepest need of mankind. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be

¹ For a full discussion of the philosophical implications of such a conception of Hell as has been outlined above, the reader is referred to the chapter on "Moral and Religious Conditions of Eternal Life" in Temple's *Nature, Man and God*, pp. 452-472. The whole matter needs more careful consideration than it usually receives, and might well figure more largely in our preaching.

saved" (Acts iv. 12). Those words are set out with the confidence—indeed intransigence—typical of the first believers in the Lord Jesus. The New Testament is like that. It speaks declaratively, not argumentatively; it is always proclaiming a solution rather than focusing on a problem. It proclaims that the work of redemption is in hand. How different from the pathetic earnestness of those who say the world may be redeemed, if only the nations get the right kind of governments and better systems of education, and provided they learn to use atomic energy sensibly and make the United Nations work properly! And how markedly different from the cynicism of those who cannot give any meaning at all to the idea of redemption! This intransigence of the New Testament is not cocksureness or fantasy, but the confidence born of faith and based on fact; the fact of the life, death and rising again of Jesus.

And of those who resent this assurance, or find it difficult, it may properly be asked, Where else is salvation to be found? Who offers it, and rivals Christ as saviour for this present age, as it faces up to new possibilities for human life but equally large anxieties? Professor Dodd has penned a thought-provoking phrase that leaves no room for easy optimism when he writes of "the inherent self-destructiveness of our present civilisation".¹ Whence cometh our help? Is there no hope and power and peace, such as the New Testament asserts?

Science promises much, has indeed already conferred much. Our civilization is quite dependent on what science has done and will do. We cannot go back to a time before steampower, anaesthetics and the telephone. But what of the man who operates and benefits by the machine? His options are to destroy himself or to make himself more and more comfortable by means of his machines and inventions. But is his development in goodness or what the Bible calls "growth in grace" any whit aided? Scientific humanism is a not ignoble creed. But man's need is greater than is visualized by the scientific human-

¹ *The Johannine Epistles*, p. 146.

ist. His sin is more baffling, his eternal destiny all out of proportion to the this-worldly perfectibility which humanism, scientific or any other, envisages.

What can Communism do? Much, no doubt, as it has already done much economically for at least one great country. But how much more is Communism than an economic or political theory? Does it promise not merely economic and political security, but something analogous to what religion calls salvation? Does it realize how much more man is than a being needing food, shelter, money, games, and an outlet for sexual energy? Political ideologies fall short in the meanness of their conception of human nature. They do not take account of the range of which it is capable, from moral degradation, at one extreme, to exaltation to fellowship with God, at the other extreme. They understand neither man's need of moral salvation, nor the possibility of it. Man is made *for God*, not for existence *in this world* alone. He can never be content nor realize his destiny by using his wits and inventions simply to dominate his earthly environment and live an increasingly streamlined existence here and now.

How adequate is our reorganized education to minister to the needs of man and society? Opinions vary as to the amount of Christian leavening it contains, and anxiety has been expressed on this score. We may agree, however, in the conviction that no system of education can meet the deepest need of the human personality unless it has Christian content. That will mean more than regular periods of worship and instruction in Biblical knowledge or Christian doctrine; it implies opportunity for the expression of Christian values in the working of the system and in the life of a school. It means the recognition that the children being educated are not simply future citizens or wage-earners or parents, but human beings whose personality is not truly understood apart from the light thrown upon it by the Christian revelation. It is a very limited view which sees in education mainly the opportunity to acquire informa-

tion. That is the legacy of the Socratic dogma that virtue is knowledge and sin essentially ignorance—a most unfortunate half-truth. It is only through Christ that we perceive how delusive a half-truth that is, how much of human behaviour it ignores, how little it considers the exceeding weight of sin. It is by the standard of Christ that the value of an educational programme is to be judged. If the curriculum and ethos of a school or college obscure the true purpose of life or direct attention only to facts and means, ignoring the purpose and goal of human endeavour, or leave the impression that the fullest development of the personality can be attained where the Lordship of Christ is not acknowledged—there is grave cause for anxiety. No form of education can by itself do what Christ does for man. He alone is the Saviour.

The atheist and agnostic we have always with us: what is their gospel? An issue of ultimate truth is involved, concerning both God and man. There is the practical unconfessed atheism of Hollywood or the black market, for example; no Christian need waste time trying to find a point of contact there. But the theoretical avowed atheism of, say, Marx or Bertrand Russell might claim some of his attention. Lord Russell in a recent book has urged us to reverence the cosmos. That is an improvement on his earlier advice, to build on the foundations of unyielding despair. But is this later version constructive and directed to man's inner need? And have the Marxists exalted man by their doctrine that religion is dope and that belief in God is to be discarded because it distracts men from concentrating on the primary problem of their own betterment? There is the Christian agnosticism of Albert Schweitzer, bidding us reverence life; the cultured rationalism of Gilbert Murray; the kindly humanism of E. M. Forster, critical of theologians rather than of the ordinary believer. There is the confident reforming humanism of J. B. Priestley, contemptuous of all religious faith and practice, and assured to his own satisfaction that religion does not help toward the solution of

the main human problem as he sees it; or again there is that experienced observer of mankind's troubles, A. J. Cronin, capable of exposing religion's shams but also feeling that religion may produce a Father Chisholm whose spirit quietly dominates sadness and despair. Faith may be rejected with greater or less completeness, and this rejection may be very variously expressed. Similarly the stages on the way from unfaith to faith find varied statements from the pens of gifted people, and it is probably true to say that this generation is less satisfied with agnosticism than were the previous two generations. To those who with these varied emphases reject his faith, the Christian believer has the right to pose the question: Is yours a faith to live by? Is your diagnosis of the human situation as true as the Biblical diagnosis, and is your philosophy commensurate with it?

These alternatives are no alternatives. They do but show "how much it costeth not to follow Christ". There is no chance of being "presented faultless before the presence of God's glory" unless Christ has the matter in hand. There is no hope beyond death, no salvation of the soul, no perfection of the personality that shall endure beyond the contingencies of earthly existence—unless He is the architect of it. But of this we are assured in the Bible. This is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto us. The one absolute power is the power of "our Jesu's conquering love". It "moves the sun and the other stars", as Dante says. And, as the Apostle assures us, nothing can separate us from it.

CHAPTER IV

CHRIST AND HIS SOCIETY

Christian fellowship, it has been well said by Karl Barth, is grounded more upon what men lack than upon what they possess. It is precisely when we recognize that we are sinners in desperate need of forgiveness that we come to realize that we are brothers. It is when we see that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; that there is none righteous, and that we all have one supreme need in common . . . that true fellowship is born. The Fellowship of the Spirit lives and grows in the atmosphere of Calvary. . . . The early Christians at Jerusalem were not brought into fellowship with one another because they had all things in common. They behaved generously to one another because they were redeemed.

R. V. G. TASKER: *The Old Testament in the New Testament*, p. 74.

Relevant Biblical passages: *Deut. vii. 6-12. Lev. xix. 1-4, 9-18, 32-37. Isa. i. 2-20, xl, liv. Jer. xxxi. 23-34. Ezek. xxxvii. Hos. xi. Matt. v-vii, xviii. John xiii-xvii. Eph. iii-v.*

OUR ground is covered. The essentials of our subject have been considered. It remains to discuss, in the two chapters which follow, two matters which, though of great importance and each worthy of a treatise to itself, are of the nature of corollaries in relation to the main theme. For the subject of this book is the work of redemption. God, the originator of all, is the author of this work, and Christ is its mediator, and it constitutes the deepest aspect of human history. The Christian Society and the Christian Scripture are secondary, though each in its own way is a medium of the continuing process of redemption. Through that alone does each attain its significance.

The Christian community is the sphere of operation of this process whereby man's need is met and man himself remade. More strictly, Christ is the Mediator through the Christian

community, i.e. the Church, as medium. In New Testament language, the Church is Christ's body, His hands¹ and feet as it were, which He uses as His instrument to get His will carried out; He is the Head of the body (Eph. iv); elsewhere He is the animating Spirit or life-principle.² According to the famous metaphor of the vine (John xv), Christ is the tree itself, the root and life-giving sap, the disciples (who, of course, represent the Church of succeeding generations³) are the branches whereon grows the fruit. But the centre and heart of the organism is Christ. The Church can be defined only in terms of Him, never in terms merely of a part, however prolific in fruit-bearing or however long-lived.

From the New Testament we learn further of the intimate connection between the Church and the Kingdom of God. These two realities are not to be identified (as Roman Catholics tend to do); but neither are they to be contrasted as in the epigram (which it is to be feared represents much popular thinking): "Jesus promised the Kingdom; all that came was the Church!"⁴ The Church cannot be truly understood apart from the events of Jesus' ministry which in a real sense constituted a "coming" of the kingdom on earth; where Jesus was, the Kingdom was. He was, so to say, an embodiment of it; He made men aware of it and persuaded them to enter it, and extend its borders by their acceptance of its rules. We do not identify Jesus so intimately with the Church, but we may venture to summarize the New Testament teaching about Church and Kingdom by describing the Church as the sphere within which, subsequently to Jesus' own work, culminating in the

¹ Cf. the wish of the mystic Tauler: "I would fain be to the Eternal Goodness what his own hands are to a man."

² Cf. T. W. Manson, *The Church's Ministry*, p. 84: "We see . . . the birth of the new body of Christ, a body which He can use to continue His ministry to the ends of the earth and to the end of the world. Of that body, the Church, He is head and life and soul. . . . Church history is the biography of Christ continued."

³ Cf. the dictum of Hort that the Farewell Discourses of John's Gospel are the most pregnant teaching about the Church to be found in the whole Bible (*The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 223).

⁴ I cannot find the source. It is quoted in some book of Harnack's.

Cross and Resurrection, of bringing the Kingdom into the actual experience of men, the Kingdom continues to reveal itself and win its citizens. This is ludicrously inadequate, even as a summary of the New Testament affirmations, which on this theme are particularly pregnant with meaning;¹ but it must suffice for our present task, which is to indicate how in the light of the New Testament the Church has a divine origin and reference which differentiates it from all other human institutions.

We must, on the other hand, assert quite definitely that the Church is a human institution. It is both divine and human. This dual character is one indication that it is not to be identified with the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, it makes the Church an enigma to those who can give no meaning to the idea of "divine". The Church is neither a wholly divine nor a wholly human reality. It is constantly treated as if it were either the one or the other, and this creates only misunderstanding. So far we have dealt with its divine aspect, in noting the main attributes which the New Testament predicates of it. We must now make it clear that these do not amount to an assertion of perfection. The Church "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing . . . holy and without blemish" (Eph. v. 27) is not the actual Church as we see it, but the Church as it will be when Christ has made her thus presentable; and that is not yet. The members of the Church are not morally perfect people; they never were. We have our self-righteous adherents, but the Church has no monopoly of self-righteousness, and on the whole we know the sort of people we are: far from perfect and daily conscious of it. Moreover, we know the sort of man the Apostle Peter was. And we know the sort of people the

¹ The New Testament evidence is delicate and needs to be interpreted with care. For full consideration of it see R. N. Flew, *Jesus and His Church*; cf. also an article by the present writer in *Expository Times*, 1936, pp. 369-373. Strictly, we should think of the Church as not in existence till after the earthly ministry of Jesus was finished; it presupposes the death and resurrection of Jesus. So G. Johnston, *The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament*, p. 56, and C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* p. 136-8.

first Corinthian Christians were. Paul's letters to them are most revealing, not concerning that particular Church only, but concerning the nature of a Christian Church. The Church is Christ's body, but that does not mean necessarily a perfect body, for its weakness and lack of unity frustrate as well as further Christ's purpose. God is infinite, not only in wisdom and love, but also in patience.

The man in the street has been known to remark that Christians are not as good as they ought to be. He may have seen a church member doing what is unbecoming for his Christian profession. Or he has been reading a newspaper and learned to his surprise that a deacon of such and such a church—or was it a churchwarden?—has been “had up” in court; he can't remember what the charge was, but the very idea of a Christian being brought before the magistrates! This is an inverted compliment. The critic is judging Christians by what he knows of Christ, and Christians must be prepared to face such a criticism, however humiliating it be. It may be true and salutary. Nevertheless, we must not allow our thinking to become confused. The Church is the company not of the morally perfect, who are incapable of doing anything that could place them in a law court; the Church is the company of the redeemed, some of whom may indeed have been charged in the courts and even committed to prison. Can a criminal become a Christian? Yes, provided Christ is dealing with him. Could a Christian be a criminal? Conceivably. And would he then cease to be a Christian? No, because Christ is still dealing with him, through the agency of his fellow church members, for that is what they are for and that is what Christ is for, in a world where crimes are committed, and where even Christians are not immune from temptation, being in fact more conscious of it and of the reality of sin.

We are not hereby involved in taking crime lightly or despising the work of the magistrate; but only in indicating that the work of reclaiming sinful men and women (of whom crimin-

als are the minutest fraction) is the proper work of Christ in His church. The Church is essentially a Prisoners Aid Society (prison being the bondage of sin in all its forms), not an ethical improvement society. Can a gaol-bird be redeemed? By an improved system of after-gaol care or of general education, possibly; by Christ, certainly. The Church is the institution which exists to make Christ available, to be His tongue and hands and legs, so to speak, in His redeeming energy. It accomplishes this by means of what it says and does through its preachers, committees and the individual lives of its members.

For evidence of Christians, ex-Christians and critics of Christianity in prison, see the remarkably interesting book by Richmond Harvey, *Prison from Within*. We read there of one gifted man who "believed in the Founder of Christianity while condemning all his followers". Intelligence, whether inside prison or outside, recognizes the uniqueness of Christ and His power to influence men for goodness. What is not always understood—and for this the Christian Churches must be humble enough to take responsibility—is that Christ founded Christianity, i.e. the Church, not to offset His own power by contrast, but to carry on His work. The answer to Nietzsche's gibe: "There was only one Christian and He died on the Cross" is that Nietzsche made the mistake of thinking Christians ought to be, not men and women of flesh and blood, but angelically perfect; in fact, a series of Christs. This is to misunderstand the nature of the Church radically. Christ was not the first Christian. He was the founder of the Church, not a member of it. It is not a perfect instrument for His purpose, but it is the instrument He has chosen to use, taking all the risks involved in its intractability. The Church is composed of people who are not fully redeemed themselves, but who are in the way of redemption, penitent because of their sinful past, but able to see a new goal that Christ has set before them, and by His grace enabled to move towards it, even in spite of continued failures and

wandering, of which they are painfully conscious, and for which they daily seek forgiveness.

The inner secret of the Church's life, and the source of its power, is the daily renewed miracle of Divine forgiveness. The experience of Paul is normative for the Church of every place and generation: "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor. xii. 9). Again, "Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. . . . I count not myself to have apprehended. . . . I press toward the mark for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii. 12-14). If the Apostle would not claim to have reached the goal of moral perfection, how much less the average Christian? We repeat, church members are not morally perfect,¹ any more than they are all Admirable Crichtons, or Members of Parliament, or Doctors of Divinity. This is the uniqueness of the Christian society. Christians are, in Luther's memorable phrase, "at one and the same moment sinners and righteous". Their characteristic language is that of H. F. Lyte's well-known hymn:

"Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like thee His praise should sing?"

Charles Wesley's hymn:

"Whom Jesu's blood doth sanctify
Need neither sin nor fear."

expresses a particular doctrine of Methodism rather than nor-

¹ The word "perfect" in Phil. iii. 15 is ironical. Some of the Corinthians liked to call themselves perfect, and the word had a vogue in the religious speculation of the time. Paul is good humouredly pricking the bubble of this self-esteem. Matt. v. 48 raises a larger problem. But it may be said summarily that "perfect" here has for its background Old Testament usages (of David, Job, etc.) which clearly do not imply absolute perfection of character as does the word in modern usage. The real difficulty is the demand for God-likeness, cf. Luke vi. 36. See further the Commentaries.

mative Christian experience;¹ elsewhere a hymn of his makes us confess: "A sinner still, though saved, I am."

To quote a recent theological study of the New Testament by a young Methodist scholar: "The distinguishing feature of the Church is not that its members are ethically better than other people . . . but that they have been saved by God through Christ."²

The Church is not synonymous with humanity or all decent people. It is neither "the Conservative party at prayer", nor even the whole British nation at prayer. Nor is it equivalent to the totality of good men and women of all nations striving to attain their ideals of truth, beauty and goodness. There has been—and still is—a tendency to think thus of the Church, ignoring varieties of professed religious creeds. Take, for example, Longfellow's poem which appears as Hymn 216 in *The Congregational Hymnary* [249 in *Congregational Praise*]:

One holy Church of God appears
Through every age and race . . .
Her priests are all God's faithful sons
To serve the world raised up;
The pure in heart her baptised ones,
Love her communion-cup.

It is what a man does rather than what he believes that matters, says common sense, and how plausible that is! The right answer

¹ Cf. also: "Help us to make our calling sure,
O let us all be saints indeed,
And pure as Thou Thyself art pure,
Conformed in all things to our Head!
Take the dear purchase of Thy blood;
Thy blood shall wash us white as snow,
Present us sanctified to God
And perfected in love below."

The older Methodist hymnbooks have verses like this in almost every hymn—which is an indication of the virility of Methodism. What a contrast with Lutheran pietism! Nevertheless the Methodist emphasis on the possibility of perfection in this life, though always timely as a corrective of indifference, tends, by its ethical stress, to overshadow that Christian experience of redeeming Gospel which is prior to ethics.

² C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition*, p. 137.

to that is to admit the importance of what men do, but at the same time to point out the superficiality of this verdict and then take the matter to a deeper level. Conduct is always the fruit, whereas what we really need to be concerned with is the root. Matthew vii. 16-27 shows how Jesus stressed the importance of conduct. He wanted people to do what He said, not simply profess admiration. But He emphasized also that there can be good deeds only where there is a good heart; a good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit. His concern was to get men good at the heart, at the root. What a man is in his heart is the source of his behaviour to his neighbour and of what he is seen to do in society; moreover it is intimately connected with what he believes. For belief is not what you say with your lips, nor even what you say in church as you participate in hymn and prayer; it is the expression of your heart's conviction, of your inmost self. Because of this it matters vitally what a man believes, and what he believes is prior to what he does. The Church gives attention to belief for this reason, and is not put off by objections that have no deeper basis than common sense. For it is founded not on common sense, but on faith. Faith, or belief, matters as much as conduct, though it is a man's conduct which comes more directly to the notice of his fellowman.

There is much truth in the conception of the Church as a "gathered" community; gathered, that is, out of the general community of mankind or nation. Those first Congregationalists who thought thus of themselves, and criticized the established Church of Queen Elizabeth's day as no more than a conglomeration of parish musters, were resuscitating the old Hebrew conception of "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. xix. 2). There is danger in this, for it leads to self-righteousness and Pharisaism unless it is controlled by compassion for the world out of which the Church has been "gathered". The besetting sin of Pharisaism has often proved too much for the Christian Church, just as it did for the ancient Jewish Church. But the Church must to some extent conceive

itself as gathered out of the world, "called out".¹ The Church's safeguard against pious self-regard is the recollection that it is called out of the world only in order to be made aware of its mission to the world. Paul, the ex-Pharisee, was quite clear about this when he described himself (Rom. i. 1) as "called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God". The preposition "unto" is significant. Christianity, as distinct from Pharisaism, means being separated *for* something, not simply "*from*" or "*out of*" something. Its object is not avoidance of contamination and concentration on its own purity, but apostleship and service. The Christian community is to be a redeeming as well as a redeemed one.

The Church needs to be alert to avoid pluming herself on being holy. Holiness in the popular sense of moral perfection is certainly not her attribute. In that sense she can claim it only in so far as Christ is present to her; and this, though it is always to be affirmed, can never be exactly measured. As a human institution, the Church partakes of the imperfection of everything human. Nor is she indispensable. If she proves unworthy, Christ can choose, or create, another instrument. He can fashion a tool better fitted to execute His handiwork upon the developing life of mankind, and the intractable, though not unpromising, material which is human nature.

An important Biblical way of expressing the distinctiveness of the Church as over against the total life of man was the idea of a covenant people. Israel thought of itself as in covenant with its God and that idea expresses vital truth in religion, and must be continually re-applied. Our Lord Himself gave explicit sanction to the idea when in solemn words at the Last Supper He spoke of His impending death as the means in God's hands of inaugurating the new covenant of prophetic hope and vision.² Since then the Christian Church has rightly thought of

¹ The Greek word for church, *ekklēsia*, comes from a verb which means "to call out". The word Pharisee is a Grecized form of the Hebrew *Parush*—separated. Holiness involves a measure of separateness from ordinary usage.

² Jer. xxxi. 31-34.

itself as the people of the new covenant and has felt justified in applying to itself the promises and conditions referring to Israel, the people of the old covenant. What then is implied in the covenant relationship?

The general idea is familiar enough. It is that of contract or bargain. Nor was ancient Hebrew religion the only religion to make use of this notion. It played a large part in the religion of ancient Rome. It was the Hebrew genius, however, which lifted the idea out of the realm of the merely legal and gave it a distinctive development by virtue of which it still serves as the vehicle of the deepest Christian thought about God.

It is best to start with the book of Deuteronomy. This book purports to be the "second lawgiving", in other words, the final exhortations of Moses before his death, with re-iteration of the law promulgated by him to an earlier generation. The first lawgiving at Mount Sinai followed close upon the miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt.¹ This is all now re-interpreted, and Moses' parting legacy to Israel is described as this clarification of what it meant for Israel to be in covenant with their God.

Moses teaches that their escape from Egypt is not to be regarded by Israel as due to chance, a piece of good luck for them which was alternatively bad luck for the Egyptians. It was Divine Providence, a signal intervention of God on their behalf, and no other interpretation of it was to be considered. The interpretation of life as the interplay of chance forces, as governed by luck, or grim fate (as in Winwood Reade's *Martyrdom of Man*, and to some extent in Thomas Hardy's novels, and several present-day writers) is not the Biblical

¹ Exod. xiv is the narrative of the deliverance at the "sea of reeds". Exod. xx-xxiii is "the book of the covenant" comprising the ten commandments (xx. 1-17) and the judgments (xxi. 1-xxiii. 19). Exod. xxiv. 1-8 describes the ritual inauguration of the covenant.

The following pages (96-106) are reproduced with slight alteration from an article contributed by the present writer to the *Presbyter* (Fourth Quarter, 1949). The Editor's permission to do this is here gratefully acknowledged.

conception. Thus in the ornate language of Deuteronomy: "The Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with great terribleness and with signs and with wonders" (Deut. xxvi. 8); or in the more sober narrative of Exodus concerning the escape from Egypt: "And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you today. . . . And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians; and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses" (Exod. xiv. 13, 31). God has clearly shown His hand. He has a purpose in which Israel has to play a part, not as slaves under foreign domination, but as free men in a land of their own, where they are not limited by the outward circumstances of their life in the full performance of God's will. Will they respond aright? A covenant is being offered them. God is the author of it and is inviting them to be the other party in this bond with Him. The contracting parties are not equals, it is to be noted; the initiative comes entirely from the side of the higher partner. (Here we begin to see the difference between this religious use and the purely secular idea of covenant.) Israel could no more claim to have deserved this privilege than she had been able to expect it. Deuteronomy makes this very clear: "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people, for ye were the fewest of all people; but because the Lord loved you . . . hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand . . ." (Deut. vii. 7-8; cf. also ix. 4-6: "Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go in to possess their land").

In thus defining the terms of the covenant which he ascribes to Moses, this ancient writer (sixth century B.C.) is making the Mosaic covenant typical of redemption for all time. If man is to have dealings with God, God must take the first step to make it possible. Man as creature has no claim on God, and man as sinner can offer nothing worthy to God; therefore he can do

nothing and the initiative cannot come from him. But God in His infinite compassion takes the initiative, and man can be saved.

What does God require of His earthly partner in the covenant? What are the terms of the contract? This is where the Law comes in, with all its detail. There are various codifications before us in the Old Testament, but for our present consideration we need refer only to "The Book of the Covenant" (Exod. xx-xxiii) and the book of Deuteronomy. Our first reaction is to think this must have been most burdensome, but the Hebrew did not so think of it. Law was essentially teaching or instruction, and their word for it—Torah—did not suggest the law court and punishments for disobedience. It meant the revealed will of God concerning how men were to live in fellowship with Him.

"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. xxix. 29).

And in Hebrew belief the determinative revelation came through Moses.¹ At the heart of it is the more definitely moral code² of the Ten Commandments. God's requirement of man is called by Deuteronomy with wearisome insistence "the statutes and the judgments". If Israel are faithful on their side

¹ Many of the laws contained in the Old Testament are later than the time of Moses (the Book of Leviticus, e.g., and parts even of the Book of the Covenant), though all were attributed to him by Hebrew tradition. It is not certain how much was known of the will of God before Moses' time. Two of the main Biblical sources assume that God was not known by the name Yahweh earlier than Moses' day (cf. Exod. vi. 3). It has been suggested that Yahweh was a Kenite deity whom Moses learnt to worship during his residence in Midian. See Elmslie, *How came our Faith?* p. 119-120. Dr. Elmslie's view is that in their pre-Mosaic nomad stage the Israelites were moon-worshippers, Ya or Yah being not the name of their deity, but a term chanted or shouted in the cult ritual. This view is not generally accepted.

² In our modern sense, distinguishing "moral" from "ceremonial". The Hebrews made no such distinction. The Ten Commandments are presented twice, with slight (but significant) variations: Exod. xx. 1-17 and Deut. v. 6-21.

in observing these, their God can be relied upon to be faithful on His side in continuing to protect and bless them: He will "keep (i.e. continue in being) the covenant and the mercy".

"Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations . . . thou shalt therefore keep the commandments and the statutes and the judgments which I command thee this day, to do them" (Deut. vii. 9, 11; cf. also xxvi. 16-19).

To quote Dr. Elmslie's summary of his study of the Mosaic covenant in his recent and illuminating book *How Came Our Faith?*:

"To the penitent, the thankful, the willing, God whose mercy never faileth, could impart the gift that He could not sooner give, knowledge how to live aright; God's marvellous gift for the freedom of their spirit, even as the liberation from Egypt had set free their bodies. If they were fully willing to obey His will, God could bless them as His mercy everlastingly desires to do. Divine grace—human acknowledgment—Divine teaching; that is the sequence then and ever" (op. cit. p. 211).

But what happens when men are not willing to obey God's will? What happens if the covenant is broken? There was no question of God failing in His covenant obligations, but with the unreliable "stiff-necked" human partner it was different. Israel's history provided all too frequent examples of covenant breaking on her part; did that mean the end of covenant relationship, i.e. of religion, for her? It ought to have done, according to ordinary justice. The book of Deuteronomy itself states so unambiguously, for it explicitly mentions the possibility of Israel's defection. "If thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, and walk after other gods. . . . I testify against you this day

that ye shall surely perish" (Deut. viii. 19-20; cf. also iv. 23-28; vii. 10; xxviii. 15-68; xxix. 14-28). But we must go beyond this book with its frank warnings of disaster, fundamental as its teaching is on this subject of the covenant. For stern denunciation is not the last word. Only the strange and manifold mercy of God makes it possible to say this, but Israel's prophets, to whom we now turn, were given insight into God's way of dealing with His refractory creatures; and that way was above and beyond strict justice. "Just are the ways of God, and justifiable to man," says stern and dignified Puritanism, echoing passages of the Bible itself. Yes, but the deeper message of the Bible is richer and more intricate than that. If Israel fails to act righteously according to God's direction, then the covenant is at an end, and God is quit of further obligation: So legality would be satisfied. But God does not take this easy way out. He is more than legal justice. His justice is not the justice of the human law court, which imposes punishment on the guilty and then can do no more. God is concerned to bring man to repent and hate of his sin, and is ineffably forbearing until this end is secured, even when He has to let punishment be inflicted as a means to that end. For with God His justice¹ is His mercy, and His mercy is His justice.

This perception was granted to the greatest of the Hebrew prophets, and it is the highest point of their teaching about God.² It is, in fact, the Gospel of the Old Testament, for it was this same Divine characteristic which, when active in the human life of Jesus of Nazareth, brought into being the New Covenant and created new possibilities of goodness for mankind, and has ever since been proclaimed to mankind by the

¹ The Hebrew word "tsedaqah" is untranslatable, and the English rendering (like the Greek rendering "dikaionune") has been most unfortunate. It means that activity of God whereby He deals with guilty mankind so as to make it righteous in the end.

² Deuteronomy is vacillating on this point: iv. 24 says, "The Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God", while a few verses lower we read: "The Lord thy God is a merciful God" (iv. 31). The deeper synthesis is not achieved, although this is later than Hosea.

Church as THE GOSPEL. The wit of man could not have devised this good news. It is alien to the logic of man; but it is the divine logic. God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways. It is good tidings of a redeeming love of God which will not let man be out of covenant with Him, but is constantly seeking him in his waywardness and setting his feet once again on the right way, however often it is flouted by human pride and rebuffed by the rebelliousness of man's heart. But still it remains true that "the eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. xxxiii. 27). "Jeshurun waxes fat and kicks" (Deut. xxxii. 15), "but there is none like unto the God of Jeshurun who rideth upon the heaven for his help" (Deut. xxxiii. 26).

A classic chapter is Hosea xi. The progression of the thought deserves careful study. It is the most noteworthy of all the Old Testament anthropomorphisms, and ventures almost to the point of irreverence in laying bare the tension in the heart of God over this stupid and corrupt Israel, so provoking in its concentration on its feverish politics and refusal to heed the way of true security which its God has made known. Is God to abandon her to the Assyrian for her sins? Only so can she be shaken to penitence and brought to her senses. That was indeed the way God had to deal with her in the end. But Hosea dares to suggest that God can hardly bring Himself to allow this fate to befall His people whom He has loved and had in covenant with Him since the time of their oppression in Egypt (note verse 1). "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me . . . I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger. . . . For I am God and not man . . ." (Hos. xi. 8-9).

Many pages of the prophetic books are given to denunciation of individual or national corruptness. In other words, the prophets were saying to their contemporaries: "You are not fulfilling your covenant obligations." Some prophetic passages

(the whole of Amos, for example) seem to have no more to say than that, except to define the probable consequences according to the insight granted to them. Yahweh's reaction may take the form of submitting the people to bad harvests, or defeat in battle, or captivity, the prophet may suggest; Yahweh is even thought of as actually making use of an enemy army to carry through His own drastic dealing with Israel (Isa. x. 5; Jer. xliii. 10). But the highest revelation of Hebrew prophecy is when the prophet discerns that denunciation is not the whole of his business, nor punishment the end and climax of Yahweh's purposes. Yahweh's concern is "by hook or by crook" to keep the covenant in being. He will not accept as final the refractoriness and unreliability of His people; again and again He will give them a new chance and make possible a new start in right relations. There is no limit to the divine forbearance. God can be very patient with erring humanity; He will rather lead than drive. "Not even God can batter affection into our hearts, like a nail into wood. How then can the light of His moral perfection dawn upon our finite consciousness so that we shall desire truth above all things and long to do right?"¹

The greatness of Hosea was that for all his exposure of their degradation he saved people from despair;² that is, as it were, God's problem, and His truest interpreters are those who can convey this, through and in spite of their declaration of the vanity and sin of human wishes and deeds. We have already quoted Hosea. It must suffice to quote the great nameless prophet who roused Israel from resignation in Babylonian exile to new hope and confidence. His message is that there is comfort. The need for stern dealing has now passed. Israel must not say: "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God (i.e. I have lost my chance of getting justice done to me, or my complaint noticed, by God)"

¹ Elmslie, *How Came Our Faith?*, p. 351.

² Elmslie, *op. cit.*, p. 280: "Amos (theologically) put an end to Hope. Hosea's genius, confronting the same actualities, put an end to Despair."

(Isa. xl. 27). God's glory is to be newly revealed (Isa. xl. 1-5) and those who wait upon Him, though they have no might, i.e. are politically insignificant, may renew their strength (Isa. xl. 31; cf. also xli. 14; xlix. 13-21; lii. 7-12). God can never give up Israel, faithless as she has shown herself. Israel on her part may regard the marriage as null and void through her adultery, but not so her Divine husband (Isa. l. 1). The same metaphor of the marriage relationship is used again movingly in Chapter liv to bring home this precious truth of the Divine forbearance: "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee." (Isa. liv. 1-10; cf. also xlix. 14-15). Among the many references outside this section of Isaiah to this contrast between human independableness and the divine refusal to be alienated permanently by it, we may note particularly Ps. lxxxviii. 9-11, 37-39; cvi. 40-45; Jer. xxxii. 26-44; Ezek. xvi. (the sternest exposure of Israel's infidelity in the whole Old Testament).

We must now notice three further emphases in the Old Testament:

(a) God will never abandon Israel (mankind). The covenant is everlasting. "The Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Ps. c. 5). This is frequent in the Psalms, e.g. Ps. lxxxix. 3-4, 28-37; cvii, cxi. See also Gen. xvii. 7.

(b) Jeremiah speaks explicitly of a *new* covenant in the famous passage Jer. xxxi. 28, 31-34. Jeremiah was not alone in this, however, for we may compare Hos. ii. 18 (earlier than Jeremiah) and Ezek. xi. 19-20; xxxvi. 26-28; Isa. xliii. 19, 21; xlix. 6, 8 (later than Jeremiah).

(c) The new covenant is to be for all men, not for Israel only. The Second Isaiah is most explicit on this; cf. Isa. xlii. 4-7; xlix. 6, 8; lvi. 4, 6-7, lx. Israel needed this emphasis because she tended to rest on her privileges as a "favoured nation", and the treatment she had received at the hand of

more powerful nations gave her some excuse for a less than generous attitude to them. The Second Isaiah, who has just been quoted, addressing an Israel that had experienced two generations of exile under the domination of a foreign imperial power which had destroyed the holy city of Jerusalem,¹ urges her to rise above that limited view of an affronted national pride turning to cynicism, into a universalism which could regard all nations as having a place in the Divine providence and which reckons her own religious inheritance as one to be shared with all men. Henceforward the temptation to congratulate herself on her unique religious experience was to be avoided.

Those prophetic notes were often lost during the centuries after the Exile in the sometimes discordant blare of Jewish nationalism, but they were woven by Christian apostles, especially Paul, into the new harmony of the Gospel proclamation. They still need to be listened for and heeded. For there have been times when the Church has lost them, and the Gospel harmony has been marred by the jazz music of new Pharisaisms and exclusiveness, the blare of the theologian's anathema or the prelate's excommunication, the toneless beating of denominational drums, or the dead silence when the Church becomes careless about its commission to take the Gospel to every creature and make disciples of all nations.

One final point in Old Testament teaching about the covenant remains to be noted before we pass to the New Testament, and it must have emphasis both because of its importance and because it makes the main strength of the bridge leading from the Old Testament to the New. Indeed, its meaning becomes plain only in the light of Christ. In the Old Testament covenant-making is connected with sacrifice. The passages about covenant do not all refer to this, but it is a question of the

¹ Cf. Ps. cxxxvii, esp. 5-6. "Let my right hand forget her cunning . . . if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy."

general background and setting, and the implication of Israel's covenant religion is that the repeated breaking of the covenant required atonement, and the system of sacrifice was supposed to guarantee this. There is here a dim apprehension of the truth that sin and its consequences are deadly in their ravages, and that redemption from them is no light matter, but correspondingly costly, even unto blood. Fuller understanding of this came through Jesus Christ, through the fact that He in loyalty to His cause and obedience to the will of God went so far as to die, and did not shrink from the full offering of Himself in blood and death. In the light of Mark xiv. 24 with its quotation of Jer. xxxi we cannot doubt that He interpreted His death as having covenant-making significance, really effecting what the prophet had seen in hope and what the sacrificial blood-ritual was supposed to effect. This interpretation was developed by New Testament writers¹ for whom the New Covenant was actually in existence, a fact of their experience, not a piece of theological speculation.

Turning then from the Redeemer to the redeemed, we see that the Christian Church is the people of the New Covenant brought into being by Christ. This is essential for the understanding of the nature of the Church although the actual use of the word "covenant" in the New Testament is limited.²

The Church is a redeemed people; as sure of redemption as old Israel was when it looked back to Moses and the Red Sea, and thought of Pharaoh's chariots and the servitude under Egyptian taskmasters. For Christians also there has been a house of bondage and taskmasters and pursuing avengers: to wit, their former Judaism with its pride, or their former paganism with its hopelessness; the tyranny of law or luck or superstition; sins of the flesh, philosophy and vain deceit, anger, malice and all uncharitableness, the assaults of demons

¹ Cf. Rom. iii. 21, I Pet. i. 18-19, I John ii. 2, etc., and at fullest length Heb. v-x.

² Cf. Mark xiv. 23-4; Acts iii. 25; Gal. iii. 26-9, iv. 31; Heb. viii. 6; x. 11-23, xii. 24, xiii. 20.

and spiritual powers of darkness. But from all these they have been emancipated and they stand fast in a new freedom. They are dead—crucified—to all that. They have been translated out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God's love.

The Old Testament Church had been taught to regard itself as owing its freedom and its very existence to Yahweh, being Yahweh's "favoured possession", and having no significance above the other nations apart from Yahweh's choice of it, most signally made known in the deliverance at the Red Sea. Similarly the emergence of the New Testament Church was entirely dependent on a signal redeeming act: that of Christ who in His incarnation, passion and resurrection brought to a focus the redeeming energy of God. The Church's whole existence looks back to that. From Christ it learns its present duty. His teaching is its new commandment. From Him and from Him alone comes its hope of final perfection.

The Church is under a new law. For Christians moral obligation is not removed but intensified, seeing that Christ, though in one sense the end of law (Rom. x. 4), is in another sense a new embodiment of it (Gal. vi. 2). But there is joyful prospect of fulfilling the demands of conscience and duty, for the Christian is equipped by the Spirit with moral resources to meet this claim (Rom. viii. 3-4). Thus God has provided for righteousness to be attained, which is His purpose with man all along. The Church is a "people zealous of good works". There is no slackening of moral earnestness, for they are in covenant.

This reconstruction of the outlook of his forbears in the faith may strike the modern Christian as an ideal only, and in the light of his own experience he may be sceptical. The answer to that is Yes and No. Two things are to be said. First, we must be true to the New Testament affirmations, and not dilute them or lower them to the level of our own timid mediocrity. The first Christians certainly knew what it was to be dragged

back by their old past, and they realized the need to be constantly on guard against the lure of sinful habits; good conduct had not become automatic for them, and it was difficult while still being "in the flesh" not to live "according to the flesh". But in spite of all that the glorious fact of redemption could be affirmed and reaffirmed. The past might not be entirely forgotten, but it was past. They were facing forwards and had their backs to it. There had been a decisive break with it. They were, so to speak, under new management! A new covenant was in being. Christ had been crucified and was risen. Hallelujah! But secondly, if we press the question: Was that ideal realized?, we must answer No. And this very admission should call attention to something quite fundamental in the Church's experience, namely, its awareness of the need, *and* its experience of the reality, of divine grace. It is not perfect in the covenant, but alternately covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking, like Israel of old. Such is our humanity, even redeemed humanity; but also—here is the Gospel note—such is the nature of the God with whom we have to do, the one whom we know as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The new covenant then, though surely inaugurated, is not perfected. Redemption has its future aspect still. This introduces us to the Church's forward look. It still sighs for perfection, and the consummation tarries. But there is assurance: the Spirit is not only moral power for the believer, but the pledge of his inheritance (Eph. i. 13-14). The covenant shall be finally sublimated at the coming of God's Kingdom when all shall be presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24).

Our long emphasis on the covenant theme is justified because it illustrates that interaction of God and man which is the very marrow of Biblical religion: God in his might and mercy, man in his sin; God intervening to redeem, man alternately accepting and spurning the redemption; God commanding, man obeying and disobeying. A full exposition of this is

necessary if we are to understand the nature of the Church, that is, the Covenant people, the company of those who are aware of this redeeming activity of God and live by it.

The Church has its critics, and may well profit from them; particularly among its own membership it may be glad to have those who criticize its practice in the light of its own first principles, i.e. Jesus and His Gospel. This is one function of the Christian prophet today, and it is a very necessary function. For Christians need to be kept in remembrance not only of their privileges—that has been the content of this chapter—but also of their responsibilities. Christian responsibility in this generation must therefore be briefly touched upon before the chapter is concluded.

Is the Church a refuge from reality or the redeemer of reality; an adornment or a hindrance? Is it tackling real problems—finding ways of true community, generating goodwill, pointing fearlessly to abuses, showing the level on which forgiveness of wrong is possible and suspicions melt away, teaching people how to build happy homes; or is it only singing hymns?

J. B. Priestley has somewhere related how he once attended a church service, but came away with distaste because the congregation seemed to be doing no more than sing in antiquated language the songs of ancient dervishes. There is caricature as well as criticism in this, but is there not some truth also? How much of what the Church does, particularly in its Sunday meetings, is antiquated—not matched up to the needs of present-day men and women?

Many a novel describes the human scene with true realization of its sin and struggle. Some—George Blake's *Five Arches* for instance—have a pathetic hope in the power of a glass of whisky to create a comradeship that can lift people above that struggle, but still acknowledge that it is a dark picture which has to be painted. To such novelists the Church and its parsons are simply part of the darkness, rather than the light that illu-

mines it. We have to ask to what extent they are right, and if there is truth in their contention we ought to confess with shame how far the present-day Church is from the intention of its Founder.

Is the Church a mere passenger, or a working member of the crew which is modern society? A faith that is not relevant to work-a-day living is dangerous fantasy. The fellowship of Christians among themselves is a kind of hot-house; those who partake of it must not stay too long, but must get into the fresh air where most people actually live and work. The warnings of Scripture are not otiose, but are still relevant to the covenant people of today. We are our brother's keeper. Of those to whom much is given, much will be required.

Paul gave thanks for the "work of faith and labour of love" of his Thessalonian converts; their faith expressed itself in appropriate action and their Christian love moved them to service of their fellowmen that wore them out (the word "labour" is expressive and means no less than this).

Does this apply to the contemporary Church? How keen is it on helping men towards personal and social righteousness? That is only one way of saying: How keen is it on contributing to the Divine work of redemption? Does it frustrate or forward the purpose of God? Does it run away from the God-given task, like Jonah? How many opportunities does it miss? When it sinks into conformity with the world and confuses Christ's service with mere nationalism or some ideology, is that not a modern equivalent of what the prophets of old called "going a-whoring after other gods"?

There is now (since the Amsterdam Conference of 1948) a fully constituted World Council of Churches, but how slowly the consciousness of being a world-church permeates the thought of Christians, and how complacent we still can be about our denominationalism, and how much inclined still to refer to our unhappy divisions as inevitable! Is not this tantamount to resigning ourselves to having the Saviour presented

to the world in a patched garment that does Him dishonour, when we all know that His robe should be seamless?

One ancient Christian community was warned by the Lord and Judge: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, but thou art dead"; and another: "I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot" (Rev. iii. 1, 15).

A Church that is not doing a real job and contributing to the redemption of man must be rejected by the Lord who is committed to the work of redemption, and cannot allow that work to be undone. A blunt and useless instrument must be discarded. "Because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Is this the solemn meaning of some events we have witnessed in our day? Antagonism to Christianity in Russia, for instance: something less doctrinaire than the Marxist dogma that religion is dope must be at the root of that. The virulence and thoroughness of the anti-Christian propaganda of Communism were more probably due to the supineness of the Russian church in face of social wrongs under the Tsars.

And what of the partial eclipse of Christianity in Europe, including England? Must we not discern part at least of the cause in the tendency of the Churches to lose sight of the welfare of the people through engrossment with the welfare of Church-going people—who are rather less than the majority? And what of a Church that has openly blessed tyranny in Italy and Spain? What of a Church in Protestant Germany that condoned it? Ye are the salt of the earth, said the Master; here are Churches that are not only insipid but insidious; wherewith shall they be salted? "It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men" (Matt. v. 13). "When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke xviii. 8). "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten. . . . He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. iii. 19, 22).

But the work of Christ goes on, wonderfully even as the very existence of the Church is a wonder. It is often feeble, but Christ cannot admit defeat. The world needs what only He can give. For the civilizing in the truest sense of its society it needs to draw upon the resources which He imparts, and which the Church exists to make available. Here we see the Church's responsibility to society generally. We may as Christians admit to our shame that the Church has failed in the discharge of this responsibility, but we need not confess utter failure. The conviction that there is no other hope of purification and moral power for mankind apart from Christ should prompt renewed commitment to our task in this generation. In our time, as in Paul's, "there are many adversaries". The present moral need is patent, and it is the measure of the Church's opportunity and responsibility. The forces of evil are as active as ever, and there are fewer optimists today who go about like an exuberant character in *The Cloister and the Hearth*, slapping people on the back and proclaiming that the Devil is dead. However it may be with the Devil, the Christian knows that Christ is alive in His Church still offering resources for the healing of the nations. It depends on the people of the Church whether those healing virtues are applied to the world's wounds. Woe to the Church if it allows anything—its preoccupation with worship, for example, or theology, or even reunion—to become to it as the tithing of mint and anise and cummin, whereby it neglects these weightier matters. But in so far as it faithfully serves the purpose of the greater Healer and Redeemer, serious men of all nations may offer their service to it, and so there may yet be laid the foundations of a world-civilization wherein dwelleth righteousness.

CHAPTER V

CHRIST AND HIS BOOK

*Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.—JER. xv. 16.
The full discovery it (the Bible) makes of the onely way of man's salvation.*

THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION (1647).

Get me that big book over there. "The Bible designed to be read as literature" they call it. Though it seems to me a matter of common sense that the Bible was designed to be read as the Bible. You read the Bible, and Marcus Aurelius, with an occasional dip into Shakespeare, and you won't hurt.

HAMER SHAWCROSS in HOWARD SPRING'S
Fame is the Spur, p. 665.

The treasure in the Bible offers itself as present wisdom and power which any man can grasp, and of which all stand in need. For the marvellous fact about what Christ and the prophets said and did was that they cut through tangled perplexities to make profound things simple, by revealing that certain simple things are profound. Moreover, Christ and the prophets bring the issues in life before us in such a way that when our mind assents, saying "Yes, that was right", conscience speaks within us saying, "It is right for me to-day".

ELMSLIE: *How Came Our Faith?*, p. 22.

To disuse familiarity with a whole great literature—a familiarity not, as with the Greek classics, to be won only at the cost of long laborious study and then only attainable in the nature of things by a very few, but accessible to all in our own tongue through an incomparable translation: this is a voluntary starving of the mind and an impoverishment of the spirit which seems an incredible folly.

LAURENCE BINYON in his Introduction to
The Bible designed to be read as Literature (vi).

A man who puts aside others' interpretations and studies with unprejudiced mind his English Bible and his Shakespeare, need lack very little of all that appertains to right thinking and true manhood. . . . He will find high humour, a close touch with nature, a tenderness and compassion that no other books will give him, with an imagination and faith that reach to great heights, and an outlook beyond the grave. If he wants to verify and test the

truth of life in these two libraries of human experience and prophetic insight be must read widely that he may know the human story so far as it has been told. . . . But so far as my poor reading goes he may wander through a labyrinth . . . only to find that, if his studies have not taken him to the slough of despond they have at best only brought him back to the things to be learnt in their broadness and fullness from the Bible and Shakespeare. In them, if he will, he may learn the whole duty of man: "To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God."

J. M. DENT in *The House of Dent*, p. 26.

IF it is still true that the Bible is a best seller, one can hardly help wondering whether it is possible to be a best seller and yet be comparatively little read; much advertised but little used. One whose business it is to lecture about the Bible is constantly aware of the difference between reading the Bible for oneself and listening to talks about it, and the usefulness of his lectures depends on whether they stimulate the hearers to open the Bible and read therein. Unfortunately not all lecturers and preachers are as effective as Paul was at Berea, nor are all audiences like the Jews who sat under Paul when he visited that city (Acts xvii. 11). The late Bernard Manning in one of his sermons reminds us that the proper thing to do at the Burning Bush is not to botanize about it, but to take the shoes off one's feet and adore.

The Bible is a rather difficult book, admittedly. But who can grumble at that, if it is half as precious and mighty as Christians have traditionally claimed it to be? It can indeed be read without help, and in the mercy of God His guiding and illumining Spirit has made the Bible page shine and speak for many a simple but earnest reader who had never heard of a concordance or Bible dictionary, and who could never get his tongue round the word "exegesis".¹ Nevertheless, the ordinary reader of today will not despise talk about the Bible that will teach him how to approach it and find his way about in it.

¹ Exegesis is the technical term for exposition of the meaning of a Biblical passage or idea.

There is a proper place for what is called "Introduction to the Bible". For something more than the ability to read is necessary for its full appreciation. It is not a book to be taken up in moments of relaxation when one is too tired to concentrate on other reading or one's ordinary work. It is serious reading, and demands attention, a mind alert and conscious of God. It is possible to make unintelligent and superstitious use of it, one example of which is the old method of the Biblical "lot", according to which the page was opened at random and the first verse that struck the eye was taken to be a piece of guidance direct from God. Even so great a mind as that of John Wesley could countenance this use of the sacred Book. This and similar treatment of it gave rise to the ugly word "Bibliolatry", which sounds like idolatry, and does in fact signify a kind of idolatry. To avoid that there is need for instruction *about* the Bible. The serious student will avail himself of this and need not be in doubt when to pass on from reading about it to reading in it; just as, on other business, there is a moment when a man puts the timetable in his pocket and hurries off to catch the train. The result of this kind of reading is that a man not only grows familiar with the names of the kings of Israel and Judah, and is able to find the book of Obadiah without irritable muttering; it becomes a living Word of God to him, and he finds himself using it with deepening thankfulness as the compass by which he directs his life.

The traditional title "Word of God" ceases to be an empty one, and takes on fresh meaning for him. When he is at the Burning Bush, he does not stay too long, pondering why the bush was not consumed or whether it was really only a sunset which Moses saw—that is mere botanizing, to quote Manning again; he is led on to consider the ways in which God lays hold of a man, and he does not leave the passage without asking afresh what it is the Lord wishes him to do with his life.

The Bible, of course, has a unique authority among Christians. The historian, J. R. Green, wrote with reference to the

effect of the Authorised Version of 1611 in the daily life of England that the English people had become the "people of a book". That is regrettably no longer true of our nation—indeed, this fact creates one of the modern preacher's opportunities. But it is still true and must ever continue to be true of the Christian community within the nation. The average Englishman may have ceased to be a Bible reader, nourishing his mind upon it and culling its phrases like rare flowers to express his more deliberate thoughts. But the Church member has not; or has he? If he has, and cannot be induced to see what a treasure is there, then indeed the glory has departed. For without the Bible in its midst, opened regularly and read and pondered and talked about as well as preached about and formally expounded in its proper meetings, the Church is like a ship drifting without a compass. It is bound to forget its own *raison d'être*. Its people run the risk of becoming like ancient Ephraim "a silly dove without understanding". It will neither understand its function nor have a message to deliver. Without the Bible it has no sure link with Christ its Lord.

The Bible is the Christian's source-book, the touchstone on which he can test the rightness of his thought and action. Of all books, it is the one he can least do without, for in these pages alone can he be sure of hearing God's word addressed to him, and here alone does he find Christ his Lord livingly present. This is also true in a special degree for the Christian preacher, whose message has to be not his own reflections and comments on the affairs of the day, but his exposition of some aspect of the truth he finds in the Bible. His own ideas, however bright or however topical, are no substitute for the Biblical faith and the Biblical gospel. As Dr. Selbie used chidingly to urge upon his students in sermon class and upon new ministers at their ordination: "You are not set here to deliver your own soul, but to declare the glorious gospel of the blessed God." True, no man declares the Gospel persuasively without a fresh experience of its power in his own life. But how

can his preaching declare it truly, without dilution or debasement, unless he constantly has open before him the Book where the Gospel was first set down in words?

But the Bible is a difficult book. It is by no means light reading. It has the quality of a strong spirit and has to be taken slowly, diluted as it were by careful reflection, if it is to be rightly assimilated. This implies the desirability of instruction about the varied contents of this Book and guidance as to the best method of studying it. An objection may be raised by those who say they have read it with enjoyment and profit all their lives, although they were never required to attend a course of lectures about it. These objectors may go on to declare that our Bible-reading forefathers also, and that Bible-reading generation, to which J. R. Green refers, who first enjoyed the privilege of having the incomparable Authorised Version in their hands, were not troubled or diverted by any preliminary instruction. To this the answer is Yes and No. Would there were many more who were prepared to take a Bible from the shelf and sit reading it; all honour to them! No one wishes to be critical of that practice.¹ It may, however, be fair to remind such readers that they probably have had help which has become so much a part of them that they are unmindful of it: Sunday School teaching in early years, the example of parents, advice given incidentally through sermons they have heard, and such aids as are provided by the International Bible Reading Association. Moreover, those older readers generally read the Bible in the light of some "scheme of salvation" which was in effect a summary of the most important teaching and a principle of interpretation. There is much to be said for this. For the Bible is not all of one piece, nor all its parts of equal value or inspiration. Even the staunchest advocates of verbal inspiration have to admit that some

¹ Cf. Elmslie, *How Came Our Faith*, p. 81: "There is something solid to build on when people know their Bibles. Because honest hearts are more common than astute brains the vast majority of the Bible's readers drew not perplexities but authentic spiritual sustenance from its words."

parts of the Bible are more precious than others, and some parts are hardly ever read, either in public or in private; and inevitably and rightly so—who has heard Leviticus or Esther or the Song of Solomon read as a lesson in Church, for example, or from the New Testament the Epistle of Jude or the middle chapters of the book of Revelation? And who honestly feels the lack? Martin Luther, who was not a believer in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, made no secret of his preference of the Epistles of Paul to the Gospels, and of the Epistle to the Galatians to the other epistles; and by comparison with the Paulines, he regarded the Epistle of James as an “epistle of straw”. And what was his standard of judgment? His conception of the Gospel itself, of God’s ineffable grace to sinful man, which for him stood most manifest in Galatians. This then for him was the outstanding peak in the whole Biblical range. With true (though not infallible) insight, he looked upon the Bible as showing many contours, and not as all on one flat level. His example may be followed.

The Biblical literature is a wide and varied range, and its readers can be excused if they neglect some pastures because they find others rich enough to nourish their souls; in short, if they read and re-read certain books or chapters and leave others unread. That is what most of us do, and it must be taken account of in our theories of the Bible’s inspiration. There may be a grievous lack of discernment of course; most noticeable in the case of preachers who seem to go to no other parts of the sacred book for the themes of their preaching than Daniel and Revelation, and even then it is not always the teaching of those books which is faithfully expounded, but the speaker’s own nostrums about the Pope or Hitler or his particular political *bête noire* of the moment.

Dr. Forsyth used to make a distinction between the whole of the Bible (i.e. the sum total of its contents from Genesis to Revelation) and the Bible as a whole (i.e. its main message, a summary of its teaching). It is the latter that claims the greater

attention, and our reading of the Bible, however wide and however detailed, should subserve an understanding of this central doctrine.

Before we proceed to consider this more closely, it must be made clear that this chapter is not concerned with the historical and literary questions involved, and with what is usually called "Introduction to the Bible". That is a necessary preliminary study, and there is no intention of minimising its importance, particularly for teachers and preachers. It is presupposed here that there is some familiarity with the critical study of the Bible which has been pursued with wonderful results during the past hundred years or so. The results of that study are to be accepted with gratitude and admiration, and they have come to stay.¹ They cannot be ignored, as some pretend to do.

The purpose of the present discussion is to assume the main results of criticism and to press them on toward the full elucidation of that inner core of meaning, to which reference has just been made. For "Introduction to the Bible" is what its name implies: introduction—that is to say, it is not the Bible itself. The wiser critics have all the time been aware of this. But readers of their work may be pardoned if they have sometimes received the impression that the new critical theories were an end in themselves; that it was as important to know that Isaiah, chapters xl to lv, were not the works of the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz who lived at the end of the Eighth Century B.C., as it is to read what those chapters actually say! Strange confusion! More will be said on this later. At present

¹ The books that might be consulted are legion. For a minimum selection, the best would probably be (for the Old Testament) H. W. Robinson, *The Old Testament, Its Making and Meaning*; (for the New Testament) A. M. Hunter, *Introducing the New Testament*. Simpler still, the admirable companion volumes recently published by Messrs. Arnold at the remarkably low price of 3s.: *Introduction to the Old Testament*, by T. H. Robinson and *Introduction to the New Testament*, by W. G. Robinson. The best single book is no doubt C. H. Dodd, *The Bible Today*. The Revised Version is indispensable for the full understanding of the Old Testament, though not necessary for the New Testament. The new revised American Standard Version is much to be commended. All modern versions have their usefulness in illuminating the text.

we simply remark that Handel's Messiah would not have been improved had the composer been able to read a modern critical analysis of the Old Testament; and we pass on to attempt to lay bare what the Bible fundamentally says.

What is the Bible really about? What is its core and central meaning? Is there a guiding thread which winds through and holds together all its separate books, making them a unity and justifying their being bound together, Old and New Testaments, in one volume? Criticism has supplied a bunch of new keys; let us not be content to jingle them, but use them to open the locks and find what is stored away for our use.

The Bible is the story of man's redemption. It records the development of man's personality in its moral aspect towards a perfection which is affirmed to be man's destiny, though beyond man's attainment if he has no help but the resources within himself. Call it the epic of man if you will, provided you understand that it includes man's failures and debasement as well as his successes and his worthiness. Righteousness is the chief thing, but man has shown himself unable to attain it unless his Maker draws near to succour him. The difficulties of man's earthly environment are taken account of, the fact of evil is recognized; but man is not thereby rendered impotent, nor is he a tool of chance forces; he is a free being, able to choose right or wrong, and therefore culpable when he, in fact, chooses wrong.

The Creator's purpose is that His creature should evolve to perfection of character, and that there should ultimately be a perfect society in a perfect environment. Man being what he is, this becomes not only the Creator's purpose but the Creator's problem, but the faith and hope of the Bible is that God has taken this problem upon Himself and stands, so to speak, committed to seeing mankind through to a final perfection of character. That goal will be attained in a glorified community of persons, and in a dimension of existence other than that in which the human drama is now being played out. This is the

prospect which the Biblical narrative holds out before us. It is not history, but salvation-history, to adopt the convenient term coined by German theologians (*Heilsgeschichte*). It is the story of a series of divine interventions on behalf of mankind in a world which has meaning only as God is recognized as Lord and Creator of all.

Fundamentally the Bible is story, not philosophy or textbook of theology. It is not about ideas of God but about God's action in history, "for us men and for our salvation".¹ It affirms that the Eternal has manifested Himself in time. For the process in which human beings are the chief actors is moving towards a culmination beyond time, and God who is Lord of time and eternity is presiding over this process. This divine control is the guiding thread in the Bible story.

Let us now briefly indicate these events wherein Biblical writers discerned the "mighty hand and outstretched arm" of God. There are three which stand out in relief: the escape of the Israelites from Egypt, their subsequent exile in Babylon, and the work of Christ. But these cardinal events or major turning points in this salvation-history are seen to be illustrated by many lesser ones when we examine the Biblical record more closely.

For this purpose we may take the Bible as it stands, ignoring for the moment the source criticism, for our business is not literary analysis but theological understanding of the content of the units of literature here assembled; that is to say, we may read the Bible from Genesis i onwards, trying to discern the implication of the story, in its present arrangement, as it unfolds. But first a caution, lest we seem to have no historical sense and to be indifferent to the distinction between what has actually happened and what is only fairytale, between history and mythology, fact and fancy. It must be admitted frankly that much of what is related in the book of Genesis—to a less

¹ Cf. what has been said in Chapter I about the nature of God in Christian apprehension of Him.

extent in other books of the Bible—is not history. It is nevertheless possible to appeal to this first book of the Bible as well as others because, though it contains story and folk-lore as well as sober fact, its writers are setting out this material to illustrate a faith which they have inherited and which is based on fact; the faith of Israel learned through their deliverance from bondage and hammered out in subsequent experience, not all of it pleasant and not without suffering and shame. This is not superstition or mythology, but the insight of a faith tested by events and rooted in history.

Imaginative reconstruction of early history can therefore be justified if it is done in the light of recent history and to attest convictions born out of real experience. That is what the early chapters of Genesis are, and however negative our estimate of their value as history or science, they are still the bearers of religious truth. They witness to the faith of the Hebrew people which was based on their experience of God in history. The literary form may be mythology, but the content is truth that all men need to know.¹

The opening chapters of the Bible imply that God's intention was, and is, a perfect man in a perfect environment. This, however, is by no means the case with human life as we know it, and there is no reason to suppose that it ever was so. No human being was ever like Adam as described in Genesis i and ii. We first come to actual history in the third chapter; not that we have here description of events that ever took place—the Garden of Eden is on no map—but that we are here dealing with experiences, temptations, sins that are those of actual men and women. Adam and Eve are typical figures. This does not mean that they are unreal, but the contrary. They are not the first human pair, progenitors of all the human race; they are Mr. and Mrs. Everyman, and more particularly they are my wife and I, and my neighbour and his wife. "Every man is the

¹ The philosopher Plato used the myth or story to express truths for which he felt his normal dialogue form was inadequate.

Adam of his own soul", as an old Jewish writer put it.

This famous third chapter shows that something has gone wrong with the human experiment, with the process of evolution in its moral aspect. Man knows what he ought to do, but he also knows that he has not done it—and never will fully do it, though this he is less willing to admit to himself. This classic story is the tragic—in the true sense of that over-used word—declaration that man cannot be righteous. But man is not alone. There is a God, and that God is man's creator and redeemer. He is concerned that man shall become righteous. With this presupposition, the Biblical narrative now begins of how man struggles and is led onwards and upwards toward that goodness which is the true development of his personality. There are shameful lapses and setbacks, but God never forsakes His creature, and always provides a new way forward. This is the true inner history of mankind which the Bible is concerned with. It is not the economic, or sociological, or evolutionary, but the religious, interpretation of history—history understood as dominated not by great personalities, heroes or supermen, but by the creative personality of God; least of all is it history considered as aimless succession or as the play of chance or fate, but rather as directed by the reason and will of God who sees the end from the beginning, and Himself exists from everlasting to everlasting.

Genesis iii teaches that the Holy Will of God reacts sternly to human disobedience. God takes notice and acts. He is no distant President of Immortals, intent only on having sport out of His human playthings, like the God of Thomas Hardy. Nor can He shrug His shoulders and resign Himself to the failure of His experiment with human beings. He is committed to them and must somehow see them through. So the story says that Adam and Eve were dismissed from the Garden of Eden. Perhaps the old writer was thinking no more highly than of the analogy of ordinary deterrent punishment. But we may discern a deeper logic in this quaint story. If in a perfect environment

humanity is capable of disregarding the highest it knows, then it must be tried in a less perfect environment. It needs the discipline of toil and hardship and the fear of poverty and death; maybe that will prove an incentive to right living. If man can bring himself to "welcome each rebuff that turns earth's smoothness rough", then there is hope of him mastering his environment and his self, and keeping his conscience clear and conforming to his Maker's design. The suggestion of the Biblical story is that God determines to give His creature this second chance. The experiment shall go on.

But the ancient writer's inspiration was controlled by the facts of human experience. He dared not make his next story a happier one. In Chapter iv we read of murder, and that between brothers. We are being told the full truth, and spared nothing. But are there not exceptions to the general rule of evil? What of the undoubted goodness in human life? Yes, the writer will allow for that, and naively records how one Enoch was so distinguished from his contemporaries by the goodness of his character that he had to be removed from the sinful environment.¹ "He was not for God took him."

But the general situation went from bad to worse—remember that this is not ordinary history but the history of human behaviour in the judgment of God—until it merited description as follows:

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."²

An unsparingly grim judgment, and apparently embodying a doctrine of the total depravity of man which we shall be loathe to accept and which is more than the Bible as a whole implies concerning human nature. But the emphasis is less on the

¹ This is not the only possible interpretation of the cryptic reference to Enoch: Gen. v. 22-24.

² Gen. vi. 5.

condemnation of human behaviour than on the fact that God saw it. The full summing up of the situation is not that the earth was corrupt, but that the earth was corrupt *before God* (see verse 11). There is a God who takes notice of what men do, and this forbidding judgment is the introduction to a fresh story of Divine action in this human situation that has got out of hand.

An old story of a flood is retold in Hebrew in such a way as to bring out this lesson of the divine control, stern to ruthlessness as it may be if moral corruption requires it. No date can be given to the incident. We are in the realm not of history but of salvation-history, using a folk tale imaginatively reconstructed as its literary medium. But the meaning is that it is possible for human society to reach such a depth of moral degeneracy that divine direction brings it to the point of self-destruction, leaving only a minority to be the founders of a worthier society of the future. And surely that is truth which, though "presented in a tale, may enter in at lowly doors", however difficult it may be for the less lowly and the sophisticated to admit it? The present generation, uncertain whether it has enough moral capital to float the new enterprise of United Nations, should certainly be prepared to consider this truth. But how shall they hear without a preacher?

So the Biblical narrative proceeds, selecting those events which reveal divine dealing with human kind. We are shown God in action at the Tower of Babel (Gen. xi. 1-9); a naive story this, but the real unfortunates are not the Ziggurat builders of ancient Mesopotamia, but over-confident humanists, ancient and modern, and all who recognize no eternal standards of right and truth, but make their own ambition their sole guide. In our day it is not so much individuals as nations who are guilty of this sin.

The next major development is in Chapter xii, which describes a new method adopted by God, the method of concentration on one particular clan in the hope that by a kind of

intensive training or favoured development, they may achieve standards of individual and social justice which will inevitably influence all mankind. So the famous promise to Abraham is to be understood (Gen. xii. 2-3).¹ The idea of a chosen people has offended many, but needlessly, for if there is one thing that the history of nations reveals, it is that different races have different characteristics, and some are so richly endowed or have made so good a use of their opportunities, that they can make a greater contribution than most to the common life of mankind. Whether they do so is another question, but the fact of varied racial capability is beyond dispute, and the genius of the Hebrew race in religion ought to be no more denied than the fact that Julius Caesar was a Roman, or that the Battle of Trafalgar took place in 1805. It is worthy of note, too, that according to the Abrahamic promise, it was recognized that privilege implies responsibility; Israel is not to be pampered, but to be the servant of mankind in this matter of moral progress which is God's concern.²

The remainder of the book of Genesis is largely taken up with narrative that is less directly, or not at all, related to the main thread of the Bible story of redemption. We need not, therefore, linger upon them, except to note that the interest in the Hebrew people and the land where God's experiment with them is to be played out persists. Jacob, for example, is not allowed in the story to settle down happily in Syria with the wives of his choice; he must be taken back to Canaan. And in the great Joseph saga, to which thirteen chapters of vivid narrative are devoted, the main point, in the light of the central redemption motif of the Bible, is that by Joseph's elevation to high office in Egypt the survival of the chosen people is made possible. Whether there is any basis for that in historical fact

¹ Cf. especially 3b: "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." This is omitted in the reiteration of the promise in Gen. xvii, but it is the most important element in it, and one which Christianity re-emphasizes. Cf. Gal. iii. 8-9, 14, 26-29.

² Here again Gen. xii is more significant than Gen. xvii. Cf. also Amos iii. 2.

or not, that is the value of the stories theologically. The most significant part of the story is Chapter xlv which indicates how the divine control was operative, overruling even the treachery of Joseph's brothers; what appears to men to be luck, good for some and bad for others, may yet in the providence of God, which is not so apparent, be productive of ultimate good for all. In revealing his identity to his bewildered brethren, Joseph says: "Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Gen. xlv. 5-7). Much more is hinted at here than the personal magnanimity of Joseph.

We come next to that great event in Israel's history which has become a classic symbol of redemption: their period of slavery in Egypt and deliverance from it under the leadership of Moses. The books of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are devoted to this, and there is constant explicit or implicit reference back to it in other books of the Old Testament. Moses, the leader and lawgiver, was the Man of God *par excellence*. The experience and the subsequent reflection on it prompted by Moses made the people conscious of their special destiny and of the good hand of their God upon them. This was an event which changed the course of history for them—it must be remembered that we are now dealing with real events, not tradition or fiction—and made possible the beginning of a religious interpretation of history, as we should call it, that is, a growing discernment that what happens is part of a process that has meaning, this meaning moreover being for this particular people a dealing of God with them, with a view to their progress morally and culturally towards an ideal community. This was the first dawning of the faith that, in Paul's words, "to those who love God, who are the called in accordance with His design, all things contribute to a (final) good result" (Rom. viii. 28).¹ Degraded to slavery in Egypt,

¹ My rendering. For an alternative translation, see Moffatt, and Dodd's commentary ad loc.

the Hebrews had been far from being able to respond to such an upward calling. Their freedom they had neither expected nor deserved, and they learnt from Moses to regard it, not as inexplicable good luck, but as experience of a divine succour. Perhaps only a few in that generation were willing to take that lesson from Moses, but there was then and always a nucleus of men of faith in Israel who clung to that belief and held it in trust for those who came after them. It was belief in redemption, offered by a merciful God to the undeserving and sinful whom He wills to educate to better things. That faith wrote the Bible, and the continued unbelief and unrighteousness of the majority in Israel were not able to prevent the light of faith shining in the darkness.

We have seen in the previous chapter how the Hebrew conception of the covenant was related to, in fact derived from, that unique experience of redemption at the Red Sea. The covenant idea preserves the belief in the God who redeems beyond man's deserving, and upholds the importance of right living while at the same time admitting fully man's departure from right living. The goodly fellowship of the prophets kept this idea before their people, so that redemption and righteousness are the theme of the Old Testament right through. There are deviations from this theme, as witness such a book as Esther or Ecclesiastes, as well as sections within other books. But we insist that the heart and core of the Old Testament is this theme of the righteous God pleading and working for the redemption of unrighteous man. The word righteous as applied to God in the Bible has not merely a passive sense, but an active or causative sense as well: making others righteous. The covenant conception is in itself a guiding thread that runs through the whole Bible.

Israel's history reveals no more good men than does the history of other nations. Israel had special opportunities, but as often as not she misused them. But she was the Hound of Heaven. The distinctive thing about her was her awareness of

God, the God Who had to deal sternly with her, Who revealed Himself as a God of judgment before it was known that He was also a God of mercy; the God Whom she forgot in her prosperity but found again in her calamities.

Jacob is a typical figure. He is by no means an attractive character. But underneath his craftiness and his persistence that could sustain him in evil courses equally as in good, there was a quality which made him a man open to divine control, responsive to God even in his sins. Is it not written that even when running away from the consequences of a misdeed, he is overcome by his consciousness of God's presence and sees heaven opened?¹ Israel as a people had that quality. In her periods of weakness and of strength she produced men who could discern the hand of God acting purposefully in history, a God who requires obedience to His commands, but who also forgives the disobedient, raises the fallen, restores the exiles and opens the doors of the prison house to them that are bound; a God of judgment and mercy, loving righteousness and hating iniquity; the Redeemer of Israel and of all the nations.

This awareness of God inspired the men who spoke and wrote the Old Testament, and compiled it in its present form, as the book which with unique insight and realism lays bare the true need of man and the divine response to it.

We pass on to the New Testament. The Old Testament leads naturally on to it, and the two testaments belong together as one book of the redeeming mercy of God. We are still dealing with the same theme, but what we have in the New Testament is the record of one culminating appeal of God to mankind, an act or rather series of acts in which His redeeming purpose was supremely made known, in such a way that nothing can be added to it and no higher or more convincing evidence can be

¹ Gen. xxviii. 10-22. Even if Jacob be not an historical figure, the contention of the remarks above is not affected. The point is that the Hebrews who told this story of Jacob regarded him as an honoured ancestor, although he was that sort of character.

required that God is in lively earnest in wrestling with the soul of man, in hating sin and seeking to provide a way out of it. This new series of acts is the life of Jesus Christ, Who showed in word and deed the way of God's requirement, and sealed His testimony when He yielded His life up in a death which because God was in it became a renewed life. What He achieved is perhaps best described (using the terminology of the Gospels themselves) as the establishment of the Kingdom of God. That kingly rule of God, which Israel had theoretically believed in but had not seen being realized in the life of their nation, did begin to be a real experience among men through the power that was in Jesus. What had been an ideal then became actual. What had never before been seen on earth was entering into the world's life.

“Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached” (Luke vii. 22-3; cf. iv. 17-21).

God's Kingdom was being set up in men's hearts (Luke xvii. 21) in the midst of the kingdoms of this earth, and Satan's kingdom was shaken to its foundations (Luke x. 17-18; xi. 14-22).

The life of Jesus thus had a quality and an energy¹ which no prophet had shown. The events of His life were more revelatory of God and His purpose than any previous events in the history of Israel. And after His death and resurrection, the goodly fellowship of the prophets is succeeded by the glorious company of the apostles to be the interpreters of those events (cf. “we are witnesses of these things” Acts ii. 32; iii. 15; x. 39) and ambassadors on behalf of Christ beseeching men to be reconciled to God (II Cor. v. 20).

The powerful redeeming love of God is now fully revealed and veritably at work in this new development inaugurated

¹ Paul calls it a divine energy—Eph. i. 19-20.

by Christ, the covenant of new moral possibilities for all who respond by faith. The end is not yet; but the process of which it is the climax has been set in train. The Kingdom has come and shall finally fully come when everything that opposes God's will shall be brought to obedience and all shall be presented faultless in the presence of God's glory, and sin and death are no more (Phil. ii. 9-11; iii. 20-21; I Cor. xv. 24-28; Jude 24; Rev. xxi-xxii).

One other question claims to be briefly considered: that of the Bible's authority. The interest which the critical studies of the last hundred years aroused has tended to divert attention from this question, but the present generation of Christians, and especially preachers, can hardly defer serious thinking about it. It is most important that we should have a clear opinion as to why we regard the Bible as a book of unique value, worthy to be called the Word of God and Sacred Scripture, and able to be so called with real meaning and without misuse of words.

For some the problem does not arise. The Roman Catholic may be content to say the authority of the Bible is guaranteed for him by the authority of his Church. That is no way out for most of us. Neither can we agree with the Fundamentalist, who is content to equate authority with verbal inspiration and infallibility, and does not perceive the objections which the content of the Bible itself raises to that opinion. How else then can the authority of the Bible be defined?

The line of our answer to this question has been laid down already in the foregoing pages. The Bible is unique among literature because only there can we find testimony to the God Who acts mightily for man's salvation. This means that though it is ancient literature, it is not simply literature (the "Ancient Literature of the Hebrew People", as the title of the Old Testament appears in four volumes of the *Everyman* edition); and though it contains valuable material without which the ancient history of the Near East could not be fully reconstruc-

ted, it is not simply history. It is religion; and indeed not merely that. It is Gospel. There is only one Gospel and only one Gospel book, which is therefore rightly named Bible with a capital "b", a Scripture with a capital "s".

And what is meant by calling it "canonical" Scriptures? What does canon or canonicity signify? This is another matter which requires more precise definition than it has received in theological discussions of recent years. Our fullest and most learned study of the subject in English is Westcott's *History of the Canon of the New Testament*—there is a companion volume on the Old Testament by Ryle—and it is remarkable that both of these books confine themselves to historical treatment of their subjects and give no adequate consideration to the fundamental matter, namely, the nature of canonicity itself. The reason, no doubt, was that these books were written with readers in view who needed no convincing with regard to the superiority of the Bible to all other books; it was for them not literature—it was the Bible; it was God's word, not man's, and that verdict upon it put it in a class by itself, and there were so many people prepared to admit this opinion that it seemed to require no arguing.

Such is not the position today. If it is suggested to people that the Bible should be given more credence than other books, people want to know why. It contains good thoughts, admittedly; but so does a book of philosophy, or the poems of Browning, say—or the "Bibles" of the political ideologies, like Communism. And what about the Koran, or the Hindu Sacred books? In other words, people are inclined, if they take an interest at all, to take the Bible out of its glass case, as it were, to have a look at it—and it is by no means certain that they will put it back in its glass case again!

Now the pioneers of critical study of the Bible—and let us give them the credit they deserve for their learning, critical acumen and Christian piety—did in a sense invite people to take the Bible out of the glass case, to which the reverence of

an earlier age not animated by the scientific spirit was content to consign it, and have a close look at it, comparing it with other literature, sacred and secular. That was a right instinct. It was in the interest of truth and was owed to the enquirer trained to ask questions fearlessly, and without prejudice, in other fields of study. If religion imparts truth, it need not fear to have that truth compared with other truth. All that religion need fear is prejudice.

So the work of the Bible critics proceeded, against much prejudice and needless trembling for the ark of God on the part of church people. It was a necessary and salutary discipline for the Church itself. But we are now in our day at a point where we must raise the question: What about the glass case? Is the Bible to be restored to its pedestal there, or not? Has it perchance been decided that it is not fitting for it to be put back there, because its proper place is on the ordinary shelf, preferably among the Sacred Books of the East? If so, there is no further use for the glass case, which should be removed—and incidentally the anxieties of the churchmen who opposed critical research on the Bible were justified.

Now, as a matter of fact, our Bible critics have omitted to answer these questions. They have been preoccupied with the details of their work. Some of them do appear to have treated the Bible simply as a book of ancient history, or, if not the whole of it, that section customarily referred to as the Old Testament. The question cannot longer be left undecided. The issue is now a contemporary one. How does the Bible come out of the dust of criticism and debate? Are we still to spell it with a capital "b"? Can it still appropriately be called the Word of God? Wherein does its uniqueness and authority consist?

It is significant that a recent Old Testament study of great importance (Dr. Elmslie's *How Came Our Faith?*) devotes a chapter to this issue. The book as a whole is an outstanding example of how the new knowledge and methods of interpre-

tation made available by modern critical study are to be used to make the ancient words live again in their reference to our contemporary situation. The chapter in question (pp. 56-87) reviews with wit and mastery the uses, good and bad, the Church has made of the Bible, exposing particularly the futility of allegorical interpretation, and leading up to the Church's opportunity at the present time. But it does not deal with the question of the essential meaning of Word of God, i.e. revelation; or of the nature of inspiration and canonicity.

Canonical Scripture is that book or collection of books which set forth what a religion essentially is, before apologists have begun to defend it against its critics, or theologians have brought their minds to the fuller exposition of its tenets, or the march of time has institutionalized it and involved it in compromise with the world. In the case of Christianity, which took its origin in certain historical events, this means that its sacred canon will have an interest in history rather than in philosophy or abstract ideas, and will consist of writings which are roughly contemporary with those original basic events. History, as distinct from mere chronicles or annals, records more than bare events; it gives some interpretation of them, if only by its principle of selection and its relation of these events to others.

The Christian canon similarly presents the events which are constitutive for the Christian faith together with their interpretation, which reflects that faith and can awaken it in those who read. Its content will be limited to those writings which were produced near enough in date to those events to be able to witness to them and their true significance. This is what is meant by saying that the canon consists of writings which are roughly contemporary with the movement or crisis out of which the Christian religion arose. This must be clearly understood. It is sometimes suggested that a selection of more recent literature might be added to the Canon of the New Testament: something concerning the work of great personalities at crea-

tive turning points in the history of the Church; for example, Luther. There has been great literature written since New Testament days, e.g., Shakespeare, and great literature within the Christian sphere, e.g. Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Charles Wesley's hymns. And some would add: Are not the writings of great reformers like Mazzini or Gladstone, or others more remote from recent time about whom there is a more settled verdict in the estimation of Christians, Anselm of Canterbury for instance, or St. Augustine, worthy to be set alongside the prophets and wise men of Israel? The prophets were after all enunciators of the great principles of righteousness on which the universe is governed, and surely they have successors who have done the same in modern history, who therefore merit equal veneration. Such arguments as these, well-intentioned as they are, belong to the type of thinking known as "woolly". They confuse the present issue, which is not concerning great men, past and present, nor even concerning inspiration in life and literature, nor concerning the difference between sacred and secular (on all of which subjects there is a great deal to be said in the appropriate place); the issue before us concerns the essential idea of canonicity, and the principles on which a canon of sacred scripture is delimited.

It need not for a moment be denied that much in post-Biblical literature is truly inspired of God. Nor is this confined to writings within the religious realm or those which were written by people of Christian convictions; Shakespeare and Goethe hardly come within the category of orthodox churchmen, but their inspiration is not in question. Of course, God is still alive and in touch with His world, and He is constantly inspiring men and women to great deeds and great writing; and nothing noble and of good report is without His prompting, whether that is realized or not. Our doctrine of the Holy Spirit must be made to cover all this.

But the Bible, the sacred collection, is not simply great

literature. It is the writings, and those writings alone, which enable us to know the happenings which created and kept in being a covenant people and eventually brought Christ upon the human stage to demonstrate supremely God's ways in redemption. The Bible thus constitutes the norm or criterion by which all else, word or deed, that claims to be Christian can be tested. (The word "canon" itself means measuring rod, rule, standard.) This we find in the Bible and nowhere else, and because of this it cannot be expanded. There is nothing that could be added to it of its own kind. Thus to ask for an enlargement of the canon of Scripture is to ask for what is not conceivable, and the question reveals grave confusion of mind about what the nature and function of a Christian canon is.

The Bible consists of two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The former was originally the sacred scripture of the Jews, and its canonization was decided in principle in the time of Ezra (c. 398 B.C.), practically completed c. 200 B.C., and finally ratified in its present form by the Rabbis of Jamnia c. A.D. 100. The Christians took over the Old Testament¹ automatically as their Scripture, and the earliest Christian canon was simply the Old Testament. But distinctive Christian writings were gradually produced, beginning with the Pauline epistles, and including, of course, the Gospels.

The New Testament had attained something like its present form by the middle of the second century when the challenge of heresy compelled the Church to determine the limits of the New Testament canon. Some writings, e.g. the Epistle of Barnabas, were then rejected, though they had their partisans, and there was doubt in some parts of Christendom about the retention of others, e.g., the Apocalypse. The final decision was made at the Council of Carthage, A.D. 397. The Apocrypha was then included, and is still a part of the later Bible of Roman Catholicism, and of the Greek Bible of the Greek Orthodox

¹ In its Greek version, part of which dated back to the Third Century B.C.

Church. There was an element of human error in the decisions about the canon, and the story of the gradual recognition as canonical of the New Testament writings is a tangled one.¹ But there is no justification for demanding a new selection, or the jettisoning of the Old Testament from the Christian Bible.

It may be objected that this takes no account of the influence of the Holy Spirit. Is it not when the Spirit of God interprets the Bible page to a man that it becomes authoritative to his mind and conscience, a veritable word of God to him? And may not the Spirit in like manner speak a word of God through a page of some other book, even possibly a book that is not specifically religious? There is much truth here. It is conceivable that even the writings of Karl Marx might so stir a Christian man to action against social wrong and economic blundering that they could be called a word of divine direction to his life, more potent than preachers' exhortations.

Divine guidance may come through many an experience, especially to those who are habitually schooled to expect it and courageous enough to respond to it; and that schooling and sensitivity is the work of God's spirit in the heart. The flaming beauty of a desert bush mediated God's presence and command to a lonely shepherd one fateful day, and initiated a new development of history and the birth of a church. Likewise, says a modern poet, any common bush may be afire with God. And the romantics are wont to speak similarly about sunsets.

But we are getting wide of the target. Our subject is the Bible and its claim to be the word of God. Is there some quality in it and absent from other literature which justifies that claim for it? Is there something objective in Scripture itself, apart from the inward witness of the Holy Spirit making

¹ See the regular text books: Ryle, *Canon of the Old Testament*; Westcott, *Canon of the New Testament*; Souter, *Text and Canon of the New Testament*. See also the present writer's *Marcion and his Influence*, pp. 23-37 on the factors which were influential during the Second Century A.D. in determining the limits of the New Testament Canon.

use of it, which sets it apart:¹ Many are inclined to answer, No: only when the Spirit breathes upon the Word is the truth brought to light. The right answer, however, is surely that the Bible alone contains that record of the revelation in Jesus Christ which is fundamental for Christianity. No other writing, Christian or non-Christian, can dispute with it for that title. Its language is often undistinguished, nearly always simple; it does not pretend to be distinguished as literature, nor is it infallible in detail as history; but it does contain this indispensable testimony. We include here in the Bible the Old Testament as well as the New. For while our claim is applicable primarily with reference to the New Testament, which was composed more directly under the impact of the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ, the Old Testament is also covered by the claim, because it is the indispensable framework of the New Testament, which is inexplicable without it, like a tree without roots, or a statue without legs. As Brunner has somewhere written: "Without the Old Testament there is no Jesus Christ."²

It should now be clear in what sense we can uphold the classic designation of the Bible as the Word of God. Strictly speaking, the Bible *contains* or *mediates* the Word of God. For the Word of God in its fullest declaration is Jesus Christ. This Word is conveyed *in*, and mediated *through*, the words of the Scriptures. Those words are the words of human writers, and it is not to be expected that they should not contain imperfec-

¹ The inward witness of the Holy Spirit, *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*, was recognized by Calvin as necessary, if the word of God contained in the Bible was to become a living word of God to a modern reader. This takes account of the fact that an infidel may read the Bible and not be moved at all; a Fascist may burn it as a mere piece of Jewish literature; or a scholar may use it simply as evidence for certain periods of ancient history.

² The writer is not committed to the tendency to find reference to Christ everywhere in the Old Testament, as in some recent Continental theology (e.g. W. Vischer, *The Witness of the Old Testament to Christ*), and in the older Typology. The subject is a fascinating one, but needs very careful treatment. See my article in the *Congregational Quarterly*, January 1946, and the important book of Dr. A. J. B. Higgins, *The Christian Significance of the Old Testament*.

tion. That is incidental to mediation. But God conveys something of Himself through the imperfect medium. Thus He stoops to conquer. Luther's dictum about the Birth of Christ is applicable to the Bible as a whole, and is most illuminating in this connection:

“Poor and mean the swaddling-clothes are, but precious is the treasure that lies in them.”

The function of critical study is to distinguish between the outward swaddling clothes and the precious child who is the Word of God, and the Eternal Son; to fold back the clothes—noting here and there how mean and unworthy they are—that He may be the more clearly seen. Then it remains for the humble reader—not without the Spirit to illumine his eyes—to behold and adore.

“The Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit . . . and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. iv. 12). This refers not to the Bible, but to a divine activity, of which the Bible is a record and witness, but which is prior to the Bible and continually energizes through time and eternity. The Bible has, so to speak, caught a few photographs of it at different stages in its course, developed them (not all equally clearly), and arranged them as a series (not always, say the critics, in the best possible order—the book of Isaiah, for example, might have been much better arranged, they think). It is wise to bear in mind that God's quick and powerful word is something mightier than what the Bible has captured of it; but it is through the Bible that we are made aware of it. The Bible is therefore indispensable for us. Let us set down in briefest summary the main things we learn about this sovereign Word:

(a) It was the Word which called the universe into being: Gen. i. As a word pronounced by human lips is the expres-

sion of a thought conceived in the mind, so God's Word is an outgoing of His thought and purpose: Isa. lv. 10-11.

(b) The Word of God raised up Moses and the prophets, i.e. the inspired leaders of mankind through the generations: Exod. iii, Jer. i, etc.

(c) The Word took flesh in Jesus Christ: John i. 14.

(d) The Word called into being the Church: John xiv-xvii, I John i. 1, I Cor. i. 17-18. The original Word of creation has become a Word of reconciliation: II Cor. v. 17-19.

A recent book by Sir Charles Marston, the archaeologist, has the title *The Bible Comes Alive*. The Bible comes alive not merely because the excavator's spade digs up ancient Jericho and demonstrates how the walls fell flat (cf. Joshua vi), or reveals the busy life of Ur of the Chaldees in the days of Abraham;¹ but rather because in and through it the divine Word becomes living and active for a reader, piercing, discerning, challenging, humiliating, inspiring.

"Of making many books there is no end", said the cynical Preacher (Eccles. xii. 12), and how much more justified would his remark be today! There is all the variety of what pen does on paper, from newspaper and thriller to Hansard and the White Papers; there is pornography for those who itch for it. But there is only one Bible. A renewed seeking of God and His Word through the Bible would minister not only to the seeker's own deep need; but to that of his generation. For the Word of God is quick and powerful to challenge the false gods—ideologies—in which men and nations vainly trust, and to kindle that dynamic and sense of purpose which mankind sorely needs but cannot find.

¹ Cf. Sir L. Woolley, *Ur of the Chaldees* (Pelican book).