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# THE THINKER'S HANDBOOK

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# THE THINKER'S HANDBOOK

*A Guide to Religious Controversy*

BY  
HECTOR HAWTON

LONDON  
WATTS & CO.  
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## INTRODUCTION

RATIONALISM, in the wide sense of the term, began with the Greeks. The first break with the traditions of the sacred colleges occurred in the sixth century B.C. It started the search for a natural, as opposed to a supernatural, account of the universe. Indeed, the simplest description of rationalism is that it is "naturalism," in contrast to "supernaturalism," but, like all simple descriptions, this needs some qualifying.

It is astonishing, however, to see what progress was made once mythological explanations were left behind and men began to use their reason and powers of observation in order to experiment and systematize their discoveries. Many of their answers went wide of the mark, but in some directions their success seems incredible. The atomic theory was a brilliant but enormously important guess. Aristarchus, for reasons we do not know, taught that the earth revolved round the sun; and Eratosthenes calculated by strictly scientific methods the circumference of the earth to a very close approximation. Untrammelled by religious tradition, there seemed scarcely any limit to what the new-found instrument of reason might discover.

But all this proved, unhappily, to be a false dawn. Once more a mythological account of the universe returned like an extinguisher, backed by a far more highly organized religion than man had ever known before, and, in the last resort, by the secular arm of the State.

It is an over-simplification to say that Christianity was the chief cause of the decay of classical science. But the Christian Church made it almost impossible for a scientific outlook to reappear by creating a mental atmosphere inimical to scientific inquiry. The obscurantism of St. Augustine fixed the matrix of European thought for a thousand years: "Whatever knowledge man has acquired outside Holy Writ, if it be harmful it is there condemned; if it be wholesome, it is there contained."

The Renaissance made a rent in the iron curtain. But when Galileo asserted things that could not be found in Holy Writ he

was imprisoned by the Inquisition and forced to recant. There were signs, however, that after a millennium of stagnation scientific investigations had begun again and could not be wholly stifled. In the sixteenth century these inquiries re-started in northern Europe, and before long there was a brighter blaze of discovery than anything known to antiquity.

Science was nevertheless strictly enjoined to keep within certain limits. So long as it seemed to demonstrate the reign of law in Nature the Protestant Churches welcomed it as providing proofs of the existence of a Supreme Law-giver. Their troubles did not begin until attempts were made to bring man—and even Holy Writ—into the scientific picture.

That occurred shortly after the middle of the nineteenth century, when Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, which was followed by *The Descent of Man*. Immediately there was a storm. It was one thing to say that the earth went round the sun, but it was quite another matter to suggest that man, lord of creation, had descended from an ape-like ancestor. Even the most cultured theologians believed that the universe had been created in 4004 B.C., that Adam and Eve had sinned in the Garden of Eden, that man suffered as the result of this Fall, and that much of the evil in the world was due to some mysterious hereditary taint transmitted by a primitive couple, the parents of all mankind. If there had been no Fall what need was there of Redemption? And if the Genesis story was grossly wrong how much else of the Bible could be trusted? What became of the doctrine of its verbal inspiration?

### *Dangerous Thoughts*

The dust has begun to settle on some of these controversies, but they caused enormous excitement at the time. Geology gave a new time-scale for the world; archæology threw back the origin of civilization and set the Hebrew contribution in truer perspective; anthropology compelled a drastic revision of ideas about primitive peoples; and the Bible itself was subjected to severe textual and historical criticism.

The entire theological superstructure seemed as though it were about to collapse. Churchmen lost a good deal of their arrogant assurance. They looked about anxiously for some means of

buttressing the tottering edifice. Some found it in a tortuous compromise which regarded the Bible as still true in an allegorical sense. Some joined the Roman Church, which wisely went straight on with its eyes averted as though nothing had happened. Others frankly admitted that the new knowledge was incompatible with religious dogmas.

From the time of the Greek materialists there had always been an underground movement that resisted the superstitions uncritically accepted by the mass of people. In the heyday of the Church such rebels were treated as dangerous heretics. Unless they kept their doubts a secret they were thrown into prison, tortured, burnt alive, or broken on the wheel. They were usually described as atheists, though quite often this was inaccurate.

Even when active persecution died down, an independent thinker was liable to be ostracized, to be beggared and calumniated. Spinoza, who was regarded with general horror, did not publish his *Ethics* in his lifetime. Hume had to veil most of his scepticism in bland irony and pretend to believe in God. To be an agnostic was considered to be only a little less disreputable than to be an atheist. If the latter expressed his views to a popular audience in plain language he was liable to arrest under the Blasphemy Laws. Atheism is still allowed to be propagated only if it is wrapped in the decent obscurity of learned language.

Nevertheless, in the sixties and seventies of the last century an increasing number of men of integrity began to proclaim their disbelief in the dogmas of the Christian religion. Such men were in the line of descent of the great rebels of the past. They might disagree with each other about some matters, but they had a common temper of mind. It was the temper that had made science possible; and it was the exact opposite to the religious temper as displayed by St. Augustine.

These doubters were rationalists in the sense in which the term is used by Lecky in his *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*. Just as the Protestants broke with the Roman Church at the Reformation, preferring to use private judgment than to submit to clerical authority, so these men broke with revealed religion completely. They refused to regard the Bible as being essentially different from any other

ancient literature. For them private judgment meant the use of reason in interpreting a world of common experience. It meant restricting belief to propositions for which there was good evidence. Truth was valued for its own sake, and the pleasures of wishful-thinking, as we should phrase it nowadays, were rejected as harmful. Thomas Henry Huxley described faith in a religious dogma for which there is no proof as "the lowest depth of immorality." A brilliant young geometer, W. K. Clifford, called it "guilt" and "sin" to believe even the *truth* without "scientific evidence."

This was a new accent and a portent. Men had cared passionately about truth before, and gone to the stake for it, but such men did not exist hitherto in great numbers. There was no widespread open defiance of religious dogmatism, but only isolated instances. The growth of scientific knowledge, however, had begun to create a new public with a new outlook and a new morality; a minority, it is true, but one too powerful to be ignored or suppressed.

It was inevitable that at a certain point this minority should try to organize itself. The time was ripe for the rationalist temper to attain concrete expression, and the loneliness of the sceptic, which drove poor Hume to such fits of melancholy that he described himself as a "strange monster unfit for human society," was coming to an end.

### *Organized Rationalism*

The Ethical Movement, the National Secular Society, and the Rationalist Press Association were symptoms of this situation. On the conservative wing, so to speak, there were those who rejected the miraculous and sacramental elements of religion but still retained theistic beliefs. Some of them were Unitarians, others followed the pattern of eighteenth-century deism. They were prepared to cry, with Voltaire, "*Écrasez l'infame*," though they would remember that he added: "If God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him; but all Nature cries out to us that He exists."

A middle position was occupied by the agnostics. In the first number of the *Agnostic Annual*, which appeared in 1884, Huxley wrote: "Agnosticism is of the essence of science, whether



ancient or modern. It simply means that a man shall not say he knows or believes that which he has no scientific grounds for professing to know or believe."

Huxley used this term as early as 1869, taking it from the Greek *a*—not, *gignoskein*—to know. An agnostic neither affirms nor denies the existence of God. Like Herbert Spencer, he regards the knowable as the sphere of science, and the unknowable as the province of religion.

Organized secularists represented the militant wing. Many of them were atheists of the stamp of Bradlaugh. In this section also were materialists like Marx and Engels. Militant secularists were regarded as specially shocking because they did not address themselves solely to the intelligentsia. They took unbelief to the masses, just as General Booth and the Salvation Army took evangelism. They held, with La Mettrie, that a State composed of atheists would be the happiest of all States, because materialism freed man from a sense of guilt and responsibility to God and the fear of future suffering.

A Rationalist may be either a theist or an atheist. It is safer to regard Rationalism as the genus, and agnosticism, atheism, and even some forms of theism, as the species. This is undoubtedly how Lecky thought of the matter, and organized Rationalism took a similar broad view of itself.

## Chapter One

### REASON AND REVELATION

The authority of Tradition. The Inner Light. Types of Revelation. Cardinal Mercier's definition of faith. Luther on faith. Pascal's wager. Critics of Humanism. The empirical basis of Rationalism.

FOR debate to be possible there must be an agreement about what determines the truth of an assertion. When Pascal tells us that the heart has reasons of which the intellect knows nothing, we can understand very well what he means, but we cannot argue on such a basis as we could, for example, with Socrates. There are few more moving scenes in literature than Plato's account of Socrates calmly discussing the prospects of surviving death with his friends while the gaoler prepares the cup of hemlock. We may disagree with his reasoning, but we feel that he would not have minded our disagreement. On the contrary, we feel that his eyes would have brightened at the fresh challenge.

Similarly, we feel that we could argue with Confucius or with Buddha. "Do not believe a thing because many speak of it," Buddha is reported to have said in the *Anguttara*. "Do not believe on the faith of sages of the past. Do not believe what you have imagined, persuading yourself that a god inspires you. Believe nothing on the sole authority of your masters or priests. After examination, believe what you yourself have tested and found to be reasonable, and conform your conduct thereto."

Jesus, on the other hand, seldom argued. He appealed to the Jewish Scriptures as to an unquestionable authority, but for the most part he spoke as the inspired oracles had spoken from time immemorial. He used the imperative; and no doubt this is one of the secrets of the success of Christianity. The majority of people do not want to argue, still less to suspend judgment on difficult questions. They want to be told what to believe; and they *want* to believe. They are very glad to learn that philosophy is "foolishness" because they have always mistrusted "high-brows."

Nevertheless, if it had not been for the "highbrows" who refused to accept the stories of the priests and oracles there would have been no need to make a virtue of faith. This was made very clear by Robertson Smith when he broke new ground in his *Religion of the Semites* some fifty years ago. He pointed out that in ancient religion belief was a secondary matter; what was meritorious was the act *done*, not the state of mind, or *belief*. You did not choose a religion but were born into it. "You could not be absolutely irreligious. It was a social obligation. You were born into a circle of divine beings as well as kinsfolk. Society was made up of gods and men." 53

Obviously there was no need for faith before it occurred to men to doubt. When the orthodoxy of the times was challenged, however, a new and rather startling question appeared: How do we *know* that these stories about the gods are true? And to that question there are several possible answers. We can say that the stories are true because the priests or the Scriptures tell us so. The traditional wisdom is thus passed down by authority, as we find in a fragment of Euripides, whose Melanippe says of her cosmological doctrines: "It is not my word, but my Mother's word."

Alternatively, we can say that the stories must be true because they are so reasonable. We may not be able to prove them, item by item, but that does not matter if we can prove that the priests have access to inside information about the cosmos. We may argue that even if we cannot *prove* that God exists it is nevertheless reasonable to suppose that he has revealed his intentions to the priests. If there are rival priesthods, telling different stories, the situation is admittedly difficult, but perhaps God has favoured his chosen priests with miracles and superior sanctity so that we can distinguish. It should then be plain, on careful examination, that the false priests are conjurors; that, instead of being holy men, they indulge in orgies of depravity.

But if this will not do, the whole idea of looking for external signs of revelation may have to be given up. We may be driven inside ourselves to find justification in our own conviction of certainty. We are then thrown back, like Pascal, on reasons of the heart; or, like Newman, on a special faculty, the illative sense; or, like Schleiermacher, on the feeling of dependence. We then claim that we know that God exists by direct acquaint-

tance. We have experienced the presence of God, and there is no room for argument about it. We can but pity those who have missed such an experience. As Eddington writes: "I could no more ram religious convictions into an atheist than I could ram a joke into a Scotchman." <sup>24</sup>

### *Can We be Rational?*

The Roman Church has always frowned upon this appeal to intuition. Obviously it may lead to the view that priests and sacred scriptures are unnecessary. If the individual can discover the sublime truths of religion unaided, the entire ecclesiastical superstructure is threatened. Everybody, so to speak, becomes his own Pope. Instead of obeying the infallible voice of the Church he obeys the infallible voice of his conscience, which may sometimes clash with the sacred authorities. Both Pascal and Newman, therefore, toyed with a dangerous doctrine and unwittingly paved the way for such thinkers as Blondel, who held that metaphysical, scientific, and religious truths are all in the same boat; they all start from undemonstrable principles, and so rest on acts of faith.

We can hardly be blamed for feeling somewhat bewildered by the variety of meanings attached to the word "faith." We are told that it is important that we should have faith, that we cannot be saved without it, that we are missing a priceless experience in this life as well as imperilling our fortunes in the next world. But when we ask for a plain definition of faith we are met by a mass of contradictions. Some say that faith is a "leap in the dark," that it means believing what is obviously absurd—"Credo quia absurdum," as Tertullian boasted. Others tell us that it is not really a leap in the dark, but rather in a sort of twilight; whereas from still others we learn that if only we would use our eyes we would see that it is all as plain as day.

"But why *should* I believe that certain writings preserved by the Jews are true? Why should I believe in the supernatural drama—which so closely resembles pagan myths—that the Church has embodied in its creeds? Why should I believe that Jesus was essentially different from Confucius, Buddha, and Socrates? For that matter, why should I believe in God—or in anything whatsoever unless there is some supporting evidence?

Why must I regard it as sinful to require evidence and virtuous to do without it?" These questions have long been asked by sincere, puzzled men, and a clear answer has seldom been given, perhaps because to attempt it usually means arguing in a circle. If we can be led to believe even one thing on faith, it can be shown, with great logical cunning, that it is reasonable to believe more than one thing—a very great deal more, in fact. But if we obstinately refuse to play, our opponents angrily retort that we are only pretending, that we *do* employ faith but will not admit it.

"Rationalism is based on blind faith," says Mr. Arnold Lunn. "The Christian begins by proving, the Rationalist by assuming, the first articles in their respective creeds." This is tantamount to saying that Rationalism (in the sense of Humanism) is impossible; indeed, it is a misnomer. The Catholic Church is genuinely rational, but those who believe only in accordance with the evidence are irrational. They are condemned out of their own mouths. Thus, we are told by Mr. Lunn that Whitehead admits that "science has remained an anti-intellectualist movement based on naïve faith."

### *The Demand for Evidence*

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." Mr. Lunn is like Humpty Dumpty—and so, for that matter, was Chesterton before him. Chesterton's retort to doubts about the existence of God was to demand proof of the existence of one's next-door neighbour. It is doubtful whether "proof" in the mathematical sense can be given; but that does not mean that there is no *evidence*. Because we do not possess mathematical certainty in everyday life it by no means follows that we lack reasonable probability.

Religious faith involves belief in propositions for which there is no material evidence. This is a different usage of the word "faith" from when we speak of faith in an ideal, faith (*i.e.*, a feeling of expectation) that a hypothesis will work, "animal faith" (as Santayana calls it) in the reality of a common world. The scientist must trust the delivery of his senses; or more accurately, he must use his reason to interpret the raw material of knowledge provided by his senses. His interpretations may

often be wrong, but they are always related to something that he has *perceived*.

From this point of view science is undoubtedly "anti-intellectualist," as Dr. Whitehead says. This merely means that it is anti-metaphysical, that modern science began as an empirical revolt against deductive rationalism or "intellectualism." Empirical science has not *yet* found a full theoretical justification of its method; that is tirelessly insisted upon by Bertrand Russell, for example, scarcely an enemy of Rationalism; and it was pointed out long ago by David Hume, a strange witness indeed to call on behalf of religious faith!

Now, to ask for a certain amount of evidence before believing what we are told is scarcely a mark of eccentricity. We could not carry on the business of everyday life if we believed uncritically anything that took our fancy. Man could not perform the elementary tasks of feeding, clothing, and housing himself unless he accepted a fairly realistic outlook during his working hours. The more he trusts his fortunes to the stars, or to prayer-wheels, the less efficient he is in the management of his affairs. It is sufficient to recall the disastrous results that followed Hitler's trust in astrologers and intuition.

In the long run a heavy price is paid, both by the individual and society, for wrong thinking. There was more excuse for it in the past, before the alternative of scientific knowledge gave the promise of such control over our circumstances, but it is obviously of overwhelming importance today that we should think correctly.

### *The Defence of Revelation*

The real antithesis is not between faith and reason (the terms are too vague) but between believing something without evidence and believing only when there is evidence. This implies another important distinction—viz., between certainty and probability.

As we have seen, the scientist need not claim to be in possession of absolutely *certain* knowledge, apart from mathematics. Everything else he believes can be regarded as more or less probable. His faith in natural law is utterly unlike the faith of the religious man in divine law. (Admittedly it was not always so; but it is so today.)

Religious faith does not admit of degrees of probability; and

it originated, of course, long before the meaning of probability was understood. Religious faith is an imperative which gives certainty. No degrees of acceptance can be tolerated. It is all or nothing. Doubt is not a mere mistake but a *sin*.

Traditional theologians have defended this attitude in four ways. They have held that the findings of reason and revealed truth are in perfect harmony. This was the view of Justin Martyr and Erigena; but it is difficult to maintain such a doctrine nowadays unless we accept the Hegelian dictum that "the real is the rational and the rational the real."

More popular is the Scholastic view that religion transcends reason without contradicting it. Aquinas taught that revealed truth is certain, and if science appears to contradict it we may be sure that we are mistaken in our science.

Locke was equally convinced that there could be no contradiction, but he held that, if there appeared to be, we may be quite sure that we have misunderstood the revealed truth. Aquinas created the official philosophy of the Catholic Church; Locke paved the way for liberal Protestantism—a more dangerous path than he foresaw.

Thirdly, there is the so-called theory of double truth. According to this, every proposition of reason and faith must be accepted as true, each in its own realm. The greater the conflict the more meritorious the belief. And finally there is the purely subjective or mystical attitude which protests against the intrusion of reason into an intimate experience which validates itself. And so we get the Christian "existentialism" of Kierkegaard and his modern admirers.

It is not necessary for our present purposes to examine these theories very closely, although it may perhaps seem surprising that such a wealth of theory should be necessary to account for a choice of belief on other than rational grounds. Once a man is freed from the obligation to judge according to the evidence, what is to prevent him from believing anything he pleases?

The finely-spun network of theory obfuscates, consciously or unconsciously, the very simple outline of the situation. The Christian asserts something to be the case. The Rationalist inquires *why* he thinks so. Whereupon the Christian tries to escape from the vicious circle in which he is caught. Even if he appeals to the authority of the Church he must still explain *why*

a man who does not believe in that authority should change his mind. If he could say—as indeed Locke was bold enough to do—that Christianity is reasonable, the debate might begin. But it is impossible even to start the argument if one of the parties insists on the necessity of faith. Obviously faith may be the *cause* of a man's beliefs, but it cannot be the *reason*.

### *Faith Defined*

“What, then, happened to *you*?” we may ask. “At least tell me *how* you came to take this leap in the dark if you cannot explain *why* you suddenly decided to believe these doctrines on faith.” To make matters easier, let us suppose that the Rationalist is addressing a convert to Roman Catholicism, since it is hardly possible to argue at all with a Christian existentialist, or a member of the Oxford Group, and few people nowadays seem to be converted to Anglicanism. The Catholic will probably call attention to the mature and very logical discussions of the matter by the neo-Thomist theologians. He might quote a well-known manual edited by the late Cardinal Mercier:—

If it is asked how is it that the will acts upon the intellect so as to constrain it to assent to what, if left to itself, it would not assent to, we should say that the part played by the will is both that of withdrawing the reason from a too close scrutiny of difficulties which naturally arise from the obscurity of the material object, and also that of concentrating attention on the consideration of motives which make the proposition certain: that a revealed truth can be believed by a prudent man and ought to be believed. When the firmness of our assents surpasses the cogency of rational motives this bespeaks within us some action above ourselves, an action called by theologians the effect of supernatural grace.<sup>12</sup>

This is an admirably clear statement. The Catholic starts with the proposition that God exists, which, it is officially laid down, “can be known with certainty by the natural light of reason.” Consequently he is spared the trouble of dealing with the various dogmas of his religion piecemeal. By “withdrawing the reason from a too close scrutiny of difficulties” he assents to the proposition that God reveals himself, in certain circumstances, through the pronouncements of the Pope. Everything that the Pope pronounces to be true, when speaking *ex cathedra*, is therefore included in the general act of acceptance.



We may feel that this sounds very like auto-suggestion, and that in any case if this is how Catholics acquire their beliefs it is impudent for them to pose as champions of rationality. But it will soon become apparent that the real motive for "withdrawing the reason"—and pretending not to—is not a serious concern about the irrationalism of modern science but something very different. "A revealed truth can be believed by a *prudent* man and ought to be believed," because the prudent man will not risk the sinister consequences of refusal. If he does not believe he will go to hell.

### *Believe or be Damned*

The fear of hell may not trouble many people in this country, since only about 10 to 15 per cent of the population are regular churchgoers, but it is still potent in Catholic countries. It is also the mainspring of evangelical Christianity, with its popular revivals. The Reformation brought no alleviation of this doctrine, and Luther made it the test of faith:—

This is the acme of faith, to believe that God, who saves so few and condemns so many, is merciful; that He is just who, at his own pleasure, has made us necessarily doomed to damnation, so that He seems to delight in the torture of the wretched and to be more deserving of hate than of love. If by any effort of reason I could conceive how God, who shows so much anger and harshness, could be merciful and just, there would be no need of faith. (*De Servo Arbitrio.*)

Luther, who once threw an inkpot at the Devil, had been schooled in the eminently "rational" and quite unsentimental doctrine of Aquinas, who taught that the pleasures of the saved were increased by contemplating the sufferings of the damned. Would not the blessed ones feel pity, Aquinas was asked, at the sight of so much pain? By no means, was the reply, for they rejoice in the awful demonstration of the justice of God. We must therefore choose, said Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, between exemplifying the love of God in heaven or his justice in hell. And he drew up his famous *Spiritual Exercises*, which every Jesuit undertakes periodically, with their meditations on the suffering of the damned. We are invited to apply our various senses, in imagination, so that we can *see* the terrible fire, *hear* the shrieks of the helpless victims, *smell* the stench of the burning flesh.

No wonder that the highly-strung Pascal proposed his famous "wager." His argument is roughly as follows. If there is the slightest chance of such ghastly punishment overtaking the unbeliever, is it not prudent to gamble on the Church being right? Certainly no man at the gaming-table would dream of playing for such high stakes—eternal happiness if the coin shows "heads," eternal pain if it shows "tails." If we make the venture of faith, we have lost nothing should we be mistaken; but we shall lose everything if we do not make it and we *then* turn out to be wrong.

The argument is one that would suggest itself easily to a brilliant, haunted mind, fresh from the discovery of the mathematical Theory of Probability. It is sometimes dismissed as being unworthy of serious consideration. John Stuart Mill retorted, with angry defiance, that if he were doomed to hell by God for having been unable to believe in a deity who would be capable of such an enormity, then to hell he would go.

This is an attitude with which many people nowadays will feel sympathy; but it is not really an answer. Perhaps the best purely intellectual answer is that it is impossible to accept such a wager because the choice is not necessarily between the Christian God and atheism, but may be between rival gods. The Mahommedans, for example, divide mankind into two classes: *Mu'mins*, or believers, and *Kāfirs*, or infidels. According to the Koran, "Infidels now are they who say God is the Messiah, Son of Mary"; and we are told that when they die they will undoubtedly go to hell.

### *Cheerless Tidings*

Rationalism, according to Mr. Lunn and many other believers in hell, is "a gloomy faith." One would have thought, on any ordinary usage of words, that a constant preoccupation with death, a belief that human nature was incurably deformed, a conviction that the majority of mankind were irrevocably damned, hardly constitute what would normally be hailed as "glad tidings."

Christianity took shape in a world ridden with superstitious terrors. It is the great merit of the Epicureans that they perceived how much unhappiness was caused by purely imaginary fears. A fragment of the sayings of a certain Diogenes, who lived in

Cappadocia about A.D. 200, has come down to us, and Professor Gilbert Murray writes as follows of this disciple of Epicurus:—

The people of his time and neighbourhood seem to have fancied that the old man must have some bad motive. They understood mysteries and redemptions and revelations. They understood magic and curses. But they were puzzled, apparently, by this simple message, which only told them to use their reason, their courage, and their sympathy, and not to be afraid of death or of angry gods. The doctrine was condensed into four sentences of a concentrated eloquence that make a translator despair: "Nothing to fear in God: Nothing to fear in Death: Good can be attained: Evil can be endured." <sup>50</sup>

*Nothing to fear . . .* that is not the least important reward of a humanistic outlook. What healing sanity it would have brought to the self-tormented Augustine, to Pascal trembling before nightmares of the imagination, to the schizophrenic Kierkegaard, to obscure millions whose minds bear the trauma of horrors imprinted in childhood. We need scarcely marvel at the cruelties of the Inquisitors when we realize that they worshipped a savage Moloch who prepared for them in paradise the delights of a perpetual *auto-da-fé*.

As long as men believe absurdities, said Voltaire, they will commit atrocities. It is the task of Rationalism to expose what Freud calls fantasy-thinking, and to replace it by reality-thinking. Faith, in the religious sense, justifies the confusion of fact with fantasy, because the only touchstone we possess for distinguishing between them is deliberately thrown away. As Nietzsche, in one of his more penetrating passages, truly said, "Faith as an imperative is a veto against science."

### *Is Humanism Enough?*

More and more people seek a new outlook on the world that will co-ordinate the great advances in knowledge and take the place of religion; but they sometimes complain that a purely scientific philosophy does not satisfy their inner demands.

It is important to try to understand the attitude of those who have lost the old faith and cannot find anything better than "a dusty answer." Victorian literature is haunted with the pathos of vanished simplicities. The crumbling of the citadels of orthodoxy was viewed by Tennyson with helpless dismay, by Browning with an uneasy defiance, by Matthew Arnold with

wistful melancholy, by Swinburne with hysterical and somewhat unreal glee, by Hardy with titanic despair. George Eliot was stoical—we must learn to live without opium. But what, it was continually asked, was the purpose of life in a world ruled by blind, pitiless, mechanical forces?

“One moment in annihilation’s waste”—by expressing the mood of the time in his translation of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam, Fitzgerald found rather belatedly that he had written a best-seller. The meaning, the life, the mind and soul, seemed to have died out of the cosmos. In Matthew Arnold’s well-known lines:—

And here we are as on a darkling plain,  
Swept with confused alarm of struggle and fight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Nor has the poetic vision become any brighter since. The bewildered seekers after certainty turn nowadays to the metaphysics of Communism or to Roman Catholicism. To those who accept the latter the scientific outlook is still as sombre as the picture Bertrand Russell once incautiously painted in the *Free Man’s Worship*:—

A strange mystery it is that Nature, omnipotent but blind, in the revolutions of her secular hurrying through the abysses of space, has brought forth at last a child, subject still to her power, but gifted with sight, with knowledge of good and evil, with the capacity of judging all the works of his unthinking Mother.

“The darkling plain” has become the desert of men’s hopes, T. S. Eliot’s *Wasteland*:—

This is the dead land,  
This is cactus land.  
Here the stone images  
Are raised, here they receive  
The supplication of a dead man’s hand  
Under the twinkle of a fading star.

Naturally, if we go about boasting that we can live without opium we imply that truth is painful, that the universe is as black as some of the Victorians painted it. Stoical fortitude may be admirable, but the advocates of suffering without anæsthetics will never draw a large following. They give some substance to the charge that they hold a “gloomy faith,” however courageous it may be.

There is, actually, as little reason to regard a humanistic outlook as gloomy as to look upon Christianity as the jolly religion that Chesterton and Belloc once depicted. It is a sheer inversion to think that a scientific philosophy reduces us to "unyielding despair" by robbing us of a fairy-tale as joyous and innocent as Father Christmas. "A little poison now and then, that will give pleasant dreams: and a great deal of poison at the end to make a pleasant death," said Nietzsche—thereby destroying his own case. For if the truth is unbearable and life is just "a tale told by an idiot," why endure it? It would be better, indeed, to remember the grim reminder of Epictetus: "The door is open."

The "opium" of religion, like real opium, gives many dreams that are far from pleasant. It drives men only too often to frenzy and despair. How un-Greek, for example, was the note struck by Augustine. The pursuit of virtue had been regarded by Aristotle as a rational endeavour, and he believed that if men were prepared to discuss the problem calmly and sensibly they could arrive at some agreement about the meaning of goodness. For Augustine, however, what was formerly regarded as "unwise" became "a foul and accursed joy." He gives one of the most moving accounts ever written of the anguish of a mind divided against itself:—

But I wretched, most wretched, in the very commencement of my early youth, begged chastity of Thee, and said "Give me chastity and continence, only not yet!" He cries out in despair: "Whence is this monstrousness? and to what end?" And yet again: "Thus soul-sick was I, and tormented, accusing myself much more severely than my wont, rolling and turning me in my chain, till that were wholly broken, whereby I now was but just, but still was, held."

The "dry light" of the clear, Hellenic sky had gone. Something had entered the consciousness of Western man, like opium from the East, but it brought no dreams of delight. In a mass-hysteria, which Gibbon described with such fine irony, many Christians clamoured for martyrdom. They found their ecstasy under the flagellating rod, and if no one would whip them they lashed themselves. They went out in droves to live as hermits in the Egyptian desert. Some of them, like Origen, castrated themselves.

Scientific learning was abhorred. Twice the great library of

Alexandria was burned by religious fanatics, first by Christians, then by Mahommedans, and priceless treasures were reduced to ashes. Darkness settled over Europe and lasted for seven centuries. The distinctively Christian culture that emerged was distorted by the "soul-sickness" that afflicted Augustine. There are few more preposterous legends than that which describes the Middle Ages as a sort of Golden Age. Modern scholarship has surely disposed once and for all of this fantasy; but it is only necessary to look at the carvings in the great cathedrals to see in what a demon-haunted world medieval man cowered.

The torture-chambers of the Inquisition, the public burning of heretics and witches, by Catholic and Protestants alike, the massacres and the ferocity of the religious wars—are these delightful dreams which the dour Humanist forbids?

### *No Rationalist Answer Book*

"We understand what Rationalists *don't* believe," it is sometimes said, "but what is it that they *do* believe?" In other words, is there a Rationalist creed to serve as a substitute for the religious creeds? Is there a positive philosophy of Rationalism?

Those who put such a question have really missed the point. They may have discarded religious beliefs, but they have not got rid of the religious craving for certainty. They still want, it is to be feared, to be *told* what to believe, instead of being encouraged to think for themselves.

The demand for "something to take the place of religion" is usually an essentially religious demand. It is made by those who are half-way on the bridge to a genuinely rational and scientific outlook, who cannot go back, but who want to find something on the other side that resembles what they have left behind. They do not want to abandon religion but to find a new religion.

There can be no clear-cut system of fixed beliefs ready waiting for those who have cut their moorings to tradition. There is, however, an extremely powerful technique of thinking which, if sufficient trouble is taken to master it, will give more permanently satisfying results than auto-suggestion. No final certitude can be promised, no easy black-and-white pronouncements, no reach-me-down philosophical scheme. The scientist pursues truth as the artist pursues beauty, because no ersatz

product will satisfy that restless longing which has acted as a ferment through all history, and on which the meaning and the very possibility of civilization ultimately rest. The biggest demand that can be made of any man is that he should think for himself, and that is what is required of us when intellectual adolescence ends and we become mature.

Having seen what is meant by religious faith there is no longer any excuse if we confuse it with "the faith of the scientists." What, then, is implied, what has to be assumed, in order to make use of scientific method? According to Professor L. S. Stebbing, the faith of the scientist can be summed up in the statement: "What happens, happens in accordance with laws, and these laws are such that we can discover them."<sup>80</sup> It follows that scientific investigation presupposes that Nature is fundamentally simple, for if it were infinitely complex it would not be intelligible to human beings. The correct procedure, therefore, is to prefer a simple explanation to a complicated one, if there is a choice, and to make as few assumptions as possible. Another principle underlying scientific method may be summed up as follows. For a statement to be true it must be capable of being tested in some way; what is intrinsically incapable of being tested is not merely untrue, it is meaningless.

These principles may seem innocuous and almost self-evident when stated in this highly abstract way, but in practice they are revolutionary. They place in our hands the most powerful instrument ever devised. It is this instrument which was used by Galileo, Newton, Darwin, Einstein, Bohr, and all those who have transformed, not merely our ideas about the world, but the very face of the world itself until, at last, exploration of the atom seems to bring us to the verge of the ultimate physical secret.

But philosophy does not merely answer the question, "What do we know?" said Kant; it must answer the practical questions: "What ought we to do? What may we hope?" How, then, can scientific method help us to answer these questions? Those who call themselves Rationalists or Humanists believe that it can—or at least that the attempt to apply it to the entire field of experience is worth making, because neither religious faith nor intuition is an acceptable route to knowledge.

Given scientific knowledge, man can make or mar his fortunes. He is free and he stands alone, with nothing but his knowledge

—and the instrument for increasing that knowledge—to save him. He cannot shift his responsibility to Fate or God. Our own happiness and that of countless future generations may depend on how we use, here and now, the potent instrument that we possess; on how realistically we think, how successfully we avoid the short-term luxury of make-believe. In specifically human affairs that means turning for solutions to the economist rather than to the politician, to the psychologist rather than to the priest, and guarding with vigilance the intellectual liberty without which knowledge cannot continue to expand.

Nevertheless we have to acknowledge that although science can give us plenty of facts and many probable conjectures, when all its lessons have been read there is still very much in this baffling universe that we do not know, and never shall know. We have added a few more stones to the pebble which Newton, with the humility of greatness, said that he had found on the shore of the ocean of undiscovered truth. But many of the enigmas that have fascinated the subtlest minds throughout the ages remain unsolved—and the questions that are hardest to answer are perhaps the most humanly interesting.

This book is designed to deal with such questions. The successes of science will be found in appropriate textbooks; I am more concerned here with the failures, with that fascinating borderline region between science and philosophy, with the as yet unsolved mysteries of life and the universe.

There is no end to these problems. On some of them we should perhaps suspend judgment, but on many of them we must make a provisional decision because we have to act. It need hardly be stressed, after what has been said in these preliminary chapters, that no definitive answers need be expected; nor shall I intrude purely personal conclusions of my own. My object is to assemble the best solutions that have been advanced and leave the reader to decide for himself which, in Plato's phrase, is a "likely story." The Gestalt psychologists have shown that the human mind naturally completes unfinished patterns and "bridges the gap" in matters of which we are ignorant. Speculative philosophy is probably the result of this difficulty in suspending judgment; but it is harmful only when we forget that it is *speculative*.



## *Chapter Two*

### IN THE BEGINNING

Creation myths. A defence of Genesis. The date of the Creation. The infallibility of the Bible. Catholic and Protestant views on the Bible. Hebrew cosmology. The Ptolemaic universe.

FROM time immemorial man has invented stories to account for the origin of the world. The ancient Germans believed that the sea was made out of the blood of a slain giant, the earth out of his flesh, mountains and rocks out of his bones and teeth, the sky out of his skull. The Babylonians thought that the world was made out of a female monster, Tiamat, that was slain. They also believed in an age of innocence when mankind dwelt on the east of the Persian Gulf under the rule of the earth-god, Enki. Sickness, old age, and injustice were unknown. "The lion did not maul; the hyena did not snatch away the lamb."

But Enki was disobeyed, and so he drowned the whole of mankind except Tagtug. The resemblance of these legends to the stories recorded by the early Hebrews is obvious enough. The fact that for a period the Jews were enslaved by the Babylonians, and that their sacred books were written after the return from exile, makes it reasonable to suppose that the familiar stories of the Creation, the Garden of Eden, the Flood, and so on, were acquired from the Babylonians. It is thought that the Babylonian word "Tiamat" gave rise to the Hebrew "Tehom," which is translated as "the deep"—the dark, watery chaos that existed before creation. "And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

Dr. Heinrich Zimmern, the Assyriologist, traces the Babylonian origin of the Jewish myth as follows:—

During the long winter, the Babylonian plain looks like the sea (which in Babylonian is Tiamat) owing to the heavy rains. Then comes the spring, when the god of the vernal sun (Marduk) brings forth the land anew, and by his potent rays divides the waters of

Tiamat, sending them partly upwards as clouds, partly downwards to the river and canals. So, thought the early Babylonians, must it have been in the first Spring of all, when, after a fight between Marduk and Tiamat, the organized world came into being. Or (for Marduk is also the god of the early morning sun) just as the sun crosses and conquers the cosmic sea every morning, and out of the chaos of night causes first the heaven to appear and then the earth, so must heaven and earth have arisen for the first time on the morning of creation. To imagine a similar origin of the myth from the Hebrew point of view would be hopeless. The picture requires as its scene an alluvial land, which Babylonia is, and Palestine, or the Syro-Arabian desert, is not; and it requires, further, a special god of the spring sun, or of the early morning sun, such as Marduk is and Yahweh is not.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Truth of Genesis*

In a report on Church doctrine, by a Commission appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, published in 1938, we read:—

No objection to a theory of evolution can be drawn from the two creation narratives in Genesis i and ii, since it is generally agreed among educated Christians that these are mythological in origin and that their value for us is symbolic rather than historical.

The traditional view still finds support in some quarters. The point at issue is the authority of the Bible, and in defence of its verbal inspiration both Fundamentalists and Roman Catholics find a measure of common ground. After all, if the Bible is held to be quite literally the revelation of God—and it was so held by the majority of Christians until comparatively recently—it is unthinkable that it should contain false information.

A sample of the argument that so far from contradicting the scientific account, Genesis anticipates it, is afforded by a curious book called *The Truth of Christianity*, which was first published in 1895. It became a best-seller, and it is significant that a new edition in 1934 was given an enthusiastic reception in the Catholic as well as the Protestant Press. Although the author, Lieut-Col. W. H. Turton, might well have been treated as a heretic a few centuries ago, the *Universe* now describes his book as “one of the very best defences of the Christian religion to be found.” And the *Catholic Times*, so far from recommending it to be placed on the Index, declares that “it should be found in the library of every Catholic family, school, and institution.”

Genesis is no Jewish or Babylonian myth, according to this defender of the faith. On the contrary, Genesis correctly states the order of evolution. Science, by its laborious methods, has only just caught up with the revelation made thousands of years ago. We have only just realized, for example, the truth of the apparently preposterous statement that the sun was created *after* the divine fiat, "Let there be light." As Turton put it :—

Science has now shown that it is correct. However strange we may think it, light did undoubtedly exist long before the sun. In other words, the original nebula of our solar system was luminous, and lighted the earth, long before it contracted into a body with a definite outline, and producing such intense and concentrated light as could be called the sun. And since the earth would cool much quicker than the large nebula from which it was separated, vegetation might commence here before the nebula had become a sun, though this latter point is doubtful.<sup>3</sup>

Just how "doubtful" it is will be appreciated by anyone with a smattering of astronomy. It would be tedious, at this time of day, to give a detailed refutation of these naïve views, but they have been acclaimed so warmly in the religious Press that the argument is worth recording because of its social significance.

Despite all the knowledge so freely available today there is still, apparently, a large and by no means illiterate public that believes in the literal truth of Genesis :—

The points of agreement between Genesis and science are far too many and far too unlikely to be due to accident. They are far too many; for the chance against eight events being put down in their correct order by guesswork is 40,319 to 1. And they are far too unlikely; for what could have induced an ignorant man to say that light came before the sun, or that the earth once existed without any dry land? . . . Now, what conclusion can be drawn from all this? There seem to be only two alternatives: either the writer, whoever he was, knew as much about science as we do, or else the knowledge was revealed to him by God.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Date of Creation*

The collection of writings forming the Hebrew Scriptures have no greater *a priori* likelihood of being true than the clay tablets found in the library of King Assurbanipal (668–626 B.C.), or the Hindu *Vedas*, or the *Theogony* of Hesiod, or the *Koran*.

All these religious accounts are a tissue of guesswork, poetic fantasy, and tribal memories. They are of absorbing interest to the student of history and folklore, but they tell us nothing about the universe in which we live. What is so astonishing is that sophisticated people should think otherwise and exercise such pains and ingenuity to show that these legends are somehow true, if not in a straightforward sense, then in some Pickwickian sense.

The Fathers and the medieval scholastics allowed that some Biblical expressions might be taken symbolically. Thus, Aquinas (1224-1274) did not hold that the Church was committed to the belief that creation occupied six days of twenty-four hours. There was the difficulty that before the creation of the sun the word "day" had no precise meaning. But it is simply dishonest to pretend that the Church had doubts about the authenticity of the basic story about the making of the world, the descent of the human race from a primitive couple, and the period of innocence followed by the Fall. These were believed to be objective facts, and a precise date was assigned to them.

Many of the early Christians took the view of a Syrian heretic, Bardesanes (A.D. 154-222), that since a thousand years was but a day in the sight of the Lord, the total duration of the world would be 6,000 years. At the end of that period the Millennium would come, and after the reign of saints for 1,000 years there would be the Judgment, and heaven and earth would pass away. Professor B. Farrington writes:—

But the limiting of the course of this wicked world to six thousand years, comforting as it must have been to suffering millions, was a fatal blow to the presuppositions of science. In the fourth century a Latin father, Quintus Julius Hilarianus, distressed by the fact that some of the brethren thought the world was more than 20,000 years old, worked out a scheme of chronology that dominated the Middle Ages and lasted down to quite modern times. The fixed points in this scheme were the Creation or the Beginning of Time, the Nativity or the Fullness of Time, and the Judgment or the End of Time. In the precise chronology worked out by Hilarianus, God had created the world at six o'clock in the morning of the spring equinox 5,899 years before. According to calculations based on Biblical history, from the Creation to the Flood was 2,257 years, from then to the Exodus 1,389 years, from then to the Fall of Jerusalem and the Captivity 1,168 years, from then to the Passion 716 years, and 101 years were still left before the Millennium.

This dating would already make nonsense of such ideas as that of

Herodotus that it might take ten or twenty thousand years for the alluvial deposit from a river to create a territory like that of the Nile delta, or the idea expressed by Plato that 9,000 years before his time Attica had been a fertile country deep in soil which slow erosion had carried away. Still further complications were produced when the Millennium failed to come. Every year that the world lasted after the 101 allowed to it by Hilarius had to be taken off the beginning. Thus while Hilarius had allowed 5,550 years between the Creation and the Nativity, Bishop Ussher in the seventeenth century was compelled to reduce the interval to 3,999 years, 2 months, 4 days, and 6 hours, which still in the seventeenth century allowed some time before the end of the world. It did not, however, leave enough time for the previous history of mankind.<sup>4</sup>

It is with something of a shock that the reader of John Locke (1632-1704) discovers, in the midst of a lucid philosophical discussion on Time, that the calculations of Ussher (1581-1656), Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland, are taken as probably true. "We suppose it to be 5,639 years from this time to the first existence of anybody in the beginning of the world. . . ." <sup>5</sup>

The same chronology is to be found in the margin of many Bibles, and it cannot be doubted that innocent and devout readers are completely deceived. Whether it is of any practical importance that a large number of people should be mistaken about the date of the origin of the earth is beside the point. To a Rationalist critic there is a lack of sincerity in turning the blind eye to these inconsistencies.

### *The Christian Dilemma*

What are the implications? Traditionally, both the Catholic and Protestant Churches regarded the Bible as the Word of God, and therefore infallible. If there seemed to be mistakes in it, those "mistakes" were due to our misunderstanding. There was the theory that the author of a particular passage was not giving his own views; or that something intended to be an allegory was being taken literally.

All that is well enough, but the judges of Galileo would not have accepted the argument that a stationary earth, which was an essential feature of Hebrew cosmogony, was merely a symbolic immobility. The theory that the movement of the sun was as

metaphorical as "God's right hand" would not have appealed either to Protestant or Catholic in the sixteenth century. Both Luther and Melanchthon condemned the view that the earth moved round the sun.

It is fashionable to make light of all this and with a somewhat disingenuous air of frankness to acknowledge that the objective framework of Christian dogma must be given up. Thus, Dr. H. D. A. Major declares almost jauntily: "The creeds are all pre-Copernican, pre-Darwinian—in short pre-scientific."<sup>6</sup>

The Archbishops' Report states:—

The tradition of the inerrancy of the Bible commonly held in the Church until the beginning of the nineteenth century (though often held in association with allegorical and other interpretations which profoundly modified its significance) cannot be maintained in the light of the knowledge now at our disposal. . . . Christian thinkers are not necessarily bound to the thought-forms employed by Biblical writers.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, the Vatican Council repeats and amplifies the doctrine of the Council of Trent that the Bible is literally inspired. The insistence of the Roman Church on its exclusive right of interpretation must not blind us to its Fundamentalist attitude to the Scriptures. According to the decree of 1864:—

The books of the Old and New Testament are to be received as sacred and canonical, in their integrity, with all their parts . . . not because, having been carefully composed by mere human industry, they were afterwards approved by her [the Church's] authority, or merely because they contain revelation, with no admixture of error; but because, having been written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, they have God for their author, and have been delivered as such to the Church herself.

The Christian dilemma has been intensified in the past hundred years. The Churches are involved in a crisis that nineteenth-century Rationalists clearly foresaw and regarded as inevitable. There was for them a simple enough way out of it—namely, to accept the march of scientific knowledge without reserve, and acknowledge candidly that all so-called sacred writings had a purely human origin and authorship.

The idea that if you accept one type of miracle you might as well accept another is ingeniously stated by Dr. F. Sherwood Taylor. He gives an inkling of how a modern Catholic, with a

scientific training, endeavours to escape from the dilemma that the creeds and the Bible are "pre-Copernican, pre-Darwinian—in short pre-scientific." He writes :—

The Christian religion acknowledges as "true" a body of writings known as the Holy Scriptures. In view of the literary conventions and modes of instruction which were customary when the oldest of these writings were composed, it is recognized that their authors did not always intend their readers to understand by their words the meanings which today they superficially seem to imply. These writings recount much that is miraculous—events that cannot be attributed to the normal agencies which science studies, but have a cause not perceptible by science, namely God himself. It is possible to hold that some of the wonderful events narrated in the Scriptures were not due to miraculous agency properly so-called. . . . But it is also quite clear that in most cases the scriptural writer intended to give an historical account of events which actually happened and which were strictly speaking of a miraculous nature. To these, the Christian is bound to give assent, and it is immaterial for the purposes of our present discussion whether such events be few or many. So far as the discussion of the relation between science and the miraculous is concerned, the choice of miracles to be accepted does not matter—if any miraculous event has ever occurred, there is no theoretical, as distinguished from historical, reason to deny any other such event.<sup>7</sup>

This, at least, is clear and outspoken. There is no juggling with what the Anglican Commission calls "thought-forms employed by Biblical writers." We are told plainly that "the scriptural writer intended to give an historical account of events that actually happened."

How can it be doubted that the author of the creation story believed that he was describing something that really happened? And if we are going to believe that it is possible to rise from the dead and ascend into heaven, why should we doubt that God created the world in 4004 B.C.? What is to govern our picking and choosing of religious beliefs and scientific beliefs? Catholics like Dr. Taylor may place the responsibility on the Pope, but even Catholics cannot wholly avoid the dilemma.

They do admit change. They, too, sometimes evade the issue. Admittedly no Pope ever pronounced *ex cathedra* that the earth is stationary, but is not this doctrine (and very much else) implied by the *ex cathedra* pronouncement already quoted that the Scriptures have God for their author?

No human author could commit such blunders as are contained

in the Bible and retain our confidence. The truth of the Hebrew cosmogony is a legitimate deduction from the truth of the Bible. More accurately, perhaps, we should speak of Babylonian rather than Hebrew cosmogony, for, as one writer puts it, "the ingenious gentlemen who desire to harmonize Genesis with the facts of science would be much better advised to take the further step of harmonizing geology with the details of Babylonian mythology." <sup>1</sup>

### *The Changing Cosmos*

Both Catholics and Protestants have been in retreat since the rise of modern science three centuries ago, and both sides even now avert their eyes from the logical implications of the many changes that they have been forced to accept. The critical situation that they have reached is summed up by Dr. Inge as follows :—

By degrees the Copernican astronomy has passed into the region of common knowledge; and, though Rome put it under ban, the devout Romanist is no longer expected to assert that the earth is the centre of the universe. But the retreat of Church authority has been gradual, and, as usual, unavowed; there has never been a time when it seemed necessary to consider the new situation created by the revolution in astronomy. The task has been put off from generation to generation, and to this day little has been done to relieve the strain upon the intellect and conscience of the Christian world. Those Churchmen who airily declare that there is no longer any conflict between Christianity and science are either very thoughtless or are wilfully shutting their eyes. There is a very serious conflict, and the challenge was presented not in the age of Darwin, but in the age of Copernicus and Galileo.<sup>8</sup>

Various texts in the Old Testament enable us to piece together a fairly coherent picture of the cosmos, as it appeared to the Jews. The earth was flat and circular in shape. God "set a compass upon the face of the deep" according to Proverbs viii, 27. There were subterranean waters which gave rise to fountains and the sea, which was then divided. "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear," as we read in Genesis. But there were also waters above the firmament. These were depicted, with archaic simplicity, as the source of rain. In the six hundredth year of



Noah's life "the windows of heaven were opened, and the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights."

The firmament was supported by pillars, and it divided the waters that were above from those that were underneath. The abode of the just souls, however, was not above the sky, as in later and medieval conceptions, but below ground in a region called Sheol. The upper part of Sheol, known as Abraham's bosom, was reserved for the blessed; the lower part, or Gehenna, was the abode of the wicked.

There is no reason to suppose that the Jews, any more than other ancient peoples, thought that the tiny lights moving across the sky were important, except in an astrological sense, or even a long way off. The Babylonians thought that an eagle could fly up to heaven, and this features in one of their best-known legends. The Egyptians believed that the firmament was so close that you could reach it by a long ladder. They placed bronze ladders in the tombs of their kings.

Both in the Middle East and Greece there was a poetic fancy that some of the stars were either gods or the souls of the glorious dead.<sup>9</sup> Recalling this, we can make sense of the statement that "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera." The stars could fall from heaven (Psalms civ, 2 and Matthew xxiv, 29), no distinction being recognized between meteors and stars.

How relatively unimportant the stars were is surely shown by the mention of their creation almost as a postscript. We are told that God made two great lights, "the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars, also . . ."

Then man was made, in the image of God; and as in so many pagan mythologies, he was fashioned out of the dust of the ground, his life being breath. The conflict between Genesis i and ii has long been noted; the second version, which causes man to be created first, is consistent with a Sumerian myth discovered by Dr. Pinches.

### *Thomists and Evolution*

Even Roman Catholics are apt to react warmly to the suggestion that they are committed to belief in the details of this charming legend. Officially, they are permitted to accept a

very modified version of the evolution theory. According to Professor D. D. Williams (of the Chicago Theological Seminary) :—

Catholic apologists now hold that the Church can accept any biological development, always with the provision that the Church's teaching concerning the supernatural and special creation of the human soul is not denied.<sup>11</sup>

Modern Thomist philosophers are sometimes congratulated on providing a more intellectually satisfying account of the universe than scientists have been able to produce. As an example we may quote from the English version of the Louvain *Traité élémentaire de philosophie*, in which probably the best possible attempt is made to reconcile Scholasticism with modern science :—

The question concerning the unity of mankind, which was once the subject of hot discussion among naturalists, is today finally decided. Science has definitely ascertained that the variously different groups of men that at the present moment are distributed over our globe do not represent many species, but are different races or varieties of the same species. May we go further and say, on the authority of natural science and archæology, that not only is mankind one species, but also that it has one origin? We may certainly say that it is both possible and probable that the human race sprang from one primitive couple; but if reason is to rely on purely scientific arguments alone, it cannot, we think, establish this with certainty.<sup>12</sup>

No serious theologian, before the nineteenth century, doubted that the human race sprang from a primitive couple, the consequences of whose misdeeds gave rise to the necessity for the crucifixion of Christ. The sin of Adam, and consequently the truth of his existence, is the very corner-stone of the traditional Christian scheme. The difference made by changes in the conception of the physical universe was less obvious, though, as Dr. Inge has pointed out, it was real, and the instinct of the Church to resist was sound enough, from its own point of view.

### *The Ptolemaic Scheme*

The change from the Jewish to the Greek cosmogony does not appear to have troubled many consciences. The pillars supporting the firmament disappeared. The damned were still consigned to a subterranean hell, but the blessed were translated

to a paradise above the sky. The new model of the universe was bigger, but it remained completely anthropomorphic, as indeed it had to be if this planet was the scene of the most momentous event in the whole of cosmic history.

Aristotle had taught that the heaven was a sphere which rotated in a circle, and the reason he gave was that a circle is the most perfect figure. The centre of a rotating body must be at rest; therefore the earth must be at rest. It seemed plausible enough that the stars should be carried round the earth by the movement of a celestial sphere, but what about the planets or "wanderers," as their name signifies? Aristotle adopted the solution of Eudoxus as amended by Callipus.

Briefly the idea is as follows. The world itself consisted of four concentric spheres made of earth, water, air, and fire. Beyond these were fifty-five celestial spheres which revolved round the earth and carried the heavenly bodies. Neither the spheres nor the heavenly bodies were made of the four terrestrial elements, but of a fifth element, ether. They underwent no change and they were indestructible. The universe was finite.

This provided the material for the more detailed constructions of Hipparchus and Ptolemy. The difficulty was that the planets still could not be made to conform to the requirements of circular motion. By an ingenious mathematical device Ptolemy explained the discrepancy as resulting from the revolution of each planet round a circle whose centre was on the circumference of another imaginary circle drawn with the earth as its centre. The big imaginary circle was called the deferent, and the smaller circle the epicycle. There was no theological virtue in epicycles. What mattered was that the Biblical model of a stationary earth was thereby saved.

The distances in this system were small, but it would be wrong to suppose that the medieval mind was not overawed by them. Ptolemy had declared that the earth was a mere dot in comparison with the heavens, which were so vast that a fixed star would take 36,000 years to complete its circuit.

Again, although the earth was believed to be the centre of the cosmos, it should be remembered that it was thought to be composed of corruptible matter, in contrast to the incorruptible substance of the heavenly bodies. Montaigne described man's place in the cosmos as "the filth and mire of the world, the worst,

the lowest, most lifeless part of the universe, the bottom storey of the house."

The true importance of this world was that it was the scene of a divine drama rather than the centre of revolving spheres. To quote Professor Lovejoy :—

Thus, with however glaring a contradiction of the doctrines of the divine self-sufficiency and impassibility, the affairs of men were conceived to be objects of immeasurable solicitude on the part of Deity itself; so that a single natural folly of an unsophisticated pair in Mesopotamia could, by its consequences, constrain one of the persons of the Godhead to take on human flesh and live and die upon this globe for man's salvation.<sup>151</sup>

The progress of science has been accompanied by gradual emancipation from such anthropomorphic conceptions. They are the very framework of traditional Christianity. Hence the conflict between science and revealed religion, which cannot be resolved by small compromises and ever vaguer re-formulations. The medieval attempt to harmonize science and theology, faith and reason, appeared successful only so long as science remained static.

## Chapter Three

### THE FRAMEWORK OF CHRISTIANITY

Jewish and Greek ideas contrasted. Aristotle and the Church. The significance of Galileo. The Catholic doctrine. The compatibility of faith and reason. The Westminster Confession. Modernism.

It is often said there is not the slightest reason why modern Christians should be troubled about the falsity of the picture of the universe contained in the Bible and presupposed by the creeds. We are told that it is not necessary for a Christian to accept either the Jewish or Greek cosmology. All that is essential is for him to admit that the world was created by God.

From a rationalist point of view it is difficult to see how such a position can be *consistently* maintained. The dogmas of Christianity and their cosmological setting seem to form an organic whole. The traditional interweaving of natural and supernatural events is opposed to the spirit of empirical inquiry.

The earliest attempts at compromise were designed to explain how the Jewish and Greek accounts could be reconciled. There was, of course, nothing in the Bible remotely resembling the Greek doctrine of heavenly spheres. Moreover, although Genesis is somewhat ambiguous on the point, in the second book of Maccabees it is stated explicitly that God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. Creation *ex nihilo*, however, was flatly denied by the Greeks. According to Aristotle matter was eternal and indestructible.<sup>13</sup>

The general tendency of the early Church was to ignore profane learning and to be content to hold what was "to the Greeks foolishness." No one doubted that the earth was immovable, though whether it was round or flat was an open question. Augustine held that the antipodes could not be inhabited because men living there would be cut off from hope of salvation. This was a very real problem for those who accepted the orthodox view of Redemption.

A century later the flat-earthers were supported by a popular

book called *Christian Topography*, by Cosmas Indicopleustes. He based his doctrine on the widely accepted view that the tabernacle of Moses was a model of the universe. For the most part the science of the day was scorned as pagan, and all inquiry into natural law was regarded as a vain pursuit because it had no bearing on salvation.<sup>4</sup>

According to Dr. Charles Singer :—

In the earlier books of the Old Testament there is no conception of natural law. Natural phenomena and especially the more dramatic events, the thunder and the whirlwind, drought and flood, plague and famine, are the result of God's immediate action. . . . The new astrological science coming in from Babylon had suggested the complex mathematical order of the heavenly bodies as the motive power of all things. The *Wisdom of Solomon*, which was written in Alexandria about 100 B.C., inveighs against all these :

Surely vain were all men in their natures, and without perception of God

Who could not, from the good things that are seen, know him that is.

Neither by giving heed to the works did they recognize Him who hath wrought them,

But either fire (i.e. Heracleitus), or wind or the swift air (i.e. Anaximenes),

Or circling stars (i.e. Pythagoras), or raging water (i.e. Thales), or the lights of heaven (i.e. the astrologers),

They deemed the gods which govern the world.<sup>14</sup>

### *The Medieval Picture*

Classical science gradually ceased to exist. It is a mistake to suppose that the Church killed it, but Christians certainly did not strive officiously to keep it alive. The conflict in the primitive Church was not so much between religion and science as between religion and philosophy. When Christianity became firmly established the light of science was rekindled, not in the monasteries, but by the Arabs. It was from Arab sources that Aquinas became acquainted with the teaching of Aristotle.

To quote Dr. Singer again :—

Many elements of the Aristotelian philosophy were, of course, incompatible with the biblical account. Such for instance was the spherical earth. The incompatibility was ignored, or the biblical account was held to be allegorical or to have some mystical or moral

meaning, or again it was pointed out that the Bible was not written for the purpose of teaching science and that such apparent inconsistencies were without profound significance. Allegory was often invoked. . . . Nevertheless, in the Aristotelian philosophy there certainly were very disturbing elements which might have led to profounder conflict. . . . If the actual words of Aristotle had been confronted with the biblical phrases the result would have been a very serious clash.<sup>14</sup>

All this sounds familiar enough. If we substituted "science" for "Aristotle" the above passage might describe the present situation. Those who deny the clash are, according to Dr. Inge, "wilfully shutting their eyes." He writes:—

The supreme question for Christians is whether the catastrophic scheme which we have inherited by tradition can be fitted into the evolutionary scheme in which we have come to believe.<sup>8</sup>

To put this in yet another way, consider the three fixed points in the traditional Christian scheme already alluded to: (1) The Creation, or beginning of Time; (2) The Nativity, or Fullness of Time; (3) The Judgment, or End of Time. These, and their associated details, form the framework of orthodox Christianity. Take them away, treat them symbolically, and what is left except moral precepts? Indeed, unless these are objective facts, what special sanction do even the moral precepts possess over the ethical systems of other religions?

The Churches are still struggling to fit this traditional pattern into the scientific scheme. Something has to be sacrificed in the process, because, on the face of it, the two schemes are clearly incompatible. The Catholics jettison as much of science as possible; the Modernists jettison as much of revelation as they dare. To the onlooker it is a tragi-comic spectacle of wasted learning and mis-spent ingenuity.

### *After Copernicus*

A retreat became noticeable in the seventeenth century. Suddenly, the comfortable policy of accepting or rejecting philosophical views according to taste, and declaring awkward passages in the Scriptures to be symbolical, no longer worked. The Church came up against a disturbing, potentially verifiable fact.

Whether God had created the universe *ex nihilo* was not in itself a question that could be decided experimentally. But the dawn of science brought to an end the period when theologians could settle great issues solely by *talking*. The real revolution in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was that a novel means of settling disputes was proposed—the test of public experiment.

Copernicus (1473–1543) himself did not prove empirically that the earth moved. All that he could advance in favour of his hypothesis was that it was mathematically simpler than Ptolemy's epicyclic system. He still believed that the planets moved in circles and that the sun was the centre of a spherical universe. Copernicus worked out a detailed alternative to the geocentric theory, but there were other speculative minds that also challenged the prevailing view. Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) wrote: "I have long considered that this earth is not fixed but moves, even as do other stars. . . . To my mind the earth turns upon its axis once in a day and night."

Such views were considered daring and paradoxical, but they seemed to fly in the face of facts so patently that they were tolerated at first as the whimsies of learned men. Matters did not come to a head until the invention of the telescope.

Most of the Fathers, as well as the Scholastics and Reformers, had believed that the world had been miraculously created out of nothing in six days less than six thousand years ago. As Luther said: "Moses is writing history and reporting things that actually happened." Luther denounced Copernicus as "an upstart astrologer who dared to set his own authority above that of Holy Scripture." Calvin demanded: "Who will venture to place the authority of Copernicus above that of Holy Scripture?"

The Pope dealt with Galileo in no uncertain fashion. On June 22, 1633, in the Dominican convent of Santa Maria Sofia Minerva, Rome, Galileo knelt and abjured the detestable heresy that the earth moved round the sun. The story that he whispered "*Eppur si muove*" (And yet it does move) is probably apocryphal. Nevertheless, the apology sometimes offered, that the available evidence in favour of the Copernican view was inadequate, will hardly do.

It must not be thought, however, that the Copernican hypothesis influenced theology directly. It clashed with the Scriptures, but so did the cosmogony of Aristotle and Ptolemy.



In *The Great Chain of Being*, Professor A. O. Lovejoy sums up the position very clearly :—

The truly revolutionary theses in cosmography which gained ground in the sixteenth and came to be pretty generally accepted before the end of the seventeenth century were five in number, none of them entailed by the purely astronomical systems of Copernicus or Kepler. In any study of the history of the modern conception of the world, and in any account of the position of any individual writer, it is essential to keep these distinctions between issues constantly in view. The five more significant innovations were : (1) the assumption that other planets of our solar system are inhabited by living, sentient, and rational creatures ; (2) the shattering of the outer walls of the medieval universe, whether these were identified with the outermost crystalline sphere or with a definite " region " of the fixed stars, and the dispersal of these stars through vast, irregular distances ; (3) the conception of the fixed stars as suns similar to ours, all or most of them surrounded by planetary systems of their own ; (4) the supposition that the planets in these other worlds also have conscious inhabitants ; (5) the assertion of the actual infinity of the physical universe in space and of the number of solar systems contained in it. The first of these—and, of course, still more the fourth—deprived human life and terrestrial history of the unique importance and momentousness which the medieval scheme of ideas had attributed to them, and Copernicanism had left to them. The theory of the plurality of inhabited worlds tended to raise difficulties, not merely about minor details of the history included in the Christian belief, but about its central dogmas. The entire moving drama of the Incarnation and Redemption had seemed manifestly to presuppose a single inhabited world. If that presupposition were to be given up, how were these dogmas to be construed, if, indeed, they could be retained at all? Were we, as Thomas Paine afterwards asked, " to suppose that every world in the boundless creation had an Eve, an apple, a serpent and a Redeemer " ? Had the Second Person of the Trinity been incarnate on innumerable planets in turn, or was this the only portion of the universe in which moral agents had any need of redemption? <sup>151</sup>

Such questions came to be very seriously discussed. Augustine's anxiety about the salvation of those out of reach of " the Good News " was extended from the antipodes to the starry universe. In a very popular work published in 1686 Fontenelle argued that the moon and planets were almost certainly inhabited. A similar view was put forward in a textbook on astronomy by William Derham which had considerable influence on opinion in this country in the early eighteenth century. The general

result of these speculations was to deprive man of his unique status in the universe, though the full effect was not felt until the nineteenth century.

### *Science versus Tradition*

Catholics and Protestants gradually came to see that the framework of faith was threatened. As Dr. Barnes writes :—

Many traditional types of argument were so framed as to leave the impression that the Christian conception of God was derived from Jewish cosmology; and that it would not be true unless the Biblical accounts of the Creation and the Fall were, in substance, historical facts. It was an axiom of Catholic orthodoxy that the Creation took place in time. . . . Further, the earth was assumed to be the centre of this universe. Sun, moon, planets, and stars were all subordinate to it. On the earth, and on the earth alone, existed man, specially created "in the image of God." Furthermore, all the manifold defects of human nature which lead to individual corruption and social disorder were deemed to be the result of a Fall, an act of disobedience on the part of the "first man" Adam, by reason of which all his descendants inherited a moral taint.

We must set our religious intuitions and aspirations against the background created by the new knowledge. We must, whenever possible, test religious dogmas by the methods of a scientific inquiry and refashion them in the light of scientific progress.<sup>15</sup>

When this has been done, what remains of the traditional beliefs? What remains of the dogmas of the infallibility of the Bible and the Church, the Creation and the Fall, and the miraculous events described in the New Testament? What plausibility do any of these doctrines possess if we accept the findings of critical scholarship and the theories of modern biology and astronomy?

Even the Roman Church has had to retreat, albeit reluctantly and with bad grace. The limit of possible retreat seems to have been reached by theologians like Dr. Barnes. A short step beyond their present position would take them into Rationalism.

The Rationalist, fortunately, does not have to hedge and wriggle and twist words out of their accustomed meanings. His credo is quite simple. He rejects what seems to him the vestigial remains of ancient mythology and accepts the scientific account of the universe, not as the last word to be said, but as the best kind of knowledge that we can obtain.

Before contrasting in detail the framework of the Christian creeds with the scientific picture, let us glance at a few of the more striking examples of the retreat from orthodoxy. It is everywhere admitted that the Bible, the Fathers, the Inquisition, Luther, and Calvin were wrong in proclaiming an immovable earth at the centre of the universe. To explain how revelation can ever be "wrong" a new theory of what constitutes revealed truth has sprung up—a theory that would have been severely dealt with in the Middle Ages and during the Reformation.

Aquinas taught that a conflict between faith and reason was impossible. The most recent formal pronouncement by the Roman Church is that of the Vatican Council :—

Although faith is above reason there can never be a discord between faith and reason; for God Who reveals mysteries and bestows the gift of faith is He Who has also illuminated the human mind with the light of reason; but we cannot find contradiction in God, and neither can truth be opposed to truth. If the vain appearance of such contradiction should arise, this is either because the dogmas of the faith have not been understood and expounded according to the mind of the Church, or because arbitrary opinion has been mistaken for judgment founded on reason.

Paul Mansion, a Catholic mathematician, writes :—

It is not scientific to speak insistently of the antagonism between Science and Catholicism in a vague and general way without ever coming down to detail. If the anti-Catholic Press is so sure of this antagonism, why is it not more explicit in stating wherein the claimed opposition between science and faith lies? Let its writers set down in two parallel columns the scientific truths reached by physics, chemistry, astronomy, mineralogy, geology, botany, zoology, anthropology, biology, etc., and—if such they can discover—the contrary decisions of the Councils and the Popes, as they are to be found, for example, in Denziger's *Enchiridion*.<sup>12</sup>

It is true, of course, that the Popes have not made *ex cathedra* pronouncements about special sciences; and no other pronouncements, presumably, will count. But there can be no question that the Church has pronounced *ex cathedra* on the inspiration of the Scriptures.

According to the article on "Creation" in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* :—

In these simple words the author of Genesis describes the advent of life, plant and animal, on our earth. . . . An immense amount of

patient research and ingenuity has been spent in the task of harmonizing the successive stages of the terrestrial evolution, as deciphered from the records of the rocks, with the Mosaic narrative; but the highest tribute to the success of these efforts is that they more or less graphically corroborate what must be already *a priori* certain and evident, at least to the believer, that between the truth of revelation and the truth of science there is, and can be, no discord.

The writer of the above quotes a learned Jesuit, Father Knabenbauer, who seems to think that you can both have your cake and eat it :—

The article of faith contained in Genesis remains firm and intact even if one explains the manner in which the different species originated according to the principle of evolution.

Preparations are perhaps being made even by the Roman Church for holding the last line of defences, namely that all that has been revealed is that God created something, somehow. Thus one apologist sums up the situation :—

The ultimate explanation of everything that exists is God; science, which is concerned with secondary causes, need not normally invoke God as a solution for immediate problems.<sup>18</sup>

Protestants have retreated even more drastically from the position taken up by the dominant figures of the Reformation. In 1645 the House of Commons asked the Westminster Assembly of divines to present to it a confession of faith for the Church of England, and this was published two years later. It was adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and is now authoritative in most Presbyterian Churches. The Westminster Confession asserts :—

It pleased God in the beginning to make or create out of nothing the world and all things therein in the space of six days.

On the other hand, the Archbishop's Report merely states : "Christianity is committed to the doctrine that the world depends upon God as His Creation." The Genesis account, however, is dismissed as "mythological in origin."

So, too, Dr. Barnes ignores the traditional framework and seeks to devise another out of the materials of scientific knowledge :—

By reason of the knowledge laboriously built up from the application of scientific method to various branches of inquiry, we have now

a picture of the nature and past history of the universe on which, so far as it is clear and not blurred, we can place considerable reliance. We have already said that it differs fundamentally from that associated with traditional Christian theology. Now any scheme of theology must, to be adequate, take account of the way in which God has fashioned and controls the universe and must therefore be permeated by the new knowledge. . . . The right starting-point for theology, as Inge has well said, "is to examine the conception of the world known to science."<sup>15</sup>

The old starting-point was the cosmic picture disclosed in the Scriptures; orthodoxy, whether Catholic or Protestant, still begins with the Biblical account and absorbs as little of the scientific account as possible. The orthodox theologian takes such science as is forced on him as though drinking from a cup of hemlock. The Modernist, on the other hand, genuinely starts with the scientific picture and takes his religion grudgingly. Some Modernists, by tampering with the doctrines of the Virgin Birth, Incarnation, and Resurrection, move towards a pure Theism.

## Chapter Four

### ELIMINATION OF THE SUPERNATURAL

The beginning of modern science. Superstitions of the scientists. The belief in angels. Early Vitalism. Eighteenth-century Mechanism. Catholics and science. The natural and the supernatural. Christian Rationalism. Kierkegaard. Eddington's defence of mysticism.

THE progress of science has been accompanied by the gradual elimination of supernatural causes. This has come about largely by two rules of procedure, which distinguish the scientific method sharply from the religious. Modern science began with Galileo and it owes to that astonishing man its insistence on the *verification of hypothesis by experiment*. The second rule is the so-called canon of logical simplicity, doubtfully attributed to William of Ockham (1280-1359)—*Do not multiply entities without necessity*.

Looking back on all that has happened since, we can see now that the demand for verification and the preference for the explanation with the fewest assumptions must inevitably have undermined the traditional picture, which was quite arbitrary in its origin and was believed on faith.

The consequences of the great storm that engulfed medieval cosmogony and shook Christian theology to its foundations are concisely stated by Dr. Julian Huxley :—

When Kepler showed that planets moved in ellipses instead of circles, when Galileo discovered craters on the moon, spots on the sun, or showed that new fixed stars could appear, their discoveries were not indifferent to religion as might have been supposed. On the contrary, they had as much influence on the religious outlook of the day as had the ideas of Darwin on the religious outlook of the Victorian Age, or as the ideas of Freud and Pavlov are having on that of our own times.<sup>17</sup>

### *The Medieval View*

Why was this? One reason was the doctrine of the crystal spheres that were supposed to carry the planets and the stars.

Everything above the region of "the visiting moon" was supposed to be composed of a different *kind* of matter.

Celestial matter was absolutely pure—and so sunspots were unthinkable blemishes. It could not change, and so no new stars could appear. In the sublunary region things left to themselves moved naturally up or down; any other kind of movement—e.g., a leaf blown by the wind—was characterized as "violent." But the incorruptible bodies in the spheres above the moon moved in circles, because circular motion was regarded as "perfect" and therefore natural to them.

Commenting on the medieval view, Rudolph Eucken remarks:—

Religious truth, as a divine revelation, seemed, even more than anything else, to be unchangeable. But in other departments of life, also, such as philosophy and medicine, law and politics, there seemed no hope whatever of man attaining to anything more than that which he already possessed. The dogmas of the Church were hardly more authoritative than the teachings of Aristotle and Galen.<sup>18</sup>

We are so accustomed to regard knowledge as progressing that we find it hard to imagine the state of mind of those who felt that practically everything that man was likely to discover about Nature was already known. And, of course, everything needful to salvation was also supposed to be known. It was contained, as Augustine had said, in Holy Writ. Not only was the earth fixed, but knowledge also was static. How the shattering of this illusion was completed by Newton is shown by Dr. Huxley:—

Before Newton's time men supposed that the planets and their satellites had to be, in some way, perpetually guided and controlled in their courses by some extraneous power, and this power was almost universally believed to be the hand of God. Then came Newton, who showed that no such guidance or controlling power was, as a matter of fact, needed; granted the universal property of gravity, the planets could not help circling as they did. For theology, this meant that men could no longer think of God as continually controlling the details of the working of the heavenly bodies; as regards their aspect of the governance of the universe, God had to be thought of as one removed farther away, as the designer and creator of a machine which, once designed and created, needed no further control.<sup>17</sup>

With the emergence of exact science God was no longer invoked to account for the detailed running of the universe. He was still believed to have created it out of nothing, but once it was created it was thought to run with the smoothness of a perfectly designed machine. This analogy delighted the eighteenth-century mind, when all the storm and stress had died down.

The absence of any conception of natural law in the earlier books of the Bible was explained away, together with much else, by acute intellects with a genius for explaining things away. But the conception is found in the later books of the Old Testament :—

Dost thou make the heavens to know the laws?

Dost thou establish the dominion thereof in the earth?

Job xxxviii, 33.

It is generally thought that the view of natural law contained in Job and the "Wisdom literature" was due to the impact of Greek ideas on Jewish speculation. The contribution of Newton to the theological dilemma of the seventeenth century was to place the whole of the physical universe under the reign of law, abolishing the distinction between the two types of matter, corruptible and incorruptible.

The Anglican Church was under no obligation to provide a solution for the difficulties of Catholic theologians. The Protestants quite enjoyed the discomfiture of the Catholics. There was no disturbing consciousness as yet of a conflict between Protestant Christianity and the new "experimental philosophy," as science was then called. The march of Newtonian science seemed to be in step with religion. It seemed almost self-evident that universal law required a Supreme Lawgiver, and the proofs of God's existence were re-written accordingly.

### *Superstitions of the Scientists*

Newton is often cited as an example of a great scientist who was also a devout Christian. The implication we are intended to draw is that if one of the founders of modern science could see no incompatibility between science and religion there is no reason for the modern believer to feel any qualms. Such an argument, however, betrays a serious lack of historical sense.



The emancipation from medieval superstition was slow. Newton, in some ways an enigmatic figure, was far more easily excited by the prophecies of Daniel, and even by alchemy, than by the great discoveries with which he is normally associated.

In his admirable book *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* Professor Burt shows that Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Newton were all infected by non-rational ideas. Kepler believed that the planets were guided by angels. His interest in the solar system was inspired by a sort of Zoroastrian sun-worship:—

It was primarily by such considerations as the deification of the sun and its proper placing at the centre of the universe that Kepler, in the years of his adolescent fervour and warm imagination, was induced to accept the new (Copernican) system.<sup>19</sup>

Both Kepler and Galileo believed in astrology; at least, they practised it. Galileo drew up a horoscope for his patron the Grand Duke Ferdinand I de Medici of Tuscany, and predicted that he would enjoy a long and happy life. Unfortunately the Grand Duke died within a few weeks of receiving the good news. On the other hand, the allegation that Newton also believed in astrology has been carefully examined by Dr. Robert Eisler, but he concludes "there is no trace of his showing, at least in his mature age, the slightest preoccupation with or sympathetic interest in astrology."<sup>9</sup>

In the more backward fields of medicine and biology superstition was hard to drive out. Astronomy had exiled God to a lonely eminence outside the universe that He had made. But in other departments, even today as far as the Roman Church is concerned, "the angels keep their ancient places." This means, in effect, that physics and astronomy were the first sciences to be secularized. What Lecky called "the spirit of Rationalism" was the motive-power of the secularizing of *all* branches of science.

Although the medieval map of the cosmos had to be torn up, the belief in the supernatural beings that populated it remained. It is difficult to remove these beings from the context of the traditional Christian scheme without damaging it.

The Scriptures are saturated with demonology, and it is futile to attempt to explain this away. Examples of the intervention

of angels and of possession by demons are too numerous and well known to quote. It seems, on the face of it, perfectly plain that the Jesus of the Gospels accepted the crude science and demonology of that time, and believed that disease could be caused by malignant spirits and cured by casting them out (Matthew viii, 28).

This was a universal primitive belief. Long after the theory of possession was discarded as an explanation of physical disease it was retained as a likely explanation of madness. The exorcist still practises his profession in Roman Catholic countries, and it was not until psychology began to be secularized that lunatics ceased to be treated with barbarity.

Typical of the traditional view that in living organisms, especially in man, the natural and supernatural meet, is the doctrine that the human body is a microcosm of the whole universe, subject to mysterious influences from the stars, and inhabited by spirits.

Paracelsus groped towards a more rational view. Thus he wrote in 1527: "The body is a conglomeration of chemical matters; when these are deranged, illness results; and nought but chemical medicines may cure the same." But he could not free himself from the general presuppositions of the time. He reformed the pharmacopoeia and saved the life of Erasmus by his enlightened treatment, but he clung to the fiction that *something more* than physical constituents was involved.

He believed that the various organs of the body were controlled by subsidiary spirits, which he named *archaei*. If an organ was diseased, that was a sign that its controlling *archaeus* was either absent or negligent. A little later van Helmont took over this idea, but he regarded the *archaei* as hostile influences which could be overcome by suitable drugs.

Just as the angels who were supposed to guide celestial phenomena lost that function when astronomy became rationalized, so the numerous spirits of medieval fancy within the body were reduced to *one* spirit. This logical reduction was effected by Descartes in his *Traité de l'Homme*, which was the first textbook of mechanistic psychology. It marked a necessary stage in the elimination of the supernatural, although such had been far from Descartes' conscious intention.

In harmony with the prevailing ideas of the age, which had

regarded material objects on the analogy of a machine, Descartes tried to show that the human body was no exception. That, too, was a machine. Multiple *archaei* were therefore superfluous entities; all that was needed was a single immaterial soul.

There were now two rival paths for science to choose between, and they led to what today we call mechanism and vitalism. The vitalists still continue to fight a rearguard action against the elimination of the supernatural. They have steadily purged their system of the grosser superstitions, of course, and the clash in the eighteenth century is exemplified by Stahl and La Mettrie.

In his *Theoria Medica* (1708) Stahl taught that there was a single *archaeus*, distinct from the immaterial soul of Descartes, which he called *anima sensitiva*. The health of the organism depended upon it, and the physician was necessary only when it failed to function.

In opposition to this we have the view of La Mettrie (1709–1751), physician to Frederick the Great:—

The body may be considered as a clock, and the fresh chyle we may look on as the spring of that clock. The first business of nature upon the entrance of the chyle into the blood is to raise a sort of fever which the chemists (who dream of nothing but furnaces) call fermentation. Let us conclude boldly that man is a machine, and that there is only one substance, differently modified, in the whole world. What will all the weak reeds of divinity, metaphysic, and nonsense of the schools, avail against this firm and solid oak?

La Mettrie was supported by d'Holbach and Cabanis, and the latter made the famous remark that “the brain produces thought in the same way as the stomach and intestines operate in digestion, the liver filters the bile and the submaxillary gland secretes the saliva.”

### *The Unnecessary Hypothesis*

In the same spirit Laplace made his equally famous reply to Napoleon, in reference to the *Mécanique Céleste*, published between 1799 and 1825: “Monsieur Laplace, they tell me you have written this large book on the system of the universe and have never even mentioned its Creator.” Laplace answered: “Sire, I had no need for any such hypothesis.”

To Laplace, as to the modern scientist, God could not be validly invoked as an explanation of anything. It does not

follow from this that the existence of God need be explicitly denied. It merely means that His existence is not a scientific question.

Whether there are any questions about existence beyond the competence of science is a matter of dispute. The significance of the changed attitude of science can be seen, however, when we compare Laplace's reply with the concluding words of Newton's *Principia*, written a century and a half earlier :—

This most elegant system of suns, planets and comets could only arise from the purpose and sovereignty of an intelligent and mighty being. . . . He rules them all, not as a soul of the world, but as sovereign lord of all things, and because of that sovereignty He is commonly called "Lord God Almighty."

Broadly speaking, the religious interpretation of the universe seeks to preserve the domain of the supernatural, and so to place a limit upon the encroachment of science into every department of knowledge. Religion draws a frontier which it would be impious to cross. Particular sects may draw the frontier differently, but sooner or later the scientist will come to a notice warning him against trespass. Wherever the line is drawn, the supernatural may be defined as an arbitrary limit to scientific investigation.

Apart from Fundamentalists, who are more logical than those who deride them seem to realize, the Roman Church gives the clearest warnings, and if it could have had its way the scientific trespasser would not be let off with a mere reprimand. The Roman Catholic makes no bones about his belief in two interpenetrating worlds, one natural, the other supernatural.

In 1821 the works of Copernicus and Galileo were removed from the Index, and so the faithful were permitted to read that the earth went round the sun. Opposition to evolution was naturally strong; but the modern Catholic apologist is probably kinder to Lamarck than he would have been if Darwin had not existed. Evolution (the curious word "transformism" is sometimes preferred) may now be believed in by Catholics so long as the orthodox doctrines of the soul and Original Sin are retained.

The following defence of the present-day Catholic attitude to the encroachments of science is advanced by a Jesuit, Father C. W. O'Hara :—

It [the Church] condemns the scientific error, not because it can place its finger on the precise point where the error lies, but because truth cannot contradict itself. It seems to me that while the recent developments have led scientists to admit that their theories are changing—and yet in doing so are converging towards the ideal general theory by slow but sure stages—nevertheless in practice they forget the consequences of this admission. If the scientific theory, as at present formulated, is not the complete one, then it must be conceded that the facts forbidden by this theory may or may not be forbidden by a more general and complete theory.<sup>17</sup>

It would appear from this that the Church takes out an insurance policy for life-protection against science. Because science is not complete, and never will be, nothing it says can be a *conclusive* objection to articles of Faith, and so we may safely believe *anything* that the Church teaches, confident that it can never be disproved :—

Religion only asserts those facts about which it is certain, not on its own authority nor because it understands them, but because the source of its certainty is the absolute truth. The control which religion exercises when it condemns scientific error does not cramp the intelligence, but is making an attempt to preserve the mind from narrowness. It would, of course, be more satisfactory if religion could point out where the mistake lies, but it does not pretend to do so.<sup>17</sup>

So much for Catholic theory. As far as the practical application is concerned it is perhaps sufficient to recall a famous attempt “to preserve the mind from narrowness.” The charge against Galileo was “of believing and holding the doctrines—false and contrary to the Holy and Divine Scriptures—that the sun is the centre of the world, and that it does not move . . . also that an opinion can be held and supported as probable after it has been declared and decreed contrary to the Holy Scriptures.”

There cannot be much doubt about the denotation of the supernatural world in which Catholics believe. It is a transmogrified paganism in which the old gods and daimones reappear with the haloes of saints, the wings of angels; and enshrined above them is the primordial image of the Great Mother.

The impact of this invisible world is manifest in the various sacramental devices. There are detailed ritual practices for tapping a mysterious reservoir of power, which is a refinement of the primitive idea of mana. “The statement that the catho-

licizing of Christianity was the paganizing of it is more true than most epigrams," remarks Dr. Barnes.

### *The Meaning of the Supernatural*

But what of Protestantism? As we have already seen, there was not such a sharp cleavage at the Reformation as some people suppose. Both Catholics and Reformers believed that parallel with earthly society there was a heavenly society with a hierarchy of seraphs, cherubs, thrones, dominations, virtues, powers, principalities, and angels. Spenser was so rich in angelic lore that Milton described him as "our sage and serious poet Spenser, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus and Aquinas."

The modern, sophisticated Protestant is apt to smile rather superiorly at all this. Dr. Theodore M. Greene, writing on "Christianity and its Secular Alternatives," remarks:—

Naturalists and humanists are about equally critical of the "supernatural." They either insist that they can attach no meaning to this term or else give it a meaning which makes it utterly irrational. It is safe to say that no informed Christians—and few professing Christians are informed—believe in the supernatural which these naturalists and humanists repudiate. What, then, do Christians mean by the supernatural? It is quite easy to give a verbal answer to this question but not at all easy to comprehend its true impact. By the "natural" Christians mean, first of all, whatever has been created by God and what the Bible refers to as a "creature" or the "creaturely." This includes the physical world and man as a psycho-physical being, subject to the laws of the universe. God, as the Creator of this creaturely world, is accordingly conceived of as "supernatural."<sup>20</sup>

It would appear that among "informed Christians" the traditional doctrine of supernatural interaction has been dropped. The angels have been driven out; heaven and hell are empty, except for God. But how, we may well ask, does the Modernist get this interesting information? Very few, it is admitted, have access to it, and we may be tempted to exclaim that never before have so few believed so little, and still called themselves "Christians."

Dr. W. R. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's, warns us to distinguish between the supernatural and the miraculous. Not, indeed, that the miraculous need be rejected:—

If we took "Nature" to mean the whole universe in the fullest sense of that word, the complete order of being, I suppose there is scarcely anyone who would maintain that there could be any event which was contrary to or outside that order. If we work with this meaning of "nature," even the resurrection of our Lord would not be miraculous, for as St. Peter reminds us, so far from it being contrary to that order it was entirely consonant.<sup>21</sup>

But Dr. Matthews emphasizes that the "supernatural" which Christians must defend is not the doctrine that Rationalists attack:—

Properly, there is only one supernatural—the creative and redeeming God; and we may distinguish between supernatural religion and all other types of religious feeling by this touchstone.<sup>21</sup>

There is nothing very surprising in the depopulation of the invisible world. A similar evolution of ideas has occurred in other fields, and it is what might have been predicted. Those Churchmen who try to come to terms with scientific thinking, instead of violently suppressing it, are driven by relentless logic to abandon the traditional Christian scheme.

First the authority of the Bible as the word of God is undermined, and so the avalanche is started. The Creation and the Fall have then to be treated symbolically; and if the Fall is symbolic, so is the Redemption. The next dogmas to become victims of this destructive reasoning must be the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and Ascension. These doctrines are enshrined in the creeds and celebrated by liturgical festivals in which Anglican Modernists must take part. They no longer accept the doctrines in a straightforward sense, but in some new-fangled sense or else reject them outright.

The great emptying of the skies of spheres and controlling spirits brought about by the rationalization of the latter by Newton as "a sovereign lord of all things" is paralleled by the expulsion of vital spirits from the human body and their rationalization as *anima sensitiva* or an *entelechy*. The same logic would eliminate magic and mythology from Christianity itself.

We may well ask, Where is the process to stop? To this question we receive a confusion of answers. Only a small minority, who regard themselves as "the informed," would agree with Inge that the right starting-point for theology is to examine the universe disclosed by science. Yet any other

starting-point introduces a false bifurcation of reality into natural and supernatural.

As Dr. Julian Huxley writes :—

Only certain of the Churches have accepted evolution, though this was without doubt the most important single new idea of the nineteenth century. It [religion] has not yet assimilated recent advance in scientific knowledge of the brain and nervous system, of heredity, of psychology, or of sex and the physiology of sex. And, in a great many cases, while accepting scientific discoveries, it has only gone half-way in recasting its theology to meet the new situation.<sup>17</sup>

The most drastic “re-casting” results in the view already mentioned that the totality of things may be regarded as natural, and therefore amenable to scientific investigation, and the only truly supernatural entity is God. “Rationalist criticism may succeed in showing that much of the Bible is folklore,” we are told in effect, “but they cannot disprove the existence of God; and that is all that matters. Christianity is not a set of beliefs but a living experience.”

It is sometimes thought that this attitude is impregnable. But those who adopt it must choose between two streams of thought : one rational—and even calling itself “Christian Rationalism”—and the other mystical; one conscious of a need for intellectual formulation, and therefore objective; the other content to enjoy an experience that defies articulation, and so subjective. Both these currents of thought spring from the belief that the existence of God is, so to speak, the last ditch in the retreat from the traditional framework.

### *Christian Rationalism*

Dr. Whitehead is a very heretical witness, but he has won the approval of so-called Christian Rationalists by stressing rational theology as “the chief safeguard against the wild emotions of superstition.” He makes an interesting suggestion with regard to the Apocalypse :—

Yet it is shocking to think that this book has been retained for the formation of religious sentiment, while the speech of Pericles, descriptive of the Athenian ideal of civilization, has remained neglected in this connection. What I am advocating can be symbolized by this shift in the final book of the authoritative collection of religious



literature, namely, the replacement of the book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine by the imaginative account given by Thucydides of the speech of Pericles to the Athenians.<sup>22</sup>

This is throwing out ballast with a vengeance. "The task of theology," Whitehead continues, "is to show how the world is founded on something beyond mere transient fact, and how it issues in something beyond the perishing of occasions." We need not quarrel with this aim, but we must doubt the wisdom of leaving such a task to theologians. Such understanding of the universe as we have won has obviously come to us as a result of turning aside from the speculations of priestly custodians. And the gains have been accompanied, without exception, by the elimination of the supernatural.

A more detailed plea for "a rationalist Christian theology" is made by Dr. M. B. Foster :—

If God made the world according to reason, the world must embody the ideas of his reason; and our reason, in disclosing to us God's ideas, will at the same time reveal to us the essential nature of the created world.

The scientist is enabled by the use of his reason alone to enter into the reason of God, or in Kepler's phrase, to "think God's thought after him"; and because God has made nature to conform to his thoughts, what the scientist discovers by this process will be in fact the laws of nature.<sup>23</sup>

There is no place for the miraculous or the vulgarities of supernaturalism in this rarefied atmosphere. Dr. Barnes expresses a similar view :—

God has not withdrawn from Nature to revisit it at intervals when His presence is shewn in supernatural interventions. The reality behind those sequences from which we derive our laws of Nature exists in Him; in popular language the laws are His laws. To believe Him to be in the habit of breaking or suspending such laws is to put an end to any science of Nature.<sup>15</sup>

Those who build on experience rather than reason take a very different line. The extremists, inspired by the Danish mystic Kierkegaard (1813-1855), turn their back on science altogether. The vogue of this type of mysticism, sometimes called "Christian Existentialism," is an aspect of the modern revolt against the intellect, of which Bergson and William James were pioneers.

The movement spread between the two wars, when D. H. Lawrence preached "mindlessness" and "thinking with the blood," and Aldous Huxley turned to theosophy. As everyone knows to his bitter cost, this attitude took a more sinister form in Germany.

Of the Kierkegaardian variety, however, Dr. H. R. Mackintosh says :—

Faith on these terms is blind defiance. The way into the Kingdom lies through the simple crucifixion of the intelligence. Reason is stunned—rendered unconscious as it were—by the logical enormities thrust upon it by the Gospel.

But there is a type of mysticism, also opposed to Christian Rationalism, which claims to be compatible with the latest advances of science; and of this type of thought Eddington was the most brilliant exponent. The chief positive commitment is the belief in God.

Eddington takes the whole of experience, not merely the universe constructed by the scientist, as his starting-point. So far from conceding to the Christian Rationalist that in natural law we find a revelation of divine reason, he expresses a doubt as to whether the universe is truly rational.

He regards the world of science as a mental construction (rather than a discovery) built out of aspects of our experience. But that is not the whole story, he claims :—

We all know that there are regions of the human spirit untrammelled by the world of physics. In the mystic sense of creation around us, in the expression of art, in a yearning towards God, the soul grows upward and finds the fulfilment of something implanted in its nature. The sanction for this development is within us, striving both with our consciousness, or an Inner Light proceeding from a greater power than ours. Science can scarcely question this sanction, for the pursuit of science springs from a striving which the mind is impelled to follow, a question that will not be suppressed. Whether in the intellectual pursuits of science or in the mystical pursuits of the spirit, the light beckons ahead and the purpose surging in our nature responds. Can we not leave it at that? Is it really necessary to drag in the comfortable word "reality" to be administered like a pat on the back? <sup>24</sup>

No Rationalist (Christian or otherwise) can regard the question of "reality" as trivial. Whether religious experience has the

objective cause (God) that is claimed for it is surely an important point. No one denies that people may have the *emotions* that Eddington and others describe. What is in question is the *interpretation* to be put on those feelings. How is this to be decided?

The belief in an external God is a surviving fragment of the vitalism which once dominated the world of astrologers and astronomers, but has been all but expunged today from scientific interpretations of the universe. The innumerable spirits once lodged in every nook and cranny of the world have vanished for the Modernist; but a single, all-powerful Spirit remains, and he is equated, as we have seen, with the supernatural.

It is, however, as true today as in Laplace's time, that this Spirit, the supreme Archæus working behind the scenes, is not in practice invoked in the domains with which science is concerned. But if we set no limit to the field of scientific inquiry, supernatural causes must not be invoked as an explanation of anything whatever that occurs.

Science is an attempt to interpret all phenomena without calling in spirits or gods. A gap in an interpretation does not justify our introduction of some supernatural entity. To suppose otherwise was surely the great mistake made in the past, and it led to gross crudities. Storms and sunshine, pestilence and famine, were attributed either to the direct action of God or to the intervention of subsidiary spirits.

Mystic experience and the belief in God fall outside the sphere of the physical sciences with which writers like Eddington are mainly concerned, but they certainly come within the purview of the historical sciences and psychology. These sciences may seem rudimentary compared with physics, but, unless they are utterly negligible, such concepts as God, soul, and conscience are as much objects of scientific investigation as the spiral nebulae and the fossils embedded in rocks.

## Chapter Five

### GOD AND THE UNIVERSE

Did the universe have a beginning? Science and the belief in God. The classical proofs of God's existence. Kant's criticism. The ontological proof. God as a hypothesis. The universe of science. The running-down of the universe. The problem of purpose. The argument from design.

THE various Christian sects find common ground in the doctrine that God created the universe out of nothing. A few early Christian writers supported Justin Martyr's contention that the world was fashioned out of formless matter, and this was in harmony with the Greek axiom that "nothing can come out of nothing." To avoid the idea that God and the world are one (Pantheism) implied in the doctrine that the created world is an "emanation" from God, the Church emphasized the conception of a Creator quite distinct from creatures. God, therefore, must have existed from all eternity, and the world must have had a beginning in time.

Catholic teaching has been defined in an unambiguous Vatican decree: "God, from the very beginning of time, produced out of nothing the world and all things both spiritual and corporeal." The Westminster Confession expresses the same dogma: "It pleased God in the beginning to make, or create out of nothing, the world and all things therein in the space of six days."

The Archbishops' Report (1938) states:—

Christianity is committed to the doctrine that the world depends upon God as his Creation. Historically this has been affirmed by the Fathers in the doctrine of creation out of nothing, *ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων*, in opposition to the idea of an independent *ύλη* or matter.

The account in Genesis can be used to support the dogma of creation *ex nihilo* or the contrary dogma, held by Justin Martyr, of the imposition of form on formless matter (*ύλη*). This dispute, however, concerns only those who believe that genuine information is conveyed in Genesis. What is more to the point is to inquire whether there is anything in the scientific account of the universe that supports or refutes these contentions.

*God and the Scientists*

In one sense, of course, it would be absurd to look in scientific textbooks for help in this matter. There is no mention of God in such textbooks. Science can tell us what probably happened many millions of light-years ago, but its records do not go back indefinitely. How the world began—whether it had a beginning—is a speculation of absorbing interest, but those who restrict themselves to the scientific method cannot contribute anything of value to the debate.

It is a fact that many individual scientists believe that the universe had a beginning in time, and that it was created by God. They cannot prove this, but they regard the supposition as at least highly probable. Lord Kelvin wrote as follows :—

There is nothing between absolute scientific belief in a Creative power, and the acceptance of the theory of a fortuitous concourse of atoms. . . . If you think strongly enough, you will be forced by science to the belief in God, which is the foundation of all religion.

In 1942 Professor E. T. Whittaker wrote :—

Belief in God the Creator is the first article of the Creed, and the foundation of the Faith. The purpose of creation was completed by the Incarnation of the eternal Word, Who was in the beginning with God, and Who was God; which gave to this small planet the value of the universe, and gave to the narrow span of time the value of eternity. But the doctrine of the Incarnation belongs to revelation, and I have moved within the narrower sphere of the natural reason. The purpose of these lectures has been to maintain the doctrine which the Church has expressed in these words, "That God, the first cause and last end of all things, can, from created things, be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason."<sup>25</sup>

The views of Sir James Jeans have received wider publicity. He argued :—

As we trace the stream of time backwards, we encounter many indications that, after a long enough journey, we must come to its source, a time before which the present universe does not exist. Nature frowns upon perpetual motion machines, and it is *a priori* very unlikely that her universe will provide an example, on the grand scale, of the mechanism she abhors.<sup>26</sup>

And so he reaches the conclusion that "the universe can be best pictured, although still very imperfectly and inadequately,

as consisting in pure thought, the thought of what, for want of a wider word, we must describe as a mathematical thinker." <sup>26</sup> This is a little reminiscent of the view of the great seventeenth-century pioneer, Robert Boyle, who declared that "mathematics is the alphabet in which God wrote the world."

The majority of scientists do not broadcast religious and philosophical opinions. An attempt is described in *The Religion of Scientists*, edited by C. L. Drawbridge, to arrive at the opinions of Fellows of the Royal Society. Of the replies received to the question "Do you think that science negatives the idea of a personal God as taught by Jesus Christ?" twenty-six said "Yes" and 103 "No."

On the other hand the American statistics quoted by Professor Leuba in *God or Man* (1934) give a different impression. The questionnaire sought to ascertain the number of believers in God and immortality. It is emphasized that what is meant is "the God of the religions and no other conception of the Divine." Among the physical scientists, biologists, historians, sociologists, and psychologists questioned, somewhat less than half professed a belief in God, somewhat more than half a belief in personal immortality.

Leuba writes :—

A comparison of the several classes with each other and, in each class, of the less with the more distinguished group, yields particularly interesting results. In every class, without exception, the number of believers is considerably smaller among the more distinguished men. It is among the psychologists, who may be supposed to have more knowledge bearing upon God and Immortality than other scientific men, that one finds the smallest number of believers. Whereas among the greater men of the other classes the number of believers in God varies from 35% to 17%, it is only 13% among the greater psychologists. And, as to the belief in personal immortality, while it varies from 40% to 25% among the greater men of the other classes, it dwindles to less than 9% among the psychologists. <sup>27</sup>

Not much can be established by such tests, and the results are liable to fluctuate from generation to generation. The suggestion that psychologists are better qualified to judge such ultimate questions than anyone else is debatable. But it is as well to remember that when such writers as Eddington and Jeans speak of "Science" they usually mean physical science; they seldom

seem conscious of the existence of psychology. The belief in God certainly seems to find more supporters among physicists and mathematicians than among biologists and psychologists.

To compare lists of "believers" and "unbelievers" in the past will take us nowhere. Christian apologists sometimes try this dialectical trick, but the Rationalist can always make the reply of Laplace. Not even Catholic scientists use the hypothesis of God in their science. Catholics who advance this type of argument might also be reminded of the words of Aquinas in the opening of the *Summa Theologica*—*locus ab auctoritate qual fundatur super ratione humana est infirmissimus*, (the argument from human authority is the weakest of all arguments).

### *Proofs of God's Existence*

The classical proofs of God's existence are seldom used nowadays and there is a fairly widespread agreement outside the Catholic Church that they were effectively disposed of by Kant. Few modern philosophers would assert that the *existence* of anything can be certified by logic.

On the principle of safety in numbers, Aquinas offered no less than five proofs of the existence of God, and they are still considered valid by the majority of Catholics. The first proof is drawn from the fact of motion. The whole series of motions in the universe must have been started by a Prime Mover, himself unmoved.

This was a perfectly natural supposition to make in the thirteenth century. Aquinas accepted the Ptolemaic doctrine of spheres, which we have already examined. The whole machinery was believed by Aquinas to have been started by an angel acting on divine command. Angels apart, this so-called proof rests on a conception of motion, however, that has been abandoned.

So, too, modern scientific conceptions give no support to the second proof, which leads from a series of causes to a first cause. According to Bertrand Russell:—

All philosophers, of every school, imagine that causation is one of the fundamental axioms or postulates of science; yet, oddly enough, in advanced sciences, such as gravitational astronomy, the word "cause" never occurs. . . . The law of causality, I believe, like much that passes muster among philosophers, is a relic of a bygone age,

surviving like the monarchy, only because it is erroneously supposed to do no harm.<sup>28</sup>

The third argument amounts to saying that no particular thing that exists is strictly necessary. We can conceive a wholly different universe from the one we inhabit. Yet there must be some being that is independent and not contingent. The fourth argument is based on the idea that we cannot speak of imperfection without assuming perfection; and the fifth urges that there is evident purpose in the scheme of things, and so there must be mind ensuring the realization of ends in the cosmos.

It may be said, fairly plausibly, that although we cannot regard such proofs as rigorous in a logical or mathematical sense, they nevertheless give us some justification for postulating the existence of God. Until the last century, however, most philosophers tried their hands at inventing new proofs.

It was a sort of intellectual game, like squaring the circle. Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, and Berkeley tried to show that God could be known by the light of reason. All that their efforts amounted to were more or less successful attempts to invoke God to save the philosophical schemes that they invented from collapse.

Kant brought this intellectual pastime to an end by showing that no evidence from the state of the world could establish a Creator with the required attributes of Infinity, Omnipotence, Omniscience, etc. A perfect Creator cannot be inferred from an imperfect world.

There are qualities, says Kant, such as beauty and symmetry, in Nature which almost drive us to believe in supernatural design; on the other hand there is undoubtedly waste and disorder and pain and frustration. The proof from design must therefore be rejected. The fact of a moral law gives the best assurance of the existence of God.

Kant's "modernism" led him into serious trouble. In 1794 he was informed by the Prussian Cabinet:—

Our Highest Person has been greatly displeased to observe how you misuse your philosophy to undermine and destroy many of the most important and fundamental doctrines of the Holy Scriptures and of Christianity. We demand of you immediately an exact account, and expect that in future you will give no such cause of offence, but rather that, in accordance with your duty, you will employ your talents



and authority so that our paternal purpose may be more and more attained. If you continue to oppose this order you may expect unpleasant consequences.

Kant did not abjure his heresies, but he agreed to preserve silence during the reign of the then King of Prussia.

There can be only one type of proof of God's existence in strict logic. Induction means arguing from the particular to the general; it can yield probability but not certitude. A strict demonstration must be deductive.

All through the ages men have been haunted by the feeling that if God exists the fact must be self-evident: hence what is known as the ontological proof.

It was first advanced by Anselm (1033-1109), rejected by Aquinas, but restated with modifications by Descartes and Leibniz. It really amounts to saying that God's existence cannot be denied without contradiction. If we can form the conception of an absolutely perfect Being, then he must exist—reality must be part of his perfection.

Kant pointed out that this was word-play because, as Aristotle had also taught, "existence" cannot be treated as a predicate. There have been recent attempts to re-state the argument in a more satisfactory form, but they have made little impression. Dr. Barnes writes:—

If the ontological argument were satisfactory, a purely *a priori* proof of the existence of a Supreme Being would be possible. We must, in the light of the history of philosophy, admit that such an *a priori* proof cannot be found.<sup>15</sup>

### *God as a Hypothesis*

The religious alternative to the view that God's existence can be proved is that it is a hypothesis. The idea of a "hypothetical God" is stated by Dr. Matthews in *Studies in Christian Philosophy and Essays in Reconstruction*. Canon Streeter advances a similar view and compares the development of religious hypotheses with that of scientific hypotheses. The point about a hypothesis, he urges, is that we must act upon it:—

It was not by rejecting Newton's hypothesis, it was by accepting it, and by acting upon what was then the truest thing men knew, that science was able to move forward. And it will be by accepting this, our "hypothesis"—accepting it in the truly scientific sense of using

it as the basis of practical experiment, in will and work and prayer—that man will discover whether it is indeed the final hypothesis, or only the highway to one of such grandeur that today it cannot even enter into the heart of man to conceive.<sup>20</sup>

This argument seeks to get all the advantage out of the scientific prestige of such a word as “hypothesis,” but it will not pay the price. In the first place we are told that in order to test this hypothesis we must believe it. We must become Christians in order to verify whether Christianity is true or not. But it is obvious that no scientist is required to *believe* a proposition that he tests. A hypothesis may turn out to be false. What if the Christian hypothesis should turn out to be false?

Clearly such a possibility is not envisaged. The only alternative to rejecting the hypothesis is to move along “the highway to one of such grandeur that today it cannot even enter into the heart of man to conceive.”

Despite the brave talk about belief in God being regarded as a hypothesis to be proved by experiment, it is quite plain that no theologian can *really* mean that this is possible. Dr. Matthews virtually admits this:—

But the hypothesis of God is, in fact, even from a severely logical point of view, in a different position from that of rival hypotheses. We might justly call it a “forced hypothesis.” The more we think about the nature of the true “riddle of the universe,” and the further we reflect upon the conditions which must be fulfilled by any hypothesis which will solve the problem, the clearer it becomes that there are really no alternatives. The other hypotheses are, in fact, elaborate methods of giving the riddle up.<sup>21</sup>

We must certainly be ready to submit any belief to such tests as can be devised. But the parallel between a religious postulate and a hypothesis such as Newton’s or Einstein’s very quickly breaks down. There were certain physical experiments, which could be stated in advance, to decide the issue between Newton and Einstein. No one nowadays proposes physical tests—like the calling down of fire from heaven by Elijah, or the spreading of plague by Moses—to establish the existence of God.

### *Science and Creation*

“You will read in some books that the men of the Middle Ages thought the earth flat and the stars near, but that is a lie,”

declares Mr. C. S. Lewis.<sup>30</sup> Technically, he is right; but let no one assume (as it may be intended that they should) that the men of the Middle Ages were not fantastically mistaken in the cosmogony which harmonized so well with their elaborate mythology.

Ptolemy taught that the earth was a sphere and at the centre of the universe. What created the illusion of its importance was not its supposed centrality, but the fact that the most significant event in the history of the universe was thought to be the Incarnation. Moreover, it had already happened, and so medieval man looked backwards, not forwards.

As Eucken puts it :—

History meant far more to Christianity than it did to the ancient world. It was the Christian conviction that the divine had appeared in the domain of time, not as a pale reflection but in the whole fullness of its glory; hence as the dominating central point of the whole it must relate the whole past to itself and unfold the whole future out of itself. The unique character of this central occurrence was beyond all doubt. Christ could not come again, and yet again to be crucified; hence the countless cycles of the ancient world disappeared, there was no longer the old eternal recurrence of things. History ceased to be a uniform rhythmic repetition and became a comprehensive whole, a single drama.<sup>18</sup>

A single drama, occurring at the centre of the universe, at a fixed point in time, fitted neatly into the medieval picture. It does not fit into the modern picture.

We know now that the earth is a minor planet revolving round an average-sized star. Nor is the sun at the centre. It is but one of the myriads of stars in the galaxy known as the Milky Way. And the Milky Way contains some 50,000 million suns. The largest of them is Betelgeuse, which is 25 million times bigger than our own sun.

But that is far from being the whole story. The Milky Way is not the entire universe. It is sometimes spoken of as an "island universe," and there are millions of others. They are so remote that their distance is computed in light-years—the distance that light can travel in one year at a speed of 186,000 miles per second. The Great Nebula in Andromeda is nearly a million light-years distant, but it is visible to the naked eye. When the new 200-inch telescope is ready it will be possible to observe galaxies 1,000 million light-years away.

In speaking of these distances there is another possibility to remember. It is thought that the nebulae may not be stationary. The distances seem to grow bigger every moment. A nebula one million light-years away seems to be receding at a speed of 1,000 miles a second. The more distant nebulae move away from us at an even faster rate. It is as though we were making our observations from a flying particle inside an exploding rocket.

As far as our own galactic system is concerned its centre is over 30,000 light-years from the sun in the direction of Sagittarius, and the diameter is about 100,000 light-years. The sun moves round this centre at a velocity of 170 miles per second. It takes 224 million years to complete one revolution.

Small wonder that Inge writes :—

There is, I think, something derogatory to the Deity in supposing that He made this vast universe for so paltry an end as the production of ourselves and our friends.

Some Christians find no difficulty in believing that this unimaginably vast assemblage of suns was created partly for man's benefit. That anything so preposterous could nowadays be asserted by educated men is well-nigh incredible, but the fact remains. Thus the Rev. A. E. Baker writes :—

According to Catholic teaching, the universe was created for the glory of God, and for a means, an instrument, for man's salvation, which in its turn will be for the glory of God. . . . Man is so important that his salvation is the meaning of Creation as well as of history.<sup>31</sup>

Although it seems manifestly absurd to suppose that the entire cosmos was fashioned for the benefit of man, there is no intrinsic absurdity in supposing that it had a beginning in time—or, to put it another way, that time had a beginning. Kant held that to say that the universe had a beginning and to say that it did not have a beginning are “antinomies”—contradictory propositions between which there is no possibility of deciding. Recently, however, a purely scientific argument has been advanced in favour of the view that the universe had a beginning.

As everyone knows, if a poker is taken out of the fire it will grow colder and the surrounding air will become hotter. The reverse does not happen. The second law of thermodynamics, as formulated by Clausius, states: “Heat cannot of itself pass from a colder to a warmer body.” If we apply this to the entire

universe we must hold that there is a tendency for the bodies in it to reach a state with no variations of temperature. Since heat is a form of energy, there is a tendency to reach a state in which there are no further changes. This is sometimes described as a state of thermodynamical equilibrium, or "maximum entropy."

This is what is meant by saying that the universe is running down. If the universe is thought of as a clock that is running down, the question naturally arises whether it was once wound up. Some modern theologians, of course, regard this situation as a gift. But let us see what Eddington himself says:—

There is no doubt that the scheme of physics as it has stood for the last three-quarters of a century postulates a date at which either the entities of the high organization, or pre-existing entities, were endowed with that organization which they have been squandering ever since. Moreover, this organization is admittedly the antithesis of chance. It is something which could not occur fortuitously.

This has long been used as an argument against a too aggressive materialism. It has been quoted as scientific proof of the intervention of the Creator at a time not infinitely remote from today. But I am not advocating that we draw any hasty conclusions from it. Scientists and theologians alike must regard as somewhat crude the naïve theological doctrine which (suitably disguised) is at present to be found in every textbook of thermodynamics, namely that some billions of years ago God wound up the material universe and has left it to chance ever since. This should be regarded as the working hypothesis of thermodynamics rather than its declaration of faith. It is one of those conclusions from which we can see no logical escape—only it suffers from the drawback that it is incredible. As a scientist I simply do not believe that the present order of things started off with a bang; unscientifically, I feel equally unwilling to accept the implied discontinuity in the divine nature. But I can make no suggestion to evade the deadlock.<sup>24</sup>

Susan Stebbing sums up the controversy as follows:—

In my opinion no arguments favourable to Christian beliefs can be drawn from the law of entropy, either with regard to the beginning of the world or with regard to its gradual and final degeneration into a condition of thermodynamical equilibrium. That a God such as a Christian could worship originally created this world is surely not to be inferred from the laws of physical phenomena. That the Christian belief that "heaven and earth shall pass away" is in conformity with the heat-death of the universe predicted by scientists as a consequence of the law of entropy should not, I think, be too easily assumed.<sup>25</sup>

### *Has the Universe a Purpose ?*

Many people ask this question: What is the *purpose* of the incredibly vast activity of stars, the spawning of life on the pin-point in the universe which we inhabit? If there is no purpose behind it all life seems "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

This question seems to spring from our deepest nature and it cannot be brushed lightly aside. There is a fundamental human need to make experience intelligible. Both religion and philosophy attempt to satisfy this need by suggesting a pattern. To say that the world was created by God is an attempt to rationalize experience; the concept "God" is invented, like the concepts "soul" and "archaeus," to make the world intelligible.

There is nothing wrong with inventing concepts, as such. Science is always inventing new concepts in order to establish connections between observations and to rationalize our experiences. Those of us who endeavour to build a philosophy on the best knowledge available—i.e., scientific knowledge—cannot possibly object to the formation of new concepts. The point is whether the concepts we use are necessary or otiose.

Now it is plain enough that the scientist does *not* find the concept of God necessary in his professional capacity. If he did he would use it, and the word "God" would appear in text-books together with "energy," "space-time," and the rest. We have already seen how the progress of science has entailed the elimination of the supernatural. We have seen that theism has approved of the elimination of the angels that were once supposed to guide the planets, and of the spirits that were once believed to preside over the workings of our bodily organs.

The theist, however, refuses to go through to the bitter end and eliminate the supernatural completely. Indeed, as Dr. Matthews says, the supernatural *is* God. And so, although the subsidiary agents are disposed of, the theist is left with a single Spirit, a Supreme Archaeus. This is as inconsistent as the position of a man who expresses agreement with Bertrand Russell that advanced science need not make use of "efficient causes," and yet insists that there must nevertheless be a First Cause.

The Greek word *telos* means end. When Tennyson speaks of "the one far-off divine event to which the whole Creation

moves," he implies that the universe is teleological—that it has an end in view—namely, the "far-off divine event." If the universe is teleological it is either consciously moving towards an end or it was designed for an end. Now, the view that the universe is itself striving is really pantheistic; that is to say, the Universe and God are the same thing, as Spinoza taught. We are concerned at present with theism, which is strongly opposed to pantheism.

The Church has always condemned pantheism. Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) held a form of pantheism, among other heresies, and was burned at the stake. Spinoza (1632–1677) was excommunicated from the Jewish Synagogue and regarded in general abhorrence as an atheist, though in truth he was a pantheist. Einstein is sympathetic to pantheism.

The traditional Christian doctrine is that God and the world are distinct. That is the reason for the insistence (a) that the world had a beginning in time, which it would not have had if it were identical with God; (b) that the world was created out of nothing, instead of from the substance of the divine nature. Traditional logic was of great assistance to theologians in preserving the orthodox view.

Aristotle had distinguished four kinds of causes: formal, material, efficient, and final. We need only concern ourselves now with the last two. An efficient cause is what we mean by the word "cause" in everyday language. If you shoot a man, the efficient cause is pulling the trigger. But the object you had in view also determined his death, and that is the final cause, in this terminology.

Aristotle (mistakenly) thought that the main business of science was to search for causes. Science had to search not merely for efficient causes but for final causes. Science was, therefore, the "handmaiden" of theology. The fetters were not broken until the conception of final causes—"those barren virgins," as Bacon called them—was given up. This brings us to an extremely important point. The progress of science depended, not only on the elimination of the supernatural, but on the elimination of final causes or teleology.

The so-called teleological argument takes many forms, but basically it is the same. The argument is that there is evidence of purpose in Nature; and that presupposes a Person, a Mind.

To put the question "What is the purpose of the universe?" is to presuppose the truth of theism. "The word purpose," writes Professor Hyman Levy, "has meaning for us only in connection with the actions of living beings. . . . Purpose, therefore, is man-made as far as social life is concerned, and to suggest that there is any purpose other than what man himself can create, and does create, is to use the word *purpose* in a non-sensible way. The question becomes devoid of meaning." <sup>33</sup>

It is perhaps worth while glancing at a famous though now generally discarded argument advanced by William Paley (1743-1805) to show that design implied a Designer. Paley imagined that if a savage picked up a watch he would conclude that it had been designed. He went on to argue that animals showed even more design than watches, and so he was led to postulate a Supreme Designer. Professor J. B. S. Haldane comments :—

If, then, animals were designed, they were designed for mutual destruction. If there was one designer, he is, or was, a being with a passion for slaughter, like that of the ancient Romans, and the world is his Coliseum. A much more reasonable consequence of the hypothesis of design is Polytheism. If each of the million or so animal species were the product of a different god their mutual struggle would be intelligible. One must particularly admire the ingenuity of the creators of some of the parasites, particularly those with several hosts. For example, the digenetic trematode worms, such as bilharzia, which passes one generation in a water snail and another in human beings, causing an extremely painful chronic disease, often terminating in cancer, are an amazing piece of work. So are the malaria parasites, which live alternately in mosquitoes and human blood. . . . Wherever Paley's argument leads it does not lead to Christianity. If pushed to its logical conclusion it forces us to believe in a malignant creator, or, more probably, in a number of malignant creators. Certainly this creator, or these creators, are not wholly malignant. The world of life contains a great deal of beauty and pleasure; but one can admire the beauty only by closing one's consciousness to the pain and injustice which are bound up with it. A biologist who has spent his life in the study of parasitic animals must inevitably smother his feelings of pity to some extent and tend to take human misery and injustice for granted.<sup>35</sup>

Darwin's own view is of more than historical interest. In the autobiography that he was writing in 1876, a few years before his death, he said :—



There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings, and in the action of natural selection, than in the course which the wind blows.

It seems, therefore, in vain to appeal to astronomy or biology for any conclusive evidence in favour of theism. Science cannot provide proofs of the existence of God and does not itself require God as a hypothesis. The logical proofs are invalid, and their very multiplicity suggests a lack of confidence on the part of those who advance them.

There is, however, nothing new in this conclusion. It was all said long ago by Kant. He believed that the only proof worth considering was the argument from the existence of moral standards, and this must now be examined.

## Chapter Six

### THE PROBLEM OF VALUES

Morality and materialism. Hastings Rashdall on absolute morality. The meaning of beauty. Truth. Good and evil. Moral axioms. The moral proof of the existence of God.

THE most popular argument today for the existence of God is drawn from ethics. Stripped of technical terms it amounts to this: some actions are good, others are bad, consequently there must be a moral law. Now, there is no moral law in the material universe; there is no sense in saying that one movement of a piece of matter is *better* than another. We might say that an unsupported object *must* fall to the ground; but it is pointless to say that it is *right* for that to happen. "The ball no question makes of 'ayes and noes'"; indeed, when we use such terms as right and wrong, good and evil, we assume conscious purpose and the power to choose.

In the universe of the mechanical materialist there can be no such thing as right and wrong, just as the actions of a machine or a robot cannot be praised or blamed. If the materialist is correct, it is as senseless to blame human beings for what they do as to blame a motor-car for breaking down. How, it is asked, can we accept such a repulsive conclusion? Do we not condemn murderers and torturers? Do we not praise heroism and unselfishness? Are not selfishness and cruelty always wrong and unselfishness and courage always right? Whence do we derive these values? The source of our information cannot be "heartless, witless Nature." It must be—so the argument runs—something behind Nature, something over and above it: and what can that be but God?

The "moral argument" is admirably stated by one of the ablest of Protestant theologians, Hastings Rashdall:—

An absolute moral law, or moral ideal, cannot exist *in* material things. And it does not exist in the mind of this or that individual. Only if we believe in the existence of a Mind for which the true moral

ideal is already in some sense real, a Mind which is the source of whatever is true in our own moral judgments, can we rationally think of the moral idea as no less real than the world itself. Only so can we believe in an absolute standard of right and wrong, which is as independent of this or that man's actual ideas and actual desires as the facts of material nature. The belief in God, though not (like the belief in a real and an active self) a postulate of there being any such thing as morality at all, is a logical presupposition of an "objective" or absolute morality. A moral ideal can exist nowhere and nohow but in a mind; an absolute moral idea can exist only in a mind from which all reality is derived. Our moral ideal can only claim objective validity in so far as it can rationally be regarded as the revelation of a moral ideal eternally existing in the mind of God.<sup>36</sup>

### *Does Beauty Exist ?*

The argument for a Supreme Valuer is based not only on the demand for a ground of Goodness but also to guarantee the reality of such values as Beauty and Truth. Are some things intrinsically beautiful and others ugly, or is it just a question of personal taste? According to Keats :—

Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The literary temperament has always been moved by the type of mysticism which Plato injected into the stream of European consciousness, and which we have inherited. One can hardly fail to be moved by that magnificent passage in Plato's Symposium :—

He who has been instructed thus far in the science of Love, and has been led to see beautiful things in their due order and rank, when he moves towards the end of his discipline will suddenly catch sight of a wondrous thing, beautiful with the absolute Beauty : and this, Socrates, is the aim and end of all those earlier labours. . . .

Socrates gains a glimpse of the unity in the eternal realm behind the veil of appearances. And at last the vision is revealed to him of a single science which is the science of beauty everywhere.

That the contemplation of truth can suffuse the mind with a sense of beauty is indisputable ; but so, unfortunately, can the contemplation of error. The feeling that accompanies our thinking is no witness to its correctness. Nevertheless, there is a connection between beauty and reasoning. Both Bertrand Russell

and Henri Poincaré testify to the beauty of mathematics “where everything is exact and delightful.” And Poincaré goes so far as to say :—

The scientist does not study nature because it is useful to do so. He studies it because he takes pleasure in it, and he takes pleasure in it because it is beautiful. If nature were not beautiful it would not be worth knowing, and life would not be worth living. I am not speaking, of course, of that beauty which strikes the senses, of the beauties of qualities and appearances. What I mean is that more intimate beauty which comes from the harmonious order of its parts, and which a pure intelligence can grasp. . . . Intellectual beauty is self-sufficing, and it is for it, more perhaps than for the future good of humanity, that the scientist condemns himself to long and painful labours.<sup>37</sup>

It is easy enough to see how men have been impelled by the sheer strength of such an emotion to postulate the real existence of beauty as an attribute of God. The argument from motion to the Prime Mover, or from cause to the First Cause, seems cold and uninspiring in comparison with that from beauty to the Source and Divine Origin of the Beautiful. As Aldous Huxley writes :—

Among the trinities in which the ineffable One makes itself manifest is the trinity of the Good, the True and the Beautiful. We perceive beauty in the harmonious intervals between the parts of a whole.<sup>38</sup>

But let us face the problem squarely. There is beauty in the explosion of an atomic bomb. One of its inventors, Professor P. Morrison, writes as follows :—

The column itself is mainly a cloud, just like any thunderhead, except for the dust and vapour it holds, radioactive and generating heat. . . . As the column rises like the smoke from a chimney it may come to what is called an “inversion” by the meteorologists. This is a layer of air warmer, instead of cooler, than the air below it. When such a layer is reached the gas of the column will spread out and rise no longer. This is the formation of the mushroom. But some of the gas of the column is still being warmed by radioactivity. This gas is warm enough to break the inversion layer, and the column sends another stem from the first mushroom cap. This too mushrooms, now very high in the air, perhaps six to eight miles. All of these grand and ironically beautiful phenomena can be seen in the moving pictures of the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>39</sup>

Professor Morrison felt that it was ironical to speak of the "beauty" of an explosion that killed in Hiroshima 60,000 human beings, and injured 100,000—men, women, and children. In this instance, certainly, the Good and the Beautiful do not seem in harmony. Yet they ought to harmonize if these values have a real existence, independent of our thinking, either in Plato's sense as Eternal Ideas, or in the theistic sense as attributes of God.

### *The Problem of Truth*

Before considering alternative explanations of the nature of beauty, let us examine the other member of the trinity of values, Truth. "What is truth?" asked Pilate. It was a perfectly sensible question, for which he has been unwarrantably derided. We are not now concerned with the purely philosophical aspect of the problem. What is more pertinent to the present discussion is why men should *care* about truth. That some do care, profoundly, is plain from history; men have gone to the stake for it. They refused, time and time again, to burn incense to Caesar, because they believed that to do so would be acting a lie. Neither rack nor dungeon could force those who were persecuted for truth's sake to compromise with falsehood. We admire them for it: *Why?*

The strength of the personal conviction of being right cannot guarantee that a martyr was, in fact, right in his beliefs. Martyrs have died for opposed conceptions of truth. Many have died for grotesque superstitions. When people die for principles that we ourselves do not believe in we are apt to call them fanatics rather than martyrs. But the question remains: Whatever the truth about a particular issue, why do men feel that it is right to make a stand for the truth *as they see it*?

The religious answer is that truth is an eternal value, and that without an Absolute Valuer there would be no sense in making such a fuss about accepting a lie. Indeed, some go as far as to say that unless truth is an absolute value there is no means of discovering truth. Thus Dr. Joad argues that a materialist is not even entitled to talk about truth:—

If Materialism is true in all that it asserts, then Materialism tells us about that part of the world which is the body and brain of a particular individual, and only about that part. It follows that Materialism, in

so far as it purports to give an account of the world as a whole, cannot be true; or, more precisely, it is meaningless to say of it that it is true or false, since it turns out that it does not tell us anything about the world at all. Thus, in so far as it establishes its conclusion, Materialism destroys its case. Even if what Materialism says were by some odd coincidence to be correct, it could adduce no grounds for supposing it to be correct.<sup>40</sup>

To discuss all the issues raised by this argument would carry us too far afield, but two things might be pointed out: (1) Whether we are materialists or no, our observations are necessarily confined to a small part of the world. There is no reason, however, why we should not discover some truth within the limited field that we can examine, and there is no reason (unless we are theologians or metaphysicians) why we should not admit ignorance of what lies outside our ken. (2) Scientific truth, at any rate, involves action—i.e., experimenting and testing our hypotheses. Science does not claim that its results are absolute and unalterable.

It is superfluous to say of a fact that it is true. Facts simply *are*. There are facts, on the one hand, and there is language, on the other—a system of signs, designed for convenient use, to evoke emotion or represent facts.

If we use words or signs which do not stand for facts in order to convey information, we write nonsense, we utter mere empty sounds: "Twas brillig and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe." But if we say "The house is on fire" we use individual words that correspond to facts. Such a combination may, of course, be true or false. Truth is a property of sentences (or propositions, as the logician calls them), not of words.

### *What Values Imply*

The issue is now somewhat clearer. Science gives us information about the universe, but it does not discriminate between the bits of knowledge it yields, grading them according to value. Scientific knowledge does not tell us that cruelty is evil, that sunsets are beautiful, that truth is worth dying for. Because it cannot tell us these things we are tempted to suppose that there is another *kind* of knowledge, lying beyond science, a mysterious realm of values from which the information can be obtained.

Few people nowadays would assert, with Plato, that values exist as independent realities in their own right. Plato claimed that abstract nouns represent subsistent realities—that circularity exists as truly as circles, beauty as truly as beautiful objects. We need not consider this curious doctrine. The majority who reject it, however, advance a view that is no less logically shocking, though our ears have become accustomed to it. They hold that although it is absurd to say that beauty and goodness and truth exist, independently of beautiful and good things and true propositions, nevertheless God exists, independently of specific gods (Zeus, Allah, Yaweh, etc.). They may agree that value does not exist, over and above specific values, but they contend that there must be a Valuer. The argument is made to look more impressive by a typographical trick. Instead of writing beauty they write Beauty, instead of truth, Truth, instead of god, God.

This is a mere rhetorical device. Without its aid, the proof of the existence of God from values begins to look hardly more convincing than the proof from causes or design. Indeed, we soon become involved in the same sort of contradictions as beset the latter in particular. The proof from design is shipwrecked on the evidence of faulty design. The proof from values also founders on the rocks of imperfection. The very fact that we ask God (or his supposed representatives) *which* things are good, *which* are evil, entails treating evil, as well as good, as really existent. If values are not merely man-made, then surely evil and ugliness are not man-made. If we postulate God as the source of goodness and beauty, why not postulate him as the source of evil?

The traditional and very easy answer is to say that good comes from God, evil from man. The existence of freewill is supposed to solve the difficulty. But surely this will hardly do. At the most freewill could account for the harm a man does to himself, because of his wickedness; it can be stretched only with great difficulty to explain the suffering of the innocent, even into the third and fourth generation. And there is some evil in the world—in the sense of pain and frustration—for which human beings are certainly not responsible; also there is evil of this *kind* in the animal kingdom.

It may be objected, of course, that as good may come out of evil, the degree of evil in a situation depends on the circumstances, and perhaps nothing is evil in an ultimate sense. But the moral

proof of God's existence depends on the existence of an absolute, objective moral law.

The word "objective" here needs some explaining. If we hold that a lie can sometimes be justified—say, a lie that will save your wife from being raped and murdered—we do not believe that lying is absolutely and objectively wrong. Similarly, if we hold that mountains are not intrinsically beautiful, that it is just a matter of individual preference—that beauty is in the eye of the beholder—we deny the absolute, objective value of beauty. We make beauty a subjective instead of an objective value.

No Absolute Valuer can be derived from purely subjective or man-made values. Only if we hold that values are absolute and objective can we argue to the existence of an Absolute Valuer. As Eddington writes in *The Nature of the Physical World*:—

We have two alternatives. Either there are no absolute values, so that the sanctions of the inward monitor in our consciousness are the final court of appeal, beyond which it is idle to inquire. Or there are absolute values; then we can only trust optimistically that our values are some pale reflection of those of the Absolute Valuer, or that we have insight into the mind of the Absolute from whence come those strivings and sanctions whose authority we usually forbear to question.

### *The Subjectivity of Values*

What reason is there to suppose that the Good, the Beautiful, and the True are absolutes? Certainly there is nothing to lead us to suppose that people are agreed upon their meanings. Some, it is true, think that the Greek style of sculpture is intrinsically more beautiful than the Oriental style; but an ancient Egyptian or Chinese would have disputed this. We have only to recall the controversy that once raged in art circles over the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, and Cubists to realize how tastes in art change. Wagner provoked a storm of abuse when he was first heard; Schönberg, Hindemith, and Bartok still shock many people.

As for absolute truth, what propositions outside mathematics have other than a degree of probability? In the world of experience there are facts on the one side and interpretations on the other. How can we claim to know for *certain* that our interpretations are not mistaken?

But in the field of morals, it may be urged, there are *some*



actions which are universally condemned. That, however, is not what we are discussing. It may well be a fact that unselfishness is always held to be right, though even on this not all would agree. Professor E. Westermarck writes :—

Some “moral specialists” say it is an axiom that I ought not to prefer my own lesser good to the greater good of another; whilst others not only deny the self-evidence, but thoroughly disagree with the contents of this proposition.<sup>41</sup>

But let us assume for the sake of argument that everyone agrees that unselfishness is right. Does that prove the existence of a moral law? Surely it does not. It merely informs us of an attitude common to members of the human species.

The standard is man-made. For it to be an absolute we should have to hold that unselfishness is not merely universally *believed* to be right, but *is* right in every conceivable circumstance. In other words, even if we could promote widespread happiness by a selfish action we nevertheless ought to refrain from doing so. Those who think that such a case is impossible should consult Bertrand Russell’s playful essay on “The Harm that Good Men Do.”

The absolute moralist denies that circumstances alter cases, that consequences need be considered. He is driven to the extravagance of saying, with Newman, that it would be better for everyone in the world to perish than for a man to save the world by telling a lie. And the absolute moralist must hold that since there is a moral law, all men can discover it—that there is a wide measure of agreement about what is right and what is wrong.

No such widespread agreement can be found on many urgent issues. The “inward monitor” told Solomon that he could have as many wives as he could afford; it was harsher in the days of Henry VIII. It permitted the Kings of Egypt and Peru to marry their sisters; it forbids many savages still extant to as much as look on the face of their mother-in-law.

“It is as much the ‘nature of man’ to be conscious of a difference between right and wrong as it is to be alive to a difference between male and female,” declares Professor A. E. Taylor.<sup>42</sup> But what is the use of such consciousness if there is no *agreement* on what constitutes right and wrong? Again, Professor W. R.

Sorley declares that moral judgments prove the existence of an objective standard or ideal of goodness, "objective because all men who judge correctly must find the same moral value in a given situation." 43

How are we to tell whether they judge "correctly"? The inward monitor tells one man (even within the same culture-group) to fight, and another to be a pacifist; one to approve divorce, another to condemn it, and so on. Is there, then, an Absolute Valuer who has elsewhere revealed his intentions? But we cannot find justification of an absolute standard in the revelation of God if the very existence of God must first be inferred from the possession of an absolute standard.

### *Are There Moral Axioms ?*

If it were possible to see that some actions are wrong by immediate inspection, as we can see the truth of the laws of logic—e.g., "A statement cannot be both true and false"—we should have moral axioms, just as we have logical and mathematical axioms. An axiom is a truth that is supposedly self-evident; and if some moral truths were self-evident, it would be a great convenience, because we might be able to arrive at a system of morals by deduction.

Locke believed that he could do the trick. He took an unfortunately "period" example, however: "'Where there is no property, there is no injustice,' is a proposition as certain as any demonstration in Euclid." Nowadays it might be protested that in some cases—e.g., a man starving in the midst of plenty—the absence of property would itself be an injustice.

As long as we keep the argument abstract, the theory that some moral judgments are self-evident sounds fairly plausible; but it breaks down when we examine concrete cases. It is not enough, of course, to show that a moral judgment seems self-evident to a few philosophers; it must be as plain to everybody as is the statement that twice two are four. Pascal said ironically:—

We hardly know of anything, just or unjust, which does not change its character with a change of climate. Three degrees of polar elevation overturn the whole system of jurisprudence. A meridian determines what is truth. . . . There is not a single law which is universal.

But if this is really the case how can we maintain that moral standards are absolutes? Rashdall affirms it, but he does not prove his case, though he suggests, somewhat obscurely, that there is psychological evidence for the contention :—

The moral law has a real existence, there is such a thing as an absolute morality, there is something absolutely true or false in ethical judgments, whether we, or any number of human beings at any given time think so or not. Such a belief is distinctly implied in what we mean by morality. The idea of such an unconditional, objectively valid, moral law, or ideal, undoubtedly exists as a psychological fact.<sup>36</sup>

The retreat from mathematical “self-evidence” to psychology is significant. He must, however, meet the challenge (on the ground he has himself chosen) of Westermarck :—

I have thus arrived at the conclusion that the attempts of philosophers and theologians to prove the objective validity of moral judgments give us no right to accept such validity as a fact. I am now prepared to take a step further and assert that it cannot exist. The reason for this is that in my opinion the predicates of all moral judgments, all moral concepts, are ultimately based on emotions, and that, as is very commonly admitted, no objectivity can come from an emotion.<sup>41</sup>

### *Failure of the Moral Proof*

We must postpone a full discussion of the nature of morality. What we are immediately concerned with is whether there exists an absolute moral standard, or whether we are dependent on our inner feelings. If there is such an answer-book, if there is an absolute right and wrong, then there is some justification for assuming the existence either of a mysterious realm of Platonic Ideas or of God. This is so because morality, regarded as an absolute, involves the conception of *purpose*.

On such a view, it is natural to suppose that when we do right we are fulfilling some purpose beyond ourselves, “something not ourselves which makes for righteousness.” Such a purpose can be no other than the divine Will, and so we are led to the conclusion that virtue is the realization of the Will of God rather than the fulfilment of our nature recommended by the Greeks and Confucius. “In Thy Will is our peace,” as Dante perfectly expressed it.

And so, with Kant, purpose, or teleology, which had been

banished from the physical universe, returns as a support for morality. That absolute morality, in the sense defined, needs such support seems undeniable. If we believe in moral absolutes we must believe in God. On this point Professor A. E. Taylor is surely correct :—

If the implications of the moral law are what Kant, and though less explicitly Butler, take them to be, consideration of it leads us not merely to our acknowledgment of "one God" but of "one God almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible." <sup>42</sup>

But are we justified in believing in moral absolutes? The difficulties are immense, as Westermarck shows. Kant would have been shocked if someone had suggested that the time would come when "conscience" would be studied by ordinary laboratory methods; yet that is precisely what modern psychologists are trying to do. The elimination of the supernatural from morals has been accomplished largely as a result of the pioneering work of Freud. We need not accept the whole of Freud's theories, but we must recognize that just as Newton took away the entire province of astronomy from theology, just as Darwin showed that man himself was an animal, a late fruit of the tree of life that sprang from the scum floating on the primordial ocean, so Freud made "the inward Monitor" an object of purely scientific investigation.

We cannot prove the existence of God from moral absolutes because their existence has not been established; but we must believe in moral absolutes if we believe in God. To quote Rashdall again :—

Only if we believe in the existence of a Mind for which the true moral idea is already in some sense real, a Mind which is the source of whatever is true in our own moral judgments, can we rationally think of the moral ideal as no less real than the world itself? Only so can we believe in an absolute standard of right and wrong, which is as independent of this or that man's actual ideas and actual desires as the facts of material nature. . . . Our moral ideal can only claim objective validity in so far as it can rationally be regarded as the revelation of a moral ideal eternally existing in the mind of God. <sup>36</sup>

This seems perfectly reasonable. It means that the moral law, like the law of gravitation, describes objective facts. If there were a moral law, it would indeed be as Rashdall says; but there is no more agreement to be found about the law of the Good, than

about the law of the Beautiful, when we regard human opinion as a whole throughout history. The law of gravitation is experimentally verifiable; but no law of the Good or the Beautiful can be submitted to public testing.

And so we are back where we started from. The advance thought to have been made by Kant turns out to be illusory. The mistake that runs through all these arguments is to suppose that if we postulate the existence of God we really do *explain* what we would like to see explained. Yet the notion of an uncaused Cause is no more an explanation than the notion of an uncaused or beginningless material universe. (We must distinguish between the present type of organization, which may have had a beginning, and the stuff which is organized.) And in the same way, the notion of a *Source* of values, a *Ground* of Goodness and Beauty is no solution to the problem which confronts us, because if beauty and goodness are real, so are ugliness and evil.

If, in Plato's words, we could see even the rudiments of "a single science which is the science of beauty everywhere," there might be some substance in the argument. But unmixed beauty is not everywhere. There is evil, too—very often accompanying the beauty. Hence the outburst of the great Lord Salisbury: "God is all-powerful and all-loving—and the world is what it is! How are you going to explain that?"

## Chapter Seven

### THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Instrumental and intrinsic evil. The theory of privation. The optimism of Leibniz. The limits of omnipotence. Dualistic theories. The doctrine of the Fall. Satan and Nature. The problem of pain.

THE fact is that there is no special problem of evil, apart from the question of how to overcome it. Clear thinking and scientific technique are more likely to remove the elements of hurtfulness and frustration from the world of today than religious ardour. We are more likely to banish disease by studying it in a laboratory than by praying about it in church.

Not so long ago a plague of caterpillars was countered in France by priest and acolytes, using a once popular ritual which entailed a solemn cursing of the pests with bell, book, and candle. Modern man prefers to put his trust in D.D.T.

The metaphysical problem of *why* evil should exist is on a level with the child's question, *Why* is grass green? It is a problem at all only if you believe that the world was made by a loving and all-powerful God. Then, of course, your ingenuity is taxed to the utmost to reconcile the irreconcilable.

As William James asked: "Doth a fountain send forth at the same time sweet and bitter water?" If you assume the existence of that odd sort of fountain—because you believe, strangely enough, that it makes the world more intelligible—you have to think of an answer.

Our whole philosophy of life may depend on the way we regard this question of evil. In one sense all practical philosophy, and certainly the great religions, owe much of their survival-power to the success with which they seem to solve the problem of discord in the universe, war in heaven, suffering upon earth. Is evil the fault of man or God? Or is there some malevolent Power which thwarts, at least for a time, the will of God? Or are there two equally matched principles of Light and Darkness? Is it possible that God is indeed all-loving, but not all-powerful?

Theologians sometimes distinguish between *instrumental* evil and *intrinsic* evil. The former is like the frustration from which a child suffers; we do not allow a child to play with a loaded gun, lest it come to harm. Physical pain may be an instrument of good; thus toothache warns us that our teeth are decayed, and there might be grave danger to health if we had no such warning. But why should Omnipotence give us teeth that decay? The usual answer seems to be that we are lucky to have teeth at all, that it is as unreasonable to expect to have teeth which cannot ache as to ask for a square circle. It is for the reader to judge whether this is very convincing.

The scandal grows when pain in general is exalted because of its alleged "purifying" power. On this view sickness is to be welcomed as an opportunity for practising the virtue of patience, poverty for displaying the virtue of holy submission and enabling the rich to practise philanthropy. Thus, according to the Papal Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* :—

The pains and hardships of life will have no end or cessation on earth. . . . To suffer and to endure, therefore, is the lot of humanity. . . . No strength and no artifice will ever succeed in banishing from human life the ills and troubles which beset it.

Again, the Encyclical *Caritate Christi Compulsi* states :—

There are two means with which to cope with the increasing misery of the times, prayer and fasting. Let the rich carry out the fasting by almsgiving. And let the poor, and all those who at this time are facing the hard trial of want of work and security of food—let them in a like spirit of penance suffer with greater resignation the privations imposed upon them by these hard times and the state of the society which Divine Providence, in an inscrutable but ever-loving plan, has assigned to them.

Such a plan is inscrutable indeed. It may be urged that the pains of this mortal life are not to be compared with the joys to come; but they seem unevenly distributed if the poor man's virtue is meekly to starve while virtue for the rich man consists in flicking a few crumbs from his overladen table. As Professor Joseph Needham remarks :—

Proletarian misery in this world has been constantly lightened by promises of comfort and blessedness in the world to come—an exhortation which comes well enough from the ecclesiastical ascetic who does not spare himself, but very ill from the employer of labour or the representative of the propertied classes.<sup>44</sup>

*Intrinsic Evil*

What is intrinsic evil? Evidently it cannot be the misunderstood action of a guiding hand. Buddhism teaches that life itself is an intrinsic evil, but as Buddhism is not (in its original form) a theistic doctrine, it is not faced by the same thorny problem as Christianity. The Christian has to explain how evil can exist without God being responsible for it.

The traditional solution is to divide the responsibility for most evils between Satan and man, both of whom were endowed with free will; but even when this is done, some evil remains to be accounted for, some things seem ugly and painful and irrational (hence the term "surd evil"), and the blame is hard to fix either on man or the Devil.

One way out of this difficulty is to deny that evil has any *positive* existence. Something of this sort was suggested by Aquinas. Evil is not the *presence* of something, for which God is accountable, but the *absence* of something; just as darkness is not a reality in itself, but merely the absence of light.

"What lamp has Destiny to guide her little children stumbling in the dark?" as Omar Khayyam asked. They always stumble, and they certainly hurt themselves. If a man falls down a hole in a street at night, we hold the Corporation responsible for not lighting the usual warning lantern. They would be ill-advised to plead that they are not responsible for darkness, because darkness is not "real."

A more plausible view is that we simply cannot explain the fact of intrinsic evil. It is part of an inscrutable plan. Mere finite intelligence cannot expect to understand it. "God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform." We go over a Children's Hospital and see the innocent victims of syphilis and meningitis, and wonder—as needs we must—what part of the Divine Design these interesting bacteria play. We shake our heads and conclude that it is all a profound mystery. We would not have created such microbes ourselves, if we had had the power—in fact we are doing our best to exterminate them—but it is blasphemous to doubt the Divine Wisdom. And so our optimism is not impaired.

Nothing, apparently, will shake the optimism of what is sometimes called the "beer and skittles" type of Christianity, which



was so brilliantly represented by G. K. Chesterton. This school, with its gusto, its merry quips, its nostalgic, backward glance towards the Middle Ages, when life was so jolly for those who possessed the Faith, has not the slightest queasiness about the evil and ugliness that others see as a sinister thread, interwoven with the Good and the Beautiful. "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world," they shout.

Sidney Dark, who followed Chesterton—but not into the Roman Church—bids us sweep aside our perplexities:—

We live amid mysteries that we cannot explain, and, without the mysteries, life would be intolerably dull. Indeed, the supreme value of religion in an age, not unreasonably proud of its newly acquired knowledge, is largely derived from the fact that it is based on the mysterious. . . . George Saintsbury has written: "The average Freethinker never writes a book, and seldom a page, without assuming, or seeming to assume, that the supernatural must submit to the tests of the natural. Now this is precisely what any logical believer must deny." <sup>45</sup>

It is, of course, highly convenient to refuse to submit beliefs to the ordinary tests of reasonableness and evidence; but such a procedure is only "logical" in the sense that if the dogma proposed is a "mystery" anything, however contradictory, may be deduced from it.

### *Is God Responsible ?*

Leibniz, a contemporary of Newton, offered a solution which has been much derided, though some modern theologians are more indebted to him than they care to acknowledge. Leibniz was caricatured by Voltaire as Dr. Pangloss—one of those incurable optimists who drive people who have to live with them into deepest pessimism.

Roughly, his solution was as follows: An infinite number of things are possible, but some things are not possible in combination or simultaneously. For things that are possible together, Leibniz coined the useful term "compossible." He concluded, therefore, that this was "the best of all possible worlds."

It is shallow, on this view, to blame God for pain. God could have created an inanimate world, without pain, but not an animate world. If you are capable of feeling pleasure you must

be also capable of feeling pain; to wish things to be otherwise is to wish that there were Euclidean triangles whose angles do not add up to two right angles.

God cannot do the impossible, Mr. C. S. Lewis tells us :—

His omnipotence means power to do all that is intrinsically possible, not to do the intrinsically impossible. You may attribute miracles to Him, but not nonsense. There is no limit to His power. If you choose to say "God can give a creature free-will and at the same time withhold free-will from it" you have not succeeded in saying *anything* about God: meaningless combinations of words do not suddenly acquire meaning simply because we prefix to them the two other words "God can." It remains true that all *things* are possible with God: the intrinsic impossibilities are not things but nonentities. It is no more possible for God than for the weakest of His creatures to carry out both of two mutually exclusive alternatives; not because His power meets an obstacle, but because nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God.<sup>30</sup>

On this view there can be no inconsistency between the toleration of evil in the world and any of God's attributes. If we object that although the evil may be consistent with divine Reason, it seems difficult to reconcile it with divine Love, Mr. Lewis is ready for us. Our idea of Love is all wrong. We are altogether too soft-hearted :—

We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in heaven—a senile benevolence who, as they say, "liked to see young people enjoying themselves," and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, "a good time was had by all." Not many people, I admit, would formulate a theology in precisely those terms; but a conception not very different lurks at the back of many minds. I do not claim to be an exception; I should very much like to live in a universe which was governed on such lines. But since it is abundantly clear that I don't, and since I have reason to believe, nevertheless, that God is Love, I conclude that my conception of love needs correction.<sup>30</sup>

Mr. Lewis's confession is interesting. He would like to live in a universe run on indulgent lines, rather than one in which Spartan discipline prevails. He would like nature to be good-nature; but he has been informed that "God is Love," and so, since he cannot alter his ideas of the universe, he has to alter his ideas of love. One cannot help feeling that, to Mr. Lewis, God is rather like a schoolmaster of the stern, old-fashioned type who

informs him as he raises the birch rod—what he tries most dutifully to believe—that “this hurts me more than it hurts you.”

The schoolmaster walks the wards of the Children’s Hospital, sternly reproving any sentimental whimpering, and perhaps not altogether happy about the use of anaesthetics. He seems to have come straight from the world of St. Augustine, who preached the damnation of unbaptized infants—a doctrine which does not shock Mr. Lewis. Or from the world of Geneva, in which, under Calvin’s rule of saints, a child was beheaded for striking his parents.

Should we not rather call such a “reign of terror” a “reign of love”? For, as Mr. Lewis reminds us, in sober metaphysical language, “Love and Kindness are not coterminous.” More poetically, in Dante’s phrase, Love is “a lord of terrible aspect.”

### *Is Satan Responsible ?*

There are two classical types of philosophy, Monism and Dualism. As far as the problem of evil is concerned, Monism teaches that the whole creation, visible and invisible, is the outcome of either the will or the reason of one Supreme God. Dualism teaches that there are two Gods, though one may be more powerful than the other.

Zoroaster, who lived about 1000 B.C., taught that there were two cosmic Powers, Ahura Mazda (Ormazd), associated with Light, and Agra Mainya (Ahriman), associated with darkness. The universe was their battle-ground. Ormazd is not omnipotent, but he created all the good things; Ahriman created all the evil things. The angels of Ormazd fight the demons of Ahriman. Nevertheless Ormazd will win in the end.

Zoroastrianism inspired a famous heresy called Manichaeism, which flourished in the third century A.D., and taught that material things were all evil. Manichaeism assumed dangerous proportions, attracted St. Augustine, and penetrated into India and even China. It also had affinities with the Gnostic heresy, a blend of Christianity and theosophy reaching back to earlier mystery-cults, as exemplified in the works of Marcion and Bardesanes. For these heretics, the entire world of matter was satanic; it sprang from a primeval kingdom of darkness and disorder which attacked a primeval kingdom of light and goodness. Thus there

resulted an inextricable mingling of good and bad, beauty and ugliness, order and disorder, in creation.

Religious Dualism may not explain, but it does seem to reflect, the situation we actually find more adequately than religious Monism. It gave rise to curious trends within orthodox Christian theology, notably to a belief that somehow a mighty being, inferior to God, but immensely powerful, twisted and warped the divine creation. Dualism does not try to explain away the existence of evil; it fastens the blame on Satan.

Dr. W. R. Matthews writes :—

When we contemplate the details of this evolution, we have the inescapable impression of a confusion and a tendency to degeneration which are somehow inherent in the world of life. We must not here embark upon the question of the meaning of the Fall, but we may note that the myths which have expressed the idea of "something gone wrong" may have been very fantastic, but they have at least given dramatic form to a character of the world which does not disappear as we come to be better acquainted with the facts.<sup>21</sup>

Mr. C. S. Lewis is attracted to such Diabolism. He writes :—

It seems to me, therefore, a reasonable supposition, that some mighty created power had already been at work for ill on the material universe or the solar system, or, at least, the planet Earth, before ever man came on the scene: and that when man fell, someone had, indeed, tempted him. . . . If there is such a power, as I myself believe, it may well have corrupted the animal creation before man appeared. The intrinsic evil of the animal world lies in the fact that animals, or some animals, live by destroying each other. That plants do the same I will not admit to be an evil. The Satanic corruption of the beasts would therefore be analogous, in one respect, with the Satanic corruption of man. . . . If it offends less, you may say that the "life-force" is corrupted, where I say that living creatures were corrupted by an evil angelic being. We mean the same thing: but I find it easier to believe in a myth of Gods and demons than in one of hypostatised abstract nouns. And after all, our mythology may be much nearer to the literal truth than we suppose. Let us not forget that Our Lord, on one occasion, attributes human disease not to God's wrath, not to nature, but quite explicitly to Satan.<sup>30</sup>

This may seem curious language to be used nowadays, especially by one of the most "intellectual" champions of the Anglican Church. Many people will feel that such arguments scarcely need refuting. It is surely plain enough that Dualism is no

answer if the belief in an *all-powerful* God is retained. To say that it was *impossible* for God to have made a better world is surely to beg the whole question. It is not an *obvious* impossibility. It seems absurd to suppose that God was so helpless that he could not prevent the whole scheme of things from being spoiled by Satan. Dr. Barnes has a sharp comment to make on this type of argument :—

Theologians have often been hard put to it to account for the existence of evil in humanity. So long as belief in Eve's wrongdoing in the Garden of Eden lasted, a theory of the inheritance of Adam's guilt was put forward as a satisfactory explanation. That theory must now be consigned to oblivion, inasmuch as the story on which it rests is obviously folk-lore. Since its overthrow certain theologians have resuscitated the theory of a pre-mundane "Fall," some outburst of resurgent evil that took place before the world was made. This "Fall," we are told by one sponsor, was "the assertion" of the individual against "the unity" and "could not have taken place on the present globe." The theory is only worth mentioning as illustrating the way in which educated men, when in difficulty, will turn anew to myths that seemed long dead. Of course, such play of fancy is useless in serious theological reconstruction.<sup>15</sup>

### *Why Make so Much Fuss ?*

It is sometimes urged that if only we could see the whole pattern as God sees it, from the point of view of eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*), we should understand that even evil, ugliness, and falsity serve a purpose in securing the harmony of the whole. But as we are manifestly incapable of doing so this amounts, in effect, to shelving the problem.

"Christianity does not offer us a 'fool-proof' solution of the problems of evil, freewill and predestination," writes Professor W. Robinson, Principal of Overdale College. He claims, however, that Christianity "eases" them. And it is evident enough that the theologian starts by playing down the sort of evil (i.e., pain and disease) that is not due to human freewill. Rationalists come to be regarded as timorous sentimentalists, who make a quite unnecessary fuss about a little suffering. Professor Robinson continues :—

So far as pain and suffering are concerned, we must avoid the common exaggeration of the problem through equating total pain with the

sum total of all pains. My toothache is mine, and if a million people have toothache, the matter is not a million times worse than if one person had toothache.<sup>47</sup>

So, too, Dr. Matthews :—

The pains and pleasures of the world cannot be summed, and if they could the sum would not exist—for the only way in which pleasure or pain can exist is in the experience of someone.<sup>21</sup>

This has become quite a stock argument. C. S. Lewis puts it as follows :—

Suppose that I have a toothache of intensity  $x$  : and suppose that you, who are seated beside me, also begin to have a toothache of intensity  $x$ . You may, if you choose, say that the total amount of pain in the room is now  $2x$ . But you must remember that no one is suffering  $2x$  : search all time and all space and you will not find that composite pain in anyone's consciousness. There is no such thing as a sum of suffering, for no one suffers it. When we have reached the maximum that a single person can suffer, we have, no doubt, reached something very horrible, but we have reached all the suffering there ever can be in the universe. The addition of a million fellow-sufferers adds no more pain.<sup>30</sup>

So the universe, even when Satan has done his worst, is still run on quite humanitarian lines—though we must still be careful not to confuse mere kindness with Love ! It is “no worse” that a million children should be in agony than that one child should suffer : an argument that is unlikely to carry conviction outside the college cloister. It is based, however, on a logical confusion, and it is quite possible that in some cases it may be traced back to dubious conclusions drawn from a statement by Professor C. D. Broad in his *Five Types of Ethical Theory*.

Criticizing the Utilitarian theory of “the greatest happiness of the greatest number,” Professor Broad showed most cogently that although you could add black and white together to produce grey, you could not add the misery and happiness in a community together. Indeed, a collection cannot be literally happy or unhappy. This is a very subtle and interesting logical point ; but there is no need for us to try to add up each individual item of suffering. If it is morally, though not mathematically, worse for a man, like Hitler, to cause the death of millions rather than one human being, so it is worse—more morally reprehensible,

more inconsistent with the rule of benevolence—for millions of people to suffer than for a few.

Surely it were far better to acknowledge our inability to solve the problem than to put forward these trivial sophistries in the presence of the human tragedy.

### *The Mystery Remains*

The popular solution that good can come out of evil implies in the last analysis that all evil is instrumental evil. It also implies that for God (though not, presumably, for man) the end justifies the means. It is a variety of the doctrine that, from our finite viewpoint, we misperceive the divine plan; if we only knew enough we should understand that shadow is as necessary as light, suffering as joy. Such an explanation has at least the merit of placing the responsibility for creation on the Creator. This is honest; but although such a God can be worshipped, can he be loved? The qualities of love and power are still unreconciled; we can but acknowledge—if we choose to think on these lines—that we are in the presence of a mystery.

Dr. Barnes has wrestled sincerely with this difficulty. By insisting that scientific knowledge should be the starting-point, he commits himself to the view that "God's way is Nature's Way":—

In the end all attempts to take from God responsibility for the nature of His creatures must fail. . . . I can see no reason to deny that the evolutionary process is as clear a revelation of God's creative activity as we can have. Its apparently non-moral character must be with His permission. For some unknown reason He permitted death, disease, struggle, the instincts which have led to selfishness and lust in man, because He willed that higher moral, intellectual and emotional development which in man is such an unexpected outcome of the process.<sup>15</sup>

But what is the difference between taking refuge in "an unknown reason" and affirming the simple faith that "God moves in a mysterious way"? What sort of Creator, we may repeat, is revealed by Nature? The non-Christian may be content to echo the sentiments expressed in this passage from F. C. Conybeare's *Myth, Magic, and Morals*:—

Our race has been able to establish a foothold on this earth late in its geological development. But our tenure is frail and precarious; and

our origins were as much or as little the result of accident as the emergence of any other form of life. Our mother-earth, in her frequent convulsions, has no respect for our cities and centres of civilisation; and we can easily imagine a cosmic catastrophe, such as a sudden increase or decrease in the solar temperature, or the impact of a foreign body, solid or gaseous, on the solar system, which would in a moment carry death and desolation all over our globe. How, moreover, can we reconcile with the conception of a Providence, of a Creator who watches over us as a parent over his children, the great volume of human suffering and disease? We daily see children born maimed, crippled, or tainted with hereditary disease and madness. It is poor comfort to read that God is a jealous God, who visits the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation. It is all too true that they are so visited, but the intelligent and all powerful being who should be responsible for the infliction of so much suffering upon innocent beings, would be wickedder than the wickedest of our human criminals—would, indeed, be the evil Demiurge that Marcion declared the God of the Jews to be.<sup>49</sup>

We have so far largely ignored the sort of evil that can be attributed to human interference. It is pretty obvious, from what the theologians have admitted, that man does not come as wrecker into a perfectly organized universe. The ancient tradition that the evil in the animal kingdom was due to the Fall had to be abandoned when it was seen that animals roamed the earth long before man. Nevertheless, it is still widely held that man has only himself to blame for most of his troubles.

Guy Kendall, in a popular work, says bluntly :—

As for the common theological subterfuge that "God permits human freedom but foresees how it will be used," it has often been pointed out that such an explanation certainly does not free God from the responsibility of human error. Whether it assigns any real meaning to human freedom is at least doubtful.<sup>48</sup>

The problem of freedom brings us to the hoary controversy of freewill and determinism. It is partly a psychological and partly a philosophical problem. Psychology, however, is in its infancy, and philosophers notoriously disagree; but at least we know more about the psychology of man than of God.



## *Chapter Eight*

### FREEWILL AND DETERMINISM

Greek conceptions of fate. Predestination. Augustine and Pelagius. The doctrine of Grace. The teaching of Aquinas. "Buridan's Ass." Original Sin and collective guilt. Taboo. Moral responsibility. Intuition and freewill. Neo-Thomist theories. Freewill and the physicists. The case for determinism stated by Spinoza, Diderot, Schopenhauer, Laplace, John Stuart Mill, T. H. Huxley, Haeckel, and Einstein. Summing-up.

THERE is no more thorny controversy in the history of thought than that which has raged between the determinists and the advocates of freewill. Unless the issue is very clearly stated we are liable to lose our way in a maze of purely verbal argument.

The religion of the ancient Greeks encouraged a type of fatalism. Greek tragedy is overshadowed by the concept of a mysterious Fate, to which even the Olympian gods were subject. The religious idea of Fate was "secularized" by Leucippus and Democritus as abstract Necessity. Everything that happened was attributed to the movement of material atoms, and everything was consequently determined—i.e., ruled by Necessity. Against this, Epicurus raised his voice in defence of freedom, declaring that he would sooner be a slave to the old gods of the vulgar than to the Necessity of the philosophers.

The Stoics restored personality to this abstract concept, but on a higher level than that of the primitive idea. For them, Gilbert Murray tells us, Necessity "is like a fine thread running through the whole of existence—the world, we must remember, was to the Stoics a live thing—like that invisible thread of life which, in heredity, passes on from generation to generation of living species and keeps the type alive." <sup>50</sup>

The Christians also had a notion of a thread in the hereditary guilt transmitted from Adam. The Stoics, however, did not regard man's nature as inherently tainted; on the contrary, as long as man acted in accordance with his true self, he was in harmony with the Reason underlying the world, the mind of Zeus. To quote Gilbert Murray again:—

Only when you are false to your own nature and become a rebel against the kingdom of God which is within you, are you dragged perforce behind the chariot-wheels.<sup>50</sup>

Aristotle taught that man had the power to choose between good and bad actions; indeed, if he had no such power, why should the virtuous be rewarded and the wicked punished? The views of both Aristotle and the Stoics powerfully influenced Christian theologians when they came to grapple with the problem of God's omnipotence and man's freedom.

### *The Concept of Sin*

If God created everything, was he the author of sin? If God knew everything from eternity, did he know which men were saved and which were damned? In what sense are we to distinguish—if we can—between foreknowledge and predestination? Can man, by his own efforts, lift himself from the terrible state to which he has been reduced by the Fall? If all men are infected with sin, through Adam, is not this a reflection on divine justice? Why, for example, should the innocent suffer because of the guilty? Some would answer with Lotze :—

Our finite wisdom has come to the end of its tether and we do not understand the solution which yet we believe in.<sup>51</sup>

To a Rationalist, however, this refuge in what Spinoza called "the asylum of ignorance" has nothing to recommend it. The Christian, if he wishes to debate at all, should give a better answer than this. Some light, one would have thought, would be thrown on the subject by the Scriptures, but when we turn to them we find such ambiguities that confusion is worse confounded.

The orthodox doctrine of Original Sin, forgiven at baptism, simply cannot be found in the Biblical record. Much of it is, no doubt, derived from interpretations of the Pauline writings. But there is no agreement about the meaning, for example, of the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. In Romans viii, 29-30, some people claim to find justification for the doctrine of Predestination :—

For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren; and whom he foreordained, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

The best, but by no means wholly successful, attempt to clear up the muddle in the early Church was made by St. Augustine of Hippo, in the first part of the fifth century. Augustine claimed to follow Paul in teaching that God had predestined the elect to be saved. No merit, no amount of natural virtue, could entitle any individual to be saved. Thanks to Adam, sin had been inherited; and it was like a disease that had been handed down. Even new-born babes had inherited this spiritual leprosy; if they died without being baptized they would be damned.

A more humane, and possibly more pagan, view was advanced at the same time by Pelagius, a British monk. He argued that Adam injured himself alone, not the whole of mankind; that new-born children are in the same condition that Adam was before the Fall; that human nature is not so deformed that virtue is impossible without supernatural aid.

One point at issue was: Who takes the initiative when, for example, an adult, like Augustine, is converted? Did Augustine approach God, and because of his approach receive grace? Or did God approach Augustine, having marked him down from eternity for conversion? This, incidentally, lies behind the sort of question that Rationalists sometimes ask believers: How do you *begin* to have faith?

St. Augustine did not supply a permanently acceptable answer. The whole controversy was reopened centuries later. But Augustine's emphasis was on the first approach by God, who makes a gift that no man can deserve; the Pelagian emphasis was on the first approach by man, who receives according to his deserts. In the case of new-born children, the question of deserts (resulting from free choice) does not arise; to Augustine that meant that they deserved nothing, and so were damned; but to Pelagius that, since they did not deserve to be damned, they would be saved.

It is useful to bear in mind these two streams of thought, which came into such prominence in the fifth century, because they later broadened into twin rivers. The Roman Church attempted a compromise, but Luther and Calvin returned to the Augustinian doctrine. According to Luther, man has no more power to turn to God than a stone, unless God makes the first move. Man is totally depraved.

So long as the problem of determinism was stated in purely

theological language, the deeper significance of it remained hidden. Neither Augustine nor Luther was, in the technical sense, a philosopher. It is not easy to give a straight answer to the question of whether they supported freewill or determinism, because the implication of those terms was not sufficiently appreciated. To a non-Christian one thing seems plain enough : Adam, at least, was supposed to have exercised freewill in an unequivocal sense. The depravity of his descendants was due to Adam's free choice of evil; and henceforth, according to one strand of Christian thought, freedom of choice was hindered by an inherited bias.

### *The Theory of Aquinas*

Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, proposed a way out of the apparent contradiction that if man's nature possessed this bias the will could not fairly be said to be free. Aquinas saw that an important philosophical question was involved—whether the order of things was rational or whether it was the result of a divine caprice. On the cruder versions of Predestination, one would almost imagine the names of the elect and the damned to have been drawn from a hat.

To Aquinas, as to many of the Greeks, the Order of Nature seemed the expression of the divine Reason. Aristotle had compared the ordered movements of the heavenly bodies with the marching forth of Homer's armies before Troy. The starry heavens and human reason were evidence of the existence of a directing mind behind the bewildering flux of change. Thus we get the foundations on which Christian Rationalism was later built.

Aquinas saw that from the Christian point of view it was essential to explain the psychology of God as well as the psychology of man, in order to resolve the contradictions of freewill and determinism. The solution he proposed was that to be free meant obeying the voice of reason rather than the promptings of impulse.

Even God obeyed his reason. God made no purely arbitrary decrees. The divine Will was in harmony with the divine Reason. God is not a despot, demanding blind submission. God's laws and commandments are rational; and if we would be rational we must obey them. In the technical language of

philosophy, the divine Reason is "logically prior" to the divine Will.

Aquinas defined freedom as "the faculty of choosing what leads to an end" (*Summa Theologica* 1.2 62, a, 8). In other words, free choice is always between means and not ends. The will seeks happiness; in that sense every choice is determined. But the intellect may present us with rival material means of obtaining the end of happiness; and we may, foolishly, choose something that is inferior.

The problem is partially illustrated by the medieval conundrum of "Buridan's Ass"—doubtfully attributed to Jean Buridan, a French philosopher, who was born about 1288 and studied under William of Ockham, in the University of Paris. Suppose an ass were placed between two loads of hay, equal in quantity and quality and the same distance from him: would he starve to death because of his inability to choose? Those who hold that the will is bound to seek the *greatest* good offered to it must hold, it is argued, that the will would be paralysed if presented with two absolutely *equivalent* good objects.

It might be mentioned, in passing, that modern psychologists give instances of such "paralysis." A neurosis is often brought about by some internal conflict. During war the conflict between the sense of duty and the instinct of self-preservation sometimes leads literally to paralysis of an arm or leg or to hysterical blindness. On similar lines, Pavlov induced hysterical symptoms, not indeed in asses, but certainly in dogs.

What was, to start with, largely a religious problem thus gave rise to a profounder philosophical problem in the Middle Ages. The modern Rationalist, unlike his Christian counterpart, is not very concerned about the self-imposed difficulties of theologians; but the philosophical aspect of the discussion has, nevertheless, a meaning for him. Before examining what determinism signifies to the Rationalist, let us take a final glance at the family quarrel between theologians.

### *Collective Guilt*

For the Christian theologian, as we have seen, freewill absolves God from responsibility. It is a device whereby the guilt of much of the evil in the world is fastened on the shoulders of man.

"The mass of moral and social evil can be attributed to man's mis-use of free-will," Professor W. Robinson says.<sup>47</sup>

What, however, is meant by *man*? If Adam sinned and was punished, well and good; but is it just that all his descendants should have the dice heavily loaded against them? There is a tendency among contemporary Christian writers to hint obscurely at a sort of *collective man*.

Dr. Alec R. Vidler is not noticeably disturbed by the possibility of the innocent suffering with the guilty :—

The fact is that, when men, corporately or individually, in the exercise of their freedom choose evil, then, sooner or later, in one way or another, punishment, disaster, follows. This is God's way of teaching us in the bitterness of experience that evil is evil and *damnable*, and that He is a Righteous God who cannot and will not tolerate wickedness in His world. And the fact that in the working out of the consequences of sin the comparatively innocent suffer with and for the guilty is evidence of our human solidarity. We are members of a race, bound together in good and evil, not isolated atoms.<sup>52</sup>

Mr. C. S. Lewis tries to express this alarming sort of "solidarity" in more metaphysical language, but makes it no more convincing :—

That we can die "in" Adam and live "in" Christ seems to me to imply that man, as he really is, differs a good deal from man as our categories of thought and our three-dimensional imaginations represent him; that the separateness—modified only by causal relations—which we discern between individuals is balanced, in absolute reality, by some kind of "inter-animation" of which we have no conception at all. It may be that the acts and sufferings of great archetypal individuals such as Adam and Christ are ours, not by legal fiction, metaphor, or causality, but in some much deeper fashion.<sup>50</sup>

It would be too kind to call this a mystical explanation; it is just plain nonsense. Freewill is invoked to account for the existence of evil, but the argument—for what it is worth—is wrecked by the doctrine of the Fall of Man, entailing an hereditary bias to evil which makes the exercise of freewill extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible. Because we have freewill we are responsible for our actions; and yet, when temptation comes, our hand is forced, and we do not so much fall deliberately as fall because we are too weak to stand.

What sort of an "explanation" is this? It is no explanation at all. It is as though, through Adam's sin, we all suffered from

partial, if not total blindness; and were then called sternly to account for stumbling against an obstacle that we could not see.

### *Sin and Taboo*

The doctrine of freewill fails to shift the responsibility from God. It fails to reconcile divine goodness and omnipotence with the fact that the innocent suffer with the guilty. It creates even more difficult problems than those it seems to solve.

Those who reject the theological concept of "sin" see in it little more than a refinement of the primitive notion of taboo. Among primitive tribes certain acts are forbidden—they are said to be "taboo." Few of these actions would strike any of us today as being morally wrong. Thus, an Australian aborigine of the kangaroo clan is forbidden ordinarily to kill a kangaroo. If he breaks the taboo, evil consequences will follow for the whole clan.

Originally, religion was entirely a matter of external observances. This was true, too, of the religion of the Jews, as Robertson Smith showed long ago in his classic study.<sup>53</sup> The religion of the Greeks was largely a matter of performing the right sacrifices and libations. Failure to do so resulted in disaster for the whole community. The crops failed, plagues came, the population declined. Indeed, any reader of Homer or Herodotus knows that it was customary to explain catastrophes as the result of the breaking of a taboo or the neglect of a piece of ritual.

The idea of *personal* sin—i.e., sin which had evil consequences for the individual and not necessarily for the community—was a comparatively late development. Is it not reasonable to suppose that the theory of collective punishment and collective guilt, which lingers in orthodox Christianity, is a refinement of primitive superstition? And if so, even the idea of personal guilt, in a religious sense, because it is a shoot from the same stem, must surely have evolved from the superstitions of prehistoric man.

There can be no sin if there is no personal God; and there can be no sin unless man's actions are free. Sin is incompatible with strict determinism; and yet Augustine, Luther, and Calvin came perilously close to determinism. Even Aquinas taught a moderate determinism.

There is perhaps no better illustration of how, in endeavouring

to escape from one contradiction, the theologians became enmeshed in another, than the statement of the Westminster Confession: "God hath endowed the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined, to good or evil;" and yet "God ordains whatsoever comes to pass." Nevertheless, looked at historically, the meaning of the terms "freewill" and "determinism" have undergone changes. Here is a problem for philosophers as well as for theologians, and perhaps for scientists as well as for philosophers.

Whenever a problem seems insoluble we should ask ourselves whether the difficulty is verbal or real. If it is verbal then we have uncovered a pseudo-problem; our perplexities are removed by a re-formulation. There can be no doubt that, when we scrutinize some of the forms in which the freewill controversy is stated, the issues are extremely confused. It turns out that some writers are really talking about the relation of mind to body; others are discussing the status of a law of universal causation; others are mainly interested in the mathematical theory of probability. Yet another question which arises is whether or no we can trust our intuitions.

Professor Susan L. Stebbing has done much to clear away the jungle of side-issues that have almost obliterated the essential point. She contends that the tremendous importance that has been attached to the question of freewill must be due to the notion of moral responsibility that it seems to involve:—

To accept responsibility is to deny compulsion; it is not to deny causation, for not all causation is a form of being compelled.<sup>32</sup>

A similar point is made by Dr. Feigl, who roundly states:—

The freewill problem is a pseudo-issue arising out of confusion of meaning. Not determination but compulsion is the opposite of freedom.<sup>54</sup>

### *Determinism and Responsibility*

To return to Professor Stebbing:—

The *problem* of freewill does not arise until we pass from the notion of being responsible *to*. The sentence "I am responsible to . . ." requires completion. It can be completed by any one of the three variants, namely (1) God, (2) My fellow-members of society, (3) myself.



And she continues :—

I believe that the bitterness, the intensity and the futility of the prolonged controversy concerning human freedom are due to the combination of three beliefs: (1) God created me; (2) I am accountable to God for the evil that I do; (3) God punishes me for the evil that I do. It is the fact that men sin that has made freewill so burning a question; it is the belief that sin leads to damnation that has made many so eager to establish freewill.<sup>32</sup>

Another point to bear in mind is the distinction sometimes drawn between determinism and self-determinism. As we shall see, it has been suggested that a great deal of the argument about freewill is due to differences about *locating* the cause of an action. If the person who acts can be treated as the cause, and not some external or environmental agency, many think that we may retain the law of causality without losing the essence of freedom. But that means, of course, regarding the person as a unified self; it would be difficult to speak of freewill in a genuine case of split personality.

When dealing with "causes" we must remember that there is considerable difference of opinion as to what we should mean by the word. The older conception of a cause *compelling* some effect to take place has been pretty generally abandoned. Some contemporary philosophers would even like to drop the term altogether.

Finally, if to be determined is not the same as being compelled, as though by an external force, what does it mean? There is a great deal to be said for regarding what is determined merely as what is *predictable*.

### *The Case for Freewill*

Bearing these considerations in mind, let us look at some of the arguments that have been advanced in favour of human freedom. They fall into five main classes: (1) The argument from intuition; (2) The argument from experience; (3) The argument from morality; (4) The argument from metaphysics; (5) The argument from science.

**FREEDOM AS AN INTUITION.** The bluntest statement is the famous exclamation of Dr. Johnson: "Sir, I know the will is free and there's an end on't." But the best philosophical defence of this position is that advanced by Bergson (1859-1941).

Bergson approached the problem from an angle that is certainly fresh, but his general attitude is intuitionist and anti-scientific. He taught that we do not discover truth by the intellect; on the contrary, the intellect falsifies our experiences. The intellect constructs an abstract scheme, according to which one state of consciousness succeeds another, instant by instant; and this sort of scheme must land us in complete determinism. Actually, he argues, the flow of consciousness cannot be thus divided up into instants of time; true knowledge of it can be obtained only by direct insight, or intuition. Hence the paradox that we are convinced that we are really *free*, though intellectual arguments all show that we are determined. Our freedom consists in our ability to *create* the future, and that would be impossible if we were slaves of the past.

If the general position taken up by Bergson is accepted, what he says about freewill must follow. But to accept his general position means abandoning our trust in reason and scientific method.

**FREEDOM AS AN EXPERIENCE.**—The argument from intuition cannot be always distinguished from the appeal to experience because the former is obviously included in the latter. Nevertheless, when people say that in their actions they *feel* that they are free they do not necessarily mean that they have an infallible insight. Take, for example, the following statement by Sir William Bragg :—

It is true that Nature's operations move with machine-like precision, and that all her processes, whenever we are able to repeat them, follow the rules of the experimental laboratory. But it is also true that we have another laboratory, wherever we meet our fellow-men, and that there also we learn by experience, and make observations on which we base thoughts and actions. We feel that we have some control over what we do, and may act selfishly or unselfishly. If the lessons of the two laboratories seem to contradict each other, the clash is not even so definite as that in which in the physics world may set the wave theory and the particle theory in apparent contradiction, if we confuse the uses to which the two theories may be put.<sup>55</sup>

In his interesting book *The Next Development in Man*, L. L. Whyte writes as follows :—

To unitary man freedom means the power of the subject to choose, not arbitrarily or in opposition to the course of nature, but in accordance

with his own nature, that is, in continuity with his past. On the other hand the necessity in nature does not imply compulsion or constraint or even the determinism of a mechanical causality, but the continuity of form in natural processes. The experience of freedom and the recognition of necessity can therefore be translated respectively as the sense of being able to think and act in continuity with one's own past and the perception of the continuity of form in natural process. To unitary man there is no distinction between such freedom and such necessity. Continuity of development is the form both of objective necessity and of subjective freedom. The continuity of natural processes has the character of the development of form. The recognizable identity of each person lies in the continuity of development of his own characteristic form. Freewill, the exercise of choice, selection—these lead to the course which develops the person's characteristic form. There is nothing arbitrary in freewill and nothing constraining in natural law; continuity of development is common to both. Freedom and necessity are the subjective and objective, the spiritual and material, aspects of this continuity seen by dissociated man.<sup>56</sup>

**FREEDOM AS A MORAL NECESSITY.**—This, of course, is Kant's argument, but as he does not make easy reading the following paraphrase is taken from Dr. C. D. Broad :—

If it can ever be truly said that it is a duty to perform (or to avoid) an act, it must have been possible for the agent to perform it and possible for him not to perform it. Now there are some acts of which it is true to say that they ought to have been done (or avoided). Hence there are some acts which their agent could have performed and could have avoided.<sup>57</sup>

**FREEDOM LOGICALLY PROVABLE.**—Catholic philosophers claim that freewill, like the immortality of the soul and the existence of God, can be proved by logical means. Those of us brought up in the scientific tradition find it hard to understand how this can seem at all plausible to anyone. The gulf between scientific Rationalism and Christian Rationalism is profound and unbridgeable. The scientific Rationalist builds his philosophy on experience; the metaphysical Rationalist does just the opposite. The latter starts with fixed principles and uses logic to dictate to nature—hence the old argument that the heavenly bodies *must* move in circles, etc.

Modern Thomists, following Aquinas, still derive much of their psychology and metaphysics from Aristotle. If their assumptions be granted, freewill is a valid deduction. It is almost

impossible, however, to state the argument without using the technical terms of Scholastic philosophy, with which few people nowadays are familiar.

The mind is divided into sharp compartments, rather like the zones of the phrenologist. There is the will, for example, which may act separately from the intellect and the appetites. The intellect is the faculty of judgment. In the freedom of the intellect to judge truly we have the root of freewill.

The will seeks what is good and the intellect suggests alternative courses of action as good. The will tips the scales; it is the chairman using his casting vote. It is determined in the general sense that it must seek something that *appears* to be good, but it is free to choose between rival means of achieving this end.

It is rather interesting to note that on this definition liberty does not (in theory) consist in choosing between good and evil. The moral liberty which the blessed will enjoy in heaven will not involve the power to sin. That power is an "imperfection" of man on earth, a defect like the power of self-deception.

It is perhaps unfortunate that during our brief sojourn here, when the decisions we make will entail eternal punishment or eternal bliss, we should be afflicted with such a defect. But even to ask whether this is altogether fair is to risk damnation.

A cheerful doctrine indeed—and a contrast to the "gloom" and "pessimism" to which Rationalism is said to reduce us! But there is an interesting corollary. The following passage deserves to be read with care. Here indeed is the iron hand beneath the velvet glove:—

Since the liberty to commit evil is an imperfection of the will, to claim it as a right either for one's self or for others is manifestly absurd. When, therefore, a legitimately constituted authority, acting within the limits and observing the precautions demanded by prudence, takes measures to prevent, in the family or in society, vice or error leading to vice, it is protecting moral liberty and in no way curtailing it. Unbridled liberty is no true liberty but only licence, a counterfeit of it.<sup>12</sup>

This is the logic behind the Inquisition, the destruction and prohibition of scientific books, the denial of freedom to non-Catholic Churches, the prohibition of the right of non-Catholics to be divorced or to use birth control—even more concretely, behind the tyranny of Fascism in such Catholic countries as Spain.

FREEDOM SUPPORTED BY SCIENCE. Recent developments in

physics have raised hopes in some quarters that belief in freewill is no longer so incompatible with a scientific outlook as used to be thought. The argument is extremely difficult, and it cannot be followed by those who are unfamiliar with recent advances in physics. The gist of it is that although science has hitherto assumed a law of universal causation, nevertheless within the interior of the atom there seem to be breaches of that law.

Physicists now divide their subject into two fields of study, the large-scale or macroscopic world and the small-scale or microscopic world. Every *collection* of atoms—tables, chairs, stars, and human beings—obeys a law of averages, so to speak. But what sort of laws do *individual* particles obey? The answer is that we do not know; and perhaps we never shall know. It has been suggested that they do not obey any law at all—that the concept of “law” is applicable only to *groups* of particles, not to *individual* particles.

Another answer is that even the individual particles must obey *some* law, but that we have not yet discovered what it is. What is known as Heisenberg’s Principle of Uncertainty (a better word than Indeterminacy, which begs the question) is based on the fact that no experiment can be devised whereby *both* the velocity and position of a sub-atomic particle, such as a photon or electron, can be discovered; and that is because the act of observing interferes with the object being examined. This is a highly technical controversy, and the layman is well advised to leave it alone. The upshot, according to Eddington, is as follows:—

I do not think that there is any serious division of opinion as to the deace of determinism. If there is a division among scientists it is between the mourners and the jubilants.<sup>24</sup>

The jubilation may turn out to have been premature. Einstein and Planck both hope that the reign of causality will be restored. Planck states that if it is urged that the law of causality is a hypothesis “it is a fundamental hypothesis because it is the postulate which is necessary to give sense and meaning to the application of all hypotheses in scientific research. This is because any hypothesis which indicates a definite rule presupposes the validity of the principle of causation”:—

I firmly believe, in company with most physicists, that the quantum hypothesis will eventually find its exact expression in certain equations which will be a more exact formulation of the law of causality.<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, Schroedinger writes :—

Whence arises the widespread belief that the behaviour of molecules is determined by absolute causality, whence the conviction that the contrary is *unthinkable*? Simply from the *custom*, inherited through thousands of years, of *thinking causally*, which makes the idea of undetermined events, of absolute, primary causalness, seem complete nonsense, a *logical* absurdity.<sup>59</sup>

The battle still rages, and to follow it farther would take us away from our subject. After all, what has this to do with freewill, defined as responsibility? Let us suppose that the “jubilants” are right, and that in the microscopic world some events are undetermined. Human beings do not belong to the microscopic world. The most that Eddington’s argument shows is that there is no *a priori* reason why the will should not be free; but those who remain true to the empirical method of science must reject *a priori* reasons. Many people find this very difficult in the case of causality; they have unfortunately failed to keep abreast of the growing self-clarification of scientific method. They allow some metaphysical theory—usually mechanical materialism—to take precedence over the findings of experience.

### *The Case for Determinism*

With Earth’s first Clay They did the Last Man’s knead,  
And then of the Last Harvest sow’d the Seed :

Yea, the first Morning of Creation wrote  
What the Last Dawn of Reckoning Shall read.

*The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.*

The decisions of the mind are nothing save desires, which vary according to various dispositions.

There is in the mind no absolute or freewill; but the mind is determined in willing this or that by a cause which is determined in its turn by another cause, and this by another, and so on to infinity.

Men think themselves free because they are conscious of their volitions and desires, but are ignorant of the causes by which they are led to wish and desire.

Spinoza (1632–1677).

Since I act in this way, anyone who can act otherwise is no longer myself; and to declare that, at the moment I do or say a thing, I could do or say another is to declare that I am myself and someone else.

Diderot (1713–1784).

Spinoza says that if a stone which has been projected through the air had consciousness, it would believe that it was moving of its own freewill. I add to this only that the stone would be right. The impulse given it is for the stone what the motive is for me; and what in the stone appears as cohesion, gravitation, rigidity, is in its inner nature the same as that which I recognize in myself as will, and what the stone also, if knowledge were given to it, would recognize as will.

Schopenhauer (1788-1860).

We ought to regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its antecedent state and as the cause of the state which is to follow. An intelligent being who at a given instant knew all the forces animating nature and the relative positions of the beings within it would, if his intelligence were sufficiently capacious to analyse these data, include in a single formula the movements of the largest bodies of the universe and those of its lightest atom. Nothing would be uncertain for him: the future as well as the past would be present to his eyes.

Laplace (1749-1827).

That, given the motives which are present to an individual's mind, and given likewise the character and disposition of the individual, the manner in which he will act might be unerringly inferred; that if we knew the person thoroughly, and knew all the inducements which are acting upon him, we could foretell his conduct with as much certainty as we can predict any physical event. This proposition I take to be a mere interpretation of universal experience, a statement in words of what everyone is internally convinced of.

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873).

We are conscious automata endowed with free will in the only intelligible sense of that much-abused term—inasmuch as in many respects we are able to do as we like—but none the less parts of the great series of causes and effects which, in unbroken continuity, composes that which is, and has been, and shall be—the sum of existence.

Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895).

Everybody acts not only under external compulsion but also in accordance with inner necessity.

Einstein: *The World as I See It*.

A physician or engineer is free in his thoughts or his actions in the degree in which he knows what he deals with. Perhaps here we find the key to any freedom.

John Dewey: *Human Nature and Conduct*.

The great struggle between the determinist and the indeterminist, between the opponent and the sustainer of the freedom of the will, has ended to-day, after more than 2,000 years, completely in favour of the determinist. The human will has no more freedom than that of the

higher animals, from which it differs only in degree, not in kind. . . . We know now that each act of the will is as fatally determined by the organization of the individual, and as dependent on the momentary condition of his environment, as every other psychic activity. The character of the inclinations was determined long ago by heredity from parents and ancestors; the determination to each particular act is an instance of adaptation to the circumstances of the moment wherein the strongest motive prevails, according to the laws which govern the statics of emotion. Ontogeny teaches us to understand the evolution of the will in the individual child. Phylogeny reveals to us the historical development of the will within the ranks of our vertebrate ancestors.

Ernst Haeckel : *The Riddle of the Universe*.

### *A Summing-up*

Nothing in the basic principles of Rationalism prevents a man from believing either in freewill or determinism. This is a question that each individual must answer for himself—or else suspend judgment. And yet, does not this very statement imply some power of choice? Is it not a waste of time to urge people to use their reason and to weigh evidence if there is no difference between a man and a clockwork robot?

It may be doubted if anyone *really* believes that human beings are literally machines. French Rationalists in the eighteenth century used extravagant language of this sort, but from the quotations given it is obviously possible to be a determinist without being, in the strict sense, a mechanist, just as it is possible to be a materialist without being a mechanical materialist.

We can be determinists in the sense of regarding everything that happens as an instance of the law of cause and effect. That need not commit us to fatalism. As Dr. Davidson so clearly puts it:—

The true necessitarian doctrine teaches that whatever is about to happen will be the infallible result of the causes which produce it, but a Fatalist believes that, in addition to this, it is useless to try to struggle against it, because it will happen however we may strive to prevent it.<sup>60</sup>

One way of accounting for responsibility within the framework of determinism is to adopt the concept of *self-determinism*. According to this view the self, when acting as an integrated, undivided personality, is the *cause*; and it is not compelled by any outside agency to choose a line of conduct or a belief. Professor



Broad has suggested that some chains of cause and effect may be started by an event, within ourselves, which is not itself completely determined.<sup>61</sup>

Physics gives us a certain encouragement to believe that uncaused events *may* occur in nature; though it could be retorted that this is simply due to our ignorance. But as we reflect upon this we soon have to come to terms with an important principle, namely of believing only what there is evidence for. If we apply this principle to the evidence relevant to this discussion we shall see that the evidence at present favours a breach of determinism in the microscopic world; but the analogy of the behaviour of individual molecules cannot be carried very far in the world of human beings, for two reasons. First, human beings are not single particles but vast collections of them; second, there is evidence from physiology that much of our thinking is due to conditioned reflexes.

However, it certainly goes beyond the evidence to say that there are *no* uncaused events; and it also goes beyond the evidence to say that *all* thinking is the result of conditioned reflexes. Equally, if we are told that all human actions are predictable, it seems as fair to ask a Behaviourist as to ask an astrologer for evidence of an assertion that flies in the face of everyday experience. The question is difficult, but the customary reply that *if we knew enough* we could predict everything is not legitimate. It is no more valid to make such an answer than for the indeterminist to reply: "If I only knew how to do it I could *prove* that the will is free." We cannot cash a post-dated cheque on knowledge that is not, and may never be, in the bank.

But there is no need to regard the problem as essentially insoluble. The trouble is that, in the form in which it is so often stated, too many quite different problems are buried in the phrasing. These must be separated out and attacked piecemeal. We cannot hope to reach a solution until we are quite sure what we are talking about.

## Chapter Nine

### THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION

Definitions of religion. Primitive magic. Mana. Impersonal gods. The Australian All-Father. Euhemerism. Diffusionism. Theories of Aldous Huxley and C. S. Lewis about primitive man. Totemism. Egyptian monotheism. Myth and ritual. Psychological and sociological theories contrasted. Marxism and religion.

THE supernatural explanation of the origin of the universe and the destiny of man is not based on evidence but on tradition. It is an account that has been handed down from generation to generation. "It is not my word but my Mother's word . . ." a cry from ancient Greece that finds its echo in those tribal societies where all things are justified or condemned on the authority of Custom. But traditions and customs change; and no matter how old they are they must have had a beginning. If we believe that man descended from an ape-like ancestor we must suppose that not more (and probably less) than a million years ago speech was used for intelligent conversation for the first time.

For three-quarters of the Palaeolithic Age, *Homo Neanderthalensis* was the chief type of man. *Homo Sapiens* had not yet appeared. The awkward problem which Christian theologians have yet to face frankly is that Neanderthal man is a different species from *Homo Sapiens*. Yet Neanderthal man made stone implements, used fire, and buried his dead with a care that suggests rudimentary religious feeling. Did this clumsy, grotesque, and even pathetic experiment in humanity come into existence before or after the Fall, one wonders?

#### *Definitions of Religion*

Whether we describe the cults in vogue among prehistoric man, and certain aborigines that still survive, as religious or magical, is a matter of definition. Professor Leuba, in *A Psychological Study of Religion*, collected forty-eight definitions of religion. It would not have been difficult to double the number.

We must not be misled, however, by what is sometimes called the "fallacy of the True Meaning." There is a welter of observed phenomena in the religious field, and the anthropologist or psychologist selects and classifies for his own convenience. When we examine the various definitions proposed from this point of view we are no longer bewildered. We are not necessarily confronted by a conflict about the facts, but by different methods of classification.

The sense in which Frazer uses the word "religion" is clearly stated in *The Golden Bough* :—

By religion, then, I understand a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of Nature and of human life.<sup>62</sup>

According to R. H. Thouless, "Religion is a felt practical relationship with what is believed in as a superhuman being or beings." <sup>63</sup> This is vaguer and wider, but neither of these definitions would include early Buddhism. They assume that one or more gods is an essential ingredient in all religion. Matthew Arnold's phrase about "morality tinged with emotion" might be applied to godless Buddhism as well as to Hegel's definition: "Religion is the knowledge possessed by the finite mind of its nature as Absolute Mind."

The Cambridge philosopher McTaggart, like the early Buddhists, was an atheist, but he would not have disclaimed the epithet "religious." In *Some Dogmas of Religion* he proposes the following definition :—

Religion is clearly a state of mind. . . . It seems to me that it may best be described as an emotion resting on a conviction of harmony between ourselves and the universe at large.<sup>64</sup>

The French sociologists who collaborated in *l'Annee Sociologique* stress another aspect of religious phenomena. Thus Durkheim writes :—

Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things—that is to say, things set apart and forbidden: beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, called the Church, all those who adhere to them.<sup>65</sup>

On this view religion is a social phenomenon. It is what we do as members of a group, a kind of collective-thinking and mass-

emotion which strengthens the sense of solidarity. But for Dr. Whitehead, on the other hand :—

Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness. . . . If you are never solitary, you are never religious.

Religion is the art and the theory of the internal life of man, so far as it depends on the man himself and on what is permanent in the nature of things.<sup>66</sup>

Clearly the individual that Whitehead is thinking about is a member of a civilized community, whereas Durkheim and Frazer have in mind the savage. Among savages and primitives the true solitary is the magician. As Durkheim points out, there has never been a *Church of Magic*.

### *The Age of Magic*

It has been maintained that there are three great world-systems of thought, corresponding to three stages in the evolution of culture : Magic, Religion, Science. Perhaps the first advocates of this theory were a little too anxious to make a neat schematization. However we choose to classify the confused mass of facts and guesses which challenges us, there will be awkward items that stubbornly refuse to fit in to the patterns we devise. It is extraordinarily difficult to be certain what modern primitives really believe; and it seems almost impossible to enter into the state of mind of the prehistoric hunters who have left us only a few heaps of stone, some carvings, and the paintings like those in the dark recesses of the caves of the Dordogne and Altamira. Are we entitled to assume that the mental processes of Palaeolithic man were similar to those of aborigines still found in a pre-agricultural stage? Are we even safe in supposing that the mind of the primitive works in much the same way as our own?

Levy Bruhl has tried to show that the latter assumption is mistaken. He argues that primitive mentality scorns the law of contradiction and cannot be judged by the standards appropriate to civilized man, although we ourselves have a primitive layer underneath our intellectual development.<sup>67</sup> This theory was strongly contested by Frazer :—

The myth of the illogical or pre-logical savage may safely be relegated to that museum of learned absurdities which speculative anthro-

pology is constantly enriching with fresh specimens of misapplied ingenuity and wasted industry.<sup>82</sup>

These are extreme positions, but it is generally recognized nowadays that the early anthropologists were too ready to give a rational explanation of the origin of primitive beliefs. The tendency has grown since the work of Robertson Smith to look for the origin of beliefs in the rites performed, rather than to seek to account for the rites as the natural consequence of previously held beliefs.

By dressing-up periodically to represent the Spring, we may come to believe in the existence of an independent being, the god of Spring, just as we might come to believe in the real existence of Father Christmas. In the course of the pantomime or the dance, when mass-suggestibility is at its height, stories may be told, and later on embroidered. Durkheim, Jane Harrison, and many others, have contended that in this way myths and legends are generated by ritual.

The Australian aborigine who leaps in imitation of the kangaroo does so because he thinks that he assists in the multiplication of kangaroos. In parts of Germany and Austria the peasant thinks he can make the flax grow tall by dancing or leaping high: the higher the leap the taller will be the flax that year. It would be straining the meaning of the word to describe these actions as "religious." They belong to the pre-religious stage, the primitive world-system of magic.

### *The Meaning of Mana*

Frazer was taken to task for regarding magic as a sort of bad science. Be that as it may, these magical ceremonies seek to bring about the desired result largely by mimicry, and the magicians certainly believe that if the traditional acts are correctly performed they will be efficacious. There is no question of being dependent on the whims of supernatural beings. The ancient Egyptians believed that if a man knew the right spells even the gods would have to obey him. So if we classify these phenomena according to ritual (the thing done) rather than myth (the thing believed) we have a definite standard.

There is a great difference between leaping in the air to make flax grow and praying to God for a good harvest. Gods who

are petitioned and offered sacrifices in the hope that they will grant favours belong to the religious, as distinct from the magical, stage of mankind. An objective definition of a god would be "a supernatural being who is worshipped."

Primitive man, as far as we can judge, was innocent of worship. He indulged in picturesque minicry, partly because he thought that it really would ensure success in the chase and so increase the food supply, and partly no doubt because it also gave him a pleasurable and valuable sense of tribal solidarity. He was concerned to tap the mythical source of power indicated by the Polynesian word *mana*. This was conceived of as a sort of spiritual electricity which inhered more powerfully in some objects than in others.

Gold, ochre, certain shells, amulets, bull-roarers were "sacred." They were full of mana. So were blood and semen and the objects that symbolized them. There was mana in lightning, in the wind, the earthquake, and running water. The same concept is found among North American Indians under the name of Orenda or Wakonda, in Morocco as Baraka, and among the Egyptians as Hike.

Much has been made of the varying opinions held by anthropologists regarding the relation of religion to magic, but this must not be allowed to obscure the crucial question of whether in the lowest cultural stage we find societies who do *not* worship gods. Such a stage, if it exists, could not be explained in terms of orthodox Christianity. Indeed, Augustine went so far as to deny the possibility that human beings lived at the antipodes, on the ground that it would be impossible for them to be acquainted with the truths of revealed religion.<sup>4</sup>

### *Evolution or the Devil ?*

An argument that frequently occurs in Christian apologetics is that after the Fall the human race lost the vision of God and saw "in a glass darkly." The similarity between savage rites of communion and baptism and the Christian sacraments is explained as being due to a distorted view of divine truth.

The Christian Fathers, for example, were perfectly aware of the resemblances between the pagan mysteries and the Christian

Eucharist. After describing the institution of the Lord's Supper, Justin Martyr goes on to say :—

Which the wicked devils have imitated in the mysteries of Mithra, commanding the same thing to be done.

Tertullian also says that "the devil by the mysteries of his idols imitates even the main part of the divine mysteries. . . . He baptises his worshippers in water and makes them believe that this purifies them from their crimes. . . . Mithra set his mark on the forehead of his soldiers; he celebrates the oblation of bread: he offers an image of the resurrection and presents at once the crown and the sword; he limits his chief priest to a single marriage; he even has his virgins and ascetics."

When the Spanish Conquistadores first encountered the eucharistic ceremonial of the Mexicans they immediately concluded that they were witnessing a Satanic parody of the Mass.

No sensible person would advance such a theory today. A much more subtle argument is sometimes advanced to protect the belief in God from the charge that it is a mere refinement of primitive superstition. This line of defence owes a great deal to the work of F. B. Jevons, and its present form may be summarized as follows.

A god is a spirit with a proper name. An impersonal potency, like *mana*, is not even a spirit, still less a god. The idea of a personal spirit, which develops in the so-called animistic stage, is an advance on the idea of an impersonal spirit; again the idea of a single supreme God is an advance on the idea of many gods. We may rightly conclude that the evolution of religious ideas is characterized by several stages: (1) Pre-animistic or magical, with impersonal spirits; (2) Animistic, with numerous personal spirits; (3) Polytheistic, with the worship of many gods; (4) Monotheistic, with the worship of one God.

But this does not mean, we are told, that one God has evolved in a straight line from many gods, many spirits, and originally from a vague impersonal force.

If we choose to speak of this unfolding or disclosure as evolution, the process, which the history of religion undertakes to set forth, will be the evolution of the idea of God. But in that case the process which we designate by the name of evolution will be a process of disclosure and revelation. Disclosure implies that there is something to disclose: revelation, that there is something to be revealed to the common consciousness—the presence of the Godhead, of divine personality.<sup>68</sup>

The Christian who embarks upon a journey of discovery in the ancient world already believes that God exists; and so for him the evolution of the idea of God as studied by anthropology cannot be the whole story. It is sometimes alleged that the evolutionary stages mentioned above have no basis in fact. The learned Jesuit, Father Schmidt, claimed that there was evidence of Monotheism in the most primitive societies. Andrew Lang used to cite the All-Father of the Australian aborigines as an example of primitive Monotheism. To some extent this is a dispute about facts.

### *Were There Always Gods ?*

The last of the Tasmanians died in 1890. They were even more primitive than the inhabitants of the Australian mainland. According to Dr. Nixon, the first Bishop of Tasmania,

no trace can be found among them of any religious usage or even sentiment, unless indeed we can call by that name the dread of a malignant and destructive spirit which seems to have been their predominant, if not their only, feeling on the subject.<sup>69</sup>

The Veddahs of Ceylon are described by all who have come in contact with them as harmless, truthful, and monogamous. They go about nude, and share all game and honey with the community. They do not appear to have any idea of gods or immortality. The Yahgans, so primitive that they are unclad despite the bleak climate of Tierra del Fuego, do not appear to have any religious beliefs. According to the French ethnologists, Deniker and Hyades :—

We have studied the Yahgans very closely from this point of view during the year we spent amongst them and have never detected the least allusion to any kind of cult or religious idea.<sup>70</sup>

The aborigines of Australia comprise a number of tribes at slightly varying levels. Some of them have a conception of a unique, pre-eminent being called variously Bunjil, Daramulun, Baiame, Nurunder. According to one version, he once lived on earth and ascended into heaven. He makes thunder and rain. He made men by fashioning an image out of clay and breathing into its nostrils. Then there is Murtu Murtu, who made a noise like a bull-roarer with his mouth. He taught the ideas passed on in the important initiation ceremonies. He was killed by wild



dogs, who tore his body to pieces; bits of his flesh fell to the earth, and out of them the natives now make bull-roarers.

It was natural enough for missionaries who first heard these stories to conclude that the Australians believed in a single god who had created the world. They seized upon the term All-Father, as used by Howitt in his authoritative study of tribes of South-east Australia. But Howitt emphasized very clearly that this being was never *worshipped*. If we define a god as a being with a proper name who is worshipped, we must conclude that the Australians are godless.

Spencer and Gillen, whose study of the central tribes is now a classic, give an interesting account of an initiation ceremony. The novice submits to a painful ordeal, and everything possible is done to terrify him. At last he receives the great revelation "that the spirit creature, whom up to that time, as a boy, he has regarded as all powerful, is merely a myth, and that such a being does not really exist, and is only an invention of the men to frighten the women and children."<sup>71</sup>

There is no equivalent concept in the centre and north of Australia to Baiame or Daramulun, believed in by tribes of the east and south-east.

The central Australian natives—and this is true of the tribes extending from Lake Eyre in the south to the far north and eastwards across the Gulf of Carpentaria—have no idea whatever of the existence of any supreme being who is pleased if they follow a certain line of what we call moral conduct and displeased if they do not do so. They have not the vaguest idea of a personal individual other than an actual living member of the tribe who approves or disapproves of their conduct, so far as anything like what we call morality is concerned. Any such idea as that of a future life of happiness or the reverse, as a reward for meritorious or as a punishment for blameworthy conduct, is quite foreign to them.<sup>71</sup>

The theory that the Australians have a natural monotheism is therefore difficult to maintain. Those who approach the subject with a religious bias are tempted to interpret the confusing facts favourably for their own beliefs. But if we restrict ourselves to evidence, there are two alternatives of equal probability. Either the Australians acquired their ideas from some external source, or the ideas now held have evolved in the course of thousands of years.

The Diffusionist School, represented by G. Elliot Smith and W. J. Perry, claims that the Australians received many of their conceptions from ancient Egyptian voyagers. If that is the case, clearly the aborigines give no support to the view that pure monotheism is the natural theology of primitive man.

There is no way of deciding the issue conclusively, of course; but even if the All-Father idea is taken seriously, it by no means follows that this concept always existed. The evidence analysed by Durkheim can be interpreted quite differently. Durkheim calls attention to the widespread belief in a mythical ancestor of the tribe. He contends that as the tribes travel about and members of different clans intermingle, so an inter-tribal mythology is established. The All-Father is thus an ancestral spirit who has won a pre-eminent place.<sup>65</sup>

### *Man into God*

In this conflict of theories there are two strongly opposed strands of thought:—

(1) Euhemerism originated from a Greek philosopher, Euhemerus, who lived about 300 B.C., and taught that the gods are merely men who lived long ago and who have since been glorified in pious memory. The Diffusionists follow in some respects this principle of Euhemerus when they hold that the Australians' claim to have been taught their myths by mysterious ancestors is the truth. The ancestors, on this view, were intrepid Egyptian mariners. So, too, Osiris was a real man who invented agriculture and became deified.

(2) A rival theory regards gods and heroes as "collective representations." According to this, the name of a clan, for example, is not the name of a particular individual who gave rise to it. There was no such individual man as Heracles, and when we read about his exploits we are really reading a garbled version of the deeds of the clan of which Heracles is the mythical ancestor.

Again, a group of ritual dancers, taking part in some actual ceremony, may be personified as a Spirit. But this is a different type of personification from that of a natural phenomenon such as Dawn. An actual human being is dressed up as Spring, Winter, the Old Year; a succession of such pantomimes begets a belief in a being over and above the real performers, just as a

succession of Lord Mayor Shows might beget a belief in *the* Lord Mayor. The god, says Doutté, in *Algerian Magic*, is the collective desire personified.

It is clearly too simple to say that a bull-god or a horse-god is the inevitable projection of people in whose economic life bulls and horses play the leading part, though the symbol chosen will undoubtedly represent what the community values. Poseidon, for example, is sometimes represented grasping a fish in one hand, a trident in the other, and seated on a bull. This confusion is due to the fact that to begin with Poseidon was the Cretan Minotaur, half-man, half-bull, worshipped by islanders who were fishermen, agriculturalists, and herdsmen. The monstrous symbol, however, tells us more than that: it betrays the existence of a primitive ritual in which the king put on a bull's head and horns, and possibly his hide and hoofs, in order to obtain for himself and his people the fertility and potency, "the tremendous mana of the bull," as Gilbert Murray calls it. Lord Raglan writes:—

Myth is never fictitious, since it is always the story of something that real people do or did; on the other hand, it is never historical, because it is always the story of something which was done not once but many times. Myth and ritual are complementary; ritual is a magic drama to which myth is the book of the words, which often survives after the drama has ceased to be performed.<sup>72</sup>

This is more subtle and fruitful than the crude theory that the gods are merely transmogrified men. As Hocart says:—

The Euhemerists came nearer to the truth in so far as they recognized that the prime interest of man has always been man; so they looked to human actions to explain myths. Where they erred was in limiting themselves to those actions which are least capable of making a deep impression on tradition—that is, transient events enacted once for all. At the time a great battle, a tragedy of the palace, the sad fate of lovers, may fill men's minds, but after the first blaze these sensations go out, while customs continue to smoulder on during the ages.<sup>73</sup>

### *The Christian Explanation*

It is impossible for us to do more than glance at the dark labyrinth of ancient superstitions. Magic is not merely an infantile make-believe, and myth is not idle day-dreaming. Both contain important clues to the structure and history of primitive society. To unravel these clues would be no more than an

interesting academic pastime if it were not for the fact that these primitive ideas are still enshrined in the dogmas of the leading religions.

The corner-stone of traditional Christianity is the doctrine of the Fall. Whatever compromises are made by theologians with the theory of evolution, there remains the problem of early man's religion. The dim period when Palaeolithic hunters roamed over the world, fashioning flint tools, making amulets, disposing of their dead with care, is consequently of great significance. Those who accept the dogma of the Fall are hard put to it to square their theology with the results of archaeological and anthropological research.

The traditional Christian has at least two alternatives to consider. (a) He can argue that man fell so abysmally from the state in which he had direct contact with God that he lost the very belief in the existence of God. The consequence of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge was that everything he knew was blotted out of his mind. Ever since he has been slowly and painfully groping his way back through the various stages of animism, polytheism, and monotheism. It is possible, on this view, to accept an evolutionary theory of the origin of religion. (b) On the other hand, it may be held that man did not fall quite so far as this. He remembered something of Eden. If we look far enough back we shall see that it is true of the entire human race.

Not in entire forgetfulness  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God who is our home.

Whichever view is accepted, the theologian is not ashamed to appeal to scientific evidence for support. Those who hold (a) appeal to Freud. "We do not have to go to Augustine or John Calvin for a doctrine of total depravity. We find it more securely in Freud, but without any accompanying doctrine of Redemption."<sup>47</sup> Freud's own theory that religion is an illusion is conveniently overlooked.

Those who hold (b) are willing enough to believe with Elliot Smith that primitive man was harmless and friendly, and that the horrors of war and human sacrifice belong to a later, degenerate stage of society. This is sometimes regarded

as providing confirmation of the Fall from a state of primal innocence. But Elliot Smith's view that truly primitive man had no religion is usually ignored.<sup>74</sup>

When the principle of Diffusion is preferred to Evolution, care is also taken to disclaim the Babylonian origin of the doctrine of the Fall itself.

There is no comparison between this story and Babylonian and other similar stories so far as depth of insight into what is after all a fact is concerned. The story in Genesis is incomparable, if we admit the possibility of comparison at all.<sup>47</sup>

### *The Golden Age*

Naturally the theory that prehistoric man was a monotheist is welcomed in religious circles. G. K. Chesterton, who usually poked fun at anthropologists, suddenly became serious when he was told, "The Australian aborigines are found to have a pure monotheism with a high moral tone."<sup>75</sup>

A similar theme runs through Dr. Paul Radin's *Primitive Man as Philosopher*. He declares that "orthodox ethnology has been nothing but an enthusiastic and quite uncritical attempt to apply the Darwinian theory of evolution to the facts of social experience." Ethnologists, he says, have held "the curious notion that everything possesses a history; until they realize that certain ideas and certain concepts are ultimate for man, as a social being, as specific physiological reactions are ultimate for him as a biological being they will make no progress." Among these ultimate concepts is monotheism.<sup>76</sup>

The theory that the human race entered upon the earthly scene trailing clouds of glory, that the widespread legend of a Golden Age contains an element of historical truth, does not appeal solely to the Christian. It is hailed, for example, by Aldous Huxley and those for whom scientific progress merely spells the multiplication of gadgets, and is really a degenerate downward movement into a robot age. Huxley believes that prehistoric man knew all about "the perennial philosophy"—a term which he applies to his own theosophical system, though it was invented by Leibniz and is also used by Catholics to describe "Thomism."

According to Huxley, mankind indulged in profound speculations before any recorded history. How he proposes to verify

this strange statement is not very clear. He seems satisfied to say that there is no reason to doubt it:—

It is highly significant that, among many contemporary primitives, two thought-patterns are found—an exoteric pattern for the unphilosophic many, and an esoteric pattern (often monotheistic with a belief in a God not merely of power, but of goodness and wisdom) for the initiated few. . . . Strange openings and theophanies are granted to quite small children, who are often profoundly and permanently affected by these experiences. We have no reason to suppose that what happens now to persons with small vocabularies did not happen in remote antiquity.<sup>38</sup>

But the most thorough-going recent attempt to describe the religious consciousness of man before and after the Fall has been made by Mr. C. S. Lewis.

### *Mr. C. S. Lewis and Adam*

Like Aldous Huxley, Paul Radin, and others, Mr. Lewis thinks that prehistoric man knew a great deal more than we commonly suppose. "We forget that our prehistoric ancestors made all the most useful discoveries, except that of chloroform, which have ever been made." That is certainly a promising start; and, of course, it all depends on what you care to call "useful." He is cautious enough to cast his reconstruction in the form of a myth; not, he assures us, a myth in the sense of a symbolical representation of non-historical truth (as the Protestant theologian Dr. Niebuhr regards it), but in the Socratic sense, "an account of what may have been an historical fact."<sup>30</sup>

Mr. Lewis suggests that the bodily frame of man may well have come into being as the evolutionists say; such a creature may even have been clever enough to make the things which a modern archaeologist would accept as proof of its humanity. So much for the Neanderthal prototypes whose skulls and artefacts have been examined.

Then in the fullness of time, God caused to descend on this organism, both on its psychology and physiology, a new kind of consciousness which could say "I" and "we", which could look upon itself as an object, which knew God, which could make judgments of truth, beauty and goodness, and which was above time in that it could perceive time flowing past.

This self-conscious creature was not merely *Homo sapiens*, but Adamic or Paradisal man. Like a Yogi, he could control the automatic functions of digestion and circulation, he could sleep and keep awake as long as he chose and decide when to die.

Since the processes of decay and repair in his tissues were similarly conscious and obedient, it may not be fanciful to suppose that the length of his life was largely at his own discretion. Even now we meet rare individuals who have a mysterious power of taming beasts. This power the Paradisal man enjoyed in eminence.<sup>30</sup>

It is a pity that no date can be assigned by Mr. Lewis to this Edenic period of human history; apart from that, however, we cannot complain of dearth of information :—

I do not doubt if the Paradisal man could now appear among us, we should regard him as an utter savage, a creature to be exploited or, at best, patronised. Only one or two, and those the holiest among us, would glance a second time at the naked, shaggy, bearded, slow-spoken creature: but they, after a few minutes, would fall at his feet.<sup>30</sup>

Suddenly (again the date is missing) everything went wrong. Through an act of self-will the Paradisal lion-tamer lost the power to control the beasts, his digestion, and his length of sleep. "Our present condition, then, is explained by the fact that we are members of a spoiled species."

Such are the fantasies advanced today by some of our most brilliant writers and acutest intellects. There is, of course, not the slightest reason to suppose that prehistoric man was a philosopher, as Aldous Huxley alleges, or a kind of Mahatma, as Mr. Lewis depicts him. The evidence, patiently sifted by the discipline of scientific method, is all the other way. As Dr. Barnes, who conscientiously tries to harmonize his religious beliefs with an impartial survey of the facts, puts it: "Few will be convinced by the arguments of those who would have us accept a stage of primitive monotheism when worship of the All Father of the tribe was central in its religion."

### *Primitive Totemism*

Evidence of what the Palaeolithic hunters believed in is meagre, but it points to magic rather than religion, if the latter is defined as the practice of propitiating gods. Both in Babylonia and

Greece there is evidence of a period before the gods were given proper names. The Babylonian epic, which contains a creation myth, speaks of a time "when of the gods not one had arisen, when no name had been named, no lot had been determined, then were made the gods." There is a well-known passage in Herodotus about the Pelasgians, or aboriginal inhabitants of Greece :—

Formerly the Pelasgians on all occasions of sacrifice called upon gods (*theoi*) as I know from what I heard at Dodona; but they gave no title nor yet any name to any of them.

An important rite in primitive Greece was associated with the *Agathos Daimon* or Good Spirit. This spirit had no proper name. The Olympian gods, like Zeus and Hera, had names and distinct individualities, but they belong to an historically later period. Intermediate between the conceptions of a purely impersonal force, like *mana* and a clear-cut god, are semi-personal beings. They are spirits or *daimones*. Some of them become gods later on; others remain at the stage of mythical hero or ancestor.

There are important similarities between the conceptions of the early Greeks and Cretans and the ideas of societies so low in the human scale as that of the Australian blacks. One common factor is the social behaviour and beliefs associated with totemism. We cannot possibly understand primitive magic without studying this most bizarre of all beliefs. Totemism, according to Frazer, is "an intimate relation which is supposed to exist between a group of kindred people on the one side and a species of natural or artificial objects on the other side, which objects are called the totems of the human group." <sup>77</sup>

A totemic society is composed of clans. Each clan bears the name of some animal, bird, vegetable, or occasionally an inanimate object. (But it should be remembered that at the totemic level there is no sharp distinction between animate and inanimate; everything in the world is believed to be more or less alive.) Thus the totem of the kangaroo tribe will be a kangaroo, of the emu clan, an emu. Members of these clans regard a kangaroo or an emu, as the case may be, as one of their kinsfolk; it is related to them by blood, and normally they will not kill it. Under the system known as exogamy a clansman must marry out of the clan; a child may take the totem of its mother or father,



but the totem of the mother must be different from that of the father.

All religions have legends of gods transforming themselves into birds and beasts. Eve was tempted by a talking serpent in the Garden of Eden. Zeus took the shapes at various times of a snake, an eagle, a bull, a shower of gold. Apollo is associated with the lizard, Demeter with the pig, Athenae with the owl. Dionysos appears as snake, bull, goat, and lion. The animal-headed gods of Egypt instantly spring to mind, and it is generally thought that they evolved from totems of the various tribes that inhabited the Nile valley before the formation of an Egyptian kingdom.<sup>78</sup> Wherever we find arbitrary prohibitions of certain types of food we may suspect that the taboo had its origin in totemism.

Totemism fulfils an important social function. It organizes the supply of mana (and indirectly of real food) and it stabilizes social order in the primitive phase before authority is vested in a king. But it is magical rather than religious, because all authorities agree that the totem object is never *worshipped*. The totem is not yet a god, but it contains the ingredients from which a god can be made. It gives rise to ceremonies in which collective make-believe is used to mobilize the tribal energy so that the necessary measures can be taken to increase the supply of food and ensure good hunting.

### *The First God*

That totemism was universal may be disputed. Elliot Smith and his followers regard totemism as an invention of the ancient Egyptians, derived from a superstitious explanation of the placenta. On this theory man, in the godless millenniums before civilization began, wandered across the world in search of objects with magical life-giving properties—blood, ochre, anything red, certain shells and teeth, etc. Gold came to be regarded as a magical substance conferring immortality, and the search for gold sent the Egyptians far and wide, and so they spread many of their own beliefs and much of their positive knowledge.

Whether or no this is accepted—and it is a minority view—for our present purposes we may note that it supports the contention that an age of magic preceded an age of religion. Aus-

tralians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Mexicans, and Greeks—even prehistoric man if we may judge from the cave-drawings—sought to identify themselves in magical ceremonies with animals by putting on masks and skins. Their endeavour, like that of the Cretan kings who put on the horns and hide of a bull, was to obtain mana. Is it not possible that the priest, medicine man, or divine king who regularly donned this bloody garment was the prototype of the god? Gilbert Murray writes:—

If an old suggestion of my own is right he is the original *θεός*, the incarnate medicine or spell or magic power. He at first, I suspect, is the only *θεός* or God that his society knows. We commonly speak of ancient kings being deified; we regard the process as due to an outburst of superstition, or insane flattery. And so no doubt it was, especially in later times—when man and god were felt as two utterly distinct things. But deification is an unintelligent and misleading word. What we call deification is only the survival of the undifferentiated human *θεός* with his mana, his *χράτος* and *βία*, his control of the weather, the rain and the thunder, the spring crops and the autumn floods; his knowledge of what was lawful and what was not, and his innate power to curse or make dead. . . . What is the subsequent history of this medicine-chief or *θεός*? He is differentiated, as it were: the visible part of him becomes merely human; the supposed supernatural part grows into what we should call a God.<sup>50</sup>

### *The First Monotheism*

There are many theories to account for the origin of religion, and there could be no surer sign of the difficulty of the problem. Yet religion must have had a beginning, like any other aspect of human culture, like poetry and drama and science. There must have been a time when men *first* began to worship gods. Before that time they did not worship gods; and such evidence as we possess suggests that they were preoccupied with a highly practical sort of magic. Whether our earliest ancestors were mainly concerned with the preservation of their individual lives or with the collective food-supply cannot be known for certain.

We cannot be sure that prehistoric man thought and acted like the Australian aborigines; but we can surely say that societies at the totemic level cannot have been wholly different from the crude social units studied in Australia. And it seems plain that when hunting was replaced by agriculture, when the roving clans settled down in communities and acquired despotic chieftains

and even kings, a profound change took place in man's imaginative life.

The tribal spirits who had toiled for the welfare of the group were translated to the sky. In Egypt the actual reigning kings were regarded as gods, sometimes the equals and even the superiors of the gods already ruling in the sky. After death the souls of the kings went up to the sky-world and joined the other gods. Every tribal group had its chief who could be equated with "god" when civilization advanced to a certain point.

When the tribal organization was replaced by City States—in Egypt, Babylonia, and Greece, for example—every City State had its god. And when one State went to war with another, defeated and absorbed it, the god of the conquered State was either assimilated (i.e., became an attribute of the victor) or was treated as a demon of the underworld. Hell became populated by the ideological reflections of conquered kings. By studying the mythology of a State it is therefore possible to learn something of its real history. This process of imperial expansion, projected on an imaginary heaven, so that one god becomes loaded with the attributes of the vanquished as with trophies, is known as syncretism. It was almost bound to lead in the end to monotheism.

The first authentic monotheism recorded in history is that of Ikhnaton, who ascended the throne of Egypt as Amenhotep IV in 1375 B.C. He introduced the universal cult of Aton, symbolized as the sun's disc. According to Breasted:—

In the Old Kingdom the sun-god was conceived as a Pharaoh, whose kingdom was Egypt. With the expansion of the Egyptian kingdom into a world empire it was inevitable that the domain of the god should likewise expand. As the kingdom had long since found expression in religion, so now the empire was to make a powerful impression upon religious thought. . . . It was universalism expressed in terms of imperial power which first caught the imagination of the thinking men of the empire and disclosed to them the universal sweep of the sun-god's dominion as a physical fact. Monotheism was but imperialism in religion.<sup>79</sup>

In one sense it may be argued that the belief in one supreme God is the result of an historical accident, that it would never have occurred to anyone that such could be the case if the amalgamation of ancient cities had not occurred. Or we can regard it

perhaps as part of a vast social evolution, in which the transformation of tribe into empire was accompanied by the parallel development of totem and ancestral-spirit into god. What is important to recognize is that the term "god" does not contain a "true meaning." We shall learn nothing fresh by devising a definition of the word and drawing deductions from the definition. "God" is the generic name of many classes of supernatural beings in whom men have believed.

### *Impersonal Gods*

Gilbert Murray shows what widely different connotations were given to the word "god" in ancient Greece:—

We shall find Parmenides telling us that God coincides with the universe, which is a sphere and immovable; Heracleitus, that God is "day, night, summer, winter, war, peace, satiety, hunger." Xenophanes, that God is all-seeing, all-hearing, and all-mind; and as for his supposed human shape, why, if bulls and lions were to speak about God they would doubtless tell us that he was a bull or a lion. . . . "The fact of success" is "a god and more than a god": "the thrill of recognizing a friend" after long absence is a "god": wine is a "god" whose body is poured out in libation to gods: and in the unwritten law of the human conscience "a great god liveth and groweth not old" (Aeschylus). . . . And without going into the point at length, I think we may safely conclude that the soil from which such language as this grew was not any system of clear-cut personal anthropomorphic theology.<sup>50</sup>

The evidence that before clear-cut personal gods were worshipped there was a stage when more or less impersonal forces were regarded as objects or channels through which the weather and food-supply could be controlled seems very strong. And if magic paved the way to religion proper we should expect to find in the intermediate stage a concern with ritual acts rather than the individual devotion and faith which nowadays seem inseparable from religion.

This is what we do find, according to Robertson Smith, among the early Hebrews. His *Religion of the Semites* first appeared in 1894, and some of the theories he advanced are no longer easy to defend, but he was undoubtedly right in claiming that in the beginning belief was not obligatory. What was meritorious was the act done, not the state of mind or belief.

Thus, as is now widely accepted, myth is derived from ritual, not ritual from myth :—

Ancient religion was mainly a series of acts. You did not choose it but were born into it. You could not be absolutely irreligious. Religion was a social obligation. You were born into a circle of divine beings as well as kinsfolk. Society was made up of gods and men.<sup>53</sup>

The kinship of gods and men was at first taken literally. The symbol of kinship is blood; and when the tribal system broke up, the god could not be the physical father of men of diverse kin, and so he became their king, the Father of the people. The Fatherhood of God has therefore evolved from savage customs.

To argue, as theologians sometimes do, that to show how an idea evolved has no necessary bearing on its truth, is logically correct, but it is surely a remarkable coincidence if there is indeed a close parallel between the development of social institutions and the concepts of religion.

There are some critics who would deny that the principal clue to the idea of God is to be found in the history of society. Instead of starting their analysis with the history of the community, they begin with the individual consciousness. Psychological and sociological theories of the origin of religion are not, however, mutually exclusive. They have to explain the same phenomena, and although they start from a different point and use a different language, the two methods of approach should be complementary rather than contradictory. Unfortunately this is often overlooked in the heat of controversy.

### *Psychological Theories*

**FREUD'S THEORY.**—According to Freud, religion developed out of totemism; and totemism developed out of a cannibalistic feast among the primal horde, when the violent, jealous father who kept all the females for himself was slain by the sons :—

One day the expelled brothers joined forces, slew and ate the father, and thus put an end to the father-horde. Together they dared and accomplished what would have remained impossible for them singly. Perhaps some advance in culture, like the use of a new weapon, had given them the feeling of superiority. Of course, these cannibalistic savages ate their victim. This violent primal father has surely been the envied and feared model for each of the brothers. Now they

accomplished their identification with him by devouring him and each acquired a part of his strength. The totem-feast, which is perhaps mankind's first celebration, would be the repetition and commemoration of this memorable, criminal act with which so many things began, social organization, moral restrictions and religion.<sup>81</sup>

Remorse for killing the father who stood in the way of their sexual demands resulted in a guilt complex. Henceforth the slaying of the totem animal (father-substitute) and union with the mother were taboo.

It is unnecessary to go into further details of this curious theory, which no one accepts outside orthodox psycho-analytical circles, but it is easy to see how plausibly it can be applied to the numerous myths in which a god is slain and dismembered.

The fact that it is more often the son than the father who is slain in the myths is explained by the Freudian doctrine of *ambivalence*, according to which opposites may be identical, hate being found in love and vice versa :—

In the Christian myth, man's original sin is undoubtedly an offence against God the Father, and if Christ redeems mankind from the weight of Original Sin by sacrificing his own life, he forces us to the conclusion that this sin was murder.

According to the law of retaliation, which is deeply rooted in human feeling, a murder can be atoned for only by the sacrifice of another life; the self-sacrifice points to a blood-guilt. And if this sacrifice of one's own life brings about a reconciliation with god, the father, then the crime which must be expiated can only have been the murder of the father. Thus in the Christian doctrine mankind most unreservedly acknowledges the guilty deed of primordial times because it now has found the most complete expiation for this deed in the sacrificial death of the son. . . .

In the same deed which offers the greatest possible expiation to the father, the son also attains the goal of his wishes against the father. He becomes a god himself beside, or rather in place of, his father. The religion of the son succeeds the religion of the father. As a sign of this substitution the old totem feast is revived again in the form of communion in which the band of brothers now eats the flesh and blood of the son and no longer that of the father, the sons thereby identifying themselves with him and becoming holy themselves. Thus through the ages we see the identity of the totem feast with the animal sacrifice, the theanthropic human sacrifice, and the Christian eucharist. . . .<sup>81</sup>

**JUNG'S THEORY.**—Jung broke away from Freud on a number of points. Whereas Freudian analysts encourage us to think that

religion is an illusion, Jung counsels us to believe in God and immortality if we find it helps us. Jung writes with great obscurity, and he looks, not to social history, but to the Unconscious for the clue to the origin of religion. The Unconscious is represented in the conscious mind by symbols; and Jung holds that the similarity of myths and religious symbolism generally in such widely separated parts of the world is due to the fact that our minds are constituted in the same way. We all inherit an innate, archaic symbolism, and this is the language of religion. In his *Psychology of the Unconscious*, Jung contends that religion arises from a tendency to regress to an attitude of infantile dependence on the parent.<sup>82</sup>

No one can doubt that such psychological concepts as the Unconscious, projection, introversion, etc., throw a fresh light on religious manifestations. Thanks to these explorations of the mind, it is easier to comprehend ancient phallic worship, the sexual language of so much mysticism, the frequency of adolescent conversions.

**TROTTER'S THEORY.** In contrast to the schools which stress the importance of the sex instinct as a factor, there is the emphasis laid by Trotter and others on the herd-instinct. This point of view is given in W. Trotter's *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War*:—

This intimate dependence on the herd is traceable not merely in matters physical and intellectual, but also betrays itself in the deepest recesses of personality as a sense of incompleteness which compels the individual to reach out towards some larger existence than his own, some encompassing being in whom his perplexities may find a solution and his longings peace. Physical loneliness and intellectual isolation are effectually solaced by the nearness and agreement of the herd. The deeper personal necessities cannot be met—at any rate in such society as has been so far evolved—by so superficial a union. . . . Religious feeling is therefore a character inherent in the very structure of the human mind, and is the expression of a need which must be recognised by the biologist as neither superficial nor transitory.<sup>83</sup>

By contrast, Elliot Smith's view that prehistoric man was engaged in a world-wide search for substances that could be regarded as Givers-of-Life may be considered as an attempt to base religion, not on the herd-instinct but on the instinct of self-preservation. Whichever of these factors is considered to be the more important, it seems probable that each of them to a

varying degree enters into the composition of the religious consciousness.

Psychology helps us to understand the mechanism whereby impulses and conflicts in the mind are externalized and then regarded as independent realities. We can gain some knowledge of animism by watching a child infuse his own vitality into a doll so that it becomes a living thing for him. We, ourselves, behave like animists when we kick a door in anger because we have jammed our fingers.

The veneration of the national flag or regimental colours is a survival of totemic thinking. The irrational sense of guilt, the thirst for self-punishment, the ferocity of religious persecutions, are perfectly intelligible in terms of masochism, sadism, and the complexes which the psychoanalyst has laid bare. But all psychological theories have to meet the criticism that they do not tell the whole story because they deal with man as an *individual unit* and neglect the *social medium* in which the content of his consciousness is shaped.

THE DIFFUSIONIST THEORY.—Although Diffusionists reduce religion, in the last analysis, to the instinct of self-preservation, they regard the worship of the gods as the result of an accidental historical process. It follows that if there had been no kings there would have been no gods, as we understand them.

According to Elliot Smith :—

The earliest evidence which might be assumed to prove the existence of a religious system is contained in the early Egyptian writings, in which the first god of whom we have any record is defined, according to Dr. Alan Gardiner, as a dead king. As the symbolic expression of the idea of a god is conveyed by the picture of a swathed pole, it can be assumed that the earliest god was the king's mummy, a preserved corpse which was regarded as having been re-animated by appropriate ceremonies, opening the mouth, incense-burning, pouring of libations and a series of ritual dances, dramatic plays, and songs and games.<sup>84</sup>

From this the whole superstructure of religion is said to have arisen and spread all over the world :—

The whole conception of a sky-world, of the supreme god identified with the sun in the heavens, of his son as the reigning king on earth, the idea of his birth after a miraculous conception and the peculiar features of the consecration of a king by the ritual imitation of what was supposed to have happened at the Creation—all these beliefs, as well



as the stories of the deluge, the creation of the earth, and the ascent of the Son of the Sun-God to heaven, which represent the essence of the life-giving rituals of every religion, developed in Egypt as the result of speculations on the part of the priests of Heliopolis attempting to explain certain natural phenomena distinctive of one particular place in Lower Egypt.<sup>84</sup>

**DURKHEIM'S THEORY.**—Just as Jung regards “god” as the symbol of the Unconscious, Freud of the Father, Elliot Smith of the King, so Durkheim regards “god” as a symbol of the social group. It follows that changes in social organization will compel a revision of the symbol. Thus we may expect a matriarchal society to worship the Great Mother, and an Empire to tend to monotheism. These forms, however, are comparatively superficial. The function of religion is to affirm the unity of the group, whether of a clan, a tribe, a nation, or an empire.

There are rites without gods, and rites from which gods are derived; but there is no religion without a Church: “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things. . . .” The point is not whether mythology is false—that is granted—but how anything so false could endure.

Durkheim contends that religion satisfies a social need. The believer in religion feels *stronger*. He has a new power and is raised above ordinary miseries and weaknesses. This comes about when members of the community meet together. The feeling of tribal solidarity is projected as a god. What is personified, reduced to a single comprehensible symbol, is the authority of society.

**MALINOWSKI'S THEORY.**—The social value of religion is also emphasized by Malinowski:—

Religion and magic on the one hand give man freedom from fear, from despondency, from spiritual and social disorganization. On the other hand they cement and integrate the partial and specific values of conduct and of achievement into one system or several systems, each converging on the central value with its focus of efficiency placed on a world sacred, firm and powerful, just because it remains outside the normal ordinary experience of man.<sup>85</sup>

Magic is therefore good for morale. Again:—

Any system of mystical belief arises as a cultural response to the disorganizing fear of adversity and disaster. Every such system

consists first and foremost in a dogmatic affirmation, mythologically founded.

The affirmation declares: "There is a God, who is a source of strength to those who obey his words. There is a providence which can be induced to cooperate with man and make his efforts effective and successful. There are ancestor-spirits, who demand sacrifice and prayer, but who free man from the hindrances of ill-luck and the schemings of his enemies. There is another world, where those who have been oppressed, ill-treated and persecuted here will exist in the glory of strength and pleasure, hence of freedom. There is a force which man can capture and use to master and harness luck and chance through magical rite and spell." <sup>85</sup>

**THE MARXIST THEORY.**—Superficially there is a good deal in common between Marxism and the French school of sociology in regard to religion, but the difference is deep. For Marx, "god" is not so much the symbol of the community in general as of a particular kind of community, a society riven by class divisions. The modern Marxist, surveying the vast mass of material that has been collected since Marx wrote, can point to many discoveries that seem to confirm the original thesis that religion is a reflection, on the mental plane, of the material structure of society.

If God stands for king, then king stands for ruling class, not for the group as a whole, and in a classless society the concept would be superfluous. The traditional view that the king is a microcosm of society, so that injury or benefit to him mysteriously reacts on the whole social organism, is regarded as an ideological trick. The function of religion in a class-society is to identify the demands of the ruling class (equated with justice) with the will of God. Belief in the supernatural is due to man's feeling of helplessness in face of the blind forces of nature; but scientific control of natural forces will result in such concepts as "God" and "soul" becoming as outmoded as Kepler's angels and phlogiston. The following quotations will make this clear:—

Religious misery is, on the one hand, the expression of actual misery, and, on the other, a protest against actual misery. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the kindliness of a heartless world, the spirit of unspiritual conditions. It is the people's opium. The removal of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for its real happiness. The demand that it should give up illusions about its

real conditions is the demand that it should give up the conditions which make illusions necessary. Criticism of religion is therefore at heart a criticism of the vale of misery for which religion is the promised vision.

Criticism has torn away the imaginary flowers with which his chains were bedecked, not in order that man should wear his chains without the comfort of illusions, but that he may throw off the chains and pluck the living flowers. Criticism of religion disillusioned man so that he may think, act, and shape his reality as one who is disillusioned and come to full understanding, so that he may move on his own axis and thus be his own sun. Religion is but the false sun which revolves around him while he is not yet fully self-aware.—MARX, *Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*.<sup>86</sup>

Religion is a reflection, on the ideological plane, of the structure of society and it will not disappear until "the relations between human beings in their practical everyday life have assumed the aspect of perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations as between man and man, and as between man and Nature. The life process of society, this meaning the material process of production, will not lose its veil of mystery until it becomes a process carried on by a free association of producers under their conscious and purposive control—MARX, *Capital*, Vol. I.

According to Lenin :—

Religion is a kind of spiritual intoxicant, in which the slaves of capital drown their humanity and blunt their desire for a decent human existence.<sup>86</sup>

It is evident enough that there is no such thing as *the* Rationalist theory of the origin of religion. There are many theories and it is unlikely that any one of them expresses the whole truth of the matter. The individual Rationalist is concerned only to sift the evidence and to arrive at a tentative conclusion that seems to him in harmony with such facts as are at present known. What he plainly must not do is to try to fit the facts into some preconceived belief.

## Chapter Ten

### THE PAGAN BACKGROUND OF CHRISTIANITY

Pagan survivals. The Great Mother. Virgin Birth. Pagan trinities. Dying and resurrected gods. Greek Tragedy. Kingship. Bridal and funeral rites. Coronation and marriage. The Creation ceremony. The Saviour theme. Rebirth and initiation rites. Pagan ideas in Palestine.

No matter how far back we search in history we shall find strikingly similar patterns of belief. There are numerous pagan Trinities. The myth of a slain and resurrected saviour-god is almost universal. As we have seen, there are rites closely resembling baptism and the eucharist. A peculiar sacredness is almost everywhere supposed to reside in blood and in running water. The cross is a pre-Christian symbol, so are the sacred tree, the sacred bridegroom, the lamb, and the dove. The divine Mother and holy Child were worshipped in Egypt, Greece, and even in China before Christianity was thought of.

Some writers explain all this away in the following ingenious manner. They start by asserting that there is a *real* Trinity. Then they profess to feel no surprise that there should be Trinities in pagan pantheons, even female trinities such as three Moirae, three Gorgons, three Charities, etc. The mystic significance of the number three (and so, no doubt, of the numbers five, seven, and twelve) is due to an objective fact.

In the same way, the mystical identification of the sacrificer and the victim, the worshipper and the worshipped, when the sacred flesh of the god is eaten, results from a sort of unconscious pre-cognition. The bemused mind of the heathen must have caught a distorted glimpse of the eucharist centuries before it was instituted.

A writer in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* comments on the parallels as follows:—

It is meaningless to suggest to the true theist that his belief in a living God originated in ancestor-worship, animism, or animatism of

the past; such a notion is part of the fallacious theory of survivals. However persuasive be the parallels, however striking the links between theistic and other beliefs, the external observer can easily overlook the qualitative differences and the different "systems" involved in each. The most rudimentary form of a feature is not thereby the origin of what appears in advanced forms, and the data of totemism suffice to prove that the origin of religion is not so practicable a problem as the interpretation of the rudest part of it.

Dr. Barnes has remarked that "the catholicizing of Christianity was the paganising of it," and he has shown the debt of Christian sacramentalism to the pagan mysteries. On the other hand he agrees, with William James, that we must judge religion by its fruits, not by its roots:—

Eight hundred million years ago the ancestor of the modern leader of thought and aspiration was a worm in the sea mud. . . . We do not judge the man by the worm nor his creed by its primitive beginnings.<sup>15</sup>

### *The Rationalist View*

The sort of judgment that Rationalists pass on a creed concerns its truth. It can be maintained that falsehood has a social value at certain cultural levels. Malinowski and other distinguished anthropologists have claimed with considerable force that in savage societies magic has its uses. By citing William James, however, the Bishop of Birmingham called a dangerous witness, because James was a Pragmatist, and the main principle of Pragmatism is that whatever works out in practice can be considered as "true." Christian apologists may make use of Pragmatism in an argument, but if they believed it they would not send out missionaries to convert the heathen.

If a belief still held—say in baptism—can be shown to have originated in a superstition, its truth value, as distinct from whatever social value it may conceivably possess, is surely impaired. It is incontrovertible that kings wear crowns because they were once thought to be gods. We may believe in the social value of the monarchy, but we do not nowadays believe that kings are divine. To a Rationalist those who accept the Christian creeds as true are clinging to a sublimated superstition no less incredible than the divinity of kings.

Rationalists need feel no compunction about accepting what is described as "the fallacious theory of survivals." Wherein lies

the fallacy? It cannot be doubted that many beliefs still held in civilized communities by learned and intelligent men are survivals from primitive savagery. There are, of course, *qualitative* differences. The British monarchy is qualitatively different from the divine kingship of ancient Egypt. But through the centuries that divide them certain vestiges of ancient superstition lingered on—the belief in the healing power of the royal touch, for example, which brought crowds flocking to Charles II. The regalia and ceremonial of the Coronation can be understood only in the light of our knowledge of the divine Pharaohs. \*When the assembled peers cry out, "Let the King live for ever" we may smile at the hyperbole, but millenniums ago the exclamation enshrined a real belief.

If there had been no ancient kingship, is it likely that we would have invented it for ourselves? The crown and sceptre, the investiture and anointing, have lost their original meaning, just as the crown still used in an ordinary marriage ceremony in the Eastern Church has become dissociated from the primitive Coronation ceremony. It is one of innumerable fossilized remains of once living beliefs.

The material fossils found in the Alps were at first dismissed by theologians as devices of the devil to mislead the faithful. Shall we not commit a similar folly if we ignore what might perhaps be called "ideological fossils"? The structure of the still-surviving mumming plays, and even of Punch and Judy, is curiously similar to the structure of Greek drama, which in turn is similar to the structure of very early fertility and initiation rites. Again, when Oscar Wilde declared that the Mass was a survival of Greek tragedy he was uttering a truth that scholarship has confirmed.

### *The Great Mother*

The shadow of the Great Mother looms behind all ancient religions. Whether this concept was known in some crude fashion to Paleolithic man is a question that is unlikely to be conclusively answered. Stone images of a female form have been dug up, and they probably had a magical significance in the dim period when the ancient food-gatherers—like the Arunta of Australia—did not even understand the physical meaning of paternity.

As Jane Harrison points out in *Themis*, primitive man sees the mother and son relationship predominant. He projects his own emotions on Nature, and so regards the earth as mother, or food-giver, and the fruits of the earth as her son, so often symbolized by a blossoming tree. Then the influence of the sky in determining the food supply begins to be felt. The rhythmic changes of the moon are given mythological expression before there is a solar calendar. And there is still another factor, for "a matriarchal society will worship a Mother and Son, and a patriarchal society will tend to have a cult of the Father."<sup>87</sup>

Among the first agriculturalists the sowing of crops was regarded as a task for women. They knew the magical secrets and could ensure fertility. The earth was conceived of as the Mother-of-all-Living. As the Homeric hymn-writer sang:—

Concerning Earth, the mother of all, shall I sing, firm Earth, eldest of the gods, that nourishes all things in the world; all things that fare on the sacred land, all things in the sea, all flying things, all are fed out of her store. Through thee, revered goddess, are men happy in their children and fortunate in their harvest.

And Miss Harrison comments:—

Our religion teaches us to revere a male Trinity; the figure of the Mother is absent. The Roman and Orthodox Churches with a more happy and genial humanism include the Mother who is also the Maid.<sup>88</sup>

It is impossible to trace here the connection between the earth-mother (Ge or Gaia) and Rhea of Cybele (the mother of all the gods) and Demeter (the grain mother). Among the same family of ideas is the mountain-mother of ancient Crete, sceptre in hand and guarded by lions. The Cretan Lady-of-Wild-Things is practically the same as the Thracian Semele, who gave birth to Dionysos. And in Egypt, Isis was regarded as the Queen of Heaven and Star of the Sea.

### *Virgin Birth*

Sometimes this symbol of the female principle and the source of life and the fruits of the earth is associated with a divine son, sometimes with a lover. The most atrocious logical contradictions were tolerated. Sometimes the love theme is between brother and sister. There is always an atmosphere of miracle, and frequently the sacred mother is a virgin. Quetzalcoatl, the

saviour-god of Mexico, was born of the virgin Chimalman. Semele miraculously conceived Dionysos. The Hindu Devaki gave birth sexlessly to Krishna. St. Jerome knew the legend that Buddha was born of a virgin. Indeed, a similar story was told of Pythagoras.

The *Archbishops' Report* makes it plain that the dogma of the Virgin Birth is not binding on Anglicans. It was rejected, for example, by the late Dr. Henson. But Dr. Barnes was sharply attacked, nevertheless, for writing:—

Belief in the Virgin Birth of Jesus arose from a mistranslation, in the Greek version of the scriptures, of a passage in Isaiah (vii, 14). Matthew gives the mistranslation in the form (i, 23): "Behold the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel." In the original Hebrew, however, the word translated virgin means young woman.<sup>60</sup>

One thing is clear: few in the ancient world would have felt incredulous on hearing that a virgin had given birth to a child, or that a man was really a god.

Marriage and birth were important features of the Eleusinian mysteries in Greece. At one very solemn point in the dramatic performance the priest announced: "Holy Brimo has given birth to a Sacred Child, Brimos." The ordinary man might well believe that the many goddesses, with their divine sons or lovers, were separate beings, but the intelligentsia had no such illusions. It seemed obvious to Plutarch that Osiris and Dionysos, like Isis and Demeter, differed mainly in name. Aeschylus perceived the unity of the mother-goddesses: "Themis she, and Gaia, one in form with many names."

### *The Christian Madonna*

The Christian Church has taken over the plot of a very ancient story and treated fiction as historical fact. In the case of the Catholic Church, it is difficult to see how anyone can fail to notice the identity of the Virgin Mary with the great female divinities worshipped from the dawn of civilization. Not only is the similarity ignored by Catholics, but an audacious attempt is sometimes made to give the modern version of the Great Mother an air of scientific respectability. Nowadays, of course, the cult stands or falls with the dogma of the Virgin Birth, and



although this has lost ground among Protestants it is still vital to the Catholic. Dr. F. Sherwood Taylor writes :—

There is no evidence that in the normal course of nature, one conception in 10,000 or more is not a virgin conception; for were it to be so we would be very unlikely to discover it. There is at present the small positive evidence that girls of good character are occasionally known to allege this occurrence in their own cases (I know of two instances). They are, of course, disbelieved; but only on grounds of analogy, not of positive proof. <sup>7</sup>

Even if this alarming state of affairs exists there is nothing miraculous about it. But the evidence will strike most people as singularly weak—far weaker, surely, than the evidence that the concept of the Great Mother is “one in form with many names.”

We can trace the idea back to the remote days of the Sumerian goddess, Innini. Indeed, a serpent-headed goddess was worshipped in Babylonia before 4000 B.C.—i.e., before the Flood possibly described in Genesis. Innini played a leading part in the oldest of all plots, the myth of the dying and resurrected god. Time and again we find the same story with different names, and the most reasonable conclusion is that the myth was begotten by a ritual act.

In all the myths great stress is laid on the dolours of the mother (or mistress or sister or both) when the god is slain. There is a descent into the underworld. The details vary, but the association of the goddess with the world of shades is clear; and although there is certainly nothing to suggest such an association in the New Testament narrative, a visit to any Catholic church will show how this archaic pattern has persisted in popular devotions. The Virgin in her various guises—Our Lady of Lourdes, of Loreto, of Mount Carmel, of Guadalupe—has special powers to ease the lot of those who suffer, not indeed in hell, but in purgatory.

Some popular devotions recall Mahomet's curious mistake in thinking that the Christian Trinity consisted of Father, Mother, and Son. In others the Trinity appealed to is “Jesu, Mary, Joseph.” All this may be formally disproved by reference to strict theology, but we are now concerned with the living reality, not the dead letter. Dr. Coulton mentions the case of a medieval testator who bequeathed his soul “to allmighty God, my Crea-

tour, Saviour and Redeemer, and Mary, Virgin, Quene of Heaven, Lady of the Worlde and Emporessse of Helle." <sup>90</sup>

In the past the Mother and Maiden had a double function which derives perhaps from the primordial figure of Gaia, rising from the ground. Demeter was both Corn-Mother and Queen of the Underworld. Artemis, the moon-goddess, is equated with Hecate, dark Queen of the Shades, a form of the Babylonian Ereshkigal, Queen of the Land-of-No-Return.

### *The Spring Festival*

What was the ritual that gave rise to these remarkably similar personifications? Frazer, as is well known, regarded it as essentially an example of vegetation magic. It was concerned with the Corn Spirit, Maize Spirit, Rice Spirit, as the case might be. It is enough for our purposes to take the example of Osiris in Egypt:—

The primitive conception of him as the corn god comes clearly out in the festival of his death and resurrection, which was celebrated in the month of Cholak, and at a later period in the month of Athyr. That festival appears to have been essentially a festival of sowing, which properly fell at the time when the husbandman actually committed the seed to the earth. On that occasion an effigy of the corn god, moulded of earth and corn, was buried with funeral rites in the ground in order that, dying there, he might come to life again with new crops. The ceremony was in fact a charm to ensure the growth of the corn by sympathetic magic, and we may conjecture that as such it was practised in simple form by every Egyptian farmer on his fields, long before it was adopted and transfigured by the priests in the stately ritual of the temple. <sup>63</sup>

Care must be taken to distinguish fact from conjecture in *The Golden Bough*, but Frazer himself never confuses the two. He has undoubtedly established the existence of a widespread primitive ritual in which the personification of vegetable life played a dominant part. But there were other aspects besides vegetation.

Gilbert Murray writes as follows of the great Dromenon or Spring Festival in Greece:—

The tribe and the growing earth were renovated together; the earth arises fresh from her dead seeds, the tribe from its dead ancestors. The whole process projects itself in the idea of the Spirit of the Year, who in the first stage is living, then dies with each year and thirdly

risks again from the dead, raising the whole world with him. The Greeks called him in this stage "The Third One" (Tritos Soter) or the "Saviour"; and the renovation ceremonies were accompanied by a casting off of the old year, the old garments, and everything that is polluted by the infection of death.<sup>50</sup>

On the Harrison-Murray theory the main features in this ritual were (1) the agon, or contest, (2) the pathos, or defeat, (3) the reappearance in triumph, rebirth, or epiphany. Analysis of Greek tragedies suggests that whereas the stories may come from the epics, nevertheless the ritual forms, the peculiar stage conventions, have descended from the Spring Festival, which was a conflict, a dramatic setting forth of natural happenings, death being followed by re-birth, contest by victory. Professor F. M. Cornford has made a similar analysis of Greek comedy, showing its religious origin. The same process can be seen in the evolution of Olympic games.

### *The Origin of Tragedy*

The factors in Greek tragedy, on this view, are (1) Prologue, (2) Agon, (3) Pathos, (4) Messenger's Speech, (5) Threnos, (6) Anagnoresis, (7) Theophany. These are always present, whatever the plot. The similarity of this construction to the central drama of the Christian Church is obvious enough.

More recently, details of this theory have been criticized by Professor George Thomson, who calls attention to the similarity of the pattern to initiation rites. In the initiation of young men we find the equivalent of the pompe, or send off, the agon, or contest, the triumphal procession, or komos. Yet another strand in this interweaving of primitive ideas is the duel between a Fair Man and a Dark Man—mythologized perhaps into Light and Darkness, Good and Evil, though it may originally have stood merely for Summer and Winter. The threadbare pattern has degenerated into the duel between St. George and Captain Slasher in our own mumming plays.

Professor Thomson also shows how Tragedy had its origin in the worship of Dionysos:—

The Dionysian worshippers were a secret magical society which preserved in modified form the structure and functions of the totemic clan, out of which it had evolved during the later phases of tribal

society. It was composed of women led by a male priest. Its principal rite, derived from initiation, contained three elements—an orgiastic exodus into the open country, a sacrament in which the victim was torn to pieces and eaten raw, and a triumphant return. The ritual was projected as a myth of the passion of Dionysos.

It ceased to be secret and began to disintegrate. The orgiastic processions became a hymn which was developed most rapidly in the Peloponnese; the sacrament became a passion play. . . .<sup>91</sup>

### *Hocart's Theory*

An explanation is suggested by Hocart, based on the principle of diffusion, to which reference has already been made. According to Hocart, vegetation magic played a part in the primordial pattern, but it was far from being the whole story; the Year-daimon may have played a part, but that was not the whole story either. Hocart searches for a single ceremony rich enough to give rise to all the strange forms that we have examined.

He does not believe that they developed from initiation rites, although the latter contain the rebirth theme. He believes that initiation rites, and practically everything else, arose from a primitive ceremony "which includes the building up of the cosmic mound, the altar tumulus, the planting of the sacred tree, the repelling of the hostile powers, the installation of the king, the queen, and his vassals, and the mystical taking possession of the essence of the earth and all it bears for the benefit of the community."<sup>73</sup>

What is particularly interesting to notice is the method employed here. The emphasis is on ritual. Thus Hocart contends that the first chapter of Genesis should not be read as history, but as providing a clue to a ritual no doubt forgotten by the author. He claims that the "Hebrews, or their forerunners, had a rite that lasted six days, like the coronation of a Cambodian king." The best clue to the original rite is found in the sacred Indian book *Satapatha Brahmana*, which describes how a tumulus is made after the style of a household altar, surrounded by stones which represent the ocean. The first layer is the earth, the second the atmosphere, the third the sky. Above are the heavens and stars.

Now what Genesis really describes, says Hocart, is not the creation of the actual cosmos, but the making of a *replica* of the

world in a ceremony which thereby gave the king control of the real world in order to secure abundance. Between the lines of Genesis we can discern details of a complicated magic rite in which lights are renewed with new fire (torches), the heaven and earth are separated, the earth renovated, seed sown and a sacred tree planted, the course of the sun, moon, and stars fixed, life breathed into fishes and birds and beasts, man created and the new king and queen installed. The creation of man did not connote man in general but "the Man" as opposed to God (the king). Hence the historic relationship of the Vizier of Egypt to the divine Pharaoh.

Hocart has drawn attention to the quite astonishing similarities between the coronation of a king, the consecration of a bishop or of a priest, the ordinary marriage ceremony, baptism, confirmation, and even the taking of vows by a nun. Lord Raglan has argued that weddings and funerals are "variants of the same ceremony, the bride playing the same part in the former as the corpse does in the latter. Both are bathed, dressed in white, covered with a veil and decked with white flowers." Both take part in a similar kind of procession; and sometimes the bridal party and mourners enjoy a hilarious feast. So, also, at christenings we find the bath, the white dress and veil, the white flowers, the procession and feast:—

These resemblances are far too close to permit us to suppose that the ceremonies were devised with special reference to brides, corpses, or babies; they are in fact merely variants of the same death and rebirth ceremony. Just as the corpse dies as a mortal and is reborn as an immortal; just as the baby dies to sin and is reborn to righteousness; so the bride dies as a maiden and is reborn as a queen. At a wedding, in fact, is re-enacted that part of the ancient coronation ceremony which consisted in the coronation of the queen, and which followed and closely resembled that of the king.<sup>72</sup>

Professor E. O. James states:—

The veiling of the bride is in accordance with the coronation pattern, since the royal marriage is in effect the unction of the queen. . . . This notion survives in Christian rite, inasmuch as the nuptial blessing is bestowed only upon the bride, and if she has been previously married it is withheld altogether. . . . The institution is represented as being of divine origin, interpreted in terms of the Creation story, signifying the mystical union of Christ and his Church; a conception that reflects an earlier notion of the alliance of heaven and earth in a sacred marriage.<sup>92</sup>

Referring to the consecration of nuns, Professor James adds :—

That the ceremony is of royal origin is suggested by the close resemblance to the coronation rite, the honour paid to the novices, and the sacred character of the union contracted. As the queen shared the throne of her royal husband, so the virgin was spiritually espoused to Christ in a sense which made her, in a metaphysical manner, the “wife of the god.”<sup>92</sup>

Lord Raglan gives further significant information in commenting on this :—

In general it may be said that, apart from the higher religions, persons of high rank are married with elaborate ceremonies, while commoners are married with little ceremony and often after none at all. In Christianity, however, a marriage ceremony for commoners is a fairly modern innovation. It was laid down in A.D. 537 that nobles should be married in Church, but that commoners might continue to contract marriages without that ceremony, and it was not until 1563 that a marriage ceremony was made compulsory in the Roman Church. In England a ceremony did not become compulsory until 1753, and the validity of a marriage without a ceremony is still recognized in Scotland.<sup>72</sup>

### *The Creation Ceremony*

To what extent, then, is it possible, from the fragmentary myths and customs which we possess, to reconstruct a possible common source? It is not possible to doubt the validity of the method, whatever may be thought of the results. We can form a notion of an Indo-European language, no longer spoken anywhere in its original purity, but traces of which are found in living languages. If the method of philology is applied to comparative religion we can form some idea of a primitive ceremony, no longer performed anywhere in its entirety but surviving in detached parts. Parallels will then be treated like those in language. For example :—

| <i>English</i> | <i>German</i> | <i>Latin</i> | <i>Greek</i> | <i>Old Persian</i> | <i>Sanskrit</i> |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Brother        | Bruder        | Frater       | Phrater      | Brater             | Bhratar         |
| Mother         | Mutter        | Mater        | Meter        | Matar              | Matar           |
| Father         | Vater         | Pater        | Pater        | Pitar              | Pitar           |

The original annual ceremony probably entailed human sacrifice—the actual death of the divine king. It would take place within a sacred enclosure in which stood a sacred tree. The

expulsion of evils would involve the removal of the remains of the previous year's sacrifice. The king whose reign had come to an end would be slain, and probably dismembered, and the world would be magically created afresh . . . the king's eyes representing the sun and moon, his skull the sky, his bones the mountains, his blood the rivers and sea. Then Man would be fashioned out of clay and moulded on the dead king's ribs. There was probably cannibalism. This is hinted at in one of the oldest of the Pyramid texts, applied to King Unis but actually having a much earlier reference. "He hath swallowed the knowledge of every god: Lo, the god's souls are in the belly of King Unis."<sup>93</sup>

The coronation and ritual intercourse of the new king and queen would be the marriage of Earth and Sky. The cycle of nature would thus be started again, and the sacred couple would walk round the world's replica in imitation of the sun.

Whether or not we regard Hocart's hypothesis as satisfactory, it is a brilliant attempt to discover a rational order among apparently unrelated facts. It is an application of a method that has been fruitful in other fields.

### *The Dying God*

Detailed examples of the themes which keep recurring in all religions may be found in the works of Frazer, Reinach, and others. Whatever may be the explanation, there can be no doubt about the existence of parallels, not merely in the realm of imagination, but also of practice. Consider the "Saviour" theme.

The Babylonian Tammuz was the husband or lover of Ishtar, the Great Mother. Every year Tammuz was supposed to die and pass into the gloomy underworld, and every year his divine Mistress-Mother descended to search for him "in the land of no-returning, the house of darkness, where the dust lies on the door and the bolt." The world is sterile and abandoned during the absence of Ishtar, and the death of Tammuz was annually mourned by dirges to the sound of flutes. Some of the laments for Tammuz have been preserved, and the comparison with the Christian Passiontide is remarkable. The sorrows of Ishtar are akin to the sorrows of Mary.

The Greeks changed Tammuz into Adonis, a babe hidden by

Aphrodite in a chest and discovered by Persephone. This finds an echo in the story of Moses hidden in the bulrushes. The dead body of Osiris was also concealed in a chest.

Persephone, Queen of the Underworld, refused to give up the lovely Adonis, and finally Zeus decreed that Adonis should abide with Persephone in the nether regions for one part of the year and with Aphrodite in the upper world for another part. At last Adonis is killed by a wild boar, and the mourning Aphrodite is surely another prototype of Mater Dolorosa. Frazer writes :—

In ancient Egypt the god whose death and resurrection were annually celebrated with alternate sorrow and joy was Osiris, the most popular of all Egyptian deities; and there are good grounds for classing him in one of his aspects as a personification of the great yearly vicissitudes of Nature, especially of the corn.<sup>62</sup>

Osiris reigned as a king on earth, and taught the Egyptians the secrets of agriculture. Like Dionysus, he is also the god of the vine, whose cultivation he introduced. His brother Set, with seventy-two others, plotted against him and shut him in a coffer, which was thrown into the Nile. Isis, his sister-wife, wandered in search of him, uttering a loud lament. The coffer drifted ashore at Byblus, and an Erica tree shot up and enclosed it. The tree was cut down, and later the body in it was stolen and dismembered by the wicked Set. Finally Isis found the broken pieces, and through the miraculous intervention of Re, the sun-god, Osiris was restored to life. Henceforth, he reigned over the dead in the underworld.

In the resurrection of Osiris, the Egyptians saw the pledge of a life everlasting for themselves beyond the grave. They believed that every man would live eternally in the other world if only his surviving friends did for his body what the gods had done for the body of Osiris. Hence the ceremonies observed by the Egyptians over the human dead were an exact copy of those which Anubis, Horus, and the rest had performed over the dead god. . . . In this way every dead Egyptian was identified with Osiris and bore his name. From the Middle Kingdom onwards it was the regular practice to address the deceased as Osiris So-and-So, as if he were the god himself. . . . The thousands of inscribed and pictured tombs that have been opened in the valley of the Nile prove that the mystery of the resurrection was performed for the benefit of every dead Egyptian; as Osiris died and rose again from the dead so all men hoped to arise like him from death to life eternal.<sup>62</sup>



Is it so very fanciful to see in Extreme Unction and Requiem Masses a reflection of this more ancient blend of magic and religion? The cluster of ideas which Christianity inherited—collective guilt, taboo, scapegoat, saviour, death, resurrection, the divine and sorrowing mother—takes us back beyond the great Spring Festival in primitive Greece, though the latter is far enough to establish the existence of a substratum of ideas that remained, as it were, radioactive until, and even after, the appearance of Christianity.

To quote Gilbert Murray again:—

The life of the Year-Daimon, as it seems to be reflected in Tragedy, is generally a story of Pride and Punishment. Each Year arrives, waxes great, commits the sin of Hubris, and then is slain. The death is deserved, but the slaying is a sin; hence comes the next Year as Avenger, or as the Wronged One re-arisen. "All things pay retribution for their injustice one to another according to the ordinance of time." It is this range of ideas half suppressed during the classical period and evidently still current among the ruder and less Hellenized peoples which supplied St. Paul with some of his most famous and deep-reaching metaphors: "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die."<sup>50</sup>

### *The Theme of Rebirth*

The rebirth theme may or may not have had a different origin from the Spring vegetation rites. There are those who think that it goes back to totemic (pre-agricultural) society:—

The rite of the second birth is widespread and universal over half the savage world. With the savage to be twice born is the rule. By his first birth he comes into the world; by his second he is born into the tribe. At his first birth he belongs to his mother and the women folk; at his second he becomes a full-fledged man and passes into the society of the warriors of his tribe. . . .<sup>87</sup>

There are various types of ritual. The Kikuyu of East Africa re-enact their birth, and at the end of the mimicry the boy cries like a baby and is washed. Sometimes the initiate is washed in blood—either in his own or in that of an animal. Who can help recalling, when one realizes the tremendous magical significance always attached to blood, the familiar Christian symbols? The devotees of Mithra were also drenched in the real blood. The Christian differed from the rival, contemporaneous creed and was

physically immersed in water and only metaphorically washed in the saving "blood of the Lamb." Jane Harrison writes :—

More often the new birth is simulated or imagined as a death and resurrection, either of the boys themselves or of someone else in their presence. In South-East Australia an old man is buried in the presence of the initiates and after much singing he rises from the grave. Among other totemic tribes the initiate puts on the skin of an animal, and his subsequent ritual disappearance and reappearance signify his death and resurrection. He puts on a bear skin, for example, as the Christian metaphorically puts on Christ. He gets rid of the old Adam metaphorically; but in earlier ceremonies an old man is sometimes actually buried. As the Anglican Baptismal service states: "O merciful God, grant that the old Adam in this child may be so buried that the new man may be raised up in him." <sup>87</sup>

The position is summed up by Professor E. O. James as follows :—

Since the catechumen was reborn to eternal life (i.e., he "died to live") as a result of the baptismal lustration, and was united sacramentally to the risen and triumphant Saviour in a bond which endured beyond the grave, so in the last rites he was again anointed, absolved, exorcised, communicated, washed, clothed, re-animated (incense and holy water). Having fought and struggled with supernatural foes, he was carried in a solemn procession through all the stages of his perilous journey to live and reign for ever in eternal light. . . . Underlying the ritual pattern there is the age-long quest for life ever renewing, interpreted in terms of a death and resurrection cultus—a dying to live—in which the salient features of the coronation ceremony are repeated to secure the rebirth of the soul beyond the grave. If in the Christian rite it is no longer supposed that the soul is deified, its goal is nevertheless a state of bliss visualized as a solar paradise. Souls will become kings and queens in heaven where they will reign for ever and wear "the crown of glory." <sup>92</sup>

There can be no question that these pagan ideas were active at the beginning of the Christian era. Christian apologists sometimes speak as though Judaism was mysteriously insulated against the beliefs of surrounding peoples. On this point Professor (Canon) D. C. Simpson writes :—

Official Palestinian Judaism might—and it did with all its strength—resist the imposition of the worship of the gods of Hellenism and draw up minute regulations as to the correct etiquette and behaviour of the devout Jew in regard to the images of pagan gods, and refuse to allow

the Roman eagle to be placed upon a porch of the Temple, but it could do no more than check—it could not entirely arrest—the invasion of Egyptian and Oriental, Greek and Roman ideas. Thus facilitated, Greek ideas must have spread at least among some sections of the Jewish people, and have produced a recrudescence of earlier phases of superstitions, mythological speculations and magical rites, and may indeed have added new ones.<sup>94</sup>

## Chapter Eleven

### THE MYSTERY-GOD

Eating the god. St. Nilus's camel. Parallels to the Mass. Jewish sacramentalism. Mithraism. "The Jesus problem." Christos and Chrestos. Mythicism. Historicism. Dr. Barnes and his critics.

THE study of comparative religion had opened a new horizon by the beginning of this century. As Mr. A. D. Howell Smith puts it:—

Works like *The Golden Bough*, by Sir James Frazer, have done much to convince many students that the cult of Jesus the Saviour, who suffered and died for men, who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, falls into line with similar mystical cults of Saviour Gods, who also died and came to life again—the cults of Attis, Adonis, Osiris, Dionysos, Sabazios, and many other divinities, who were early rivals of the Christian Christ. Frazer drew attention to incidents in the story of the passion that recalled widely spread rites of human sacrifice, often accompanied by ritual cannibalism.<sup>95</sup>

This is not a field of inquiry in which we may expect a conclusive answer. The Christian assumes from the outset that the Gospels are to a large extent history. The Rationalist, on the other hand, approaches the subject without preconceived ideas. He does not regard the "Jesus problem" as essentially different from the "Homer problem" or the "Shakespeare problem." As we shall see, some Rationalists conclude that Jesus was as mythical as Adonis; others have decided that a real person has been draped, in course of time, and almost entirely concealed by, archaic ideas and ritual patterns.

It seems reasonably well established that all gods began as spirits, subsequently receiving promotion. For various reasons some gods began to receive a different sort of ritualistic attention from others. Some received offerings of roasted oxen and wine. They were thought of as invisibly participating in the meal. This gift-theory of sacrifice was held by the Greeks of classical times, but in the more primitive period, as Miss Harrison

has pointed out, the object of sacramental eating is to obtain mana.

Out of the original communion feast, with this object in view, grew such gods as the horned Iacchos, Zagreus, and Dionysos Tauromorphos. They were mystery-gods, vague, deeply exciting, potent, and in intimate contact with the worshipper, as opposed to the Olympian gods, who were cold and aloof, "things *known* rather than things *felt*." In the Christian scheme, God the Father has become for the popular worshipper as aloof as the Olympians; but Christ, especially in the eucharist, is a mystery-god. And all this, of course, may be accepted, whether or no the Christ of ritual is connected with an actual historical person.

### *Eating the God*

A famous early example of eating a sacred animal to obtain mana is the sacrifice of a white camel in the Mount Sinai region, which persisted down to the fifth century and is described by St. Nilus. The uncooked flesh and blood of the camel had to be entirely consumed before daybreak. The significance of this Arab rite was first discerned by Robertson Smith:—

The plain meaning is that the victim was devoured before its life had left the still warm blood and flesh . . . and that thus, in the most literal way, all those who shared in the ceremony absorbed part of the victim's life into themselves. One sees how much more forcibly than any ordinary meal such a rite expresses the establishment or confirmation of a bond of common life between the worshippers, and also, since the blood is shed upon the altar itself, between the worshippers and their god. In this sacrifice, then, the significant factors are two: the conveyance of the living blood to the godhead, and the absorption of the living flesh and blood into the flesh and blood of the worshippers.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the objections that have since been raised to Robertson Smith's interpretation, there is only one modification that need be made. Gilbert Murray speaks of his "almost prophetic insight," but states that "he spoke too definitely of the sacrifice affording communion with the tribal god. There was no god there, only the raw material out of which gods are made."<sup>50</sup>

It would be easy enough to find parallels. The Ainos of North Japan and the Gilyaks of Eastern Siberia capture a bear and feed him richly for the sacrifice. Finally, after leading for a time a life

as pampered as that of the divine kings of old, he is slain. The flesh is divided and cupsful of the blood are drunk by the men.

The same type of ceremony is to be found today in Tibet. Jevons, in his *Introduction to the History of Religion*, quotes a Catholic missionary who witnessed a parallel to the Mass in Tartary:—

This I do affirm, that the devil so mimics the Catholic Church there, that although no European or Christian has ever been there, still in all essential things they agree so completely with the Roman Church, as even to celebrate the Host with bread and wine: with my own eyes I have seen it.<sup>96</sup>

Similar sentiments were felt by the priests who accompanied the Spanish Conquistadores. The Aztecs made a dough image of Huitzipochtli every May and December; it was broken to pieces and eaten by the worshippers. The Incas made a pudding of ground maize and sprinkled it with the blood of the slain victim before distributing it to be consumed by the people. Many Protestants, of course, would not hesitate to affirm that this widespread ceremony is evidence of the magical nature of the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation. Dr. Barnes has shown in *The Rise of Christianity* that the ideas in which it had its origin invaded Christianity from the pagan mystery cults.

We must note, however, that some of these cults had vanished from the scene when Christianity appeared. The Bacchic Feast of Raw Flesh was a memory of a savage past, and the Athenian festival called the Bouphonia, in which an ox was slain and brought to life again in mimicry, even being stuffed with straw and yoked to a plough, was no longer performed. What is difficult to ascertain is the extent to which the Dionysian cult and its Orphic modifications continued to make themselves felt underground.

Ideas are seldom annihilated, though they undergo many changes. Orphism was a religion that penetrated Greece and South Italy from Persia in the sixth century B.C. According to Gilbert Murray:—

The Orphic congregations of later times, in their most holy gatherings, solemnly partook of the blood of a bull, which was by a mystery the blood of Dionysos-Zagreus himself, the Bull of God, slain in sacrifice for the purification of man.<sup>94</sup>

*Jewish and Pagan Sacraments*

According to J. M. Robertson :—

A sacrificial banquet was one of the most universal features of ancient religion, being originally the typical tribal ceremony; and though among the Jews it had been to a remarkable extent superseded by sacrifices without communion, the usage was once as general with them as with the Gentiles. . . . The presumption is that such a banquet was connected with the Semitic God-name Jesus or Joshua before the Christian era; otherwise we must conclude that a sect of "Jesuists," starting from the bare belief in the sacrificial death, adopted arbitrarily a kind of rite which was identified with the heathen worships of the surrounding Gentiles, and adopted also the Gentile sun-worshippers' practice of assembling by night. Paul's Corinthian converts are described as frequenting indifferently the table of Jesus ("the Lord") and the table of daemons—that is, of heathen Gods or demigods. As the less orthodox Jews had long dabbled in similar mysteries, there is every probability that private "Holy Suppers" had been practised even in Jewry by some groups long before the Christian period, whether or not in connection with the name of Jesus "the Saviour." The gospel phrase, "blood of the covenant," points to a standing usage, the original form of which was probably the mutual drinking of actual human blood by the parties to a solemn pledge. . . . It is further probable that the idea of a mystical partaking of an atoning or inspiring "body and blood" was of old standing in the same kind of connection. Such a practice was certainly part of the great Asiatic cults of Dionysos and Mithra; and as the ancient idea of a sacrificial banquet in honour of a god usually was that in some sense the worshipped power was either eaten or present as partaker, it is more than likely that any banquets in connection with the Syrian worships of Adonis and (or) Marnas (each name "the Lord") carried with them the same significance. In early Christian usage the ministrant of the eucharist spoke in the person of the founder, using the formulas preserved in the gospels; and as the priest in the cult of Attis also personated the god, there is a strong presumption that the same thing had been done in Jewry in the pre-Christian period, by way of modifying a still older usage in which a deified victim was actually slain and eaten. For such an ancient Jesuine eucharist (revived, perhaps, as old mysteries were apt to be among the Jews, no less than among other ancient peoples, in times of national disaster) a new meaning *may* have been found in the story of an actually slain man Jesus, whose death took a sacrificial aspect from its occurrence at the time of the atoning feast. <sup>98</sup>

Critics were not slow in pointing out the amount of conjecture in this and similar passages. On such questions as these we must

either frame hypotheses on the flimsy evidence available or leave the matter alone. The best Christian authorities now cautiously acknowledge the possibility of a Jewish sacramentalism and of a considerable infiltration, despite all resistance, of pagan ideas in Palestine in the period of the historic Jesus.

The existence of baptism is plain. John the Baptist practised it before the ministry of Jesus, and it continued in some independence of Christianity after John's death. But there were other sacramental cults, as Canon D. C. Simpson shows:—

That Oriental ideas of a very pronounced character had already entered Palestine, and had successfully established themselves in some circles—whether in the train of Hellenism in general, or directly from the Orient—is put beyond dispute by the peculiar beliefs and practices of the Essenes. The members of this rigorist and ascetic sect of Palestinian Judaism, retaining as they did many distinctively Jewish beliefs and doctrines unaltered, modified certain dogmas and added others. They formulated for themselves a code of practical life which was perhaps partly Greek—possibly Pythagorean—but which was also in part certainly of Oriental and especially of Persian origin. In particular, the Essenes' *sacramental* treatment of common meals should warn us against a too hasty judgment in favour of the commonly accepted view, that not only in its origins was the Jewish sacrificial system not sacramental, but that also in New Testament times it was necessarily and always regarded merely as “a good deed” to be performed, lacking all sacramental efficacy, and conveying no “grace” whatsoever to those who took part in it. Indeed it is far too hastily assumed that, whatever may have been the extent to which the specific ideas and practices of the “mystery religions” held sway outside Palestine, and influenced the thought and practice of the Judaism of the Diaspora and of European Christianity, they did not enter Palestine at least sufficiently early to be reckoned among the religious ideas in which our Lord was educated, and in regard to which He sought to educate His disciples at the Last Supper.<sup>94</sup>

The view that sacramental ideas were innate in the Jewish sacrificial worship and were presupposed in the words of the Last Supper is also expressed in *The Development of Sacramentalism* by J. W. C. Wand (1928). Those who accept a more or less Catholic doctrine of the eucharist may find support to a limited extent in Judaic sacramentalism, but naturally they recoil from any suggestion that these ideas had a common origin in primitive magic. The truth seems to be that the earliest Christian conceptions were subjected to two streams of influence, pagan and



Jewish, which often contended. The pagan influence was more Oriental than Greek, and the most conspicuous parallels at that time to Christianity are to be found in Mithraism.

### *The Religion of Mithra*

Mithra or Mithras originated in the primitive Aryan religion. The story goes that the first creation of Ahura Mazda was a wild bull; and this reminds us that in Persia, as in Greece, the bull was the recognized channel by which the mysterious power of mana, subsequently sublimated into "grace," reached the worshipper. Mithra, like Osiris and Dionysos, was a Saviour-god; and like Prometheus he was the friend and benefactor of man. He was born from rock, and according to the ancient myth he wrestled with the sacred bull and carried it to the obscure cave which had been the scene of his nativity, the date of which was December 25.

The slaying of the bull by Mithra was frequently depicted by ancient artists in the grottoes where his worship took place. The blood flowing from the dying, holy beast gave rise to all other animals and corn.

There were other incidents in Mithra's career which suggest familiar stories. He saved mankind from a great drought by firing an arrow at a rock and starting a spring of water. He also saved mankind from perishing in a great flood. Before ascending into heaven, when his work on earth had been completed, he held a farewell banquet. His followers commemorated this by a solemn sacramental meal, though water was used instead of wine.

Mithraism developed many astrological ideas. It taught that the soul descended through seven planetary spheres, becoming more loaded with impurity at each stage. After death it ascended through the seven spheres; and this was symbolized by the seven grades of initiation through which the initiate passed.

Reinach writes :—

Mithra grants the petitions of them that pray to him. Those who are initiated into his mysteries, in caverns like that where he first saw the day, receive after death his powerful protection against those enemies beyond the tomb who threaten the tranquillity of the dead. Furthermore, he will one day give to them a better life and has promised a resurrection. . . . It is obvious that the creed of Mithra had many elements in common with Christianity.<sup>99</sup>

The most famous Mithraic rite was the sacrifice of a bull. This was called the *taurobolium*; though sometimes a ram was substituted, and it was then known as the *criobolium*. The animal was slain above a pit covered with boards. The votaries standing in the pit were drenched with holy blood, which was believed to confer a new divine life. The candidates were "born again unto eternity" (*renatus in aeternum*). Thus the central point of the religion was to secure immortality; and artists in the Mithraic chapels that have been found depict Mithra welcoming into Paradise his faithful followers, where they will enjoy a heavenly banquet. Mithra is usually shown with a halo, for he is identified with the "unconquered sun" (*Sol invictus*).

Not much fault has been found with the moral tone of Mithraism. Its service was conceived as a warfare against the powers of evil. It was a kind of ritualistic Salvation Army, and its followers regarded themselves as soldiers in the Army of God (*militia dei*). It made a strong appeal to the Roman soldiery, and is generally thought to have been a serious rival to Christianity.

In Reinach's view the movements of the Roman Army and the great slave populations account for the spread of Mithraism. It began to move from East to West in 400 B.C., but it was not established as a great power until the reign of Trajan, about a century after Christ:—

Ninety years later the Emperor Commodus was himself initiated into the mysteries of Mithra, and by the end of the second century of the empire there was not a part of the Roman world where Mithraism had not its votaries. In the third and fourth centuries it continued to spread, despite the competition of adolescent Christianity. For a moment, the conversion of Constantine stemmed its course; then came the pagan reaction under Julian, and another outburst of energy. In the fifth century it disappeared along with paganism in general, but not without leaving profound traces in the minds of the Eastern populations.<sup>90</sup>

Dr. E. R. Bevan, however, considers that the extent of Mithraism has been exaggerated:—

The fact that monuments connected with the worship of the Phrygian Great Mother or of Isis or of Mithras are found in places far apart in Europe has probably given a false idea of the popularity of these cults in the west. . . . To speak of Mithraism as a rival which ran Christianity hard and almost captured the Roman Empire—language which has often been used by scholars in the past—seems excessive.<sup>94</sup>

*Christ and Mithras*

In *The Rise of Christianity*, Dr. Barnes made a statement about Mithraism for which he was sharply called to task by Dr. Blunt, Bishop of Bradford, in an official reply made at the request of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Dr. Barnes said :—

The likenesses between Mithraism and Christianity, as each had developed by the end of the second century of our era, were many. Each faith had borrowed from the other, and the borrowings of Christianity were perhaps the more extensive.

Dr. Blunt invoked the authority of Dr. Edwyn Bevan in an attempt to show that this was but one of many examples of the Bishop of Birmingham's reliance on out-of-date scholarship. There is considerable interest in this controversy for the Rationalist, because it has so often been said that Christianity borrowed from Mithraism. We are not now dealing with ideas that were merely in the air but with a religious worship practised side by side with early Christianity.

Dr. Bevan has given eight reasons why he thinks that Christianity owed only a superficial debt to Mithraism—and, indeed, to pagan mystery cults in general :—

(1) The Divine Being whom the Christians worshipped as Lord was Some One who had only a short while before been known as a real Man upon earth, not a nebulous figure in an imaginary past. As for believing that the Christian belief was derived from the pagan myths of Zagreus or Osiris or Attis, that can be supposed only by cranks for whom historical evidence is nothing. The death, at any rate, of Jesus was an unquestionable fact admitted by everybody, and the belief that Jesus was risen again certainly began in the primitive community of his disciples almost immediately after his death—amongst a group, that is to say, of Aramaic-speaking Jews in Palestine, the people least likely to be influenced by Hellenistic mystery religions.

(2) Osiris and Attis were not divine beings who had become men, but beings subject to death, slain against their will, who had become gods.

(3) The worshippers of Isis and Attis belonged to local congregations rather than to a widespread church.

(4) The service of Attis and Isis lacked the high morality of the Hebrew tradition. Mithraism was an exception in this respect and does seem to have contained an element of moral strength. This was because it had its roots in the religion of Zoroaster, which was more like the religion of the Old Testament than anything else outside it.

(5) Baptism had its antecedents in the Synagogue rather than in the pagan mystery association. As for the eucharist, before the initiate (of Mithra) there was set a piece of bread and a cup of water over which the priest uttered a ritual formula. Here, where the resemblance existed, the Christian Fathers took note of it. They said it was due to a deliberate imitation of the Christian eucharist by devils.

(6) Unlike the pagan mystery cults, the services of the Church were not secret.

(7) Still resembling Judaism, Christianity was marked by an intolerance quite unlike the temper of the pagan mystery religions.

(8) The important thing to grasp when we look at that bewildering medley of religions in the first century A.D. is that they belong to two main types—the type for which the time process was a vanity, to which Greek Stoicism and Hellenistic mystery religions belonged, and the type with a strong eschatological outlook, represented by Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity.<sup>94</sup>

It is evident that Dr. Bevan raises some issues that scholarship alone cannot decide. Once more we are confronted with the question: Are these parallels coincidences, or can we correlate them? If deliberate plagiarism be the charge, it is impossible on the evidence available to decide which of two religions running side by side borrowed most from the other, though Mithraism was on the scene in some form much earlier. We can, however, leave aside the possibility of conscious borrowing, as Reinach advises. He points out that this was a charge that was not even brought against the Christians by Julian the Apostate (who followed Mithra):—

We should do well, I think, to imitate this discretion, leave the word plagiarism alone, and attribute the startling likeness between the two religions to one influence operating identically on both—the influence of those old conceptions which, dating from a period undoubtedly earlier than the literary legends of paganism, yet retained their hold on the masses throughout the ancient world, and constituted a mystic environment which conditioned the form of Christianity and Mithraism alike.<sup>95</sup>

Dr. Bevan does not squarely face this issue. In his anxiety to show how little the Judaic-Christian tradition was affected by Hellenistic mysteries he does not seem to have noticed the significance of his admission that it had something in common with the eschatological outlook of Zoroastrianism. It is a matter of detail *which* non-Christian influence penetrated; the question is whether the ideas of Christianity are unique so that it

was impossible for them to have evolved in the same way as it must be admitted that other religions evolved—changing and spreading as the result of the normal processes of diffusion and syncretism.

Qualitative differences exist between many religions—though it is hard to see more than mere word-play in the often repeated argument that a god-man is intrinsically different from a man-god. More to the point is whether there was anything absolutely novel in the moral teaching of Christianity. According to Gilbert Murray :—

It is curious to observe how little of ancient philosophy has perished, and how few new ideas in the realms of metaphysics or morals have occurred to the human mind since the fourth century before Christ.<sup>94</sup>

### *Did Jesus Exist ?*

We must now consider the views of those “cranks” (as Dr. Bevan calls them) who are so impressed by the pagan parallels and the confusions and contradictions in the traditional Christian story that they do not so much despair of finding out the truth about Jesus as deny that he ever existed. This controversy is sometimes described as that of mythicists versus historicists. The principal modern mythicists are :—

J. M. Robertson, author of *Christianity and Mythology* ; *Pagan Christs* ; *The Historical Jesus* ; *The Jesus Problem* ; *Jesus and Judas*.

Thomas Whittaker, author of *The Origins of Christianity* (1904).

W. B. Smith, author of *Ecce Deus* (1906). (American.)

Arthur Drews, author of *Witnesses to the Historicity of Jesus*. (German.)

P. L. Couchoud, author of *The Enigma of Jesus* ; *The Book of Revelation : A Key to Christian Origins* ; *The Creation of Christ* (1924-39). (French.)

L. Gordon Rylands, author of *The Evolution of Christianity* ; *The Christian Tradition* ; *The Beginnings of Gnostic Christianity* (1927-40).

Edouard Dujardin, author of *The Ancient History of the God Jesus* (1938). (French.)

The myth theory goes back to the eighteenth century, when Volney published an essay suggesting that Jesus was a solar myth

derived from Krishna. A similar view was put forward by Dupuis. In 1840 Bruno Bauer, then professor of theology at Bonn, claimed that Jesus was an invention of Mark, who wrote the earliest Gospel at the beginning of the second century.

In 1900, J. M. Robertson's *Christianity and Mythology* drew attention to the possible implications of *The Golden Bough*. A novel feature of Robertson's contribution was the theory that the traditional story of the passion and resurrection of Jesus arose out of a ritual drama in connection with the cult of Joshua. In primitive times that cult had involved human sacrifice. Vestiges of the ancient cult persisted in Samaria and Galilee, but the old barbarities were toned down to a sacramental meal followed by a mimic crucifixion and resurrection.

Jesus, Robertson points out, is the Greek form of the Hebrew name, Joshua. He considers that Mark ix, 38 shows that exorcism was performed in the name of Jesus or Joshua in pre-Christian times. In itself this does not take us far, but Robertson claims that the story of Barabbas supplies an important additional clue. In the canonical Gospels this clue does not appear, but a version well known to Origen (in the third century) reads: "And they had then a notable prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. . . . 'Whom will ye that I release unto you? Jesus Barabbas or Jesus which is called Christ.' " Now Barabbas means Son of the Father; and as Jesus is a form of Joshua, Jesus Barabbas can be translated Joshua, Son of the Father. So far so good; the next step involves a leap.

It was quite common in primitive sacrifice for the son to be a substitute for the father. An echo of this may be detected in the story of Isaac; and again, as Frazer comments on an early form of the Passover, "the one thing that looms clear through the haze of this weird tradition is the memory of a great massacre of the first-born," though some scholars disagree.

Another clue noted by Robertson is thought by many critics to be even less substantial. Philo, a Jewish Gnostic and a contemporary of Paul, tells of an anti-Semitic riot in Alexandria, where he lived. The enraged mob seized a lunatic named Karabas, dressed him in a mock robe, crown, and sceptre, and acclaimed him in Aramaic as the Lord. At once the ancient pattern of a mock-coronation springs to mind; and there are no grounds for thinking that it had passed into oblivion. There is

still a trace of it in the buffoonery of All-Fools' Day. Robertson contends that Karabas is a mistaken rendering of Barabbas.

It is necessary for Robertson to postulate the continuance of a ritual drama, associated with Joshua, until after the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Passion plays were admittedly not uncommon in the ancient world. The myth of Osiris was enacted in earliest times in Egypt. It is well established that Greek Tragedy was derived from the Dionysian Mysteries. What is required in the case of the supposed Joshua cult, however, is a different kind of secularization; instead of ritual begetting myth, which becomes frank *fiction*, myth begets what purports to be *fact*. At a certain point the make-believe is taken for reality; the saviour-god who was slain and rose again in mimicry every spring is given a local habitation. Play-acting becomes mixed up with violent, historical events.

These events were the disasters that overtook the Jews in A.D. 70. Some of them had dreamed of a warrior Messiah who would overthrow the power of Rome. Things turned out differently, and if the Jews as a whole had accepted a revolutionary role they would not have been tolerated in the Empire. They would not have been licensed to practise a religion that seemed so strange to the Roman—a licence that was subsequently withdrawn from the Christians once it became clear that they were not merely a Jewish sect and were, indeed, repudiated by official Jewry.

### *Christos and Chrestos*

This rejection by the Jews of what seemed a subversive heresy led the votaries of Joshua to proselytizing activities among the Gentiles. Messiah, which means "Anointed One," was translated into Greek as "Christos"; but it became confused with the word "Chrestos," which means Good. Chrestos was a special title of the underworld gods of the Samothracian mysteries, also of Hermes, of Osiris, and of Isis. In short, Chrestos is the appellation of a mystery-god.

Robertson writes:—

The two words were pronounced alike; and the coincidence is often such as would be made by ancient thinkers, wont to lay great stress on words. In the gospel phrase so loosely rendered "my yoke is easy," the Greek adjective is *chrestos*; in the epistles *chrestotes* is the word used

in the phrase "the goodness of God"; and in the familiar Pauline quotation from Menander "good manners" is in the Greek *chreste ethe*. Among the Pagans again, this epithet constantly figured on the kind of tomb called *heroon*, erected to distinguished persons . . . who in consequence of this very epigraphic formula came in later times to be regarded as Christian martyrs. . . . There was thus on the Christist side an appeal to Gentiles on the lines of a name or badge already much associated with Gentile religion, and attractive to them in a way in which the name Christ, as signifying the "one anointed," would not be.<sup>98</sup>

The confusion is illustrated by a letter which the Emperor Hadrian wrote from Alexandria: "Here the worshippers of Serapis are Christians, and those who call themselves Bishops of Christ are devotees of Serapis." And Suetonius speaks of Claudius expelling the Jews from Rome in A.D. 49 for rioting under the instigation of Chrestos.

According to Robertson, the cult of Joshua the Messiah, translated into Greek as *Iesous Christos*, spread among the Gentiles. Membership was given to those who accepted the rite of baptism. The initiates were called *mystae*, like those of all rival religions. When Paul speaks of being "crucified with Christ" it is no mere metaphor.

As the Osirian worshipper spread himself on the cross and became one with Osiris; and as the priest of Attis personated Attis in his mysteries, so Paul or another personated Jesus in the mysteries of his sect.

Thus a dramatic or artistic representation of the crucified Christ gradually developed among the Gentiles and is the probable origin of the Gospel narratives:—

Anyone who will attentively follow the account of the Last Supper, Betrayal, Passion, Trial, and Crucifixion in the first Gospel, will see that it reproduces a series of closely continuous dramatic scenes, with no room given to such considerations as would naturally occur to a narrator of real events, and no sign of perception of the extreme improbability of the huddled sequence set forth. . . . We are reading the bare transcript of a mystery drama; a transcript so bare that, in the scene of the Passion, the speech beginning "Sleep on now" and that beginning "Arise, let us be going" are put together as if they were one utterance, without specification of the required exit and entrance between.<sup>98</sup>



Robertson concludes :—

The Gospels as we know them are a baseless fabric of myths of action and myths of doctrine leaving on scientific analysis "not a wrack behind" save the speechless crucified Messiah of Paul's propaganda, only in speculation identifiable with the remote and shadowy Jesus ben Pandira of the Talmud, who may have died for some forgotten heresy a hundred years "before Christ."

The Talmud is a collection of rabbinical writings divided into two parts: (a) the Mishnah, or oral teaching, written between A.D. 90 and 220, which does not mention either Jesus or Christianity; (b) the Gemara, or "completion," written between A.D. 220 and 500, which tells of Jesus ben Pandira, who was put to death (according to one version) in the reign of Alexander Jannæus 103-78 B.C. We read :—

On the eve of the Passover, Jesus the Nazarene was hung. During forty days a herald went before him crying aloud: "He ought to be stoned because he practised magic, has led Israel astray and caused them to rise in rebellion. Let him who has something to say in his defence come forward and declare it." But no one came forward, and he was hung on the eve of the Passover.

### *Varieties of Mythicism*

Whittaker, Drews, Rylands, and Dujardin accept a great deal of Robertson's theory and make fresh contributions. The details of their agreements and disagreements must be sought in their works. What is common to them all is the idea that a mythical being came to be regarded as having really lived on earth. What they all deny is the culhemeristic view of a man who became deified.

Whittaker claims that a statement by Origen shows that the postulated passion play must have been continued until the second half of the second century. He also draws attention to a passage in the Roman prophetic books known as the Sibylline Oracles, dating from A.D. 80, which identifies Joshua with the Christian Jesus :—

Then shall one come again from heaven, an excellent hero; He who spread his hands on a tree of beautiful fruitage; best of the Hebrews all, who stayed the sun in his course once, bidding him stay with words that were fair and lips that were holy.

Lenin became acquainted with the writings of Arthur Drews, and the mythicist theory is widely accepted by Russian Communists. Drews, however, like W. B. Smith, was a theist. He considered himself to be merely purging Christianity of legendary dross.

Dujardin, seizing on the identification of Jesus with Joshua, seeks to trace the cult to totemism. Joshua was "the son of Nun," which means "fish"; and Dujardin contends that the cult of an eel-god persisted into the second century. He points to the symbolization of Jesus as a fish in the catacombs; but Howell Smith comments that although there are paintings of fishes, none of them has the appearance of an eel.

When, according to the mythicists, did the change from legend to history occur? Dujardin suggests that there was an hallucination after a secret sacramental meal shared by Galilean fishermen and peasants who had migrated to Jericho when Herod Antipas founded the city of Tiberias in honour of the emperor. The scene of this ritual meal was Gilgal (one of the many ancient cromlechs, like the setting where "Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before Yahweh"); and the date was A.D. 27. Peter and some others believed they had seen the risen god.

The story spread among the Greek-speaking Jews of the Dispersion. At first the main import of the message was essentially Jewish—the end of the world was at hand. The note was changed after the fall of Jerusalem, and the politically subversive character of the movement became effaced.

Rylands, who made a close study of Gnosticism, stresses the Gnostic element in the Pauline Epistles and holds that the earliest Gospel—which, it is widely agreed, we do not now possess—is best represented by the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*, dated in its present form about A.D. 140. He considers that the Odes of Solomon, discovered in 1908, are pre-Christian. If that is accepted, a sect must have existed before the date assigned to the historical Jesus, who revered Christ as the Logos, which is the divine Reason or Word in a mystical context, and is equivalent to the "Wisdom" of the theosophical Jews.

The concept of Logos has affinities with the Egyptian Thoth, who was the Heart, the Tongue, the Mind of Re, the sun-god. Whatever Thoth named sprang into existence. He was identified with Hermes by the Greeks and a vast Hermetic literature came

into being between 50 B.C. and A.D. 150, though some authorities date it later.

Esoteric doctrines undoubtedly flourished in Alexandria in the time of Philo, who appears to have known nothing about the historical Jesus, though he calls the Logos "Christ." He speaks of it also as "First begotten Son of God," and "Heavenly Man."

Couchoud does not think that the idea of an historical Christ occurred to anyone before the second century. Christianity resulted from a fusion between the *Christos* of Jewish Messianism and the *Chrestos* of Gnosticism; hence its contradictions. He holds that the most primitive version of the Gospel is that of Marcion, a Christian by birth and a sea-captain. According to Marcion's Gospel, Jesus was not born of Mary but descended from heaven in the likeness of a man. Most scholars, however, regard Marcion's work as a distortion of Luke's Gospel.

W. B. Smith takes a somewhat different line. He identifies Jesus with the saviour-aspect of Yahweh. The pre-Christian sect who worshipped Jesus were Nazarenes, a name derived from *nazar* ("to keep" or "to guard.") Smith mentions a papyrus, dated by some authorities as second century B.C., but by others as third century A.D., which contains the formula, "I adjure thee by the God of the Hebrews, Jesus." It is therefore suggested that Christianity is a continuation of Jewish monotheism, and that the Gospels were originally devised as allegories to veil an esoteric teaching.

### *The Historicist Case*

One general criticism often brought against the various forms of the myth theory is that the evidence is meagre and the constructions strained. The complaint is also made that there is too much readiness to dismiss texts that do not fit in as forgeries or interpolations. Also, there are obvious dangers about postulating a secret cult or a secret meaning. But all who consider this perplexing problem without having first made up their minds on *a priori* grounds must admit that the mythicists have shed some light at least on dark places. They call attention to one outstanding fact that can hardly be denied by the secular historian, namely that there are certain categories, certain forms of thought and imagery, which no new religious movement seems able wholly to avoid. Whether these categories are due to sociological

or psychological causes is a matter of controversy. But while admitting that a very great deal of the traditional Christian picture is mythical, the historicists do not admit that a human Jesus can be eliminated altogether.

A fair and lucid presentation of the historicist case from the Rationalist point of view is made by A. D. Howell Smith in *Jesus Not a Myth* (1942). He regards the evidence in favour of Robertson's Joshua cult as thin. The Sibylline text quoted by Whittaker is "very interesting but throws no light whatever on the alleged pre-Christian Joshua (Jesus) cult." As for the Passion play :—

Even if some dramatic mystery has helped to shape the Gospel accounts of the last days of Jesus, the statement of Robertson that whoever added the Passion story to the First and Second Gospels was transcribing from a dramatic text seems to go far beyond the data.<sup>95</sup>

If the Christian movement was, as W. B. Smith alleges, a protest against idolatry, "a crusade for monotheism" in which Jesus is simply Yahweh in another guise, "why does the New Testament repeatedly distinguish between Jesus and God, making one the Son and the other the Father? Why was he credited with a virgin birth, an expiatory death, and a physical resurrection? . . . If the object of the Gospels was to preach monotheism, why, as F. C. Conybeare pertinently asks, is there no text that 'betrays on the part of Jesus, their central figure, any such crusading spirit? Jesus everywhere assumes his hearers to be monotheists like himself—he speaks as a Jew to Jews—and perpetually reminds them of their Father in heaven.'" Again, why should Jesus be made to say that his own generation would not pass away before the Messianic Kingdom is established by authors who, if they wrote as late as the mythicists contend, must have known that no one of that generation could be alive?

"But to place a long-worshipped mythical figure in Judea under the Roman Emperor Tiberius, and to make him suffer at the hands of Pontius Pilate, was a daring thing to do, and the motive for so doing has never been explained by the mythicist," Howell Smith continues. He refers to the writings of Papias, Bishop of Hieropolis, who wrote before A.D. 150 :—

There is no doubt, however, that those with whom Papias conversed were convinced that they were removed by only a few decades

from the immediate followers of Jesus. Such historic links do not exist in the case of any of the Saviour gods of the mystery cults.

One of the strongest points Howell Smith makes is that the mythicists favour a very late dating of the Gospels. Couchoud puts their composition approximately between 135 and 142. Dr. Barnes, in *The Rise of Christianity*, relegates the Gospels to the second century. Those who uphold the traditional dates have taken heart from two comparatively recent discoveries: (1) The Chester Beatty papyri, a group of Scriptural manuscripts ranging in date from the second to the fourth century, and therefore older than either the Codex Vaticanus or the Codex Sinaiticus, which were hitherto believed to be the oldest extant authorities for the text of the Greek Bible; (2) The John Rylands papyrus, found in 1935. According to Sir Frederic Kenyon:—

It is a tiny fragment, measuring only about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  by  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches, bearing on both sides of it portions of a few verses of the Fourth Gospel, ch. xviii, 31-33, 37, 38; but its importance lies in the fact that papyrological experts agree in assigning the date of its writing to the first half of the second century. Small therefore as it is, it suffices to prove that a manuscript of this Gospel was circulating, presumably in provincial Egypt where it was found, about the period A.D. 130-150. Allowing even a minimum time for the circulation of the work from its place of origin, this would throw back the date of composition so near the traditional date in the last decade of the first century that there is no longer any reason to question the validity of the tradition.

Yet how are we to measure the "minimum time" for the Gospel to reach Egypt? The new discoveries show that the very late dating favoured by some critics cannot be easily defended, but they by no means establish the traditional view. Howell Smith, after considering this papyrological evidence, concludes as follows:—

In the light of all the evidence so far available we seem justified in regarding Mark, or an earlier version of it, as having been composed about A.D. 70, just before, or just after, the destruction of Jerusalem; Luke as a work of about A.D. 80, unless, as seems probable, its author knew the writings of Josephus, in which case this Gospel must have been composed after A.D. 96; and Matthew as dating about A.D. 100, with additions made perhaps twenty years later.

The references found in the work of the historian Josephus (A.D. 37-100) raise the question of forgery. This is discussed

from the Jewish point of view by Robert Eisler; and the Talmudic evidence has been dealt with from the standpoint of a modern Jew by Joseph Klausner in *Jesus of Nazareth* (1922). F. C. Conybeare writes as an historicist and Rationalist in *The Historical Christ* (1914), which is described by a Christian scholar, Prof. F. C. Burkitt, as "the best refutation of the various theories that the Gospel story is not historical at all, but wholly mythical."

Other contributions of unquestioned importance are Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Eng. trans. 1910), Maurice Gogol's *Jesus the Nazarene: Myth or History?* (1925) and *The Life of Jesus* (1932); and Charles Guignebert's *Jesus* (1935).

## Chapter Twelve

### THE BIBLE AND REVELATION

The source-book of Christianity. Catholics and the Bible. Anglicans and the Bible. Higher and Lower Criticism. The Old Testament. The New Testament. The Septuagint. Liberal Protestantism. The Tübingen School. Schweitzer. Form-history. Christian existentialism. Typology.

ALL Christian Churches claim to be in some sense the guardians and interpreters of a message from God. Whether God has revealed anything to the rest of mankind is a question on which opinion is divided. St. Thomas Aquinas held that whereas reason could not have discovered the truths unique to Christianity, it was possible for the good pagan to obtain an inferior knowledge of God. Thus Catholics distinguish between Natural Theology, which yields the sort of knowledge accessible to Plato, Aristotle, and non-Christians generally, and Dogmatic (revealed) Theology, which is regarded as a special revelation, grounded in the Scriptures and sacred traditions, from which reason can make valid deductions.

Those Reformers who stressed the total depravity of human nature as a consequence of the Fall denied that non-Christian systems of thought contained genuine knowledge of God. It is somewhat difficult to understand how they could regard such a pagan philosopher as Plotinus, for example, as wholly deluded, since he speaks the almost universal language of mysticism. A more moderate line was taken by St. Augustine: "The philosophers have found God as truth, but without Christ they will not find the Way to Him." The sterner view is voiced in our time by Karl Barth, perhaps the most influential of contemporary Protestant theologians.

But whatever opinions may be held about *general* revelation, there is common agreement that the Scriptures contain a *special* revelation. The Bible is regarded by Protestants and Catholics alike as the source-book of Christianity. Until the nineteenth century this position could be stated without much ambiguity. It is true that the Catholic Bible contained more books than the

Protestant version and that a different translation was used. Also, the Roman Church refused to accept individual interpretations of the text. But, as a modern writer puts it:—

From the days when the canon of the New Testament was finally determined in the ancient Church until the rise of Biblical criticism in the nineteenth century the traditional Christian view of the nature of divine revelation was that it consisted of truth supernaturally communicated to men in propositional form. This divine truth, which was beyond the possibility of discovery by the unaided human reason, was contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The Bible was thus the only source book for our knowledge of revealed truth. Its supernatural origin was attested by miracle and prophecy—that is, by the miraculous occurrences which accompanied the events which its writers described, and by the fact that these writers were able to predict events which came to pass centuries after their own day. The task of the theologian was therefore to discover the meanings of the scriptural words—their literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical meanings—and then to arrange these meanings and present them in the form of a complete system of dogma.<sup>100</sup>

This is obviously what early Rationalists attacked; but many Churchmen are now at pains to disavow it. They complain that a great deal of Rationalist criticism is out of date, since it is aimed at a Fundamentalism that is no longer held. There is a certain insularity in their protest, because the Roman Church—hardly a negligible part of Christendom—firmly adheres to the view that the truths of revelation can be expressed as propositions. There is, too, skilful strategy in this latest form of defence. The illusion is deliberately created that the Church is moving forward to an advanced position; and in any case it is practically impossible to criticise truths that are not put into propositional form—or to defend them, one would have thought.

### *Methods of Interpretation*

Various methods of interpreting the Scriptures have been followed in the past. The literalist method resulted in absurdities with which every educated person is familiar. It entails that there really was a Garden of Eden, that Jonah really was swallowed by the whale, that Joshua really did cause the sun to stand still. Outside the Bible Belt, as the southern part of the United States is sometimes called, this extreme position is rarely met. Never-



theless, once you begin to pick and choose among miracles it is difficult to stop. It is no more miraculous for Elisha's iron axe-head to float than for Jesus to walk on the water or rise from the dead.

The Roman Church has well understood that by merely dislodging a stone we may start an avalanche. Catholics are of all people the least likely to worry about the incredibility of miracles. As the Church has the sole power to interpret doctrine, and as its pronouncements are binding on the faithful, it can continue to affirm in perfect safety the doctrine of the Council of Trent, which "receives with piety and reverence all the books of the Old and New Testament, since one God is the author of each." This opinion was underlined as recently as 1903 in the Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, and Modernism was condemned by Pius X in 1907.

An authoritative commentator tells us :—

Of no human composition, however excellent, can it be said that God is its author. And the divine origin of the Scriptures implies its perfect truth. We know for certain, St. Irenaeus argues, that the Scriptures are perfect, since they are spoken by the Word of God and by the Spirit. Some few Catholic theologians have, indeed, maintained that the Scriptures may err *in minimis*—i.e., in small matters of historical detail which in no way affect faith or morals, though such an opinion has never obtained any currency in the Church.<sup>101</sup>

However, this is not quite the same as Fundamentalism :—

Just as Catholics are bound to defend the authority of the Bible against the new school of Protestants who have come to treat it as an ordinary book, so they are compelled to withstand the Protestant exaggeration, on the other side, according to which the word of God is contained in Scripture and in Scripture alone. . . . Indeed, if the study of the Bible has been an indispensable requisite, a greater part of the human race would have been left without the means of grace till the invention of printing. More than this, parts of the Bible are evidently unsuited to the very young or to the ignorant, and hence Clement XI condemned the proposition that "the reading of Scripture is for all."<sup>101</sup>

The Anglican view, as expressed in *Doctrine in the Church of England*, is very different :—

The use made of the Bible as an authoritative source of teaching should be controlled by the following considerations :—

(1) The authority ascribed to the Bible must not be interpreted as prejudging the conclusions of historical, critical, and scientific

investigation in any field, not excluding that of the Biblical documents themselves.

(2) Christian thinkers are not necessarily bound to the thought-forms employed by Biblical writers.

(3) The Biblical writings display a wide variety of literary type. . . . The supreme spiritual value of some parts of the Bible is not shared by all.

(4) In estimating the relative spiritual value of different portions of the Bible the standard is the Mind of Christ as unfolded in the experience of the Church and appropriated by the individual Christian through His Spirit. That is to say, the stages of the Biblical revelation are to be judged in relation to its historical climax.

The actual teaching of Christ, as recorded in the New Testament, "was conditioned by the thought-forms and circumstances of the time. The record cannot be accepted as always reproducing the *ipsissima verba* of our Lord." <sup>2</sup>

These are big concessions to Modernism. For the Protestant Churches, though not for the Roman Church, a new attitude towards revelation has been taken up as a result of nearly a century of scientific and historical scrutiny of the Bible. Rome, as we have seen, rejects the findings of critical scholarship. Anglicans and Free Churchmen accept some of them and compromise according to individual tastes.

### *Fact versus Revelation*

As Nietzsche once remarked, if God made a revelation to man it is strange that the divine intention is not more clearly expressed. The special revelation, which should have united Christians against a world in outer darkness, is not very helpful if we cannot be sure of its meaning. Rationalists, of course, welcome the application of scientific method to the whole difficult problem of what the Scriptures are, and what the words meant to the human authors.

Insofar as the Churches accept such findings they follow the Rationalist practice, and a good many individual Churchmen have followed the logic through and ended as Unitarians, if not sceptics. Some continue to shut their eyes to the new light thrown on the Christian source-book; and others have somehow persuaded themselves that although the Bible may not be true in a straightforward sense it may nevertheless have the value of an

allegory or an analogy. Here again it is interesting to see how variously those who claim to have a revelation of the purposes of God react to the crisis provoked by Biblical criticism.

What are the real feelings of a scholarly Catholic? How can he adapt himself to infallible pronouncements that seem—at least to an outsider—to contradict flagrantly what any self-respecting historian must admit as evidence? Father H. de Smedt, the learned Jesuit author of *Principes de la Critique Historique*, explains as follows:—

To be called upon to make a sacrifice in these matters presupposes the possibility of a genuine opposition between historical truth and revealed truth. But since such an opposition is quite beyond all question, the critic has no ground for anxiety. It may happen, we agree, that some fact asserted by historical documents of unquestionable authority seems at first sight to be in contradiction with the teachings of faith. But more attentive examination of the fact in question, and the doctrine opposed to it, soon reveals that there is no difficulty in reconciling them, and that the supposed contradiction is in reality only the result of inaccurate knowledge of either or both. And further, even if it should happen that all attempts at reconciliation prove at first to be fruitless, and the most searching examination furnishes no means of agreement—an event which has never yet come within our experience—this need never disquiet the Catholic savant. He will wait again for light without being troubled by the shouts of triumph of the enemies of religion who are always so alert to claim a victory despite the many hard lessons such hasty folly has brought against them. This patience will be in every respect, and particularly for the sincerity of his faith and the peace of his soul, far preferable to the violent effort he would have to make to twist the evidence of a fact which for the moment stands opposed to convictions reached from a source higher than science.<sup>12</sup>

It is significant that the only alternative mentioned to shutting one's eyes is to "twist the evidence." The above passage seems to mean that when a Catholic historian is in a difficulty he must wait piously for it to pass away. He may have to wait a lifetime—but what matter? The Church is everlasting, and the explanation of all that is baffling will be found, if not in this world, then in the next. No doubt in a well-organized Catholic society the vigilance of the Holy Office would see to it that few perplexities, and certainly no Higher Criticism, found their way into print.

An opposite attitude is typified by the Bishop of Bristol, Dr. F. A. Cockin. He welcomes the new discoveries :—

The consequences of the introduction of the critical method have been, of course, nothing less than revolutionary. That its use has in a number of cases been carried too far, resulting in extravagantly destructive views, cannot be denied. Such exaggeration was almost inevitable and sound scholarship has already begun to correct it. But in the main its results have been of incalculable value. It has enabled us to verify past any doubt the substantial accuracy of the record of Hebrew history, of the life of Jesus, and of the origins of the Christian community. It has removed the intolerable difficulties in which the literalist method of interpretation involved the Christian mind, by enabling us frankly to recognize the fact of development in man's apprehension of God, and the economy of God's revelation of Himself to meet that development. And it has put into our hands a tested and established instrument for the discernment of the original meaning of the writers whose words are preserved for us in the Bible.<sup>102</sup>

These are bold and even surprising claims, and at first glance the casual reader may not notice the extreme care of the phrasing. What is meant by "substantial" accuracy? Is it *really* the case that modern scholarship has given us a clearer view of the historical Jesus? In what way does the doctrine of development, so artlessly introduced, differ from the famous theory of development suggested by Newman and rather grudgingly adapted to the needs of Catholic theology? No doubt we are in a far better position today to judge the original meaning of the authors of the Scriptures; but we also know that they frequently contradict one another and that their names are not always those accepted by tradition. Let us look briefly at some of the conclusions of Biblical critics.

### *The Old Testament*

The effect of nearly a century of scholarship may be judged by the kind of results accepted by an interdenominational conference appointed to recommend what religious teaching should be given in London County Council schools in accordance with the Education Act, 1944. The outcome was *The London Syllabus of Religious Education*, intended as a guide to teachers faced with the problem of giving compulsory religious instruction for the first time in the history of education in this country. The line taken is that the Bible is not inerrant; that it contains a

progressive revelation of God, which is why the older portions seem so barbaric; and that it contains a certain amount of myth.

That the books are, in the main, a patchwork of writings set down at widely separated periods is admitted :—

The books of the Old Testament are mostly compilations and many are anonymous. With few exceptions—namely, parts of Ezra and Nehemiah, some prophetic writings, and a little of the history—most of the material was first handed down by oral tradition. Later, collections of this material were made and written down, and finally, after a number of additions (introduced often over a period of centuries) and compilations of similar or differing collections worked over from time to time by a series of editors and concluding with a fresh breaking-up of some sections into books, the Old Testament reached its present form.<sup>103</sup>

This is what Rationalists have long been saying. We have only to recall the bitterness with which Rationalists were assailed not so long ago for doubting the truth of Holy Writ to realize what a victory has been achieved. As Professor S. H. Hooke writes, “those who hold that the Bible cannot contain errors must regard it as the sole authority on every department of human knowledge.” He goes on to say (with some exaggeration, surely) :—

The vulnerability of this position was very early perceived, and it is hard for the Rationalist Press to point out any errors in the Bible which Celsus had not already pointed out in Origen’s day (c. A.D. 185–254).<sup>104</sup>

The significant thing is that until comparatively recently, the errors were not pointed out by Christians; the first impact of Biblical criticism produced shock and anger. The storm raised by Dr. Barnes’s *The Rise of Christianity* shows that such reactions are by no means dead and that Rationalists have won an important battle but not the campaign.

Subterfuges are not lacking in *The London Syllabus* to explain away what seems scarcely possible for any educated person outside the Roman Catholic Church to deny. These may do incalculable harm to the mind of the child; but at least it is a gain that many results of criticism will be incorporated. For example, the *Syllabus* states :—

For many generations history and legends, songs and poems, myths and laws (some of the last already in writing) had been handed down

until, in the middle of the ninth century B.C., a man or group of men, living in Judah, gathered together those they knew and wrote them down. The resulting document is known as J, since it originated in Judah, and Yahweh is the name which it most frequently uses for God. The same was done in Israel in the following century by people who did not know J. This second document is called E, Israel being known also as Ephraim, and Elohim being the name used for God. At a later date J and E were combined, and since many of the same stories occurred in both—with certain variations—these were interwoven, naturally causing discrepancies in the narrative. During the seventh century a group known as the Deuteronomistic writers—whose document is known as D—revised the written law and produced a new section (probably Deuteronomy xxii-xxvi) and also supplied a framework for the existing JE, and finally, about a century later, priestly writers added more material, known as P—poetical, legal, and statistical—to JED, thus completing that part of the Old Testament, apart from some further editorial comments and emendations. This complicated process accounts not only for contradictions and repetitions in the books but also for the varying conceptions of God. In J He appears as a superman walking in the garden of Eden in the cool of the evening and enjoying the savour of Noah's sacrifice, but in later E He does not appear to man face to face, He speaks from behind a cloud or through the words of an angel. D emphasizes His moral nature and in P He is shown as transcendent (e.g., Genesis i), the Creator, above and beyond all that man can understand, the God portrayed by Deutero-Isaiah (e.g., Isaiah xi).<sup>103</sup>

What can this mean except that for more than two thousand years a false idea has been propagated by the custodians of the divine revelation? Neither the apostles, the authors of the New Testament, nor the members of the various œcumenical councils knew anything about J, E, and P.

The Church did not gain this information as a result of the promised guidance by the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, it is thanks to the labours of men whom orthodox Churchmen have reviled that Dr. Cockin can claim that "it is no exaggeration to say that we are in a position to understand and appreciate the true nature and meaning of the Bible in a way which has not been possible for any previous generation."<sup>102</sup>

### *The New Testament*

It would be a mistake to suppose that critical interpretations are in perfect agreement. There are some facts which are beyond

dispute, such as the patchwork compilation of the Old Testament given above. As regards the New Testament, it is generally agreed that Matthew and Luke made use of the Gospel of Mark, which was therefore earlier, and of a collection of sayings of Jesus, now lost, called Q (from the German *Quelle*—spring or source).

Matthew himself also made use of a lost narrative that probably came from the Church in Jerusalem, and this is referred to as M. Again, it is acknowledged that the Fourth Gospel is in a special category and was the latest to appear.

In Q, which may have been a translation of an Aramaic document, there is no mention of the death or resurrection of Jesus; there are no miracles and only two cures—that of the blind demoniac and that of the paralytic girl. Jesus does not claim to be the Messiah, but to possess the final revelation of God's nature.

In Mark there is no account of the birth or childhood of Jesus, and the verses after xvi, 8 are late additions. Matthew is Jewish in tone and contains the formula of Baptism. It is the only Synoptic Gospel to mention the Kingdom of Heaven and the Church. The expression "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost" which occurs in xxviii, 9, is thought to be an interpolation. Luke is written in good Greek (in contrast to the unpolished style of Mark) by the author of the Acts of the Apostles.

The Fourth Gospel is thought to have appeared too late to have been written by John, the son of Zebedee, and the Gnostic tone of it contrasts with the homely simplicity of Mark. Jesus is represented as the divine Logos, the Word made flesh. He is symbolized as the Vine, the Bread, the Light, the Door, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection, and the Way. Those who accept these Gospels as revelation must explain why the various strands contradict each other in the narratives.

As we saw in our examination of the Jesus problem, the early traditions suggest that, for some, Jesus was a Jewish Messiah prophesying the imminent end of the world; for others he was the mystical Logos; and for yet others he was a human figure. Hence the controversy as to whether he really existed. There were many gospels and many other Christian writings competing for inclusion in the Bible. In A.D. 376 Athanasius defined the canon of twenty-seven books now in use, and subsequent Church councils gave the official seal of approbation.

If we take the Bible as a whole we can see how gradual the growth of the canon was. The first books that came to be regarded as canonical by the Jews were the *Torah* (Law), better known to us as the Pentateuch (Gr. *penta*, five; *teuchos*, book). In the fourth century B.C. the Torah was regarded as the fullest expression of the word of God. The Prophetic books were added between 250 and 175 B.C.; and these, together with the Psalms, and of course the Torah, seem to have constituted the Scriptures for Luke.

At the time of Jesus there was no Bible in our sense of the word, as the Jewish canon was not closed until the Synod of Jamnia, about A.D. 90. Sir F. G. Kenyon writes:—

Fundamentally, therefore, “the Bible as Christ knew it” consisted of the Hebrew Scriptures classified in these three divisions and embodied in leather rolls preserved in the synagogues. No such thing as the Bible in a single volume existed then, or for several centuries after. There was a roll of the Law; a roll (or more probably two or more rolls) of the Prophets; and detached rolls of the Hagiographa. And these rolls were not, at any rate normally, held in private possession. They belonged to the Synagogue. Only the trained scholars who understood Hebrew could read them, and although the Rabbis must have had means of private study the educated Jew in general would not be likely to possess a private copy of the Scriptures in Hebrew. Such acquaintance as he had with them, apart from hearing them read aloud and paraphrased in the synagogue, was due to the great translation known as the Septuagint, or the Version of the Seventy.<sup>94</sup>

The Septuagint was a translation into Greek begun about 200 B.C. and finished by the middle of the second century B.C. It contained those books, known as the Apocrypha, which were excluded from the definitive canon. There were some important differences in the text of the Greek and Hebrew versions. Jerome translated the Hebrew version into Latin (including the Apocrypha), and together with his revised version of the New Testament this forms the Vulgate, which is the official Bible of the Roman Church.

It is an interesting fact that Paul used the Septuagint, whereas Jerome employed the Hebrew version. The Authorized Version of 1611 was a translation into English from Hebrew and Greek. In the middle of the nineteenth century, however, new and important manuscripts were discovered and much has been learned about ancient Syriac and Coptic versions. The Codex Alexandri-



nus, fifth century, and the Codex Sinaiticus, fourth century, are both in the British Museum; the Codex Vaticanus, fourth century, had reposed in the Vatican Library since 1481, but had only been made accessible recently.

One obvious conclusion to be drawn from these facts is that we can scarcely speak of the truth of *the* Bible. There are many Bibles; and they are translations, or copies, or both. The hand of the copyist is not so dependable as that of the printer. In the course of dictation, or subsequent translation, or copying—inevitable before the age of printing—errors crept in and texts were sometimes added.

The object of criticism is to sort out this veritable jig-saw puzzle of corrupt texts and translations of translations, to reconstruct missing material as the anatomist reconstructs an extinct mammoth from a bone, to go back to the period before the written word supplanted the oral tradition.

The purely philological examination is usually called textual or Lower Criticism; the wider inquiry, which takes into consideration the evidence of ancient history and archaeology, is called Higher Criticism. The detailed findings are too complex to consider here; what is of more concern to us is how all these discoveries have modified the claim that the Bible is a divine revelation. In what sense is the Bible true?

There are various answers, but they can be brought under two headings: (1) Harnack and his successors in the Liberal Protestant tradition reject the fabulous and Pauline-Gnostic elements and regard the Bible as mainly a source of moral truth exemplified by the life of Jesus. (2) Karl Barth and the so-called Confessional Church maintain that the Bible reveals God's dealings with man in history. Associated with some members of this school is a method of interpreting Old Testament history called *typological*, and a mode of thinking called *existential*. These terms are becoming fashionable and they will presently be explained. To understand their meaning we must examine certain trends in theology during the past hundred years.

### *Liberal Christianity*

The origins of modern Liberal Protestantism go back at least as far as Kant, but they are more particularly associated in

Germany with Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Ritschl (1822-1889). Schleiermacher introduced a subjective note by emphasizing the importance of feeling. What was of more consequence than creed was man's consciousness of God. To be redeemed meant to receive this God-consciousness through Christ.

Insofar as Schleiermacher broke with rigid orthodoxy the movement he initiated was among the liberalizing tendencies of the nineteenth century; it helped to frame one possible solution of the dilemmas to come. A more rationalistic liberalism was presented at about the same time by W. E. Channing, of Baltimore. In a sermon preached in 1819 he said:—

Our leading principle in interpreting Scripture is this—that the Bible is a book written for men, in the language of men, and that its meaning is to be sought in the same manner as that of other books. . . . We grant that the use of reason is accompanied with danger. But we ask any honest man to look back on the history of the Church and say whether the renunciation of it be not still more dangerous.<sup>11</sup>

The road leading away from tradition very quickly branched in these two directions. On the one hand, revelation seemed to consist in private experience, here and now; consequently a Church was not necessary, and even sacred writings were of secondary value. On the other hand, revelation seemed to consist in understanding correctly certain external happenings, chiefly the life and teachings of Jesus. These tendencies were profoundly affected by the new method of analysing the Scriptures.

The first serious attempt at analytical criticism was made by a group of theologians under the leadership of F. C. Baur (1826-1860), known as the Tübingen school. Baur applied the philosophy of Hegel to Christianity at about the same time as Marx applied it to Communism. Philosophy apart, the Tübingen school laid emphasis on the clash in the early Church between those who regarded Jesus as the Messiah of the Jews and those who held, with Paul, that Jesus was the Messiah of the whole world.

Only four Pauline letters (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians) were accepted as genuine writings of Paul. Matthew represented the early, Jewish type of Christianity, Luke the Pauline

opposition. Among the members of this school were Schwegler, Zeller, Volkmar, Lipsius, Hausrath, Weizacker, Pfeiderer, and Schmiedel.

The Tübingen theory that Matthew was the earliest Gospel was disproved by the researches of later scholars, notably Harnack and Holtzmann, and the two-document hypothesis (that Mark and Q were the basic documents) was widely accepted. By the beginning of the present century liberal Protestantism had adapted itself to the findings of historical research and was very largely influenced by Ritschl.

As Canon Alan Richardson puts it:—

The true gospel is regarded as consisting in the simple facts about and teachings of the historical Jesus, who can thus be objectively portrayed by modern historical research, while the interpretations of St. Paul and the other apostles may be discarded as representing values for them which are no longer values for us. Hence the Ritschlians present the history of Christian dogma as pronouncing its own condemnation in the eyes of all unprejudiced Christian people. Harnack worked out this view with massive thoroughness in the learned volumes of his *History of Dogma*. The Creed of Nicea, the formulary of Chalcedon, the dogmatic writings of the Fathers, even the Epistles of St. Paul, represent "the work of the spirit of a decadent antiquity on the soil of the Gospel." The chief emphasis is placed upon the contrast between the original Gospel of Jesus and the theological interpretations of the Church, between the Sermon on the Mount and the Nicene Creed. . . . So we come to the familiar antithesis, beloved still today of the Rationalist press, between Jesus and Paul: Jesus taught a simple ethical monotheism; Paul invented Christology and is the real founder of Christianity.<sup>100</sup>

### *Religion without Miracles*

Ritschl endeavoured to avoid the danger of basing belief on internal evidence. Nor did there seem to be any need to do so as long as this type of Protestantism could feel that history was on its side. Dr. H. R. Mackintosh writes:—

The argument as actually unfolded often appears to rest on the assumption that the Person and life-work of Jesus confront us as a homogeneous piece of "profane" history the divine import of which is accessible to direct historical inspection, or can be made plain by sober rational deduction from obvious facts. The facts simply *qua* history are revelations.<sup>105</sup>

This is close to the view of Dr. Barnes, in the following :—

Some, who have been brought up in the belief that there is a deadly opposition between science and scholarship on the one hand and Christianity on the other, may be surprised that the result of the search is not a spiritual desert: there emerges, I submit, a lovely and satisfying faith which contains the essentials of the great Christian tradition. The time has come when mistaken assumptions of the pre-scientific, pre-critical era must be repudiated.<sup>80</sup>

If such a programme could be carried out a sort of Christian Rationalism might seem to be possible. It would be hardly distinguishable from Unitarianism. But Rationalists, whether or no they accept the historicity of Jesus, are mostly in agreement that the clear picture of an ethical teacher such as Liberal Protestants require cannot be supported.

A new turn was given to the inquiry in the early part of the twentieth century by the researches of Albert Schweitzer. He claimed that modern man could not comprehend the historical Jesus with his intense preoccupation with the end of the world. "The historical Jesus will be to our time a stranger and an enigma."

An equally negative result comes from the work of the latest type of criticism, the Form-history method; or *Formgeschichte*. Wellhausen (1844-1918), who did so much to establish the order of the documents of the Hexateuch and prove the lateness of the Priestly Code in the Old Testament writings, also showed the importance of endeavouring to classify such clues as we possess to the oral tradition that preceded the New Testament. This led to an important new approach by Martin Dibelius, who published the results of his investigation in 1919 :—

It assumes that in the oral period the tradition circulated in separate units which can be classified according to their form. . . . The separate units are classified into groups, the most obvious of which are sayings and narratives. But the exponents of this method are not content with analysis. They pass historical judgments upon the groups and the units, and then Form-history becomes Form-criticism, which is the name most commonly used in English. There is no agreed terminology about the groups. Paradigms (Dibelius), Apophthegms (Bultmann), Pronouncement-stories (Vincent Taylor) refer to similar though not the same groups. The names of others, such as Miracles, Myths, Legends, not only classify but pass historical judgments upon the forms.<sup>108</sup>

Traditionalists, such as Sir Frederic Kenyon, contend that there was not time for such elaborate processes as are required for Dibelius's *Formgeschichte* to develop.

What we are entitled to claim is that the books which we know as canonical were produced within some fifty years of the first century and that the evidence for their text is in all essentials early and good.

On the other hand, the existence and importance of varying traditions out of which the New Testament as we know it was composed are acknowledged by the best orthodox scholarship. Thus in a series of lectures on "The Life of Jesus" Professor T. W. Manson sums up as follows:—

One of the principal early by-products of the new movement was a series of streams of tradition about the Founder-Person and his public career. These streams of tradition have their original sources in Galilee and Jerusalem . . . the scenes of the Ministry; and in the course of their flow, as it were, form small lakes of standing tradition at various centres of Church life. The first of these of which we have any clear trace was formed probably at Antioch about A.D. 50. This we call Q. It may be associated with the apostle Matthew. At Antioch also we can locate a body of "Johannine" tradition and (perhaps between 60 and 70) another which supplied the material peculiar to Matthew (M). This M tradition, along with Q, was used to produce the revised and enlarged edition of Mark which we know as the Gospel of Matthew and may be regarded as the Antiochene Gospel. The earliest form of Antiochene tradition reappears at Ephesus in Paul's letters; it may be that he brought it there in the first instance. Later on we find the Johannine tradition of Antioch taking literary form at Ephesus in the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles, and at Antioch in the letters of Ignatius. Another reservoir of tradition was formed at Caesarea; and this, in combination with Q, may well have formed the first (and catechetical) draft of Luke's Gospel, which later (70-75), by the addition of extracts from Mark, was to become the first part of a public apologia for the new religion. In Rome another body of tradition issued from the teachings of Peter and took literary form in the Gospel of Mark about A.D. 58.

According to the continental Form-critics, however, the authors of the Gospels were really editors. It follows that, in the Gospels, Jesus is seen from the perspective of a special group or Church. An American scholar describes the present position in

terms that can give no comfort to those who rejoiced at the apparent collapse of Liberal Protestantism :—

The result is that New Testament scholarship now generally realizes that it is impossible to write a life of Jesus. No chronological framework for it exists, and the individual traditions inevitably bear the mark of the interests of the apostolic Church.<sup>11</sup>

### *How True is History ?*

What is a Churchman to do in circumstances such as these? There would seem to be two alternatives: he can either reject the critical method altogether, or he can face its destructive consequences and pass on to the standpoint of Rationalism. Actually the need for either of these hard choices is not usually admitted.

An attempt is now being made to accept that development of criticism which has made matters so difficult for liberals of the Ritschl or Harnack school, while evading the negative conclusions about the historical Jesus. To achieve this ingenious compromise it is necessary (1) to argue that history is not *really* history, but something else; (2) to contend that truth is not *really* truth, in the plain straightforward sense. In his difficulties the theologian is now debasing the intellectual currency; and, what is even more deplorable, he is openly glorying in the fact.

Dr. Barnes believes that the historian should be impartial. "I have sought with firm impartiality to reach the truth, so far as it can be ascertained," he writes.<sup>89</sup> The very possibility of impartial history is nowadays often denied. H. W. V. Temperley, in *Research and Modern History* (1930), has stressed that the collecting of facts is only a part of history-writing, and C. Oman, in *Memories of Victorian Oxford* (1941), states that even in his own memory the idea that history is a science has perished. "Not only do we repudiate the ideal of Ranke that history should be colourless, new, and impartial. We do not even suggest that it is desirable."

Reinhold Niebuhr, in *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1941), writes :—

It is impossible to interpret history at all without a principle of interpretation which history as such does not yield. The various principles of interpretation current in modern culture, such as the idea of progress or the Marxist concept of an historical dialectic, are all

principles of interpretation introduced by faith. They claim to be conclusions about the nature of history at which men arrive after a "scientific" analysis of the course of events; but there can be no such analysis of the course of events which does not make use of some presupposition of faith as the principle of analysis or interpretation.

The dangers of this doctrine are obvious enough. If we cannot hope to get the truth about history, then historical criticism of revelation does not matter. We need not be perturbed by the fact that, as Canon Richardson points out, "the rejection of the apostolic interpretation by liberal Protestants of the Harnack type was inevitably followed by the historical scepticism of Bultmann and the Form-critical school." Historical criticism cannot prove or disprove the truths of religion :—

There can be no impersonal, "objective" knowledge of historical and theological truth, because our knowledge of human existence is different from our knowledge of the external world which the natural sciences investigate. In the concrete sciences our personal *existence*, our whole being, is bound up with and, in an important sense, included in the object of our study. It is, of course, true that even in the natural sciences there can be no knowledge that is absolutely independent of any act of faith, or of assumptions which are incapable of scientific proof; but the *existential* character of the more concrete or human sciences greatly enhances the importance of the personal act of judgment, or of faith, which is involved in any study of them.<sup>100</sup>

It follows that in matters of religion the "impartiality" of the scientist is out of place. To call religious knowledge "existential" is to indicate that the scientific detachment which the Rationalist prizes is "neither possible nor desirable."

### *Christian Existentialism*

Christian Existentialism is responsible for the extraordinary revival of Kierkegaard, the Danish mystic who has been well described as a sort of Christian Nietzsche. In strange, violent language he drew a distinction between "professing" Christianity and "witnessing" it. Those who merely *profess*, regard religion as a series of propositional beliefs and outward acts; but the Christian *witness* involves a relation of the individual soul with the living God. The demand for this vital relationship impels us to approach the dead letter of so-called evidence with bias—indeed with passion.

“What is this word of God in Holy Scripture?” asks Professor W. Robinson :—

Obviously it does not mean that every word spoken in the Bible is a word spoken by God. There are many words in the Bible spoken by men, and there are even some spoken by the Devil; and further, much of the Bible is narrative. The Bible is mainly a book of *history*. If we examine the Bible as a whole we shall see that it is mainly concerned with “the mighty acts of God”—God in His saving attitude towards His people. . . . Much confusion has arisen through treating the Bible as if it were a compendium of *information* about this or that thing, a textbook on geography, or science, or astronomy, or ethics, instead of the book which reveals to us the creative and redemptive activity of God, which is the sure and saving Word of God.<sup>47</sup>

Thus liberal theology, which was moving towards a religion without revelation, has been succeeded by another type of theology altogether which turns back in the direction of orthodoxy. The new school is represented on the Continent by Barth, Brunner, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov; in America by Tillich, Niebuhr, and Horton; and in this country by C. H. Dodd, H. H. Farmer, J. S. Whalc, A. Vidler, and others.

Scientists and Higher Critics alike are put firmly in their places. The idea that “creeds do not matter” is no longer fashionable. Intense emotional experience and a changed way of life must be accompanied by dogmatism of a new sort. “Propositional thinking,” as we are told over and over again, must be replaced by “existential thinking.”

### *The New Theology*

All this is, no doubt, a symptom of the times. Passionate belief in the racial doctrines of Hitlerism was obtained by brushing all claims of scientific impartiality aside with contempt. And the actual creed propounded by the New Theology (as it is sometimes inadvisedly called) struggles for expression in the confused depths of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, which first appeared in English in 1936.

Barth regards Faith as a contradiction of Reason. He quotes Luther to the Higher Critics :—

We must take care not to defend the Gospel so that it collapseth. Let us not be anxious; the Gospel needeth not our help; it is sufficiently strong of itself.



In what sense, then, are the alleged facts of faith true? Can any plain answer be given to the question: How true is the Bible? We come now to the curious suggestion that from the Fall until the Resurrection there are a number of "mighty acts of God" which are more than mere history, although they appear in historical guise. God's dealings with Israel as described in the Bible are *analogies*, enabling us to understand future happenings. History *itself* is prophetic, because it shows the "type" of things to come, the "type" of interaction to be expected between God and man. The Jews really are the chosen people; the peculiarity of their history is that it foreshadows the divine Drama of the death and resurrection of Christ.

### *The Post-critical Phase*

This, presumably, is what Dr. Cockin has in mind when he speaks of the "post-critical" phase in which we are living. He quotes with approval from Professor Hodgson's *The Doctrine of the Trinity*:—

The revelation of God [in the Bible] is given not in words but in deeds . . . it is only of recent years that we have been able to see it standing out clear.

How clear it is may be judged from the following:—

It means that once we begin really to get the hang of the Bible we find in our hands certain great clues, which, rightly followed, enable us to see the whole development in its true perspective and to distinguish essentials from non-essentials. Among these clues are such themes as the Calling of People of God, Obedience and Apostasy, the Preservation of the True Faith by a Faithful Remnant, the Hope and the Coming of Messiah, the Great Rejection, the Calling of the New People of God, the Christian Church. And among them all there runs the master clue of History as God-centred. The whole drama is the drama of God's activity in Creation and Redemption.<sup>102</sup>

The critical reader may well feel impatient with this sort of language. What, after all, does it really mean? The whole of traditional theology rests on the doctrine of the Fall. Once that lynch-pin is removed the scheme collapses. If there was no real Fall there was no real need for a Redemption; and, if there was no Redemption in the traditional sense, Christ becomes little more than the ethical teacher of Liberal Christianity.

The New Theology seems to face both ways. The Fall is not history in the ordinary sense, and yet it is not myth. "It is, of course, a true *mythos*, that is, truth couched in symbolic form," says one modern apologist:—

What it means is that there is no historical experience in the race memory of man, let alone any actual experience, except of man in this fallen condition. As a myth bearing the truth of what has happened and of what does happen to man it is profoundly true and can only be denied by those who deliberately close their eyes to facts. It means that not only does man commit sins but that original sin is part of his nature.<sup>47</sup>

By whom was the first sin committed? The old orthodoxy at least gave a straight answer; it was committed by Adam. But the New Theology speaks of "man" in the abstract:—

We note that man broke a rule and discovered a principle. From a state of innocency he passed to one of moral responsibility: he knew good and evil. . . . The Bible is about God's double activity: His creative activity and His redemptive activity: and, in both, He is making a bid for fellowship with men.<sup>47</sup>

The difficulties of the Rationalist—and the objections of the Catholic, too, for that matter—are evaded by the use of such nebulous language. The story of the Fall is no less a myth because the word is written in Greek; myth is a translation of *mythos*, and both words mean stories that are false. Sometimes the New Theologians write in such a way that they seem to mean, by myth, what some scientists have meant by the expression "useful fiction." A mathematical point was described by Vaihinger as a useful fiction; there is no such thing in Nature, but it is of practical convenience to pretend that there might be. Clearly this would be a slippery path for the New Theologian to enter, but he can avoid it only by using imprecise language.

Professor Cornelius van Til has written a scathing account of Barthianism, and he accuses it of denying fundamentals of Christian teaching. He writes as a Calvinist, but even a Rationalist will feel some sympathy with his argument that the issues of an historic Fall and historic Redemption are obscured.

Professor van Til charges Barth with holding that "the Resurrection of Jesus Christ stands for the idea of the general progress of the human race towards ideal perfection. Miracle

is eliminated; and naturally there can be no place for the Second Coming in any literal sense." 107

Whether or no these views are really held by Barth, it is easy to see to what lengths typology may be carried. As a further example of how the new vagueness is expressed with a vehemence that creates the illusion of something definite being said, we may take Professor Robinson's statement:—

Knowledge of God is one thing, and it may be derived from many sources (in this sense we may speak of General Revelation and of Natural Theology); but the Holy Action of God is quite another thing, and it is this redemptive action of God, which must necessarily be confined to one place and time and have the character of once-for-allness, which we mean when we speak of "revelation." 47

Fashions in theology come and go. Typological interpretation and "The Theology of Crisis" are no new things; to return to them is to go back to the period before the rise of critical method. The Rationalist is not deeply concerned about a family quarrel among Christians, but he will not be deceived into imagining that existential thinking is a novelty. It is, however, a retrogressive step and a return to the sheer obscurantism which, for a while, a more scientific attitude seemed likely to dispel.

It goes back to Pascal, whose recipe for unbelief was to attend Mass and use holy water. Indeed the roots of it can be found in St. Anselm: "The right order of proceeding is that we should believe the deep things of the Christian faith before we presume to discuss them by means of our reason" (*Cur Deus Homo*, Bk. I, ch. 2). The germ of it is in Augustine's famous saying: "Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore seek not to understand that thou mayest believe, but believe that thou mayest understand."

### *The Rationalist Answer*

The Rationalist attitude may be stated quite simply: however much we may differ about interpretations of evidence, we endeavour to sift the evidence impartially. Existential or biased thinking easily becomes a fanciful name for wishful thinking.

The core of the Rationalist case is that, in the last analysis, Christians of whatever sect or Church are driven to make assertions for which there is not a jot of evidence. They may (and do) make very different assertions, but in some sense they must hold

that they possess a means of discovering truth not available either to the scientist or historian as such.

They must also hold that, unlike other books, the documents of the Bible contain a special revelation of the mind of God not to be tested by ordinary methods.

No mere whittling down of the content of revelation will satisfy the Rationalist; no adoption of such terms as "Christian Rationalism" on the one hand, and "Christian Existentialism" on the other, can obscure the fact that ultimately we reach some propositions which the Christian accepts on *blind faith*. It is dishonest to pretend that Christianity can dispense with "propositional" knowledge or that the results of the most up-to-date scholarship actually make it easier to believe—if faith is *still needed*. In that case scholarship is beside the point; and it is more than strange that the custodians of "timeless and eternal truths" should wrangle over whether "Modernism" or "The New Theology" is the most up-to-the-minute.

We need not be impressed by the popular argument that without faith (in an order of Nature and induction, etc.) science itself would be impossible. There is all the difference in the world between a hypothesis or a rule of procedure and a revelation; the former can be discarded in the light of new evidence or to suit our convenience, but the latter is final and irrevocable. A divine revelation that merely claimed some degree of probability would be a contradiction in terms.

## Chapter Thirteen

### THE RECORD OF THE CHURCHES

The Early Church. Collegia. The persecutions. Constantine and the West. The suppression of heresy. The False Decretals. Teachings on sex and marriage. The doctrine of Hell. The Inquisition. The Reformation. The Church and the peasants. Attitudes to serfdom and slavery.

THE complaint that Rationalists tend to judge Christianity by its "roots" instead of by its "fruits" is a strange one. The fruits of Christianity are surely the lives of Christians and the record of the Churches. It is inevitable that we should speak of "Churches" in the plural because there is no *one* Christian Church, just as there is no *one* universally accepted version of the Bible.

This lack of unity, which is deplored by Christians of all denominations, is one of the most telling arguments against the claim to possess a special revelation. To the Protestants, who declare that *their* Bible is inspired, the Catholics retort that this is not so; only the *Catholic* Bible is God's Word. And they add, very shrewdly, that in the Apostolic Age, when the foundations of Christianity were laid, there was no Bible in existence at all. To this, however, the reply is usually made that Catholic teaching itself is defended by Scriptural texts; and so we have an argument in a circle.

What Christians in both camps would like to be able to show is that Christ founded a Church; that this Church grew from the tiny, Apostolic nucleus and preserved intact the divine revelation it had received. Every fresh re-statement and re-affirmation would be guided by the Holy Spirit, according to this theory. Schisms and heresies might arise from human obtuseness, but there would be a large, conspicuous, united Church, and an agreed collection of sacred writings.

All that had hitherto been said of Israel would be true of such a Christian Church, the new Christian covenant superseding the old Jewish one after the Incarnation. The Church would be the elect of God instead of an "elect race" (Deut. x, 15; Isa. xliii, 20), because the Gentiles would be included. "Many shall

come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. viii, 11; Luke xiii, 29.) Indeed, it is commonly held that the Greek word *Ecclesia*, in the New Testament, follows the usage of the Septuagint, where it is the equivalent of the Hebrew *Kahal*, meaning the solemn assembly of Israel, the people of God.

### *Roman and Anglican Theories*

Such a Church, composed of those living on earth and the souls of the departed in heaven, could be described metaphorically as the Body of Christ, or the Spouse of Christ. For a Churchman to be cut off from it would be even more dreadful than for a Jew to be "cut off from the soul of Israel"; as the famous saying goes, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, there is no salvation outside the Church.

It must follow that such a model organization could be distinguished quite easily by the unbeliever from secular organizations by the superior virtue of the members, by its unique harmony, and probably by supernatural manifestations.

This picture is not regarded by Catholics as too idealized; indeed, a favourite argument is that the Roman Catholic Church can be singled out from its rivals by the conspicuous marks of unity, holiness, and miraculous powers. And if we were to rely for our history on Catholic historians we should be struck by the way in which the Roman Church differs from all others. We should learn that it has never added one iota to the revelation made by Christ to the Apostles, that it has never failed to detect incipient heresy, that its Councils and Popes have obviously been guided in their careful deliberations by the Holy Ghost and have never contradicted previous, divinely-inspired pronouncements.

We should marvel at the sanctity of the Church in all ages; we should find it ever ahead of unenlightened public opinion, always setting an example in charitableness and compassion towards suffering humanity, preserving the lamp of culture in periods of darkness.

Protestants do not make quite such bold claims. Nevertheless, the semi-official *Doctrine in the Church of England* declares that "the Church has traditionally been affirmed to be characterized by the 'notes' of Unity, Holiness, Catholicity, and Apostolicity."

But it goes on to admit that unity has never been actually achieved :—

The divisions among Christians, as a result of which Christendom is split up into a number of competing and rival “denominations” and “communions,” are not the least grievous among the scandals that arise from moral imperfection. It is plain that at no time did all Christians, corporately or individually, so fully respond to their position as to exhibit entire sanctification.

Let us look at the facts of history and endeavour to make due allowance for the bias of those who have collated them. Is there anything in the historical record of the Churches to bear out the claim that they are essentially *different* from other social groups? Apart from extreme sanctity, are they even conspicuously more humane than secular organizations? Does the way that Church dogma grew suggest the slightest sign of supernatural guidance, or can it be just as well explained by ordinary means? In short, what is the real debt of the world to Christianity, and in what way (if any) is the Christian Church (if we can think of it as a unity) a wholly *exceptional* institution?

### *The Primitive Church*

In the first chapters of Acts, the Apostles are plainly regarded as the rulers of the Church, and this is what orthodox theory would lead us to expect. But they abruptly vanish from the scene, and there is no tradition about any of them until the third century. A belief grew up that they mostly went to the East, presumably to the Jews of the Dispersion.

Peter is said to have gone to the Asiatic provinces; and there is no good evidence in support of the other tradition that he founded the Church in Rome. Nor is there much support for the tradition that Thomas went as a slave to the court of King Gundaphorus, though there existed a Parthian king of that name in North-west India.

The truth is that we know nothing of the fate of the Apostles, and very little about Apostolic Christianity. The document called *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, discovered in 1883, is a Christianized version of a Jewish manual of instruction known as *The Two Ways*.

We have already seen that there were opposed schools of

thought at the time of Paul. Broadly speaking, these represented on the one hand a Jewish interpretation of Christianity, dominated by the belief that the world was about to end, and on the other a Greek or Gnostic interpretation. These opposing currents can be detected in Paul's quarrel with the Church of Jerusalem, where naturally the more Jewish construction prevailed. Messianic Christianity was this-worldly; Gnostic Christianity was other-worldly.<sup>109</sup>

To the Romans, Judaism was a religion permitted by law (*religio licita*); and Christianity appeared at first to be a mere variant of it. Indeed, the Jews themselves regarded the earliest Christians as Jewish heretics.

The movement must have seemed to the Jews on a level with the sect started by John the Baptist, which preserved its independence of Christianity. Attention has recently been focused on the sacred books of the Mandæans, a sect which existed in Babylonia and Persia. They practised baptism by immersion and venerated John the Baptist; and although the documents date from no earlier than the seventh century, it is thought that Mandæanism may have originated from Palestine.

Mandæanism came to nothing, however, but Christianity prospered after it had effected a satisfactory fusion between the Jewish and Gnostic elements. The Christian Church broke with the Synagogue when the burning question of "Observance of the Law" was settled. Paul played a decisive part in this controversy, and his arguments are set forth in the Epistle to the Galatians and 2 Corinthians. His efforts were probably less successful in the East than in the West, though even in Rome, if we may judge from the catacombs, the Jewish character of the new religion was strongly emphasized in the early days.

Some allowance must be made, of course, for pious deception; in the reign of Nero, Christians were outlawed, and to safeguard their tombs they tried to make them look as much as possible like Jewish burial-places. But it seems established that, in the earliest period of the Church, the Eucharist was a sacred domestic meal, partaken in the houses of the faithful after a familiar Jewish pattern.

The picture that finally emerges is not of an Apostolic unity of belief and practice that was subsequently shattered, but of a primitive diversity (one might almost say confusion) which



gradually acquired some sort of order. The first three centuries of Christianity show a painful struggle to achieve standardization.

It was no supernatural guidance, but a political event, the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, that finally settled the question of the primacy of the Church of Jerusalem. Orthodox Jews were then at pains to dissociate themselves from a seditious sect that proclaimed the imminent downfall of the Empire, and this fact also strengthened the Gentile and Hellenizing influences.

Another social factor was the existence in the Empire of *Collegia*, which may be likened in some respects to modern Friendly Societies and Burial Clubs. Some of them may be compared with Masonic Lodges, with appropriate initiations, rituals, and periodic celebrations.

Membership was open to slaves, and within the lodge there was no distinction of race or social standing. Under such a guise Christians could meet together in comparative safety in one another's houses. Thus there was a Church in the making before there were church buildings, and it is noteworthy that the term "priest" was not applied to officiating ministers until late in the second century.

Baptism was at first administered by the Bishop and at Easter. Even today, for example, no parish church in such a town as Pisa has a font of its own. The Bishops were secretaries and presidents of guilds, responsible for the admission of new members and for the celebration of the sacred meal, during which originally they sat with the elders in imitation of Christ and the Apostles. Professor Garstang, who has excavated the Roman catacombs, comments :—

When it (the Eucharist) was once centralized under the Bishop the danger of publicity had become so great from the number of partakers and the conspicuousness of the work of preparing and serving the meal, that the original procedure, and with it the resemblance to the Jewish rite, necessarily came to an end.<sup>97</sup>

The Christian ministers were, to outward appearances, the officers of a benevolent society, and gradually a more centralized organization grew up. The Bishop of Rome naturally took charge of the burial clubs that used the Roman catacombs and he appointed deacons to manage the accounts. The importance of

Rome as centre of the Empire, rather than the alleged appointment of Peter by Christ as head of the Church, was responsible for later developments.

### *The Blood of the Martyrs*

Reports of the earliest waves of persecution of the Christians have been somewhat exaggerated. As a Christian historian, Professor C. H. Dodd, writes :—

All the evidence goes to show that the Christian problem was a real embarrassment to the Government. It maintained the principle that the religion was illegal, and punished its adherents for obstinacy in not abandoning it at command. Yet the Emperors and their representatives often seem genuinely anxious to protect Christians from the consequences of their folly and their neighbours' malice. How many actually saved their lives during this period by recantation under judicial pressure we do not know. The number of those who suffered is not large. Origen, early in the third century, could still say : " There have been but a few now and again, easily counted, who have died for the Christian religion ! " <sup>94</sup>

However bitter and savage repression may have become locally, reaching its climax under Diocletian (A.D. 303), there was hysteria also on the other side. Gibbon has been abused for directing his irony to the fanatical frenzy with which many Christians deliberately sought the crown of martyrdom, but the facts he gives cannot be disputed. And when the Christians were restrained from mass-suicide they often turned on one another.

Not a few of the " martyrs " were slain by their fellow Christians because of some doctrinal quibble that to the twentieth-century mind is almost incomprehensible. All this was part of the straining of a divided Church towards a unity that it had yet to win. The turning-point was, perhaps, the Edict of Milan, promulgated by Constantine in the winter of A.D. 312-13. It laid down " that liberty of worship shall not be denied to any, but that the mind and will of every individual shall be free to manage divine affairs according to his own choice." All restrictive statutes were abrogated, and it was enacted " that every person who cherishes the desire to observe the Christian religion shall freely and unconditionally proceed to observe the same without let or hindrance." Professor Dodd remarks :—

His [Constantine's] idea was to confer upon a single definite body, the *corpus Christianorum*, those powers, liberties and privileges which were to give Christianity its status within the Empire. Unfortunately there was no single body including within it all persons professing Christianity. After vain attempts to secure unity by agreement, Constantine standardized Christianity for legal purposes by recognizing as the only Christian body before the law that Church which, though in some provinces it might be overshadowed by other bodies, yet represented throughout the Empire the majority of Christians. In the year after the Council of Nicæa had failed to realize the Emperor's hopes of Christian unity, an edict was issued expressly confining all clerical privileges to "observers of the catholic law," and excepting all "heretics and schismatics."<sup>94</sup>

The policy of toleration proved abortive before the ink was dry. Toleration and organized Christianity were incompatibles, and the years between the Edict of Milan and Theodosius (313-95) were fraught with strife between orthodoxy and heresy. The Roman Empire was threatened with collapse and the balance of power was shifting to the East; but heedless of these mighty historical issues, Christian fought Christian about metaphysical subtleties with a ruthlessness and violence that today seems almost incredible.

Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria, had declared that "the Son is totally and essentially distinct from the Father." The alternative view that the Son and the Father are of the same essence (*homoousios*), though distinct persons, was upheld by the Council of Nicæa by a majority vote. As Selden remarked in his *Table Talk*: "They talk, but blasphemously enough, that the Holy Spirit is president of their General Councils, when the truth is, the odd man is still the Holy Ghost."

### *Christian Totalitarianism*

Once the Church ceased to be an underground movement and seized power, every conceivable resource was employed to liquidate heretics and pagans, although together they formed the majority of the population of the Empire. "Soon after the accession of Theodosius," writes Fleury, in his *History of Christianity*, "the pagans, particularly in the East, saw the storm gathering in the horizon. The monks, with perfect impunity, traversed the rural districts, demolishing all the unprotected edifices." And as Gibbon stated;—

In almost every province of the Roman world, an army of fanatics, without authority and without discipline, invaded the peaceful inhabitants; and the ruin of the fairest structures of antiquity still displays the ravages of *those* barbarians, who alone had time and inclination to execute such laborious destruction.<sup>115</sup>

Christianity was imposed on the Empire from above by legal enactments; and its success was ensured by the common informer and even by mob-violence. According to Milman :—

So severe an inquisition was instituted into the possession of magical books, that, in order to justify the sanguinary proceedings, vast heaps of manuscripts relating to law and general literature were publicly burned, as if they contained unlawful matter. Many men of letters throughout the East, in their terror, destroyed their whole libraries, lest some innocent or unsuspected work should be seized by the ignorant or malicious informer, and bring them unknowingly within the relentless penalties of the law.<sup>114</sup>

Headed by an archbishop, a fanatical mob destroyed the temple of Serapis in Alexandria and then proceeded to pillage the great library, with its priceless manuscripts. In Alexandria, too, the pagan philosopher Hypatia was lynched :—

On a fatal day, in the holy season of Lent, Hypatia was torn from her chariot, stripped naked, dragged to the church, and inhumanly butchered by the hands of Peter the reader and a troop of savage and merciless fanatics : her flesh was scraped from her bones with sharp oyster-shells, and her quivering limbs were delivered to the flames.<sup>115</sup>

### *Forged Documents*

Not content with suppressing and destroying classical learning the zealots perpetrated a series of forgeries to bolster up their claims. Mosheim speaks of

the base audacity of those who did not blush to palm their own spurious productions on the great men of former times, and even on Christ himself and his apostles, so that they might be able, in the councils and in their books, to oppose names against names and authorities against authorities. The whole Christian Church was, in this century, overwhelmed with these disgraceful fictions.<sup>116</sup>

The Sybilline books were a convenient vehicle :—

The prophecies forged by the Christians, and attributed by them to the heathen sybils, were accepted as genuine by the entire Church,

and were continually appealed to as among the most powerful evidences of the faith.<sup>118</sup>

One of the most famous of all such forgeries was produced some centuries later by a cleric who assumed the name of Isidore Mercator.

These False Decretals, as they are usually called, were compiled about the middle of the ninth century. They claimed to consist of letters written by early Bishops of Rome between the first and the end of the third centuries; letters of Popes beginning with Sylvester and ending with Gregory the Great; decrees of various councils from that of Nicaea to that of Seville (619); and a copy of the canons passed by Gregory II (731) at a council held in Rome. The crucial point in these fabrications was that it is unlawful to hold a council without permission of the Pope. The sole power of judging and translating bishops and establishing new sees was also vested in the Pope.

For hundreds of years the part of the evidence offered by the Church of Rome in defence of its claims to supremacy was these very decretals written by the pseudo-Isidore, together with various earlier forgeries such as the Donation of Constantine. All Catholic historians now admit that this "evidence" of Papal supremacy was faked, but they do so with bad grace. The apology put forward amounts to saying that although the documents are spurious in form they are true in substance. One writer absolves the pseudo-Isidore from blame because his laudable object was "to provide for the use of the faithful generally a store of authoritative statements on matters affecting Christian life within the Church."<sup>101</sup>

Newman became very angry when Kingsley accused Catholics of having a very peculiar view of historical truth; just how peculiar it is may be judged from the following defence of the False Decretals:—

Suppose someone in the twelfth century had anticipated the labour of the moderns, and announced the spuriousness of a great part of the decretals; what then? The feeling would have been: What Fabian, Cornelius, Sylvester, etc., are made to say is true and useful; if they did not actually write it, they might have written it; if these are not genuine letters, then the genuine letters which they did write, and which would have been to much the same effect as those, have been lost; finally, if the Pope of the third century did not command all this

the Popes of the twelfth century are ready to command it, because it is true, wholesome, and highly necessary to be observed.<sup>101</sup>

### *Standardized Religion*

Looking back from the Middle Ages to the time of the Apostles what broad impression do we receive? What evidence is there that any real unity prevailed in the primitive Church? Unless we deliberately shut our eyes we see—what we might have expected—the nucleus of an organization that develops like a biological cell by polar opposites and repeated fission. What seem to have been the original oral traditions contain the seeds of every future conflict.

Gnosticism and Messianism repel one another and then reach a compromise. The theory that Jesus was “very God” won acceptance only gradually, and it was decreed as orthodox by a majority vote. All opposition was blotted out by the repressive machinery of the State. Uniformity was as important to the new State-Church as *Gleichschaltung* (same-making) to Hitler, and it was obtained by similar means.

The splitting of Christendom into East and West corresponded to the political division of the Empire. The disgraceful scenes in the Councils, the lobbying and abuse, the rioting and lynching that occurred, do not show the marks of unity and holiness that are supposed to enable us to single out an institution that was guided in its deliberations by the Holy Ghost. On the contrary, what happened bears an ominous resemblance to the behaviour of totalitarian States in our own day.

Those who lament contemporary violence and intolerance and anti-Semitism, and blame their prevalence on the absence of Christianity, show a strange indifference to the history of Christianity itself. So far from preserving culture, many of the early Christians did their utmost to destroy the learning and art of the best periods of Greece and Rome; and although it is true that a protest was made against the tide of licentiousness—that swept over the Roman Empire in its decline, the moderate counsels of the pagan philosophers were rejected and the Church, like many Oriental mystery cults from Orphism onwards, encouraged a debasing asceticism, with its invariable accompaniment of cruelty.

The practices of early monasticism and the austerities of the solitaries were no different from the self-torture still practised today by fakirs in India. In face of such masochism we may echo the sentiments of Lecky, in a famous passage referring to St. Simeon :—

A hideous, sordid and emaciated maniac, without knowledge, without patriotism, without natural affection; passing his life in a long routine of useless and atrocious self-torture, and quailing before the ghastly phantoms of his delirious brain, had become the ideal of the nations which had known the writings of Plato and Cicero and the lives of Socrates and Cato.<sup>112</sup>

### *Christianity and Sex*

But, as the proverb goes, if you expel the Devil with a pitchfork he will return. Very few pagans, after all, knew the writings of Plato and Cicero, and the average peasant or member of the town proletariat could not attain the ascetic ideal. The letters of Jerome show what a distorted form the Christian view even of normal marriage could take :—

I do not write to tell you of the inconveniences of marriage [he wrote to a young virgin], the swelling of the belly, the wailing of infants, the heart-burning caused by your husband's mistress, the cares of the household, and all the other supposed good things which, in any case, cease at death, but to enjoin you when you fly from Sodom to remember the fate of Lot's wife.

For my part I say that mature girls must not bathe at all, because they ought to blush to see themselves naked.

The Church, as Bertrand Russell once remarked, never really liked marriage but had to allow it, and so tried to make it as disagreeable as possible. Although marriage came to be dignified as a sacrament, the attitude of the priesthood is well reflected in a letter sent by Pope Gregory to Augustine while the latter was a missionary in Britain in A.D. 597.

Augustine was uncertain whether or no a pregnant woman ought to be baptized. Gregory generously answered in the affirmative, and also agreed that she should be permitted to enter the church after delivery in order to give thanks. This is to be allowed because " the pleasure of the flesh is in fault, and not the pain; but the pleasure is in the copulation of the flesh, whereas

there is pain in bringing forth a child.”<sup>118</sup> How long such an attitude poisoned the relationship of the sexes is shown by the religious opposition to the use of anæsthetics in childbirth in the last century, and the continued prohibition of contraceptives.

According to Gregory, whose sentiments are still those of the Catholic hierarchy :—

Lawful commerce must be for the sake of the children, not of pleasure. . . . But when, not the love of getting children, but of pleasure prevails, the pair have cause to lament their deed. For this the holy preaching allows them, and yet fills the mind with dread of the very allowance.<sup>118</sup>

Even if we disregard the extravagances of early monasticism and dismiss the self-castration of Origen as untypical, the Christian attitude to marriage is utterly at variance with the rational view. Some protest against the sensuality of Roman decadence was needed, but by allowing the pendulum to swing to the opposite extreme the attempt to check the abuses was abortive. The Church failed to raise the general standard of morality; indeed, it became hopelessly infected with the very evils it tried to expel.

The result of setting an unnatural ideal for the majority of people was a large-scale relapse into the utter depravity that characterized the Dark Ages. There is no need to repeat here what none will deny about the barbarism into which the Empire sank in the Carolingian era. The corruption lasted into the Middle Ages and was one (but by no means the chief) cause of the Reformation.

### *Eternal Punishment*

That the undue repression of normal instincts often results in sadism is a commonplace of experience. It is not in the least surprising, therefore, that the progress of standardized Christianity should be accompanied by outbursts of cruel persecution and an unsavoury gloating over the eternal torments that heathens and heretics would endure. Augustine consigned all unbaptized infants to hell—though, later, Aquinas softened the grim doctrine by introducing the conception of an intermediate place, limbo, where some happiness, but not the Beatific Vision, could be enjoyed.

Dr. G. G. Coulton, in his many learned studies of medieval life,



has exposed the falsity of the literary picture of "merrie England" and shown that for the medieval Christian the majority of mankind seemed doomed to perdition.

Aquinas was milder than Augustine, but he nevertheless taught that part of the bliss of the saved was in the contemplation of the sufferings of the damned, and the carvings and frescoes in our great cathedrals show how intense was the preoccupation with hell-fire.

Aquinas was merely expressing in logical form the feeling of such early writers as Tertullian:—

What a city is the new Jerusalem! For it will not be without its games; it will have the final and eternal day of judgment, which the Gentiles now treat with unbelief and scorn, when so vast a series of ages, with all their productions, will be hurled into one absorbing fire. How magnificent the scale of *that* game! With what admiration, what laughter, what glee, what triumph shall I perceive so many mighty monarchs, who had been given out as received into the skies, even Jove himself and his votaries, moaning in unfathomable gloom. The governors too, persecutors of the Christian name, cast into fiercer torments than they had devised against the faithful, and liquefying amid shooting spires of flame!

The harvest of deliberately inculcated sadism was reaped by the Inquisition. No sooner did the Church gain the support of the State, under Constantine, than it began the terrible process of exterminating heresy by force. The theory that gave rise to the Inquisition was bluntly expressed by Innocent III in 1199:—

For since you punish traitors with death according to the law and confiscate their property, merely sparing the lives of their children out of pity, how much more those who, by erring in faith, offend God and Jesus Christ should be cut off from the community and be despoiled of their temporal goods, since it is far worse to offend against eternal than temporal authorities.

And it was under the same Pope that the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) ordered periodic examinations in order to punish heretics and wipe out the spiritual leprosy. The heretics were burnt, their property was confiscated, and their houses were razed to the ground.

The Holy Office, or Inquisition proper, dates from the sixteenth century. By then the persecution of the Albigenian heretics had already shown what totalitarian Christianity could

do. There are disputes about the number of victims of the Spanish Inquisition, and modern apologists try to discredit the historian Llorente, whose estimates are perhaps larger than should be admitted.

### *The Reformation*

After the Reformation the pretence that unity was the distinguishing mark of the Christian Church as a whole was hard to maintain. The Catholic formula which enabled schismatics to be regarded in some circumstances as members of the Church was hardly possible to apply to Lutherans and Calvinists.

According to Aquinas, heresy is opposed to faith, schism to charity. In practice, this meant that schismatics (such as priests of the Eastern Orthodox Churches) retained a valid ordination and could administer the sacraments; but the heresy of many of the Reformers was graver, since the chain of Apostolic succession was broken in their ordination.

For example, Catholics would hold that transubstantiation occurs during the celebration of the eucharist in a Greek or Russian or Coptic Church; but that it does not occur in the communion service of the Church of England, no matter how ritualistic. There can be no doubt that many gross abuses were ended by the Reformers, though it is also true that during the counter-Reformation the Roman Church made some attempt to put its house in order. The moral corruption of many monastic orders was ended by their suppression; but the motives which led, for example, to the confiscation of Church property under Henry VIII give Protestants little cause for pride. Dr. Tawney writes :—

In England, as in Germany and Switzerland, men had dreamed of a Reformation which would reform the State and society, as well as the Church. . . . The disillusionment was crushing. Was it surprising that the Reformers should ask what had become of the devout imaginations of social righteousness, which were to have been realized as the result of a godly Reformation? The end of Popery, the curtailment of ecclesiastical privileges, six new bishoprics, lectureships in Greek and Latin in place of the disloyal subject of the canon law, the reform of doctrine and ritual—side by side with these good things had come some less edifying changes, the ruin of much education, the cessation of much charity, a raid on corporate property which provoked protests even in the House of Commons, and for ten years a sinister hum, as

of the floating of an immense land syndicate, with favourable terms for all sufficiently rich, or influential, or mean, to get in on the ground floor. The men who had invested in the Reformation when it was still a gambling stock naturally nursed the security, and denounced the revolting peasants as communists, with the mystical reverence for the rights of property which is characteristic in all ages of the *nouveaux riches*.<sup>121</sup>

### *Christian Serfdom*

The misery that had been the English peasant's lot under feudalism is described by Dr. G. G. Coulton in *The Medieval Village*:—

The serf was worse off at Magna Carta than at the Conquest, and much more than half the population were serfs in 1324 [when the slave had become non-existent in England]. In strict law the serfs scarcely had any right against their dominus—lord and master. In the courts in which he pleaded, custom and arbitrary will ruled. He was bound to the soil and his "brood" could be bought, sold, or given with land. On the tenant's decease the lord claimed as *heriot* the dead man's best beast or best movable possession, and the priest took the second best as a *mortuary*, thus arraying clerical interests against the serf. It was a medieval tenet that class divisions were of God's making.<sup>122</sup>

The serf or villein was therefore half slave in many respects, though he held some land of his own which he was permitted to till at certain times. His labour was not hired but given to the lord of the manor for a specified number of days in the year. The serf could neither emigrate nor strike; but neither could he be evicted or have his rent raised. If he ran away it was not easy for him to settle elsewhere; on the other hand, it was extremely difficult for the lord to replace him.

Such a system probably worked better in practice than might be expected—thanks to the fact that a willing serf is more profitable than an unwilling slave—but it hardly deserves the rhapsodies of those to whom Medieval Europe was a Golden Age. Professor G. M. Trevelyan describes it as charitably as possible in his *History of England*, but he does not depict the medieval peasant as a product of which Christian civilization can be proud:—

The serf was what poverty and submission made him: shifty, fearful, ignorant, full of superstitions Christian and pagan, trusting to charms and strange traditions of a folk-lore of immemorial antiquity

cheating and sometimes murdering the lord or his officers; incompetent and fatalistic in presence of scarcity and plague in the village and murrain among ill-kept beasts. The soil was undrained and sodden to a degree we can now hardly conceive. The jungle kept rushing in, weeds overspreading the ploughland, as bailiffs complained. Under the open field system, with its unscientific farming, the soil after centuries of use became less fertile, and the yield per acre was reduced.

Peasant revolts date from as early as 821. There were serious outbreaks in Normandy in 1000 and 1250; in Languedoc and Flanders nearly a hundred years later, and in England in 1381. They were put down by massacre, and agitators were treated as heretics. Nor did the Reformation bring any relief to the bitter lot of the lowest level of society. The Peasants' Revolt in Germany, in 1524, was suppressed with appalling bloodshed, to the hearty satisfaction of Luther.

The German peasants merely demanded that villeinage should end because "Christ has delivered and redeemed us all, the lowly as well as the great, without exception, by the shedding of his precious blood." Luther indignantly declared that such a proposition "would make all men equal and so change the spiritual kingdom of Christ into an external worldly one. Impossible! An earthly kingdom cannot exist without inequality of persons. Some must be free, others serfs, some rulers, others subjects." In the most fiery language Luther urged on the Princes to greater ferocity. "No one need think that the world can be ruled without blood. The civil sword shall and must be red and bloody."<sup>121</sup>

### *Church and State*

Such in practice was the new version of Christianity. The refusal of Lutheran Churches to take sides on questions of social justice has been maintained until the time of Hitler. As A. E. Garvie wrote in the *Hibbert Journal* (Jan. 1941):—

The dualism of Lutheran theology, which separated the realm of grace from the social order, and held each to be autonomous under God as Redeemer and as Creator, has made it possible for Christians in Germany to acquiesce in policies which the Christian conscience would otherwise condemn.

Another Christian writer, Dr. H. D. Lewis, points out more frankly that the Confessional Church in Germany protested

against Hitlerism only when it touched matters of Church doctrine and worship. It was unmoved by acts of brutality and terrorism that so shocked the rest of the world :—

But this is less strange when we turn to the actual teaching of the leaders of the Confessional Church in regard to the relation of Church and State. Witness the fulsome, almost blasphemous, reverence of the State in a celebrated pamphlet on *Church and State* by Barth. The author is loth to withhold the aura of a divine sanction even from the vilest acts of the State. An annoying allusiveness of style does not obscure the conviction that "the State cannot lose the honour that is its due. For that very reason the New Testament ordains that in all circumstances honour must be shown to its representatives."<sup>123</sup>

Barth has been hailed as the greatest of living theologians, and his influence is immense both on the Continent and in America. Canon Alan Richardson ranks Barth's *Church Dogmatics* with Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith* and the *Institutes* of Calvin as one of the most influential works to which Protestant theology can point.<sup>100</sup> And yet Barthianism paralysed the action of the Confessional Church in Germany at a crucial period in history.

Calvin's "Reign of Saints" in Geneva seems remote from current controversies, but again it is pertinent to ask to what extent this version of Christianity, any more than that of Luther or Aquinas, has *in fact* promoted what is usually meant by "Christian values"? The rules drawn up by Calvin had a simple object—to enable "each man to understand the duties of his position." Dr. Tawney writes :—

It is sad to reflect that the attainment of so laudable an end involved the systematic use of torture, the beheading of a child for striking its parents, and the burning of a hundred and fifty heretics in sixty years.<sup>121</sup>

It is neither possible nor necessary for our present purpose to go more deeply into the social phenomena which pass under the general term, Christianity. When its critics use the word they are referring to a fact of history, not to an idealized conception that has never existed except on paper. The double sense in which the word "Christianity" is used for propaganda purposes is a constant source of confusion. In the many arguments to the effect that civilization owes a profound debt to "Christianity" the word is used to denote an ideal rather than a concrete fact. And so the discussion *appears* to be about what the

Church has accomplished, but in reality it is about what some members of the Church have said *ought* to be done. Wycliffe and the rebelling German peasants *said* that according to Christianity no man ought to be a chattel; but the Roman Church in supporting serfdom, and the Lutheran Church in condemning the rebellious peasants, took the opposite line in practice.

By means of such a play on words Mr. Christopher Dawson, one of the ablest of contemporary Catholic writers, attributes all that is good in history to Christianity, and all that is bad to the lack of it:—

Nationalism owes to Christianity its high and almost mystical conception of the nation as a spiritual unity—a sacred community for which the individual will gladly sacrifice his life; yet divorced from Christianity this conception becomes a principle of hatred and destruction. Liberalism and democracy owe to Christianity their humanitarian idealism and their faith in progress; yet this idealization of humanity has become a substitute for the Christian faith in a divine order, and has made it possible to regard secular civilization as man's final end.<sup>124</sup>

The Oration of Pericles, however, shows that men were ready to die for the community, and that they believed in some of the essentials of democracy, long before Christianity, either as a noble ideal or a concrete fact, appeared on the human scene. It is true that Athenian democracy rested on slavery; but when did the Christian Churches condemn slavery?

A wholly false idea is assiduously spread by propagandists that the gradual easing of the lot of common man has been due to the influence of Christian *ideas*. This unhistorical notion is so prevalent that we may conclude our brief survey of the record of the Churches by noting their attitude in practice towards a barbarity that everyone will nowadays condemn, whatever his religious views.

### *Christianity and Slavery*

According to G. G. Coulton, slavery was never prohibited by the primitive Church, but the Eastern Church forbade monastic slavery in the eighth century. Early in the eleventh century Benedict VIII would not permit the children of priests to be slaves, but Clement V condemned the whole population of rebel Venice to slavery in 1309; and Paul III decreed slavery for all

Englishmen who supported Henry VIII against those princes whom in 1535 he called on to invade England.

Innocent X bought slaves to use in his army, and Alexander VII dealt in slaves in the seventeenth century. Indeed, in the eighteenth century slaves were commonly used in Italy as household servants, and in 1760 the Russian clergy possessed one million slaves.<sup>122</sup>

There were protests against the inhumanity of slavery in Mexico and South America, and individual ecclesiastics were sometimes courageously outspoken. But papal licences were granted to the Kings of Portugal in the fifteenth century to conquer heathen countries and reduce the inhabitants to "everlasting slavery." Although the enslavement of Indians was sometimes condemned, the horrible sea-traffic in negroes was not merely approved, but encouraged. Nor is this surprising in view of the toleration of slavery in the New Testament writings. (Gal. iii, 28; Cor. iii, 17; 1 Cor. vii, 22; Phil. vi, 5-9.) It was natural enough for Methodist ministers in the Southern States during the American Civil War to defend slavery in the plantations by Scriptural texts.

Slavery was finally abolished by this country in 1833. The efforts of Wilberforce were magnificent, but it can be argued that they were unscriptural. So, too, the statement by Gregory XVI in 1839 that slavery was unchristian entailed a condemnation of the precept and practice of very many Popes who had gone before him. The truth is not so much that slavery was formally unchristian as that it was out of date.

Slavery, as the main foundation of social economy, faded from Europe after the anarchic eighth century. But it was not the pleading of Christian Churchmen or the anathemas of Roman Pontiffs that turned slave into serf. No such appeals or condemnations can be traced. Classical slavery was inordinately wasteful, and we need not look further than economic causes to discover the reason for the transition to feudalism.

When feudalism had outlived its usefulness, capitalism needed neither slaves nor serfs except in outlying areas. That individual Christians were painfully conscious of new evils, arising out of the Industrial Revolution, is unquestionable; but although Wilberforce condemned slavery he opposed the rise of Trade Unions.

*Human or Divine?*

It is idle in view of the record of history to contend that idealism and social progress owe their very existence to Christianity and that disbelief in religion must mean a relapse into inhumanity and barbarism. The argument assumes many forms, and the following is typical:—

The Church has been in existence for nearly two thousand years. It is not to be denied that its ministers have often blundered and often sinned. But it has retained its fundamental doctrine and its historic character. Its claims have been justified not only by the deaths of martyrs and the lives of the saints and by the inspiration that it has given craftsmen, artists, and poets, but even more by the happiness and solace that it has afforded to countless millions of the simple. To the Catholic Church we owe all that is seemly and just in our Western civilization.<sup>45</sup>

We simply deny that such a picture corresponds to any historical reality. We admit, of course, that there were very many good men in the Christian Church, and need not seek to dwell unfairly on the darker side; but we are aware that there were also good pagans, and that the mythology of paganism “inspired” some of the finest poetry and art that the world has seen.

The ideal of loving humanity and pitying the weak and suffering is not exclusively Christian. When we inquire what *difference* Christianity made we must surely turn to those features that were *absent* from other religions and philosophies and which, for that reason, may be presumed to be the marks of a special divine favour. We then see that among the specific Christian virtues were a spirit of intolerance and persecution, and a hostility towards secular knowledge that were both alien to paganism. So far from giving us “all that is seemly and just in our Western civilization,” the rise of Christianity was accompanied by many of those detestable things with which we have lately become familiar again—forgery as a tool of propaganda, torture as an instrument of policy, mass-killings, forced conversions, oppression of minorities, the burning of books, and organized anti-Semitism.

If these are said to be due to merely human frailty, then we may again agree. What we fail to find in the record of the Church is something so superhuman that its presence can be explained only by a supernatural cause. Instead of ending “the martyrdom



of man," the totalitarian version of Christianity prolonged it by struggling against the emancipation of the serfs even while its theologians defended an abstract justice, or by ignoring the brutalities of the Industrial Revolution on the Lutheran principle that the concern of the Church must be exclusively with men's souls.

In the great crises of the modern world the respective Churches aligned themselves on a purely national basis, German Churches supporting Germany, English and American Churches supporting Britain and America, as slavishly as the Shinto sect supported Japan. The Vatican, the sole international Church, quite obviously refused to commit itself until it was certain which side would win. Surely something better than this might have been expected from an institution which claims to be the mouth-piece of God. On the evidence it seems plain that the Christian Church is, after all, a purely human institution, like any other—"human, all-too-human."

## *Chapter Fourteen*

### RATIONALISM AND THE MODERN WORLD

Is Rationalism out of date? Man's place in Nature. Atheism and Agnosticism. Ethics. Semantics. The immortality of the soul. Telepathy. The Church and the modern crisis. Conclusion.

TODAY there are some signs of a religious counter-offensive. The line of attack has undergone a change. In this concluding section we shall consider the new strategy adopted by Christian apologists. The principal charges now brought against Rationalism fall under two headings: (1) It is theoretically unsound because it rests on scientific theories and Biblical scholarship which are out of date; (2) It is in practice both useless and dangerous because it fails to provide a moral basis for life.

We must, therefore, endeavour to answer the following questions:—

(a) Is it true that Rationalists are “flogging a dead horse” when they use textual and historical knowledge to criticize the foundations of traditional Christianity? Can they meet the theologian on the new battleground that he has now chosen?

(b) Is it the case that science has abandoned its belief in Darwinism and in the Uniformity of Nature, often said to be the mainstay of the Victorian Rationalists?

(c) Is it really *impossible* to remain “agnostic” about questions of such vital concern as the existence of God and the immortality of the soul?

(d) Does Rationalism fail to satisfy our ethical and emotional needs? The ethics of Christianity are known—but what are the ethics of Rationalism?

(e) Have the indiscriminate application of science and loss of faith in fact brought humanity to the brink of catastrophe and to utter despair?

The best way of answering these questions is in the actual words of contemporary Rationalists, so that it can be shown

where, on points of detail, they sometimes differ among themselves. It should then be plain that modern Rationalism is not a mere echo of Victorian voices, and that it is not—strangest of all accusations!—ignorant of the developments of science since the nineteenth century. It should become evident that, so far from Rationalists sounding a note of despair, the very opposite is the case, and the prophets of doom are in the other camp.

We shall try to show that just as there are new developments in theology, so there are new and extremely fruitful developments in the continuous effort to reformulate old problems so that they can be solved rationally or else dismissed as pseudo-problems. It will be necessary, for example, to re-examine the words "atheist," "agnostic," "materialist," and consider whether or no they have outlived their usefulness.

### *Tampering with Truth*

Let us begin with a characteristic statement by Dr. Cockin, Bishop of Bristol, which implies that Rationalist criticism of Revealed Truth entirely misses the point. Both Victorian Rationalists and Victorian theologians were mistaken, we are told, in supposing that revelation could be contradicted by scientific knowledge:—

It will, no doubt, come as something of a shock to the modern mind to be told that the Christian answer, or at any rate the beginnings of it, are to be found in the story of the Fall preserved in the opening chapters of Genesis. . . . Surely that kind of evidence was laughed out of court once and for all in the Darwinian controversy.<sup>102</sup>

We might compare this with a typical passage from the essays of T. H. Huxley, in the heyday of the Darwinian controversy:—

If the story of the Fall is not the true record of an historical occurrence, what becomes of Pauline theology? Yet the story of the Fall as directly conflicts with probability, and is as devoid of trustworthy evidence, as that of the Creation, or that of the Deluge, with which it forms an harmoniously legendary series.<sup>125</sup>

Most people, nowadays, who care at all for scientific truth, would probably feel that Huxley had said the last word on the subject and that no respectable defence of the dogma of the Fall—the corner-stone of traditional Christianity—could be made. But

the theological mind has not exhausted its subtleties. Following the new technique, Dr. Cockin declares :—

We know now that it was a mistake ever to claim that this primitive story contained truth of a kind that could be substantiated—or refuted—by geological or anthropological research. We know now that the happenings there recorded are not events whose occurrence could have been noted by a suitably placed “observer in the Middle East.” But we know also that there is a real validity in that particular vehicle of truth which we are not afraid frankly to call “myth.” A myth is not a fairy story. It is a form of narrative deliberately chosen as the medium through which an insight into truth, which cannot be exactly stated in terms of history, science or logical argument, can be expressed.<sup>102</sup>

Rationalism, it would seem, has gained no victory at all in forcing Anglican Bishops to admit that they were mistaken. The Rationalist claim that Christianity is largely founded on myth does not perturb the modern theologian in the slightest. A myth may be *true*, we are now told.

What applies to the Fall applies also to the Resurrection and Ascension; for according to Catherine Mary Chilcott, a learned and even more advanced expositor of this school of thought, these are part of the Christian *μῦθος*. (By spelling myth in Greek it is made to look more acceptable, perhaps) :—

No one would deny that the teaching of the Cross is at the heart of the Christian religion, but it is belief in the Resurrection and the Ascension in all the fullness of their spiritual significance—which need not mean their acceptance as physical events—that secures for that sacrifice its eternally vitalising force.<sup>20</sup>

It is part of this extraordinary use—or, more properly, misuse—of language to assert, in face of the plainest evidence, that Rationalism is old-fashioned, discredited, based on discarded scientific theories. The fact is that Rationalism is not based on any *specific* scientific theory; it is a way of thinking, of approaching problems, which subsequently gives rise to specific theories. It is the spirit of science become conscious of its own operations. In short, Rationalism and scientific method are synonymous.

When the accepted method of science came to be applied more widely to fields in which a rival method—the religious—still strove to maintain its monopoly, the controversies aroused were

naturally stated in the language of the period. The nineteenth-century Rationalists were limited by the knowledge and the terminology then available.

Twentieth-century Rationalists stand on the shoulders of the pioneers of the movement. They have reaped the harvest of a subsequent revolution in thought, due to the extraordinarily rapid advance of psychology and physics. But they certainly do not regard their position as being weakened by the fact that science has not stood still. Why should they, indeed? The object of Rationalism is to speed the development of science and use the new knowledge to end the material miseries of man.

We are told in the very same breath that Darwinism is dead and that Genesis need not be believed. The Bishop of Bradford (Dr. Blunt) accuses the Bishop of Birmingham (Dr. Barnes) of "wallowing in the trough of the scientific theory fashionable fifty years ago." And the same charge is continually levelled, *a fortiori*, against Rationalists.

Liberal Protestantism must, of course, fight its own battles, but it is pertinent to ask what beliefs Rationalists are committed to which have gone out of fashion—or, more strictly, since Rationalists are not so anxious to be in the fashion as their clerical opponents seem to be, which relevant scientific theories have been discarded in the past fifty years?

The statement made by Dr. Blunt that "the Uniformity of Nature" is among the discarded doctrines of science shows a misunderstanding of the philosophical speculations of those physicists who, like Eddington, have toyed with the idea that Nature itself may be irrational. If that were literally the case there could be no science; there could be no miracles, either; no meaning in saying that Christianity is concerned with historical happenings, and no human responsibility or divine retribution.

To pursue this question would take us into a metaphysical discussion of great complexity. It is sufficient, perhaps, to recall Bertrand Russell's dry comment that we are at least able to construct nautical almanacs that work, and that what is as important for science as the Uniformity of Nature is the fortunate fact that its laws are simple enough for us to understand.

### *Man's Place in Nature*

Darwin knew nothing about genetics. That is a new branch of biology that has sprung up since his day. But even apart from genetics, it would be very surprising if a theory worked out ninety years ago needed no revision. No modern biologist has any doubt about the fact of evolution itself; and it was not because of a clash of evidence, but because man was inserted into the scientific picture, that evolution aroused such a theological storm.

We must take care not to be confused by irrelevant details. The early Rationalists placed man in the scientific scheme and therefore concluded that the sacred writings which purported to explain man's origin were merely human documents. This led them to deny the doctrines of Special Creation and Special Revelation. What "discovery" has since been made that demands the slightest retreat from such a position? We have yet to be told.

The American Rationalist, Professor John Dewey, has done as much as any man to show the tremendous significance of Darwin's achievement, and his *Influence of Darwin on Philosophy* should be read in this connection. Again, as Lancelot L. Whyte states in his valuable book, *The Next Development in Man* :—

To Kepler it was enough that God linked man to nature; to Bruno, his contemporary, it was not. For him, as for many thinkers, from Aristotle and Lucretius to Darwin, Marx and Freud, the integrity of thought required that *man must be understood as a part of nature*.<sup>56</sup>

This is what the traditional theologian must deny and what the scientist must affirm. Sir Charles Sherrington, whose researches into the nervous system have won for him a pre-eminent place, can scarcely be charged with "wallowing in discredited science." In *Mind and Nature* he writes as follows :—

Evolution speaks to us in the same breath of body and of mind. Our bodily life carries with it its own evidence that its origin is terrestrial. Its chemical elements are among those commonest on our planet. Its whole is redolent of Earth where it was dug. Even likewise with finite mind. Its ways affirm it to be so. Our stock is the vertebrate stock; our body is the vertebrate body; our mind is the vertebrate mind. If the vertebrates be the product of the planet, our mind is a product of the planet. . . . Our mind is part and parcel of terrestrial nature, in which it is immersed, and there and only there can it meet with requitals and fulfilments.<sup>127</sup>

What possible justification, then, is there for continuing to say—or, what is worse, to hint—that in the last fifty years science has undermined the conclusion that the early Rationalists drew from the Theory of Evolution—namely, that man is one with the earth and the rest of Nature? Rationalism, however, did more than refuse a supernatural status to man; it attacked the very basis of the supernatural itself, as indeed it must always do if no frontiers are to be set to scientific investigation.

### *The Flight from Reason*

Faith in the Supernatural is a desperate wager made by man at the lowest ebb of his fortunes; it is as far as possible from being the source of that normal vitality which subsequently, if his fortunes mend, he may gradually recover.<sup>128</sup>

In this oft-quoted passage from Santayana, faith is not regarded as a good but a bad thing. More recently, Professor Sidney Hook has deplored the resurgence in some quarters of “blind faith in the supernatural” :—

The new failure of nerve in Western civilization at bottom betrays the same flight from responsibility, both on the plane of action and on the plane of belief, that drove the ancient world into the shelters of pagan and Christian supernaturalism.<sup>129</sup>

He opposes Rationalism (usually called “Naturalism” in America) to this recrudescence of superstition.

The philosophy of Naturalism, which wholeheartedly accepts scientific methods as the only reliable way of reaching truths about man, society, and nature, does not decree what may or may not exist. It does not rule out on *a priori* grounds the existence of supernatural entities and forces. The existence of God, immortality, disembodied souls or spirits, cosmic purpose or design, as these have customarily been interpreted by the great institutional religions, are denied by naturalists for the same generic reasons that they deny the existence of fairies, elves, leprechauns and an invisible satellite revolving between the earth and moon. There is no plausible evidence to warrant belief in them or to justify a probable inference on the basis of partial evidence.<sup>129</sup>

The demand for evidence to support a belief is chiefly responsible for the historic cleavage between Reason and Revelation, or between Science and Religion. When Rationalists speak of “the supremacy of reason” in matters of belief they do not mean

the supremacy of *deduction*—which the phrase would have meant in the seventeenth century—but trust in evidence rather than in unsupported intuition or supposed revelation.

“It is wrong, always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence,” wrote W. K. Clifford (1845–79).<sup>130</sup> And Huxley never tired of emphasizing the point: “Scepticism is the highest of duties, and blind faith the one unpardonable sin.”

Such language may seem somewhat extravagant. It shocked William James, and he invented Pragmatism as an alternative. Pragmatism tampered with the idea of Truth by allowing its adherents to believe in anything that was found useful in practice—anything that “works.” To the early Rationalists this seemed a very dangerous doctrine. Their attitude is summed up by Noel Annan as follows:—

Let us never forget the moral and intellectual work of the Victorian Rationalists. We should remember that they were opposing the bigotry and uncritical prejudice of their times. To all criticisms they would have replied that we must always form our beliefs on the best evidence available and that merely to believe what we want to believe and to appeal to the “heart” or to “intuition” is to give in to a temptation and acquire a frame of mind which may be very dangerous when applied, say, to politics.<sup>131</sup>

### *Atheist or Agnostic ?*

Before considering the application of Rationalism to the practical affairs of life it is necessary to clear up a very common source of confusion. Are all Rationalists agnostics? it is sometimes asked. What is the difference between agnosticism and atheism? Is it impossible to be a Rationalist if you believe in God?

One answer is that within the Rationalist movement in this country today there are agnostics, atheists, and those who believe in God. Agnosticism is a term coined by Huxley which probably appealed more to his contemporaries than it does to us owing to the then current vogue of “the Unknowable.” Herbert Spencer had declared that the knowable was the concern of science and philosophy—science being partially unified, and philosophy completely unified, knowledge. He rather unkindly consigned the realm of the Unknowable to religion.<sup>132</sup>



Kant had led the way by proving that reason could discover nothing about the dogmas of religion. But he held that for practical purposes of morality the existence of God and the immortality of the soul must be *postulated*. And this, of course, was precisely what the Victorian Rationalists objected to. Some of them, therefore, seemed to be left with the "Unknowable" on their hands. Reality seemed to be wider than experience, but they preferred to keep silent rather than to guess about those regions into which the scientist had not yet succeeded in penetrating. Huxley wrote:—

When I reached intellectual maturity and began to ask myself whether I was an Atheist, a Theist, or a Pantheist; a Materialist or an Idealist; a Christian or a Freethinker; I found that the more I learned and reflected, the less ready was the answer, until, at last, I came to the conclusion that I had neither art nor part with any of these denominations, except the last. The one thing which most of these good people were agreed upon was the one thing in which I differed from them. They were quite sure that they had attained a certain "gnosis"—had, more or less successfully, solved the problem of existence; while I was sure I had not, and had a pretty strong conviction that the problem was insoluble. So I took thought, and invented what I conceived to be the appropriate title of "Agnostic." It came into my head as suggestively antithetic to the "Gnostic" of Church history, who professed to know so much about the very things of which I was ignorant.

Agnosticism, in fact, is not a creed, but a method, the essence of which lies in the rigorous application of a single principle. Positively, the principle may be expressed: In matters of the intellect, follow your reason as far as it will take you, without regard to any other consideration. And negatively: In matters of the intellect do not pretend that conclusions are certain which are not demonstrated or demonstrable. That I take to be the agnostic faith, which if a man keep whole and undefiled, he shall not be ashamed to look the universe in the face, whatever the future may have in store for him.<sup>125</sup>

There is nothing essentially new in this principle itself. It is part of the normal technique of scientific investigation. An hypothesis is accepted or rejected—in either case only provisionally—after facts have been collected and suitable tests made. The first distinguishing characteristic of scientific thinking, to quote Dewey again, is "facing the facts—inquiry, minute and extensive scrutinizing, observation."<sup>133</sup> This requires an attitude of mind utterly incompatible with blind trust in revelation:—

The experimental attitude substitutes detailed analysis for wholesale assertions, specific inquiries for temperamental convictions, small facts for opinions whose size is in precise ratio to their vagueness.<sup>134</sup>

Agnosticism, then, as Huxley conceived it, was not merely concerned with the existence of God, not just an alternative to atheism. It was an attempt to lay the foundations of a general scientific outlook and to turn man's attention from unanswerable questions.

How far this can succeed is a psychological problem.

Neither Mill nor Huxley—and certainly not Karl Pearson—were mechanical materialists. Neither were they atheists of the type of Marx and Engels. It was not the cosmos of science, but the religious framework, that was undermined by subsequent developments.

How completely it was undermined is brilliantly illustrated by Walter Lippman, in his *Preface to Morals*. He compares the story of the Fall and Redemption to a play which the world had been watching for centuries:—

Into this marvellous story the whole of human history and of human knowledge could be fitted, and only in accordance with it could they be understood. This was the key to existence, the answer to doubt, the solace for pain, and the guarantee of happiness. But to many who were in the audience it is now evident that they have seen a play, a magnificent play, one of the most sublime ever created by the human imagination, but nevertheless a play, and not a literal account of human destiny. They know it was a play. They have lingered long enough to see the scene-shifters at work. The painted drop is half rolled up; some of the turrets of the celestial city can still be seen, part of the choir of angels. But behind them, plainly visible, are the struts and gears which held in place what under a gentler light looked like boundaries of the universe. They are only human fears and human hopes, and bits of antique science and half-forgotten history, and symbols here and there of experiences through which some in each generation pass.<sup>135</sup>

He continues, more pensively, to describe the position of those for whom the old beliefs have vanished: "Among those who no longer believe in the religion of their fathers, some are proudly defiant, and many are indifferent. But there are also a few, perhaps an increasing number, who feel that there is a vacancy in their lives." They cannot organize their lives on the basis of a scientific dogma, Mr. Lippman points out, because there is no

such dogma available—for as Huxley and Karl Pearson long ago emphasized, a scientific attitude is *necessarily* undogmatic.

### *Is Humanism Adequate ?*

But is it true that Rationalism can only destroy? Is it impossible to apply its principles to the burning questions of everyday life? Its opponents maintain that it cannot fill the void it creates and so it must be doomed to failure. An admirer of Karl Barth declares that "Humanism has no more than a gospel of despair to offer."<sup>47</sup> Another asserts that philosophical materialism and the humanist belief that man can save himself are the modern equivalents of the Serpent's lie: "Ye shall not surely die . . . ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil." Consequently the right solution is to give up unbelief and return to religion. A similar line is taken by the American theologian, Professor G. F. Thomas :—

The modern denial of nature's dependence upon God and man's responsibility to Him is the root of the humanistic dogma of the self-sufficiency of man. It is the source of the rationalistic belief in the adequacy of human reason, unaided by divine revelation, to discover ultimate truth, and in the power of the human will without divine grace to attain ultimate good.<sup>20</sup>

Humanism is helpless in the face of world catastrophe, says one school; we must therefore repent and return to blind faith. Or, at the very least, we must, urge Professor J. Macmurray and Canon Streeter, accept religious dogmas as working hypotheses: "For what is Agnosticism but that mood of intellectual despair in which, because we have realized the impossibility of finality, we proclaim the impossibility of knowledge?"<sup>29</sup>

Until the outbreak of the 1914-18 war the characteristic "failure" of Rationalism was often said to be its inability to bring peace of mind. The sceptic was depicted as an outcast tormented by his intellectual doubts, wearing reason as a penitential hair shirt. There were popular books depicting the terror of the infidel on his death-bed.

Two world-wars have made us more familiar with death. It is the fate of the world rather than the soul-searchings of individuals that is our main concern today. The whole atmosphere has changed dramatically. We no longer hear anything

about the agnostic's deathbed. The possible death of civilization is the tragic theme nowadays.

Thus T. S. Eliot does not trouble to condemn, as Christians did forty or fifty years ago, the mentality of the individual agnostic; he looks with dismay at the prospect of the mentality of a great part of the world becoming moulded by scientific humanism:—

The world is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality. The experiment will fail; but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse; meanwhile redeeming the time so that the Faith may be preserved alive in the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization and save the world from suicide.

What seemed in the last century an unhappy experiment made by a few intellectuals is now viewed in horror as a world-phenomenon. The disasters that have overtaken us and those that still seem to threaten the world are blamed on irreligion, just as in Nero's day the fire of Rome was blamed on "atheists" and "enemies of mankind," as the Christians were then, somewhat ironically, called.

It would be fairer to blame our troubles on using reason too little than too much. The appeal to the sword, and even the stake, has been made often enough in the name of religion. But when have intolerance and massacre been defended by Rationalists? It is important to remember in this connection that a Rationalist is not *merely* a man who rejects the religious account of the universe. He is a man who dislikes interfering with anyone's beliefs, who holds that people should be encouraged to think for themselves. To become a Rationalist it is not enough to give up a set of irrational *beliefs*; it is necessary to stop *behaving* irrationally. Dr. K. R. Popper writes:—

I am a rationalist because I see in the attitude of reasonableness the only alternative to violence. When two men disagree, they do so either because their opinions differ, or because their interests differ, or both. . . . To reach a decision may be a necessity. How can such a decision be reached? A rationalist, as I use the word, is a man who attempts to reach decisions by argument, and, perhaps, in certain cases, by compromise, rather than by violence. . . . It will be realized that what I call the attitude of reasonableness or the rationalist attitude is an attitude which presupposes a certain amount of intellectual humility. It is an attitude which perhaps only those can take up who are aware

of the fact that they are sometimes in the wrong, and who do not habitually forget their mistakes. . . .<sup>136</sup>

Again, the ethic of Rationalism was re-stated with a slightly different emphasis by Professor Susan Stebbing in *Ideals and Illusions*, and it does not seem likely to speed the world to perdition :—

Life is not a game for which rules can be prescribed once for all; nor a rehearsal for a Great Drama the first performance of which is not yet; nor a porch leading us into heavenly courts. It is an illusion to find the value of our lives here and now in a life to come; it is an illusion to suppose that nothing is worth while for me unless I live for ever; it is an illusion to suppose that there is no uncompensated loss, no sacrifice that is without requital, no grief that is unassuaged. But it is also no illusion but uncontested fact that hatred, cruelty, intolerance and indifference to human misery are evil; that love, kindness, tolerance, forgiveness, and truth are good, so unquestionably good that we do not need God or heaven to assure us of their worth.<sup>138</sup>

### *Reason and Society*

The problem of ethics, free from arbitrary assumptions, was the subject of a profound study, *The Rational Good*, by L. T. Hobhouse. In that extremely important book he argued that reason is essentially a striving for harmony :—

It is the impulse to develop harmony, on the one hand by extending the control of mind over the conditions of its life, on the other hand by establishing unity of aim within the world of consciousness itself. The measure of harmony so achieved at any given stage is not complete, and its rules accordingly are not necessarily final. But they are to be modified only in the interests of some fuller harmony to which such a change will demonstrably lead.<sup>137</sup>

It follows that “ the irrational and immoral elements in life, its cruelties and injustices and Pharisaisms, have springs of which Reason, developed or undeveloped, is innocent.” And in certain circumstances self-sacrifice may be entirely rational :—

A society which should uniformly impose such sacrifice on all its members would not be making for the development of human powers in which we have found the rational good. Hence such a sacrifice can only be a means and not an end, not a good in itself. That the sacrifice should be made is the best thing for society under the circumstances if it is positively required to maintain or improve the existing

social order. And if it is the best thing for society, it is also the best, i.e., the least bad thing *under the circumstances* for the individual. It is his duty, and the worst thing he can do is to shirk his duty. It is also, as regards feeling, the way, not, indeed, of Happiness, but of Peace, i.e., of a sense of unity with mankind and with the general end and aim of life.<sup>137</sup>

Surely, it is often objected, no Rationalist *per se* is entitled to propose such an ethic. In the first place, he would be plagiarizing Christianity; in the second place, there is no sense in doing good unless there is an after-life in which the virtuous will be rewarded and the wicked punished. Yet the fact has to be accounted for that Rationalists are seldom more selfish than their Christian neighbours, and that the lives of many of them have been devoted to removing social injustice. Spinoza's doctrine that virtue is its own reward seems quite incomprehensible to those who are accustomed to do right, not for its own sake, but because they hope to receive compound interest.

Alternatively, it is argued that whatever Rationalists may *say* in praise of virtue, they cannot hope to achieve the real thing without supernatural aid. It may be admitted that, guided only by the natural light of reason, they are honestly trying to save the world from material disaster. Nevertheless, they are (a) attempting the impossible; (b) attempting something that is not supremely important. The accents with which these points are stressed vary with Catholic and Protestant.

Man cannot save himself, proclaim those Neo-Calvinists especially who have been influenced by the fashionable Barthian theology, because, since the Fall, human nature has become utterly depraved:—

Man is involved in the dilemma that his highest good is purchased at terrible cost. His most superb actions are tainted with pride and self-seeking. He can will no good thing that is not tainted with evil. . . . He is incapable of complete disinterestedness, which any man who is not a humbug is bound to admit.<sup>47</sup>

But is it seriously maintained that the Christian system of rewards and punishments is designed to promote disinterestedness? Would scientific knowledge be possible, for example, but for the disinterested pursuit of truth that the Church has done so much to discourage? Hobbhouse shows that the very reverse is the

case—that what has proved to be *impossible* to practise is the ethic of the Gospels :—

It has not been found possible for men to live by it, and its reception as an orthodoxy has always been a disaster to the creed. . . . To attract numbers, and keep them, the teachers and the Churches have striven in vain by asceticisms and brotherhoods, disciplines and charities. They could enforce the rules, but not breathe the spirit into the mass.

The conversion of the Empire was a pyrrhic victory for Christianity. How was communism to be reconciled with property, “take no thought for the morrow” with industry and thrift, non-resistance with the law courts, and, above all, with war, the prohibition of oaths with judicial procedure, and so forth? <sup>137</sup>

As Archibald Robertson remarks : “A time-honoured method of preventing progress is to prove in advance, to your own satisfaction and that of everyone who attaches importance to your opinion, that progress is impossible. For no one wastes time in trying to bring about what he believes impossible.” <sup>138</sup>

### *The New Morality*

It is difficult to see how anyone can doubt that scientific knowledge has given us the *power* to relieve the frustrations, end much of the disease, and raise the material standard of living in all parts of the world. The only chance that the under-nourished millions in Asia, for example, have of averting periodical famines and plagues is in the application of scientific knowledge to the prevention of malaria and similar scourges, to the extermination of locusts and other pests, to improved agricultural methods, and to control of the birth-rate. To bring these benefits to ignorant and superstitious millions, thereby forcing a rise in their level of education, is the aim of all humanists, no matter what political differences they may have. At present they lack neither the will nor the technique, but the authority; and those who continually harp on man's sinfulness and the impossibility of improving his lot are placing needless obstacles in the way.

Professor J. D. Bernal very clearly expresses the impatience that the humanist feels at the obstructionist attitude to the employment of technical knowledge, which is, ironically enough, justified by an appeal to a “higher” ethic :—

It has seemed to many in the last few years a sad paradox that while man's powers of understanding have everywhere increased, we should find ourselves in a state of want, dissatisfaction, and justified apprehension which has not been felt, at least by the upper classes of society, for over a hundred years. To shallow minds which can see only one thing at a time, science is made to be the single cause of our troubles, and it is asserted that man's moral nature is not competent to deal with the vast powers which his intellect has put at his command. They foresee doom, and demand, without either considering it or really expecting it to happen, that we abandon our knowledge and relapse into a pious and mystical ignorance. The alternative to this attitude comes from the realization that we are at this present moment of time at a particularly critical stage of transformation that began some hundreds of years back and may go on for some scores of years into the future.<sup>140</sup>

Rationalism has begun to lay the foundation of a new morality which is more practical than the precepts of the Gospels and which does not rely upon supernatural sanctions. The main principles, as shown by most of the writers quoted, are the disinterested pursuit of truth; compassion for suffering combined with a determination to use all available knowledge to end it, or at least alleviate it; freedom of thought and its expression, without which cultural life would be impoverished and scientific research stultified. If these principles were followed it is obvious that the world would be transformed. The greed, egoism, and inertia that oppose their application are defended by all varieties (some exceedingly subtle) of irrationalism.

### *The New Irrationalism*

The various types of irrationalism that confront us today are expressed in a new idiom. They have this in common: they try to prove that they are more up-to-date than Rationalism. They are unitedly opposed to any extension of scientific method outside the laboratory. They are desperately anxious that it should *not* be applied to man or to human society, and to prevent this from happening they cry "Woe, woe!" to every attempt to use the knowledge we actually possess to solve specifically human problems. They believe that they themselves possess some superior knowledge derived either from revelation or intuition.

We have already examined the theory of revealed truth. The recent history of this theory is one of retreat. The advance of secular knowledge has undermined the two main pillars of



traditional authority—the Church and the Scriptures. Only the Roman Church and those Fundamentalists whom Inge describes as “the Protestant underworld” now cling to the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible. In this situation contemporary apologists have not scrupled to debase the notion of truth itself, and we are offered symbolical truths, typological truths, existential truths, and “true myths.”

The Anglican Church has now had to throw overboard completely the traditional test of the truth of a dogma proposed by Vincent of Lerins as long ago as the fifth century. This so-called Vincentian canon declared that an orthodox belief was one held by the entire Church everywhere and from antiquity—*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*. And recently the Anglican Church has had to acknowledge that the very *language* in which its creeds are expressed is no longer acceptable. This is an even more radical change than may appear at first sight, and is an unwitting tribute to one of the most significant developments of Rationalist thought—criticism of language, or *semantics*.

The late Bishop Gore, writing at a time when Rationalism as we usually understand it was taking shape, declared that the Formula of Chalcedon, defining the Natures of Christ, was “a permanent definition” :—

Its language is permanent language, none the less permanent because Greek. . . . The ideas of substance or thing, of personality, of nature, are permanent ideas; we cannot get rid of them; no better words could be suggested to express the same facts.<sup>141</sup>

Since the above was written, however, we realize that personality, as traditionally understood, is a highly dubious concept. There are cases of multiple personality and so on. Also, physics has substituted “events” for “things.” The Aristotelian idea of “substance,” on which the doctrine of the Trinity (and, for Catholics, of Transubstantiation) depends, is thought by many philosophers to be otiose. The Archbishops’ Report of 1938 accepts this situation without appearing to realize its drastic implications :—

We believe ourselves to be affirming in our Report that which was affirmed in the language of its own time by the Council at Chalcedon. But we wish to assert that the Church is in no way bound to the metaphysics or the psychology which lie behind the terms employed by the Councils.<sup>3</sup>

Once the contradictions in this pronouncement are unravelled the basis of traditional theology crumbles away. For if the language in which divine truths are expressed is wrong, what becomes of these great truths?

By developing this sort of analysis some of the younger and ablest exponents of Rationalism today are stripping the disguise from the new forms of irrationalism. They answer the claims of intuition and of so-called "existential thinking" by carrying agnosticism a stage farther. The Victorian agnostic had called attention to the limits of what could be *known*; his modern successor explores the limits of what can be *said*, or put in language, without talking "nonsense."

Semantics is difficult and technical, but anyone can see roughly what it is about. Religious and metaphysical doctrines must be expressed in words if they are to be understood and communicated. They must be set out in the form of sentences. If these sentences are capable of being verified they are at least sensible statements, and the proposed test should show whether they are true or false. If there is no conceivable way of verifying them they are senseless statements, though they may still have great power to arouse emotion.

Apply this experiment to religious propositions and what becomes of them? They are seen to be statements which cannot possibly be *tested* (except in some metaphorical sense), and so they refer to nothing we can confidently assert to be real, though they may stimulate very strong feelings. It must not be supposed, of course, that there is general agreement among all schools of Rationalism about this new method of criticism; for that matter there is no general agreement among the irrationalists either. Whatever its value, the semantic approach at least shows that Rationalism is not embogged in the nineteenth century, though its pioneers at that time were equally strenuous in demanding material evidence, in the last resort, as a certificate of truth.

It may well be that extremely important ideas have sometimes come abruptly in a flash of insight. But although such ideas may be accepted by the religious prophet as bearing the stamp of truth, the Rationalist cannot accept them as true until they have been publicly tested. As one of the ablest exponents of Semantics, Professor A. J. Ayer, states :—

While it must be recognized that scientific laws are often discovered through a process of intuition, this does not mean that they can be intuitively validated. It is essential to distinguish the psychological question, How does our knowledge originate? from the logical question, How is it certified as knowledge? And so we may consistently allow that some of our knowledge comes by intuition and yet deny that we have any *a priori* guarantee of what seems to come through that channel.<sup>142</sup>

### *The Way of the Mystic*

The fashionable cult of Soren Kierkegaard is symptomatic of a widespread mood of irrationalism that goes beyond the boundaries of Christian thought. The vogue of "existentialism" on the Continent owes much to Kierkegaard and something to Pascal. Indeed, this type of irrationalism is so deep-rooted that the opposition between Catholic and Protestant seems to melt.

Kierkegaard's chief advocate and translator in Germany is Theodor Haecker, a Catholic; and yet Kierkegaard also inspires such Protestant theologians as Barth and Brunner. His writings, now so popular in Britain and America as well as on the Continent, contain such vitriolic attacks on the Church that Rationalists who have not met this type of Christianity before may be surprised to find their own criticisms of the Church mild in comparison.

Kierkegaard holds that the true Christian is not the man who conforms outwardly, but the man who has immediate (intuitive) experience of God. True religion is distinguished by immediacy, which is the opposite of reflection or rational thought. Professor Swenson, introducing his translation of Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*, tells us:—

There exists at present a school of thinkers whose fundamental principle is to make a sharp cleavage between what they call "logical" and "emotive" significance, denying to the latter all verifiability, and hence all real truth or error. The Kierkegaardian literature is not so much an argument against this view, which erects into a philosophical principle the vulgar prejudice which identifies the emotional with the structureless and the arbitrary, as it is a *demonstration* of its falsity through the actual production of a reflectively critical system of evaluations.

Kierkegaard and his followers do not trouble to argue; they are not hampered by rules of evidence: they merely affirm, like

an oracle. The "god-control" and "moral re-armament" of the Buchmanites are vulgarizations of this extreme subjectivity (*Innerlichkeit*).

We are not merely offered a vague, mystical experience of the divine; what is affirmed is quite detailed; it is about alleged historical happenings and so assumes the essential veracity of the Bible. Here is a typical passage, showing the influence of this new approach, by the American theologian, Dr. Theodore M. Greene :—

Secularists who reject it [the Christian Revelation] simply because it is not reducible to, or verifiable in, purely secular terms, do so at their own peril. The simple Christian is less dogmatic and more humble. He is willing to believe that the Bible is indeed the record of God's revelation to man, even though he very inadequately comprehends this revelation. He is willing to credit the testimony of the prophets and saints even though he cannot fully verify their testimony in his own experience and reflection. . . . But the faith of sincere Christians is never wholly blind; it is always rooted, to some extent at least, in their personal encounter with the Jesus of history and the spirit of Christ in the Church, and in their own experience of prayer and religious meditation.<sup>20</sup>

Or, to quote Dr. G. F. Thomas again :—

The modern denial of Nature's dependence upon God and man's responsibility to Him is the root of the Humanistic dogma of the self-sufficiency of man. It is the source of the rationalistic belief in the adequacy of human reason, unaided by divine revelation, to discover ultimate truth, and in the power of the human will to attain ultimate good. . . . God is the Lord of History, working through men and nations whom He has raised up to fulfil His purpose. As men and nations respond to His call in faith and surrender their wills to His purpose, they are raised by His Spirit above themselves and enabled to do marvellous deeds.<sup>20</sup>

German theologians call this *Heilsgeschichte* (Holy History), yet obviously it is but a refinement of the sort of language hitherto associated more with popular revivalists than serious apologists. Herbert Read suggests a clue to the puzzle of why intellectuals should use the speech of the Salvation Army when he says :—

The ever-increasing fund of scientific knowledge about the universe and the process of its historical evolution has become so diffused that the state of *doubt*, which formerly afflicted a minority of intellectual

heretics, is now universal. I would also suggest that the actual character of this knowledge has become more positive and inclusive, leaving very little to be ascribed to the agency of a supernatural power. *As a result, the minority (as it actually is) of believers, in advanced civilizations, now consists of the very ignorant and the very clever.*<sup>143</sup>

The "very clever" now tend to refuse debate. It was apparent enough some thirty years ago that Modernists, who sought to water down theology to meet scientific requirements, played the unwitting role of a Fifth Column in the orthodox camp. The road they were taking led logically to Rationalism, and so a halt had to be called. That is why liberals and Modernists (like Dr. Barnes) are now dismissed as being old-fashioned.

### *The Immortality of the Soul*

It remains to consider the question that has haunted man through recorded history and to which Christianity returns a very positive answer—is the soul immortal? The "other-worldliness" that has diverted so much social energy from the repair of injustice on earth is based, in the East as well as in the West, on the conviction that this life is but a preparation for a continued existence in some form or other. How should the Rationalist approach such assertions? He must surely ask the same question as when he is called upon to accept any other elements of traditional faith: What is the evidence? How can we test the statement that the soul is immortal?

Phrased in this way there can be no doubt about the answer which we must return. No conceivable experiment could decide whether anything will last for ever. But Professor C. D. Broad has called attention to the necessity for distinguishing between *immortality* and *survival* (or persistence). Although it must still be asked: survival of *what*?

The most recent attempt to frame a "proof" that consciousness persists after death is made by Mr. J. W. Dunne in *An Experiment with Time* and *The Serial Universe*. His arguments are too technical to discuss here; briefly, the proof is a deduction from what Mr. Dunne believes to be the nature of consciousness and time. A more frankly metaphysical attempt to deduce immortality from the concept of time was made earlier by the Cambridge philosopher, McTaggart, who believed in reincarnation, although

he denied the existence of a personal God—a position reminiscent of Buddhism.

If we deny the validity of metaphysical “proofs,” is there anything else to be said on the subject? There would hardly seem to be any further comment worth making *unless* we are willing to consider the findings of psychical research. To refuse even to look at these findings because we already hold a philosophical theory that would be upset by them cannot be defended. Whatever may be thought of some interpretations of the work of Dr. Soal in London University, and Dr. Broad and his collaborators in Cambridge, such experimenters cannot be dismissed as the mere dupes of a clever conjuror. In the opinion of many reliable witnesses they have adduced some respectable evidence for telepathy and pre-cognition. What they have *not* produced so far is any detailed theory to account for these abnormal phenomena, still less any weighty evidence of human survival. But they have undoubtedly shown that the riddle of the mind and the meaning of personality are more complex than was supposed in the nineteenth century.

Our attitude on the subject must express a belief (or suspension of belief) rather than a statement of fact. Thus, speaking as a philosopher, Russell expresses a belief rather than states a fact when he says: “I believe that when I die I shall rot and that will be the end of me.” It is interesting to note, however, that he holds this view while repudiating that “old-fashioned materialism” to which Rationalists are falsely supposed to cling:—

The modern would-be materialist thus finds himself in a curious position, for, while he may with a certain degree of success reduce the activities of mind to those of the body, he cannot explain away the fact that the body itself is merely a convenient concept invented by the mind.<sup>144</sup>

Jung takes an agnostic attitude when theorizing: “We simply have no scientific proofs about it one way or the other and are therefore in the same position as when we ask whether the planet Mars is inhabited or not.”<sup>145</sup> But he admits that as a practising physician he encourages some patients to believe in survival, “from the standpoint of psychotherapy,” if the approach of death is feared or resented.

Referring to certain theories constructed to account for

telepathy, Professor A. E. Heath draws attention to the danger of wishful-thinking :-

I have an uneasy suspicion that a great deal of the contemporary interest in these things comes from undercurrents of human feeling and not from objective concern with unusual statistical results. . . . Most people realize in their clearer moments that the only possible form of immortality for us (except that limited survival created by memory of our deeds and works) is immortality of the germ-plasm.<sup>146</sup>

On the other hand, it is justly alleged that some people may have an emotional resistance to psychical research because they fear that its results may upset their metaphysical theories. There need be no hostility between Rationalism and carefully conducted psychical research—the sort of experiments conducted, for example, by Dr. Broad and his collaborators, who regard telepathy and certain other “paranormal” phenomena as well-attested. In order to account for these phenomena Dr. Broad suggests a “minimum” hypothesis so unpleasant that no one is likely to be drawn to it by wishful-thinking. Dr. Broad calls it the Compound Theory of Mind, and it assumes that there is a substance which may conceivably survive the death of the brain. This view is dualistic and, as Broad himself says, quite compatible with McTaggart’s metempsychosis. In his own words :—

The theory that the mind is a compound substance, whose constituents are the organism and what I have called a “psychic factor,” is compatible with all the normal facts; though it is not suggested by them, and is more complex than the theory that the mind is existentially dependent on the organism and on it alone. This Compound Theory seems to be the minimum assumption that will explain certain fairly well-attested abnormal phenomena. . . . It is compatible with all the facts that everyone admits; it has nothing against it except a superstitious objection to dualism; and it leaves open the possibility that these debatable phenomena are genuine. It is quite open for anyone to hold that the mind is a compound of the organism and of a psychic factor which is not itself a mind and yet to doubt or deny that there is any conclusive evidence that a psychic factor ever persists after the destruction of the organism with which it was combined, or that if it does persist it ever combines even for a moment with the organism of some living human being to form a temporary mind.<sup>57</sup>

Personal reactions to survival can teach us little. According to Frazer :—

If abstract truth could be determined, like the gravest issues of national policy, by a show of hands or a counting of heads, the doctrine

of human immortality, or at least of a life after death, would deserve to rank among the most firmly established of truths; for were the question put to the vote of the whole of mankind there can be no doubt that the "ayes" would have it by an overwhelming majority. The few dissenters would be overborne; their voices would be drowned in the general roar.<sup>148</sup>

Yet one object of Buddhist training is to arrest "the wheel of reincarnation"—to avoid rebirth. And in all countries where Communism has gained an ascendancy, including the whole extent of the U.S.S.R., the belief in immortality is being extinguished. Whatever else the Communists are prepared to fight and die for, it is for no heavenly crown.

Even in this country, a Mass Observation survey in 1934 shows that "nearly half the women and nearly two-thirds of the men incline to think that there is no after-life, or are undecided about it." Nevertheless, 66 per cent of those of secondary education, as against 41 per cent with elementary education, answered in the affirmative. More curious still, one in ten questioned believed in reincarnation.

Personal reactions show wide variation. Einstein has stated that he has no desire for immortality. "An individual who should survive his physical death is beyond my comprehension, nor do I wish it otherwise; such notions are for the fears or absurd egoism of feeble souls."<sup>149</sup> On the other hand, Malinowski, the anthropologist, once wrote: "To me, and to those many who are like me, nothing really matters except the answer to the burning questions: Am I going to live or shall I vanish like a bubble?" And Bishop Barnes protests: "The scheme of things is unreasonable if man's personality is destroyed at death so that all his spiritual achievements are wasted save for such fragments as may survive through his influence on others."<sup>15</sup>

### *The Moral Argument for Immortality*

The argument that man *must* be immortal is often advanced and takes many forms. Thus Professor A. E. Taylor has contended that unless we survive death, it will make no permanent difference whether we lead evil lives or strive for the highest goods—namely, the discovery and knowledge of truth, the attainment and exercise of virtue, and the creation and fruition of



beauty and the relation of love between persons. To this Dr. Broad replies:—

It is certain that no doctor can prevent me from eventually dying. Does this render it irrational for me to go to a doctor if I have an illness in the prime of life, in the hope that he will cure me and enable me to live for many more years in comfort to myself and in useful activities and valuable personal relations to others? Surely it does not. Now if it is rational to seek to be cured of an illness, though eventually *some* illness is certain to be fatal to me, why is it irrational for me to seek to enlarge scientific knowledge and to produce beautiful objects, though eventually a time will come when this knowledge will be lost and these objects will no longer be contemplated? The human race has probably a long course before it, and I can certainly affect for better or worse the lives of countless generations of future men. I cannot see the least reason to think that because the course of human history is not *endless*, it ceases to be my duty to do what I can to assure to these future generations decent social conditions, clear scientific knowledge which they can build upon and extend, and beautiful objects which they can admire and use as an inspiration for the production of yet more beautiful objects. That it will all come to an end eventually is a tragedy; but this tragedy seems to make no difference to my duty here and now.<sup>57</sup>

One great difference between naturalism and supernaturalism is that the former is this-worldly, the latter other-worldly. The free man thinks of nothing so little as of death, said Spinoza. But the main focus of Christianity and most other religions is on a future life, rather than on the present one.

This other-worldly pre-occupation has been responsible for what often seems a callous indifference to social evils—a toleration of injustice, disease, and the cost, in human suffering, of war. The Catholic and medieval conception of a just war means today that the religion which claims to be based on love is nevertheless prepared to sanction the use of atomic bombs, radio-active clouds, and bacteriological weapons, provided that the enemy can be shown to be irreligious.

A Commission appointed by the Archbishops of York and Canterbury published a Report in 1948 which revives the medieval doctrine of a just war. In cautious yet unmistakable language the Commissioners declared that although atomic warfare was deplorable it might be in some circumstances permissible.

A franker expression of this strange paradox is to be found in an editorial statement by *The Christian World*. Even if civiliza-

tion is utterly destroyed by atom-bombs, such a holocaust would not matter, we are told, if religion itself could be preserved :—

The great argument used by those who speak of the "Christian Way" in a pacifist sense is that another war would destroy civilization, and therefore that nothing would be gained by opposing anti-Christian aggression—if the worst came to the worst—by force of arms. The Christian answer to that, we seriously and deeply believe, is that it would be better for civilization to be wiped out physically than to go on living in a state of spiritual death.

Rationalism does not oblige a man to be a pacifist, but it certainly prevents him from being complacent about sacrificing the world here and now in the interests of a life beyond the grave. Those who accuse humanists of leading mankind to catastrophe should consider more carefully the practical consequences of the Christian ethic. The representatives of the Barth-Brunner-Niebuhr school almost seem to relish the thought of impending doom.

Thus W. Burnet Easton, a prominent American theologian, writes in Reinhold Niebuhr's journal *Christianity and Society* as follows :—

One of the first tasks, then, of the Church in reference to the atomic bomb or anything else, is to disabuse the Church and the world of the idea that the success of the Church is contingent on preventing wars or saving man or society from destruction, or that the validity of the Christian faith is in the slightest imperilled even if the whole world is destroyed. . . . Christianity has never saved societies and has never prevented death. It has saved and can save men and women in any society and give them eternal life.

Such are some authoritative responses of the Church to the world in its present critical transition. Neo-Calvinism washes its hands of the world. Faith and Reason, this world and the next, stand opposed to each other in violent contradiction. We cannot understand it by intellect because there is a warp running through the entire cosmos and infecting our minds. "The world is a cracked mirror," said Brunner; and man is totally depraved.

The destruction of false beliefs is a necessary preliminary to the discovery of truth. Not, indeed, that we can ever hope to find absolute, unchanging truths. "To the scientific mind no theory is ever final or absolute," as Professor MacMurray points out. The cross-purposes at which the Rationalist and the Christian

often find themselves in discussion is largely due to the inability of the theologically-trained mind to be content with probability. It is the vice, too, of those who, like William James, speak as though there were only two alternatives: complete belief or complete unbelief.

The Rationalist is not blind to the dangers of the misuse of knowledge, nor is he given to jejune optimism. Before either of the two world wars that have so tragically revealed the destructive use of science, yoked to irrationalism, Dewey wrote:—

Physical science has, for the time being, far outrun psychical. We have mastered the physical mechanism sufficiently to turn out possible goods; we have not gained a knowledge of the conditions through which possible values become actual in life, and so we are still at the mercy of habit, of haphazard, and hence of force . . . with tremendous increase in our control of nature, in our ability to utilize nature for human use and satisfaction, we find the actual realization of ends, the enjoyment of values, growing unassured and precarious. At times it seems as though we were caught in a contradiction; the more we multiply means the less certain and general is the use we are able to make of them. No wonder a Carlyle or a Ruskin puts our whole industrial civilization under a ban, while a Tolstoy proclaims a return to the desert. But the only way to see the situation steadily and see it whole is to keep in mind that the entire problem is one of the development of science and its application to life.<sup>150</sup>

Apart from obvious enemies, organized science itself—like the Churches and every human institution—tends to develop a conservatism as it becomes more and more organized. It is necessary for the Rationalist to be also on his guard against any ossification of theory into dogma, as Dr. C. D. Darlington, among others, has repeatedly insisted.

In *The Conflict of Science and Society*, Dr. Darlington points out that fundamental scientific discoveries “always entail the destruction or disintegration of old knowledge before the new can be created. And it is this destruction, or fear of it, which arouses the opposition of the well-trained and well-established scientist as well as of those outside science whose beliefs the new ideas threaten to disintegrate.”

The danger that a particular world-outlook may become frozen into a dogma would still remain even in a secularized State. If theology were merely replaced by metaphysics we might have a false Rationalism, hostile to innovations and even persecuting

those who challenged its creed. In effect this would be another religion, though it would repudiate the name. It would protect science, but without freedom of expression there could be no fundamental advance. We must be suspicious, however, of those who lay too much stress on these dangers. Freedom of inquiry belongs to the scientific tradition itself; it is one of those "Western values" that certainly owes nothing to Christianity.

The scientific tradition emerged in Europe in the sixteenth century, and gradually it undermined the foundations of the religious tradition. Looking back, it seems, to an increasingly large number of people who have been trained to approach problems scientifically, that the religious beliefs which were for so long regarded as divinely revealed are no longer credible. Apart from what seems manifest mythology, the deep contradiction running through the entire Christian scheme is now exposed. The ultimate contradiction was due to the impossible fusion of Jewish and Greek conceptions of God. Yahweh was mingled with Plato's Demiurge and Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, and for nearly two thousand years theologians have sought in vain to reconcile these irreconcilables. As Professor Lovejoy puts it:—

Perhaps the most extraordinary triumph of self-contradiction, among many such triumphs in the history of human thought, was the fusion of this conception of a self-absorbed, self-contained Perfection—of the Eternal introvert who is the God of Aristotle—at once with the Jewish conception of a temporal creator and busy interposing Power making for righteousness through the hurly-burly of history, and with primitive Christianity's conception of a God whose essence is forthgoing love and who shares in all the griefs of his creatures. When applied to the notion of creation—which is the aspect of this syncretism which here concerns us—the doctrine of the self-sufficiency of deity implied that from the divine—that is from the final and absolute—point of view a created world is a groundless superfluity.<sup>151</sup>

There was no need for God to create the world, said Augustine; he did so because he chose to do so. But if God arbitrarily chose to create this sort of world, is he not responsible for its imperfections? The tortuous debates engendered by this problem have not yet died down. Those who contended that creation resulted from divine reason had to show that it was reasonable that evil should exist. Even Aquinas was driven to state that "a universe in which there was no evil would not be so good as the

actual universe." In the eighteenth century there was a wave of Protestant optimism expressed by such comforting doctrines as "Whatever is, is right," and that this is "the best of possible worlds." The contradictions remained, however, and in our time the breakdown of Christian rationalism is reflected by a return to ancient pessimism. The grand design of Nature, at which Pope and Young and Addison marvelled, has become "a cracked mirror." And since reason has failed "to justify the ways of God to man" we are enjoined to turn to blind faith.

There is, however, another alternative. If reason has been unable to resolve the inconsistencies of Christianity, and if the amassing of knowledge has intensified them, what is the point of struggling to maintain incompatibles? Let us turn frankly to the scientific and humanist tradition and endeavour to encourage, not insincerities, but an attitude of mind that is ever responsive to new ideas, opposed to all orthodoxies, prepared to submit every problem to the test of reasoned discussion and evidence. This does not mean that we disregard non-intellectual elements; but knowledge, in the sense in which we have been using the word, is what is public and communicable. Obviously a great part of our awareness consists of private feelings; we *enjoy* the universe as well as attempt to understand and *describe* it, and this subjective enjoyment gives rise to the highest flights of the creative imagination and passes beyond the limits of language. It cannot therefore be brought within the rational system of knowledge. In the closing words of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "Of what we cannot speak we must keep silent."

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