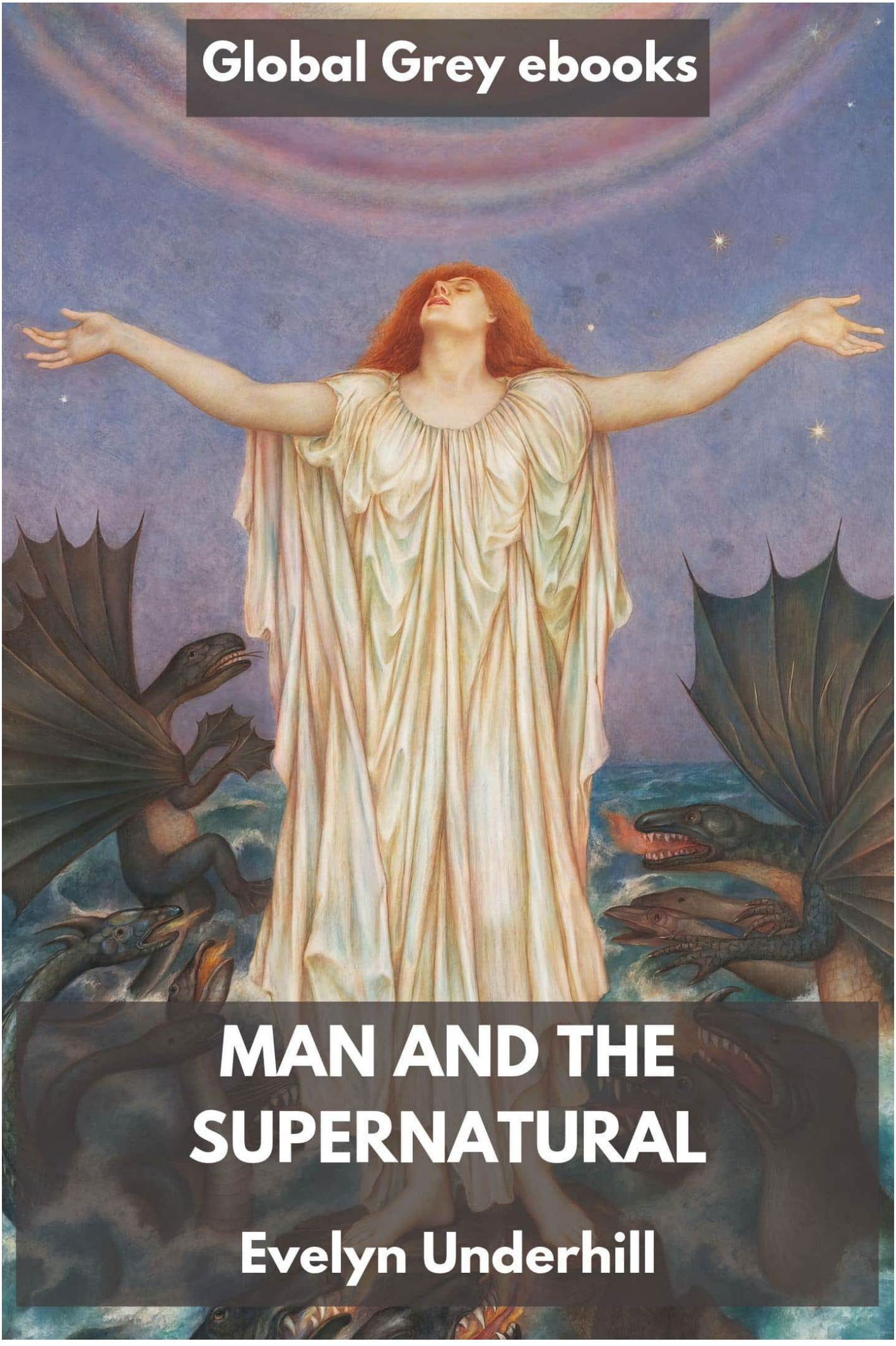
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MAN AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Evelyn Underhill

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EVELYN UNDERHILL

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Preface

Looking back in middle life upon my childhood and young age, I see in them two great literary landmarks. The first is a book called *Reading without Tears*, which, when I was six, fulfilled the promise of its name. The second, more ferocious in its methods, was administered at the age of fourteen. Its inaccurate title was *The Anxious Enquirer after Salvation Directed and Encouraged. Man and the Supernatural* is an amateur attempt to apply the methods of the first work to the subject-matter of the second, in other words, to offer the fundamentals of religious philosophy in a palatable form. An experience extending over a good many years has made it clear to me, that anxious and indeed eager inquirers into the meaning, credentials, and practices of what is generally called 'religion' are steadily increasing; but that they often find a difficulty in assimilating the answers which they receive from traditional sources. The symbols and technical language of theology seem to them at best incomprehensible, and at worst absurd and unreal. Knowing little or nothing of the system of ideas which these symbols represent, they cannot give them a content related to the experiences of ordinary life. Within the last few years, several brilliant and successful efforts have been made to help these seekers, and provide a new map of the theistic universe, agreeable to the needs of modern men. But these attempts have mostly been of one kind. They have envisaged one special class of difficulties, and aimed mainly at reconciling the outlooks of religion and of science. This religious naturalism, however, still leaves unsatisfied the deepest cravings of the spiritual consciousness. These cravings can only be met by a philosophy which shall include and give meaning to those dim yet deep experiences of the soul, those flashes of transcendental feeling which are of the essence of personal religion; and shall link these experiences with its doctrinal embodiments. They ask for something which shall look beyond the superficial explanations of psychology and shall harmonize the mystical, intellectual, historical, and institutional aspects of man's spiritual life. This book is an attempt to suggest the direction in which such a synthesis may best be sought.

Theologians and philosophers know well all that I have tried to say here. But they have a habit of disguising the vital character of their knowledge, by dressing it in strange hieratic garments which intimidate the uninitiated: as 'physiological chemists' conceal under technical formulae priceless information about the human body and how it should be fed. The result is that many feel compelled to seek abroad that which is really stored for them at home. There does seem, then, to be a need for a simple exposition of the principles of theism, and the degree in which these principles are embodied in historical, institutional, and mystical religion. Therefore I have tried to describe, in terms which I believe to be consistent with Christian philosophy, some of the ways in which that independent spiritual Reality which we recognize as divine is disclosed to human beings and enters and transforms their lives. This undertaking involves the successive discussion of the spiritual significance of historical process, of personality, and of symbols and sacraments, as means by which the Transcendent truly enters human life; and of the activity we call prayer, and the transfiguration we call sanctity, as the classic witnesses to its presence within

that life. History and confessional literature, philosophy and psychology, contribute the material upon which the various sections are based.

I am not so young as to suppose that anything which is here written will be found entirely satisfactory by others, or will long remain so even for myself. Men move on, as Blake truly observed, though the states are permanent for ever. From beginning to end every statement and argument remains in my own mind tentative and suggestive; however definite the literary form in which it is cast. The one principle of the duality of full human experience, man's implicit participation in Eternity as well as Time, runs through all the chapters; and is applied in each to a different part of the religious field. For I am convinced that the solution of our deepest spiritual problems and the real explanation of our valid spiritual practices, is to be found in the right application of this principle, and the corresponding rejection of all merely immanental explanations of the world. Here is the 'end of the golden string'. Each will doubtless wind it into a slightly different ball; but those who do so with reasonable care will find that it leads to the gateway of Reality. It is in order to emphasize this distinction in kind between the successive life of Nature and the eternal life of God, that the book has been called *Man and the Supernatural*—a title which will, I fear, invite the suspicions of many of those steady thinkers whose minds I most respect; whilst attracting lovers of the abnormal, whose approval I am less anxious to win.

The earlier chapters incorporate material which has been delivered in the form of lectures at the University of St. Andrews, at King's College, London, and at the Church Congress of 1926. Chapters II, III, IV, and VIII, also embody the substance of articles on 'The Authority of Religious Experience', on 'Our Relation with Reality', and on 'The Supernatural', which have appeared respectively in *Theology*, *The Hibbert Journal*, and the *Guardian*. Chapter VII is based upon a paper read before the Anglican Fellowship, and afterwards printed in *Theology*. All this material, however, has been completely recast for the purposes of the present book. My grateful acknowledgements are due to those authorities and editors who so kindly gave these various opportunities of publicity.

More direct and profound are my obligations to thinkers and seers, known and unknown, living and dead, who have given me teaching, stimulus, and light. Most of these debts are acknowledged in the footnotes: the greatest of all, in the dedication. I also owe much to the help, criticisms, and encouragement of many kind friends; and chiefly to Mrs. Plunket Greene and Miss Clara Smith.

E. U.

Octave of SS. Peter and Paul, 1927.

I. The Point Of Departure: The Supernatural Instinct

Je ne crois pas manquer de respect à la lumière en recherchant ses premiers reflets jusque dans la nuit.

Pierre Charles

Il n'y a pas d'ennemi plus profond et plus dangereux du Christianisme que tout ce qui le rapetisse et le rend étroit.

Abbé Huvelin

Theology is not bound to graze in a paddock.

A. Schweitzer

I wish to write a book about the fundamentals of that which we usually call 'religion'. Not about the varieties and peculiarities of individual 'religious experience'; for these varieties and peculiarities seem to me to receive a degree of detailed attention entirely out of proportion to their importance. Hundreds of students of 'religious psychology' can now pass an examination in the phenomena of conversion or the degrees of prayer; but few have anything solid to say about that view of reality which the fact of conversion and practice of prayer require of us, and without which these things are meaningless.

Roughly speaking, the existence of religion is capable of, and constantly receives, two opposite explanations. It may represent the gradual development and propagation of an initial mistake: may be, in fact, a department of dream-psychology. Or it may represent the confused and still incomplete human apprehension of a real fact and a real world. We can view it, and write of it, from either point of view; but hardly without descending on one side or the other of the fence which divides them. Religion, to put it shortly, is either an illusion or a revelation: a retreat from, or an approach to, reality. I think that it is a revelation; and that ability to receive at least some of this revelation is the essential character of man. It is this view of reality and man's relation with it—a relation implicit in the whole drift of religion, and explicit in its acute manifestations—of which I wish to write. This will involve, it is true, some discussion of special experiences; for much of our material comes to us in this form. But it will also lead us to consider the general philosophical landscape which these experiences seem to require, if the mind is to make sense of them; and the nature and need of those institutions, practices, and symbolic constructions which embody and carry forward through history the fragmentary spiritual discoveries of the race.

Such a book must be, to a great extent, the expression of personal conviction and experience. It cannot be written with entire scientific detachment. It is at least as much the result of meditation as of the industrious study of facts; and all fruitful meditation has an emotional colour of its own. But the faithful report of personal conviction has acquired in our days something of the value which scientific expositions of theology seem to have lost. Such expositions are now seldom interesting to people outside the professionally religious class; whilst those willing to disclose with candour what they really think about religion, and above all what

meaning they really attach to its mysterious terminology, may hope for a more general attention. These chapters then represent the result of personal meditation on the great assumptions, problems and practices which Christian theism involves: and, if I should appear to speak hazily and sometimes dogmatically, this is because I am trying to describe something which has gradually loomed up and become ever clearer to me, but has not yet finished coming clear.

Human religion begins with the spectacle—so startling, if we could but view it with detachment—of a self-conscious spirit emerging, he knows not how or why, from the flux of physical life; contemplating that flux and finding himself unable to be satisfied with it; and thus realizing his implicit relationship with, and need of, something other than the apparent physical world. It shows us this peculiar creature parting company with his animal relations, and beginning a blundering search for the hiding place of that haunting Presence which seems to speak to him from the burning bush. Thus, after many bad guesses, by dint of trial and error, we see man achieving the Idea of God.

It is clear that from the moment in which man thus reaches—in however vague and crude a way—the Idea of God, he ceases to live in and respond to a merely physical world. Perfect adaptation to that world is no longer his standard. His implicit relationship with something other than the physical becomes more or less explicit; a genuine correspondence begins to be established between this living and unstable creature, and a stable Reality beyond the reach of sense. The history of religion first appears to us as the history of this special human craving to discover the relation in which we stand to the eternal reality of the universe; this embryonic instinct for the transcendent. It begins with the vague sense of unexplained powers conditioning us. It leads up to the acknowledgement of affinity and dependence contained in the great saying of St. Augustine, 'God is the only reality; and we are only real in so far as we are in His order and He in us'—a marvellous thought, surely, for the little human creature to achieve.

We may put all this in a more controversial way, and in language which many people will resist, by saying that human religion marks the point of contact between natural and supernatural orders; and that it is on the fringe-region between those orders, that the spiritual consciousness of man flickers to and fro. The word 'supernatural' is now out of fashion, having been cheapened by careless use; and modern thought is hostile to the dualism that it suggests. But those who dislike this antithesis of nature and supernature must still concede that in all its permutations, growth, rising, and falling, even in its worst corruptions and extravagances, religion does maintain one fundamental character: that of witnessing to a living and abiding Reality which is distinct from and beyond the world. It cannot be set aside as one of the devices by which the abstraction called Nature bribes or frightens man into becoming his natural best: for it often enters into sharpest conflict with that natural best. Nor can it be explained as a consoling fantasy; for its ultimate demands are the hardest that humanity has to meet.

Once he is religiously awakened, we always find that man becomes strangely and dimly aware that a demand is made on him and a gift is offered to him, which cannot be expressed in natural terms: and aware too of his own status, as a creature who is somehow capable of relations with a more than natural world. This is what religion says, and says all the time. We may think that it is struggling to state a supernal truth, or that it is perpetuating a lie born of the nightmares of primitive man. But if a lie, then we are left without any theory able to account for all that is involved in the

mere existence of human spirituality—its heroism, devotedness and transfiguring power, its persistent and difficult orientation to an other-worldly end—though it is easy enough to explain or discredit its lower manifestations, if these are taken alone. Indeed, even the naturalistic critics who do thus discredit it are driven in the end to adopt the standards of value of that very conception of life which their theories reject: for all morality worthy of the name has arisen under the influence of religious imperatives.

Moreover, when we have conceded the worst that the totems, taboos, and fetishes seem to require of us, when we have explored the psychological dust-hole and considered without prejudice its most objectionable exhibits, we are still faced by the great conundrum which continues to baffle the most ingenious naturalist: the question why it is that the Idea of God is here at all, or why mammals of a certain type should be incited thus to seek communion with an unseen Power. No one has ever explained why or how a merely physical universe should or could breed these persistent other-worldly cravings, and evolve these strange interminglings of spirit with sense: or how it is that a world littered with the unpromising products of primitive credulity should yet be able to produce—either with or without their assistance—the moral splendour and heroic actions of the saints. This is the central problem of religious history; and no philosophy which leaves it out can claim to be dealing honestly and completely with the actualities of human life. To be useful to us, such a philosophy must find a place and an interpretation for these certain facts: for the spiritual life as we know it in history, with its risings and fallings, its mistakes and its triumphs, in all its non-utilitarian beauty, its austerity and its charm. The recorded and criticized experiences, achievements and peculiarities of men and women living that life have at least as much importance as the distinctive experiences and discoveries of the musician or the man of science. For it is these first-hand experiences in their totality, and not the doctrines and speculations of academic theology, which are in the last resort our most valid evidence of the existence, nearness, richness and overwhelming compulsions of a supernatural world. Here is the starting-point: in this profound human sense of an over-plus of reality, of something beyond the physical. We can allow this, long before we feel called upon to make any choice among the thousands of religious schemes in which men have given body to this instinct and tried to satisfy its demands.

There has seldom been a period in which religious experience has been more vigorously studied than it is at the present time. People explore its peculiarities, compare and contrast its various expressions, search out, describe and try to explain its most eccentric manifestations. But that which makes religious experience interesting and important is not its eccentricity, but its universality: the fact that it represents the persistent effort of the race to approach Reality—an effort which meets with a partial success. Religion cannot matter at all, unless it matters supremely: unless, as a distinguished psychologist has not hesitated to say of it, it is 'the most important thing in life'.[1] Its claim to be heard rests on the fact that there are, and always have been, men and women for whom this effort to approach or respond to Reality has been the ruling passion of existence—persons who possess in a greater or less degree what is called an 'immediate experience of God', and try to live in conformity with this vision—and the further fact that the experience of these persons does not contradict, but deepens and gives precision to the obscure religious consciousness of the race.

[1] William Brown: *Mind and Personality*, p. 268.

We look at the long and varied history of human religion; and what we find in it, side by side with many fallings short, aberrations and absurdities, is the embodiment in particular personalities of this or that element in the whole concrete richness of eternal truth. We see the constant reappearance in various degrees of purity of the same certitudes and same cravings: certitudes and cravings which the physical world cannot produce and cannot satisfy. As the evidence accumulates, so it becomes more and more difficult to evade the conclusion that there is a literal sense in which man must be a

'Swinging-wicket set
Between
The Unseen and Seen',

though much that comes through from the unseen side of the gate is pressed and distorted by its narrowness.

What then do these facts, which we cannot ignore if we want to look squarely at human experience, imply for us? What is their bearing on our conception of Reality, of life, and of ourselves—those three mysteries which we cannot solve and cannot escape? Here is the human soul, constantly asking of the other Reality over against us the eternal question which was formulated by St. Francis: 'What art Thou? and what am I?' And there are the innumerable religions and philosophies of the world, propounding their answers. Some of these answers are based on Part I of the question; and are so abstract and theoretical that they merely change the form of the mystery, the shape of the shadow which is cast upon the veil. Other of the answers are based upon Part II of the question; and answer it in a form that hardly finds a place even for man's best and none at all for his persistent sense of a better that lies beyond him. But now and again the whole question is answered with a startling thoroughness, certitude and distinctness; as in the sudden saying of St. Ignatius: 'I come from God, I belong to God, and I am destined for God!' That saying covers both the nature of Reality and the meaning of man; and at once makes the little theatre of his life the scene of a supernatural mystery. It is unfortunate that such an affirmation is now commonly classed as devotional, and tucked away into a corner, whence it cannot affect 'practical life'. But it is not really devotional. It is practical, even scientific; and in making it the key to that interpretation of existence which it is the business of the Spiritual Exercises to drive home, St. Ignatius showed far more intelligence than piety.

Neither those who ask, nor those who provide answers for these fundamental questions seem fully to have realized the strangeness of the fact that the questions are asked again and again. But could the human race and human history be seen from outside by an intelligent personality which had never heard of the religious sense—an observer possessing both width and depth of vision, and so able to see the whole human world intensively and yet relatively, as one might see a tiny ant-heap in the solemn cosmic forest—surely it is the oddness and 'unnaturalness' of our spiritual longings and experiments which would strike him first? For here we have a small ephemeral animal; one amongst the many various creatures evolved upon, and anchored to, one of the smaller fragments in an uncounted stellar universe. And this fragile, ever-changing little creature, whose birth and death conform so perfectly to the rest of the physical routine, and whose visible existence is unlikely to outlast seventy or eighty journeys round the sun, is yet possessed of an innate sense of the Unchanging. His limited faculties seem to have been wholly developed in response to the threats and invitations of the ever-changing physical world, and trained to assist

him to live and breed in it; yet he refuses to be satisfied by those given aspects of reality which are so plainly present to his senses, and are all those senses know. Alone among the jostling crowd of related organisms which surround him, feed him, threaten him and fear him, he is found again and again rejecting the obvious and inescapable landscape to which he is adapted, and seeking persistently for something unseen.

Our detached observer would therefore perceive an animal possessing a mental machine which has been developed through correspondence with a sensual world, and is indeed only truly adequate to its data and requirements. Yet he would see this machine deliberately turned by its controlling entity away from and beyond that sensual world to which it is fitted, and set tentatively and rather clumsily to seek for contact with another order of reality: and this for no utilitarian purpose, but in obedience to a craving which it could not understand. He would see man, at various stages of his racial childhood and adolescence, choosing out of his environment some power or object as yet inexplicable to him, on which to fasten his creaturely sense of dependence and impulse of adoration. A mountain, a river, a stream, thunder and lightning, sun, moon, or fire; the mysterious power that gives fertility, brings pestilence, presides over birth and death—anything standing over against the mind, as an ensign and reminder of that Reality which is always felt but never understood. And as mind, becoming more clearly conscious, achieved a more and more perfect control of its animal home; so the symbols and acts through which it apprehended the Infinite would be seen to expand in majesty and meaning. He would also see that no other member of the animal creation looked out upon the natural scene with this sense of incompleteness, or showed any signs of discovering within and beyond it the demand and attraction of another level of life.

If this dispassionate observer had the power of distinguishing the significant from the obvious, he might discover as he continued his intent contemplation, that the small creatures over-running the surface of this little hurrying world produced now and again an individual who did not merely feel the queer, vague, other-worldly hunger, but also seemed capable of a certain other-worldly knowledge. He would perceive that, with a daring and confidence at once august and absurd, this ephemeral crumb of life actually sought and claimed a personal communion with the ultimate Reality. The relation which such an onlooker would see to exist between this possible possessor of supersensual knowledge and that ultimate Reality—the place, that is, of religious genius on the scale of created intelligence, and the degree of truth to which it can attain—are matters on which it is useless for us to speculate. All we are concerned to know is the strange and yet certain fact, that the human species does produce minds which are able and anxious to transcend that sense world, in which and for correspondence with which they have been developed. The way in which they can best do this is the ultimate problem of practical religion. The reason why they should wish to do it at all is the central interest of speculative theology. But the facts themselves cannot be denied; and can never be squared with a merely naturalistic philosophy.

Perhaps our observing mind would presently perceive that something more was involved in the phenomena on which he looked than a strange craving, more or less acutely realized, and a more or less complete satisfaction of it. He might see that the up-stretching of these little animals to Something Other did not originate within their dim and half-real lives, and could not properly be described in terms of development from within. On the contrary, it was always called forth, occasioned and

met by an inpouring from beyond the apparent theatre of their life; and was indeed a response to, rather than a seeking of, an Absolute Reality which already transfused and sustained them. And further, he would see that this correspondence of the childish human spirit with its true and living *Patria* was not sterile. It started and maintained a veritable growth and transformation. There was, on the part of some of those fugitive creatures in whom the supernatural sense developed, a gradual yet actual absorption and bodying forth of that Infinite Reality, which yet so immeasurably transcended the vague and limited minds of men.

He would see, in fact, the production of sanctity. Thus, by sharing both the limitations and the privileges of the created, he would learn the three primary truths which seem to govern man's dim or vivid experience of the Infinite: God's initial movement and invitation, man's return movement to God, and sanctity, God-likeness, as the possible term of his spiritual growth. He would feel the ever present activity of an unchanging Life beyond yet within life, recognized in and through the various hints and incarnations of the temporal order; and would see the seeking spirits of men to be themselves bathed and upheld all the time in and by that very Ocean of Spirit for which they seek and crave.

Aware from another angle than ours—and doubtless in another manner—not only of this everywhere-present transcendence, but also of the majesty of its creative expression in the universe, once more the paradox of those dimly seeking and yet finding souls would amaze him: the gentle drawing-out of these little, half-real spirits from the seething world of organic life. Seen thus, it might perhaps be that the other-worldly complex of meekness, heroism and love which is called Holiness, would seem to him the most deeply significant and enduring character of the life on which he looked: for in this alone he would see, completely developed, the result of a full and faithful correspondence between the embryonic human spirit and its supernatural environment. And he would find that it was actually one of these tiny and ephemeral creatures, born of that small and cooling planet, who had found the words of awe and amazement in which this paradoxical relation of Infinite Spirit soul might be expressed:

'When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;
What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
And the son of man, that thou visitest him?'[2]

This little parable will have served its purpose if it draws attention to certain constant factors in our human experience, which naturalism can neither deny nor explain. It reminds us that religion, as seen from the human side, is a branch, and perhaps even the most significant branch of anthropology: that any attempted explanation of our nature and meaning which ignores it is distorted and incomplete. It reminds us further that the facts of religion—neither those we despise nor those we approve taken alone, but all together in their richest developments—require something more than the emergence from within the organic world of a fresh quality or power, a mere unpacking of that world's portmanteau, another episode in the endless drama of Becoming. They involve, beyond this, the awestruck response of the creature to something wholly other and over-against itself; something given, an Existence independent of all man's conceiving, which already contains within Itself both the question and the answer of Reality. Whatever our own philosophic convictions may

[2] Psalm viii. 3, 4.

be, we are forced to acknowledge that somehow or other a series of events began, which ended in the strange recognition of a contrast and a relationship between 'man's nothing-perfect and God's all-complete'. The religious history of man, minute as its best achievements must be over against the Ultimate that it seeks, does show us at an infinite number of levels and in an infinite number of ways, this mysterious surge of created life towards that which lies beyond and yet within itself; its response to the attraction of Eternity.

That religious history seems to move between two poles. On the one hand, there is the moulding action, the initial call and pressure, of the everywhere present and unchanging Reality. On the other hand, there is the need and craving of man; gradually awaking to a more and more vivid consciousness, a more and more passionate desire of that Presence in which he discerns the plenitude of knowledge, joy and peace. These completing opposites inform our spiritual experience; though we may acknowledge that they appear in it always imperfectly and unequally apprehended, always mixed with and disguised by our natural instincts and cravings, thwarted by animal impulse, and dragging with them many disconcerting legacies from our sub-human past.

These great general facts of an existent, active supersensual order calling man's awakened spirit to transcend the world of sense, and of that spirit's desiring but difficult response—facts gathered up by Aquinas in the celebrated phrase which defined man as 'a contemplative animal'—ought surely to dominate the world-view of religion. They are, or they should be, the sky that overarches and the air that bathes the special landscape of theology. And indeed it is mainly for want of the humbling sense of that unmeasured sky, and of the presence of that warmly generous fresh and living air, that this landscape of theology so often seems dry, petty, and unreal. Those whose business it is to recommend one special form of religious belief and practice, or to examine in isolation one type of religious experience, urgently need this profound yet general sense of the supernatural, as an antidote to their natural trend to theological contraction and stuffiness.

How grand it would be, were these persons compelled as a part of their training to share for a while the position of our imaginary observer! Then they would be forced to consider the background of Eternity, and in relation with the solemn pageant of the universe—or such fragments of that pageant as we can yet perceive—their always geocentric and often parochial piety. Then they might cease to feel that religion stands or falls by the poor and variable rationalizations of men; might grasp the fact that its stammering utterances convey at best a fragmentary apprehension of That which Is, and see that there is nothing inherently sacred in the particular sort of religious shorthand in which they try to describe their particular series of supernatural certitudes. This shorthand, hardly ever transcribed into the vernacular or fully and simply explained, has now become one of the great obstacles to faith. Its crisp mysterious characters repel the uninitiated, who are left without any clue to its relation with the alphabet of everyday life; concealing from all but students of doctrine and those rare persons able to read the score of the supernatural music, the unchanging and objective truths with which religion deals.

'Divine things', said St. Thomas Aquinas, 'are not named by our intellect as they really are in themselves, for in that way it knows them not; but they are named in a way that is borrowed from created things.'[3] Yet in spite of this warning voice, popular

[3] *Summa Theologica*, Pars. I, Q. 13. I.

theology has brought us to a pass in which thousands of persons spend their lives, like the unconverted Augustine, in 'reproving the saints for thinking what they never thought'.[4] They are repudiating a God and a spiritual order which Christian philosophy has never proclaimed; but which have been arrived at by understanding the condensed and symbolic statements of dogmatic religion in a crude and absolute sense. No one reminds them now, as St. Catherine of Genoa reminded her disciples, that 'all that can be said about God is *not* God, but only certain smallest fragments which fall from His table.'[5] They forget that theological terms at best can only represent the struggles of other men to communicate their limited yet ineffable experience of the Given: that 'revealed religion' in its most intensive form, is yet necessarily revealed to the human race through human minds immersed in human history, and takes colour from the medium through which it has passed. Nor do they dwell over much on the probable results of demanding from the symbols of chemistry or mathematics, the childish standard of realism which they exact from the liturgies and creeds. Hence an inquiry amongst educated agnostics and unsectarian theists, as to what they suppose Christians to mean by such terms as Trinity, Incarnation, Grace, Heaven and Eternity, would bring startling evidence of the nature of the doctrines which these honest doubters so earnestly—and in many cases so properly—disbelieve.

Within the religious world itself the result of this popular neglect of origins and meanings has been hardly less deplorable. Ignorant of the real character of its own aims, credentials and beliefs, and frightened by criticisms which it has not learnt how to refute, Christian interest has concentrated with increasing determination on the social and ethical obligations and advantages of faith. It has lost the old, deep sense of man as essentially a citizen of

'Two worlds immense,
Of spirit and of sense . . .'

a creature capable of reacting to both these orders of reality, and only living his full life when moving freely between them. And contemporary Christianity has paid for this exclusively horizontal development, by an impoverishment of that nobly transcendental temper, that rightful other-worldliness, which is or should be the very heart of religion; and which alone can satisfy the spiritual hunger of men.

When St. Augustine exclaimed 'My life shall be a *real* life, being wholly full of Thee!'[6] he proclaimed in these words the power of the human soul to transcend its physical environment: and gave human personality and human religion a content and objective beyond the span of 'social Christianity'. He felt, as the spiritual genius always does feel, that the natural world and the natural creature taken by themselves are only half-real; and that a life which merely consists in the correspondence between them leaves the soul's innate thirst for reality unquenched. In God alone he found that full reality; the plenitude of Eternal Life which 'fully Is'. And his sense that this real life, this Being, was also in a measure accessible to man's spirit, carried with it the corollary that in so far as we and other creatures lack such completeness of existence, we 'are' not. The true demand and invitation of religion, therefore, is not that the human mind shall believe something, but that the human spirit shall be something. That it shall respond to the call of this Supernatural Reality, shall receive

[4] St. Augustine: *Confessions*, Bk. VI, cap. 4.
[5] *Vita e dottrina, 77b*. Quoted by von Hügel in *The Mystical Element of Religion*, vol. i, p. 277.
[6] St. Augustine: *Confessions*, Bk. X, cap. 28

its generous dower of light and grace, and move on and grow up into a fuller being and more abundant life. And the real history of religion is the unfinished history of man's efforts and discoveries, his surrenders, triumphs and mistakes in this field.

'I perceived', says St. Augustine again, 'that I was far away from Thee in the land of unlikeness; as if I heard Thy voice from on high saying "I am the Food of the full grown: grow, and thou shalt feed on Me. Nor shall thou change Me into thy substance as thou dost the food of thy flesh; but thou shalt be changed into Me" . . . and I beheld all things beneath Thee and saw that they are neither wholly real nor wholly unreal. They are real in so far as they come from Thee—unreal, because they are not what Thou art. For that alone is truly real which abides unchanged.'[7]

These words, if we will move away from the unreal temper in which we usually read 'devotional books', and will look at them with innocence of eye, must surely amaze us. They set before us, in its most intense form, the living heart of all religion: the fact of man's craving for and implicit experience of the Spaceless and Changeless Reality of God.

[7] St. Augustine: *Confessions*, Bk. VII, cap. 10.

II. The Particular Witness: Supernatural Experience

It is one thing merely to believe in a reality beyond the senses, and another to have experience of it also; it is one thing to have ideas of "the holy" and another to become consciously aware of it.

Rudolf Otto

When thou saidst, Seek ye my face: my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.

Psalm xxvii. 8

The voice, the exceeding great cry, of that unquenchable passion, of that irrepressible aspiration, whereby the soul of man shows forth its truest dignity and highest virtue in seeking the better to know and love and serve its Highest and Invisible Object.

H. P. Liddon

I

As we look backwards along history, and around us at the social complex of which we form part, we see two distinct kinds of direct witness to a Reality beyond the natural order: two levels at which human religion appears and endures, and must be taken in account. We see first the general and widespread religious cravings and convictions of humanity; cravings and convictions which, however inadequate their immediate objective may be, yet by their existence mark us off from our animal relations, and testify to a compelling passion that contributes nothing to the physical well-being of man. There is the undeniable human capacity for feeling mystery and awe—our 'sense of otherness'—and the compulsion that seems laid upon us, to work up and embody these intuitions in some concrete system that can be grasped and used by the mind.

All this, so indubitably present however we explain it, does—even at its crudest—seem to constitute a dim, emergent, yet most real knowledge of God. The heathen in his blindness already sees in the wood and stone an intimation of Reality which the microscope refuses to reveal. But beyond this, there is that rare and special sort of individual development and experience which is virtually present wherever life touches heroic levels, and which reaches its height in the genius of the saints. There is the constant appearance throughout history, of persons with a strange capacity for self-donation to supernatural interests, and a strange inability to be satisfied by anything else. The saints are surely as much a part of human history, and their investigation is as much a branch of human science, as any other tribe or type of men. We cannot leave them out because they are so difficult to fit into a rational scheme. Yet their special discoveries, sacrifices and experiences are unrelated to the physical progress of the race. In them we seem to see the latent spiritual sense of man, his unique capacity for unearthly love, emerging and becoming regnant. They bring into focus the vague and generalized racial instinct for Reality.

We may say that human religion in its widest sense begins in that general and vague experience. But it is renewed, fed, deepened and enriched by a wide variety of special experiences; and by the material which these experiences bring in. Between these two extreme points is unfolded the whole spiritual history of man: and the claim of that history to be regarded as truly central to an understanding of the meaning of human life, rests on this double foundation of a corporate and a particular experience. We cannot reasonably regard it either as a vestigial relic of man's primitive fears and guesses, or as the peculiar aberration of certain distracted minds: because the saints give meaning and precision to the religious instincts of the crowd, and the crowd supports and guarantees the certitude of the saints.

We are further reassured by the fact that here religion seems to follow the same path of development as the other great movements in which the restless mind of man reaches out towards a wider knowledge of his mysterious environment. The secret drive towards artistic creation, the speculations of philosophy, or scientific adventure and research—these forms of exploration too, do and must take their departure both from a general and a particular response to some felt attraction and demand; a response on the one hand vague if insistent, on the other more vivid, passionate and precise. Therefore in studying man's knowledge of, and relation with, the universe, we are justified in giving a large place to the existence and the declarations of spiritual genius. Indeed, we are bound to do so; for here, so to speak, are the laboratory specimens on which our practical work must be done. Here is the only human type which claims to speak from observation and experience, not from deduction and speculation, of the realities beyond sense.

The mystics—to give them their short, familiar name—are men and women who insist that they know for certain the presence and activity of that which they call the Love of God. They are conscious of that Fact which is there for all, and which is the true subject-matter of religion; but of which the average man remains either unconscious or faintly and occasionally aware. They know a spiritual order, penetrating, and everywhere conditioning though transcending the world of sense. They declare to us a Reality most rich and living, which is not a reality of time and space; which is something other than everything we mean by 'nature', and for which no merely pantheistic explanation will suffice. These men and women therefore give precision and an objective to that more or less vague thirst for the Infinite and Unchanging which, even in the rudimentary form in which most of us yet possess it, is surely the most wonderful of all the possessions of man: that sense of another and unearthly scale of values pressing in on him: that strange apprehension of, and craving for, an unchanging Reality utterly distinct from himself, which is the raw material of all religion. And it is through the work done by spiritual genius, its power of revealing to others at least something of that which it finds and feels, that average men obtain in the long run all their more vivid convictions in respect of the transcendent world; as through the work done by artistic or scientific genius they learn something of the significance and structure of the physical world.

As only the wide-open æsthetic faculty of the great artist seems able to perceive and exhibit to us a sense-world which is truly adequate to our cravings; and only the profound intellect of the great philosopher can satisfy the insistent demands of reason for a rational universe; so only the intuition of the great mystics seems able to know, and give to others in some measure, a spiritual universe and reality which is convincing, all-demanding, utterly satisfying, in its dimly felt and solemn spacelessness, its thrilling attraction and aliveness. This supernal reality these

mystics do truly give, or at least suggest to us not as a possibility of speculation, but as a personally experienced concrete fact, which we are bound to take into account when estimating our sources of information about the world. Thus, as from the great poet we learn the full possibilities and the transcendency of Poetry, it is from the saint that we learn the full possibilities and the transcendency of Religion. We cannot say that he 'understands' it, any more than the brightest and most devoted dog 'understands' canine-human relationships. None the less, incarnated in these special personalities, with their singleness of aim and peculiar sensitiveness, are the racial organs as it were, through which humanity has received the greater part of its fragmentary news about God.

'O Thou Supreme'! exclaims St. Augustine. 'Most secret and most present; most beautiful and strong! Constant, and incomprehensible; changeless, yet changing all! . . . What shall I say, my God, my Life, my holy Joy? and what can any man say when he speaks of Thee?'[8]

That is surely the voice of the realist, absorbed in the contemplation of a given objective Fact. We do not speak thus of those compensating fantasies which are woven from the stuff of imagination and desire, and which accommodate themselves so obligingly to our human needs. And again, when St. Catherine of Siena cries 'I have not found myself in Thee, nor Thee in myself, Eternal God!' we recognize a craving and a capacity for a Reality beyond the bounds of sense. If it had not been for the delighted reports and declarations of the mystics and saints, their insistence on its overwhelming actuality, and their heroic self-dedications to that which they have seen, we, little half-animal creatures, could never have guessed that this objective Fact was there, and accessible in its richness and delightfulness to men. Still less could we have supposed that the life of conscious and devoted correspondence with this achieved and all-penetrating Perfection, which is the essence of personal religion, was possible to the human soul.

Those saints and mystics are the great teachers of the loving-kindness and fascination of God. Watching them, we become aware of that mysterious give and take between His Spirit and man, by which human personality is transformed and changed: and of the fundamental fact that, in all such give and take, the Divine action comes first. Since we are finite creatures, those ultimate values which convey to us something of the Infinite and Eternal can never be apprehended by our own efforts. They must be given, or infused; and the mystics, and those who know the secrets of contemplative prayer, have been convinced at first-hand of this great truth. God's impact on the soul always seems to them to involve, first, a gift, next a demand, and last the response, gradual growth, and ultimate transfiguration of that soul. This profound sense of something really happening, something done to it and to be done by it, sharply marks off all true religious experience on the one hand from vague spiritual feelings, on the other from those changes in man, and discoveries by man, which merely develop from within—marks off in fact, the work of nature from the work of grace.

We turn, then, from general considerations to see what it is that happens to those men and women in whom the 'supernatural sense' has thus developed and become regnant; what it is that they find and feel.

The continued existence in history of a type thus peculiarly sensitive to those spiritual impressions which the majority of men seem unable to receive—persons

[8] St. Augustine: *Confessions*, Bk. I, cap. 4.

who have in some degree that which is loosely called the 'mystical sense'—is a fact which the most hardy naturalist can scarcely deny. Human history has produced the religious genius as certainly as it has produced the philosopher or the poet; and the attempt to explain him away in terms of pathology does not get easier as time goes on. Now every other type of human genius is found on analysis to desire, apprehend, enjoy, and reveal a genuine Reality other than himself; and to grow in understanding and creative power through devoted attention to this given Real. The painter and sculptor must maintain a selfless and purifying contact with external beauty, if their art is to keep clear of feverish dream. The philosopher seeks to apprehend real Being by means of disinterested and logical thought. The musician is controlled by reverence for really existent rhythms and harmonies. So does the peculiar genius for the Supernatural, considered without prejudice, require for its explanation a real inciting cause and for its development a real response. If we should know little of the reality of God without the witness of saints, without the Living Absolute we call God it is incredible that those saints could exist at all. Life means correspondence with environment; and no lesser environment could conceivably occasion or give meaning to their characteristic response.

'I have stilled my restless mind, and my heart is radiant; for in Thatness I have seen beyond Thatness, in Company I have seen the Comrade Himself.'[9]

'Thou wilt keep him in peace, peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.'[10]

'In thy Presence is fulness of joy; and at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.'[11]

'And I said—Lord, I have called on Thee inwardly and desired to have my joy in Thee. I am ready to forsake all things for Thee. Thou verily stirredst me first to seek Thee.'[12]

'What reason hadst Thou for creating Man in such dignity?' exclaims St. Catherine of Siena: 'The inestimable love with which Thou sawest Thy creature in Thyself and didst become enamoured of him, for Thou didst create him through love and didst destine him to be such that he might taste and enjoy Thy Eternal Good.'[13]

Does not this strange capacity for supersensual enjoyment and supersensual devotion, pointing so steadily beyond the natural world, mark a fresh stage in the development of human personality? These things have been said by creatures living on this little planet: creatures whose physical ancestry leads back through the swamp and jungle, to the beginnings of animal life. Yet they point beyond the planet and beyond natural life as we know it; and declare another level of existence to be accessible to man. The name we give to individuals who speak and feel thus, and the way we try to account for them, are unimportant. The important thing surely is that they are there; and that their mere existence as a human type, let alone their heroic and selfless activities, witnesses to an independent Object both inciting and answering their other-worldly desires: a God Who 'secretly initiates what He openly crowns'.[14]

As the fish could not have come into existence without water, and the bird guarantees the supporting through invisible air, so I think we may reasonably claim that the undying fact of sanctity guarantees God. It witnesses to work really done, a give-and-

[9] *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, p. 54.
[10] Isaiah xxvi. 3.
[11] Psalm xvi. 11.
[12] *De Imitations Christi*, Bk. III, cap. 23.
[13] *Dialogo*, cap. 13.
[14] F. von Hügel: *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion*, Series II, p. 225.

take truly established, at levels beyond the normal conscious field. Labelling can neither add to nor detract from the authority of those in whom this happens: an authority which is founded in the strangely realistic character of their declarations, the fundamental unanimity existing between them, and the fact that they transcend, but do not conflict with the findings of the general religious sense. We may and should find great differences in the quality and extent of their achievement: but the claim to an empirical though never complete knowledge of a transcendental Reality unites them all, Christian and non-Christian alike. They are, in the phrase of Ruysbroeck, not only ghostly but also God-seeing men; and in some this first-hand apprehension is developed to a surprising degree of precision and richness. Thus these experimental theists inevitably furnish much of the raw material with which the philosophy of religion has to deal; and they are so numerous and so distinctive, that no theory of human knowledge which aims at even approximate completeness, can afford to neglect their witness.

That witness is two-fold in character. First and chiefly, they testify to the reality of the Supernatural by that which they become under its declared influence; the growth and expansion of their personality. Secondly, by that which they find and feel; and which they try to reveal to us, more or less, in their teaching. So as a second stage in our study of the religious complex, we may well consider in general terms what these two lines of evidence amount to. We review our witnesses; and examine their credentials, and the points in which their testimonies agree.

From the standpoint of intelligent naturalism, they are strange witnesses enough. The spectacle before us is that of a number of little creatures, apparently conditioned by the sensual world and possessing the same physical outfit and limitations as other men. Yet these little creatures are impelled to seek with ardour and determination—and commonly with some success—intercourse with a level of reality entirely beyond the reach of the most sublimated sense. We see this intercourse achieved in various ways and degrees, along two apparently inconsistent routes; sometimes by a special use of those same senses, and sometimes by a deliberate abstraction from them—in other words, by sacramental and by contemplative methods. Moreover this experience has observable results within the natural world. It transforms—again in various degrees and ways—those who are capable of it. Theology expresses this in its own way, when it says that we have here exhibited to us in a concentrated form the way in which the Creative Spirit of God deals with the individual human spirit; the sort of contact and communion possible between them; the work done upon nature by grace.

A genuine theism is committed to the belief in that living, personal and spaceless Spirit, Who was defined by St. Thomas Aquinas as ‘God Himself inasmuch as He is in all things everywhere and always’; the everywhere-present Reality, secretly and powerfully moulding and conditioning all life. Though our normal human consciousness does not of course include direct awareness of that changeless Presence, Who is the true object of all religion; yet that which we call mystical experience is aware of it, more or less. In particular individuals, specially sensitive to supernatural influences, the field of consciousness appears to be so expanded or so deepened as to include—though never steadily, completely and continuously—the profound sense of the duality of human life, the mysterious certitude of communion with that God Who is present with His creation ‘in such a way as to be all in all, whilst remaining absolutely distinct from all’.[15] Plainly the accounts given by those

[15] Nicolas of Cusa: *The Vision of God*, cap. 12.

who are thus specially sensitive must be considered with respect: although the material which they give to us is often most difficult to use. It seldom comes to us in a pure form, but on many counts, racial, traditional and psychological, requires of us careful scrutiny, sifting and comparison—a fine discrimination between rightful criticism and arrogant rejection. A constant remembrance of the oblique and partial character of all human knowledge, the history and crudity of human speech, and so a constant refusal to equate Reality even with the best experiences and declarations of men, is called for in those who would understand it; a constant agnosticism, too, as to the apparent certitudes of our neat and normal world, the true causation of that stream of events of which our experience is composed.

This attitude is the more needful because the mystical type shares in the disabilities which characterize other forms of genius. It discerns more than it can comprehend. It cannot, save by allusion, communicate the substance of its knowledge. We have always to remember the relation in which the most widely open of contemplative minds conceivable by us—anchored, as it must be still, to the conditions of physical life—stands to those realities on which its awestruck gaze is turned; and the drastic process of translation which must be needed before any fragment of its supersensual apprehensions can be imparted to other men. Mystical literature is full of this sense of the over-plus, genuinely perceived by intuition but escaping all the resources of speech. 'Seeing we do not see, understanding we do not understand, penetrating we do not penetrate,' exclaims Richard of St. Victor.[16] 'Brother, I blaspheme! I blaspheme!' says Angela of Foligno to her secretary, as she struggles to find words in which to express her great revelations of God. Such genius stretches human awareness to the utmost. It passes beyond 'that encircling wall of Paradise where apparent contradictions coincide',[17] and, because of the strain involved in its special apprehensions, suffers from cruel reactions, distresses and obscurities.

Yet we need not feel surprised that the tiny human creature, beset as it ever is by its animal limitations and adjustments, is shaken through and through by the impact of spiritual realities; that its contacts with the eternal world are so tentative and so half comprehended by it; that sometimes the truth which it lives for may abruptly capture consciousness and sometimes remain obstinately out of reach; that its other-worldly joy sometimes gets translated into the terms of emotions of an unspiritual kind, and its desperate attempts to suggest the inexpressible are not always fortunately conceived. We must expect that the reports of religious genius shall vary widely in detail, colour and proportion, as do the reports of individual explorers concerning other levels of reality. For even were the whole of their claim allowed, it would still remain true that each such explorer shows us reality partially, incompletely, and through a temperament—a temperament, moreover, which is immersed in history and conditioned by it. His instinct for Eternity operates from within the temporal order; and by means of psychic machinery which is accustomed to the stimulus of sense. That which is truly given from a transcendent source, must yet be apprehended and expressed within the historic field.

The contemplative is seldom fully conscious of all that this irreducible duality involves for him; and only in a few rare instances seems able to distinguish, as does Ruysbroeck in a celebrated passage, between 'God and the light in which we see Him'. Yet his attitude towards Eternity is essentially and inevitably that of the artist, not of the mathematician; and his best declarations and constructions will always

[16] Richard of St. Victor: *Benjamin Major*.
[17] Nicolas of Cusa: op. cit., cap. 9.

have an artistic and approximate character, carrying with them a luminous fringe of significance not amenable to speech. We mistake his office if we begin to ask him for explanations. Therefore even the report of the greatest contemplative saint is much like that of the wise shepherd; who can tell us much about the weather, but nothing about meteorology, and often supports his rightful judgments by an appeal to imaginary laws. For here, as in all the things that most truly concern our small, emergent, still half-conscious lives, our knowledge, in its luminous and cloudy mass, far exceeds any exact formulation that our science can make of it. Since that knowledge comes to us through a human consciousness—either our own, or that of other men—it is and must be, largely translated into symbols and images, and controlled by the machinery of apperception. In proportion as the spiritual genius abandons first the naïve and then the deliberate use of image and symbol—and he is tempted to do this, as their inadequacy becomes clear to him—so does he abandon the only link between pure intuition (supposing such pure intuition to be possible to men), and our conditioned minds.

Thus when Angela of Foligno says: 'I see all good; and seeing it, the soul . . . delighteth unspeakably therein, yet it beholdeth naught which can be related by the tongue or imagined in the heart. It seeth nothing yet seeth all things, because it beholdeth this Good darkly':[18] she succeeds in producing an atmosphere of ineffability, but actually tells us nothing at all. The same is true of her contemporary, the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*:

'Thou askest me and sayest, "How shall I think on Himself, and what is He?" and to this I cannot answer thee but thus: "I wot not."

'For thou hast brought me with thy question into that same darkness, and into that same cloud of unknowing, that I would thou wert in thyself. For of all other creatures and their works, yea, and of the works of God's self, may a man through grace have fullhead of knowing, and well he can think of them: but of God Himself can no man think. And therefore I would leave all that thing that I can think, and choose to my love that thing that I cannot think.'[19]

Far nearer to human experience and needs is the more humble and careful transcendentalism of Dionysius the Areopagite; who teaches that 'the Mystery of Godhead, which exceeds all mind and being', yet 'lovingly reveals Itself by illuminations corresponding to each separate creature's powers, and thus draws upwards holy minds into such contemplation, participation and resemblance of Itself as they *can* attain'.[20] Were this wholesome sense of God's infinitely graded self-communications, and our human disability to receive the supernatural unmixed with some natural alloy, fully assimilated by us; how many of the difficulties and disputes which now stain the surface of religion would fade away!

II

But our present concern is neither with divergence of detail nor obliquity of presentation. It is with the massive agreement which underlies the particular and inevitable variations of man's spiritual experience and expression: the solid witness of the mystics to an actual, living, and enduring world of transcendental realities, and to the relation in which this existent world stands to the spirit of man. As the French mountaineer climbs Mont Cervin, and the German ascends the Matterhorn, yet for

[18] *Book of Divine Consolations*: Treatise III, Vision 7.
[19] Op. cit., cap. 6.
[20] *The Divine Names*, cap. 1.

both the summit is the same: so we, becoming intimate with them, and learning to penetrate below divergencies of language and outlook, realize more and more clearly that the mystics do all experience in different ways and degrees one and the same sublime Reality. We need not limit this statement to Christians. All experimental theists have something in common. All, in the words of Dionysius, are drawn by *one* Spirit into such contemplation, participation and resemblance as each can attain: and though their experiences differ widely in depth and value, they do not rule each other out.

It is the intensely objective character of their declarations, their insistence on the complete, inexpressible otherness and yet most vivid actualness of the Real, which makes the mystics the great champions of religious realism. 'Not *how* the world is is the mystical, but *that* it is',[21] said Wittgenstein most justly; and 'not *how* God is, but *that* He is', is the central and unanimous declaration of the mystics. In the words of von Hügel, 'Religion, in proportion to its religiousness, is everywhere profoundly evidential; it affirms real contacts with a Reality which both occasions and transcends—which exists independently of—all these contacts. Presence, Is-ness, as distinct from the Oughtness of Morals; this is the deepest characteristic of all truly religious outlooks'.[22] And further study of these testimonies, supported perhaps by careful introspection on our own part, drives home the conviction that it is this 'Is-ness' and not—save in a most limited sense—the 'Whatness' of the Supernatural, which is the essence of such revelation as we are able to receive. For nothing that the mystics contrive to say, however impressive, really prepares us for the unmeasured 'Otherness' which characterizes even the smallest and faintest of true religious experiences in ourselves.

The independent pre-existence of the Object of their contemplation is, then, essential to the philosophy of the mystics. For, thoroughgoing empiricists though they be, a philosophy, a particular conviction about the nature of Reality and of life, does emerge from and is required by the sum total of their communicated experiences. This philosophy has two terms: the two terms implied in all religious realism—God and the Soul. Spirit infinite, perfect, and uncreate; spirit finite, imperfect and created. These are its realities.

As to the assertions which it makes about these realities, I will take six points which confirm and complete one another; distinguishing the universe of religious experience from that of the 'natural' man. These great intuitions, facts and experiences must all come up for further exploration and analysis as we go on. Here they are only to be considered in so far as they help us to fix the characteristics of that human type through which so much of our news of the Supernatural has come.

The first three points refer to God, the supreme supernatural Object, and declare:

(1) His Prevenience,

(2) His Perfection,

(3) His Eternity.

The last three refer to the soul's characteristic experiences over against this Object, and we might call them

(4) Vocation,

[21] *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, p. 187.
[22] *Essays and Addresses*, Series II, p. 248.

(5) Prayer,

(6) Transfiguration.

(1) I take together those great objective declarations of the mystics which assert the Prevenience, Perfection and Eternity of God.

Men and women of spiritual genius all come before us, not as the painstaking discoverers of something, but as the astonished receivers of something. Virtually or actually, they insist on the given-ness of all man's apprehensions of Reality; the absolute priority of the action of God over any and every action of the soul. The words of St. John—'We love him because he first loved us' sum up, when fully understood, their whole doctrine of mystical experience. This is a position completely opposed to all the speculations of personal idealism, all philosophies of mere development and change; for it requires us to hold that the supreme and living Object of the soul's desire Himself incites this desire as a part of His scheme of human life, that indeed He is in His immanental aspect the very source and occasion of the creature's half-conscious drive towards His transcendent aspect. Thus, feeling the power, the sweetness and the wonder that overwhelm our strangely compounded human nature when the sense of God enters the conscious field, the mystics can exclaim with no sense of unreality: 'O grace inestimable and marvellous worthiness! O love without measure singularly showed unto man.'[23]

That to which they all witness, with what one of them called 'a holy and marvelling delight', is just this touching condescension of Infinite to finite, this profound concern of Ultimate Reality with individual human life. Their knowledge, they insist, is an 'infused' and not an achieved knowledge. It is 'given'. It enters the soul from beyond themselves; and carries with it the assurance that what really matters is not this little soul's minute merit or experience, but the being, the boundless 'grace' of that distinct and supernatural world, which thus reveals some of its secrets to the desiring heart of man.

'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?

Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?

For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.'[24]

This is the note that sounds in all St. Paul's letters, and inspires his most passionate outbursts of admiration and love.

Julian of Norwich, in her *Revelations of Love*, tells us how she was shown in vision 'a little thing, the quantity of a hazel nut'; and how she looked at it with the eye of her understanding and thought, 'What may this be?' And it was answered generally thus '*It is all that is made.*' And she continues: 'In this little thing, I saw three properties. The first is that God made it. The second is that God loves it. The third is that God keeps it. But what is to me verily the Maker and Keeper and Lover, I cannot tell'.[25]

[23] *De Imitatione Christi*, Bk. IV. cap. 13.
[24] Romans xi, 33-36.
[25] Op. cit., cap. 5.

In this characteristic mystical experience, we see how the whole emphasis falls on God's Reality, and not merely on the soul's personal apprehension; and we see too how chary is the true mystic of claiming definite knowledge. Julian proclaims the vividly felt fact of God's instant and all-penetrating Reality; His unspeakable richness and wonder, creating, loving and upholding 'all that is made'—a fact so great, that against this unmeasured love and power and being, the whole visible universe seems 'the size of a hazel nut'. But when it comes to saying what this tremendous Reality can mean to her own little soul, words fail her.

Indeed that which, beyond all else, spiritual genius never fails to give us, is this realistic sense of the over-plus of Reality; a perfection exceeding in its totality and splendour all possible human apprehension. What we find is an experience in which personal and impersonal values are combined within a richly living whole. Hence the soul, struggling to convey its apprehension, uses by turns—yet never with complete satisfaction—the language of intimacy, the language of concept, and the language of space. Thus God is felt to be a boundless, all inclusive, all penetrating substance—Ocean, *Patria*, Light. Again He is Life, Joy, Peace; and, equally, a vivid personal Presence—Lover, Father, Friend. We shall not deal fairly with the situation or get any idea of the underlying richness which these stammering and always inadequate terms try to express, unless we bring together all three groups of metaphors; and, keeping ever in mind their allusive and symbolic character, see in them the struggles of the finite mind to suggest its experience of an ineffable Fact.

It is to the writings of the contemplatives, and to the mystical element present in all living theology, that we owe our best conceptions of this richness and distinctness of God; His infinite, spaceless yet vivid personality; the paradoxical union of Unknowable yet intimately known. In the words of Baron von Hügel, the whole outlook of the mystic requires 'belief in a Reality not less but more self-conscious than myself—a Living One Who lives first and lives perfectly, and Who, touching me, the inferior, derivative life, can cause me to live by His aid and for His sake'.[26] All dwell with awe and worship on the contrast between their own state and this holy Reality of God. All have experienced in some measure an Infinite, an Eternal Life, which is no mere unendingness, has in it no quality of succession, but is felt to be 'the All-Inclusive, the Simultaneous, the Perfect, the Utterly-Satisfying'.[27] To say this, is once more to assert given-ness: for where, within our poor little temporal experience, could such concepts be discovered by the soul?

Religious genius, then, in all its varieties and fluctuations, stands solidly against any and every merely subjective or psychological explanation of religious facts, and any and every merely immanental and pantheistic conception of God; asserting again and again His Eternal Perfection, independence and otherness. The one point on which definite knowledge seems always to be implied or claimed, is this changeless perfection, distinctness and actualness of God: His rich simplicity and plenitude. Whilst some may struggle to interpret their experience in personal, and others in abstract terms; for both, the ultimate Reality is absolute and complete. The real mystical experience, as St. Augustine put it, seems always to be of 'something which is insusceptible of change'.

[26] F. von Hügel: *Eternal Life*, p. 385.
[27] Ibid., *Essays and Addresses*, Series II, p. 208.

‘ “It is not enough,” says Gerlac Petersen, “to know by estimation merely, but we must know by experience, that the soul looketh upon Him who looketh at all things past, present and to come at one glance, and that He thus speaketh to the soul.

“I stand firm, and remain without changing. If thou couldst look upon Me, and see how unchangeable is My subsistence, and that in Me there is neither before nor after, but only the Selfsame, that I alone am: then wouldst thou too be able to be freed from all unevenness and perverse changeableness, and to be with Me in a certain sense the selfsame.” ’[28]

(2) We are thus led to the second group of assertions made by the mystics; assertions which are indeed already involved in their very power of pronouncing upon the nature of Reality. I mean all those which declare that the human spirit can and does most directly and vividly experience this infinite, all-sustaining, unchanging and richly living God; though in widely varying ways and degrees.

Here the human passion for the Formula, the Law—the tendency to methodize, and attribute absolute value to the system on which we arrange the observed process of life—becomes peculiarly dangerous. We are dealing with human life, the most plastic, most beautifully various and intricate, least standardized of any kind of life known to us. And we are dealing with it, as it acts and exists on that mysterious shore where the physical and metaphysical meet. Therefore we must expect, and indeed welcome, paradox in our efforts to tell at least the tiny bit we know of this. We must not demand clarity, consistency, surface logic. We must guard against the constant temptation to concentrate on a striking feature of the landscape and forget the great expanse of quiet unimpressive fields. We must observe a due proportion between the solemn background and the lovely detailed foreground; the Eternal, and the human histories that emerge from it. As botany, whilst its entrancing subject-matter requires the existence of the world of rock and soil that is dealt with by geology, does not necessarily tell us anything about that world’s ultimate being or *raison d’être*; so the existence and special characters of sanctity require the existence of God, but do not explain Him. Even at the point of apparent intimacy—perhaps most clearly at that point—the over-plus, the incalculable mystery, remains dominant; as Isaiah learnt, when he saw the seraphim who were nearest to God veil their faces before the awful Presence which asked for his personal service and determined his career.

It is only in this, the truly scientific mood of humility and reverent agnosticism, that we can safely consider or seek to classify within the three elastic headings of general character, method and result, the experiences which spiritual genius reports to us. Broadly speaking those experiences (*a*) have a vocational character: (*b*) they introduce the self into a life which is more and more fully controlled by man’s characteristic spiritual activity, prayer: (*c*) they effect a fundamental transformation of personality.

‘When,’ says Ruysbroeck, ‘we follow the Radiance that is above reason with a simple sight, and with a willing leaning out of ourselves towards our highest life, then we *experience* the transformation of our whole selves in God: and thereby we feel ourselves to be wholly enwrapped in God.’[29]

Those few lines tell all that we know about the supernatural life in man. If we remove them from the level of religion to that of psychology—if we regard them as the

[28] *The Fiery Soliloquy with God of the Rev. Master Gerlac Petersen*, cap. 11, p. 26.
[29] *The Sparkling Stone*, cap. 10.

struggle of a great and sincere mind to tell us something that has really happened to himself—do they not cast a new light on the mysteries and possibilities of our personality, and the nature of the objective which is set before human desire?

They mean that the thing we know so vaguely and tentatively as the human self is a yet unfinished bit of creation. It is emerging from 'Nature,' but destined for something other than Nature; and sometimes it achieves its goal. 'Thou hast made us for Thyself.' This experience of the Infinite Spirit, in which the finite spirit finds its meaning and therefore its rest, is not achieved but 'given'; yet being thus given, can be improved. By giving it his attention, and acting in conformity with it, 'willingly leaning out towards his highest life', man can change and enhance his whole existence; becoming, as St. Augustine says, more real. This direct though dim and never full experience—this loving apprehension which is never comprehension—yet answers man's perpetual craving for a principle of perfection and stability. It is, in its widely differing degrees of penetrative power and richness, ranging between the extremes of abstraction and personal communion, the mystical element found at the heart of all great religions: and belief in its concrete reality involves important consequences for our view of the texture of existence and the higher reaches of human life.

(*a*) The first character which we note as peculiar to man's experience of the Supernatural, is that which I have called vocation. This experience in its essence is not merely a revelation of new reaches of reality, an enlargement of the field of consciousness. We might thus describe our æsthetic or philosophic apprehensions; but not our apprehension of God. This appears always to contain, either virtually or actually, an element of demand. The little creature is stirred and called by something over against itself, not only to a new knowledge and intercourse, a new happiness and assurance, but also to a new level of life and of action; a life and action which, whether it fulfil itself in a humble or in a spectacular way, is yet definitely orientated to other-worldly aims and carries other-worldly sanctions. This in itself involves an interference with human history, difficult to explain on naturalistic grounds. The inciting Power requires and obtains from its creature a definite response, set towards a definite end.

True mystical experience is therefore never self-complete. It occurs at a point of penetration of the historical by the Eternal; a penetration which, whether small or great, sets going a series, always of psychological and often too of physical events. Thus it never leaves the human subject at the level at which it found him. It appears as a transforming energy, which compels the experient to conform to new standards and try to do hard things. Whatever the language, tradition, or symbol through which such a dynamic experience of the supernatural comes to man, whatever its limitations or temperamental form, the effects are always vital effects. The ordinary sequence of natural life may continue; but it is seen, now and ever after, in supernatural regard. The soul suddenly perceives within that natural life further unguessed possibilities opening before it; fresh heights and depths of existence, and fresh opportunities of work and of love, which require—indeed insistently demand—its co-operation at every point.

We could illustrate this from every age of religious history. Thus, in one of the most primitive yet most impressive descriptions in literature of a pure supernatural experience—the appearance to Moses in the burning bush—the revelation of the numinous is immediately followed by the compelling sense of vocation: 'Go, and I

will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say';[30] and the strange history of Israel, at once so natural and so supernatural, begins. Thus, when Isaiah sees the 'glory of God in his temple,' that sudden majestic vision of Reality first brings awe and abasement. He, the faulty human creature, is overwhelmed by a sense of shame and imperfection over against perfect holiness. But this is only the preliminary to a painful, fiery purification, preparing a call to service and an eager response: 'Here am I. Send me'.[31] Thus St. Paul, suddenly subjugated on the road to Damascus, passes directly from revelation to command: 'Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.'[32] And the supernatural touch is given, which sets going the chain of historical events that created the Catholic Church. Thus the same revelation compels St. Augustine to 'take and read', and presently demands that apparent sacrifice of a promising worldly career which turned a successful and self-indulgent young professor into a Father of the Christian Church.[33] Again, Francis of Assisi, praying in S. Damiano, is 'smitten by unwonted visitations', and 'finds himself another man than he was before'. At once he seems to hear the voice of Christ saying to him: 'Francis, repair my house'; and, 'trembling and utterly amazed', he prepares to obey.[34] So too the modern French mystic Lucie-Christine says of her first great religious experience, that she suddenly saw with her inward eye the words: 'God only!' and those words were to her 'a Light, an Attraction and a Power'.[35] She saw truth, she responded to it with delighted love, she received a new dower of energy—the power to live that life of devotion in the world to which she was called. Mind, heart and will were all enhanced.

Now take all these together. Take specially the three young Hebrews, severally destined to be a great law-giver, prophet, apostle. Take the young African and the young Italian, so decisively called from the world to vivify, re-spiritualize in different ways, the Catholic Church. Take the young French wife and mother, called to sanctify the simple life of the home through her prayer and love, and exhibit to our generation the normality of the contemplative life. Through each of these souls, something enters human history and changes it. In all, we see clearly beneath superficial differences the working of one power, evoking one general type of reaction. In each we have the same sequence of awed apprehension, imperative vocation, generous unhesitating response. The centre of the creature's interest is removed to fresh levels. A new life, a new career is begun; having at its heart, indeed in its very blood, a new activity, a new ferment, distinct in kind and in intention from all that belongs to the 'natural' life of men, but leavening more and more that 'natural' life.

(*b*) The working of this ferment—perhaps the most mysterious and universal of all the instinctive processes of human life—the mystics alone show us in its fullest development. It is that special activity of the spirit, so apparently unrelated to the creature's physical being and needs, which is called, in the most general sense, Prayer. The evolution of prayer, from the naïve petitions of the child and savage to the adoring contemplations of the saint, is surely one of the most curious and significant chapters in the history of man's consciousness; one of the greatest contributory testimonies to the actualness of the spiritual world. It is indeed so

[30] Exodus iv. 12.
[31] Isaiah vi. 1-8.
[32] Acts ix. 6.
[33] St. Augustine: *Confessions*, Bk. VIII, cap. 8.
[34] Thomas of Celano, *Legenda II*, cap. 6.
[35] *Journal Spirituel de Lucie-Christine*, p. 11.

curious and so important that it will require special treatment by itself; and is only introduced here, in order that we may note the fact that this special activity, occasioned by God, directed to God, and having no meaning whatever without God, is developed by the saints and mystics to a surprising richness and power.

(*c*) The final test of that valid experience of the supernatural which is claimed by the mystics, is never that which they tell us about Reality, but always that which their special experience of Reality causes them to be. It is in his growth, choice, work, sacrifice, endurance—all that he does with the raw stuff of his natural life, and mostly in defiance of his natural preferences, in and for the felt and loved Reality—that man proves his possession of a spiritual life. That life places the heroic, the unearthly, the absolute, the non-utilitarian love which is fed by prayer, at the very heart of existence; and steadily makes all other interests subservient to this. And the result, when seen in its perfect form, is such a complete sublimation of impulse, such a redirection of life, as makes, in the crisp language of St. Paul, a 'new creature'—though a new creature for which, as a matter of fact, most of the old material is cleansed and used again.

It is this transformation, accomplished in its fullness, which makes the saint stand out as a special variety of the race. Indeed, only those persons in whom that costly and genuine change has at least begun to take place, have any real idea of what religion means. The new line of growth thus set going, with its increase in love and creative energy—the real power of the saint to help and redeem his fellows, the social radiation of his spiritual force—this seems to result, not from any mere negative sinlessness, but from a certain real though still imperfect sharing in the achieved perfection of Eternal Life. Thus, from the admitted transformation and enhancement of personality worked by a faithful and continued response to other-worldly demands, we obtain another series of indirect testimonies to the realities of man's two-fold nature; and a scheme within which to place those isolated heroic acts, those lovely unwitting responses to the secret demands of holiness and love, which redeem the fabric of the common life.

On this dual fact of something virtually or actually perceived and loved beyond the world, and something done because of it—the balance struck between space and tension, faith and works—the soul's movement in and through history and succession to the transcendent yet truly present Goal of history and succession—on this rich paradox, the greatest spiritual teachers of the race have insisted again and again. It is this two-fold character of their testimony, which gives to the mystical saints their extraordinary impressiveness. They do not merely enjoy, but incarnate their apprehensions: bringing them, often through desperate purifications and sufferings, into direct relation within the stream of human existence. Dramatizing within nature that which they apprehend beyond nature, they make their very lives a sacrament. We can watch them in history being transformed—made, in their own strong language, 'deiform'—by faithful response to supernatural influences. It is from them that we have learned what adventures, sufferings and joys, await the human spirit, when it definitely enters upon the supernatural life.

Nor need we go to startling heroisms and asceticisms for demonstrations of the intimate claim and presence of this life. Every recognition of an Absolute is a sort of religious experience, a sort of acknowledgement of supernature; and this recognition may take the form of spontaneous action, rising from the deeps of personality in apparent defiance of 'rational beliefs'. So with many sudden heroic acts. So with much patient devotion, done without a clear conception of a 'Why', but under the

quiet pressure of a secret 'Must'. Hence it is often the most homely and commonplace which bears most heart-piercing witness to the unceasing pressure, incitement and support of that unearthly love which theologians call 'grace'. The poor slum mother in her patient and apparently hopeless self-spending, the willing sufferer who transmutes pain into an actual source of spiritual strength and joy, the inconspicuous sacrifices and the seemingly unrewarded labours of thousands of men and women, hardly aware of the impulse which controls their lives: these, equally with the specialized disciplines and renunciations to which all fully religious souls are drawn, witness to the concrete reality of the supernatural, and its overwhelming authority for human life.

Thus we are led by diverse routes to the conclusion that religious genius can and does give us special news about metaphysical truth, which is not obtainable from any other type of mind. For those who feel themselves to be wholly enwrapped in God have at least a world-view detached from mere succession, and startlingly different from that of the mass of men. They are poised on a Reality which is no mere subjective satisfaction. It is there first—given, concrete, objective, vividly alive—and for them, and those who come to believe their declarations, its existence must condition all lesser realities. The fact that this Given Truth, so vividly felt in full religious experience, is not present to the average consciousness, is surely no argument against its actualness. For if in the ordinary way, we cannot realize our physical status, flying through space upon a whirling ball; but owe our very knowledge of it to the observations and deductions of special minds—then, surely it is not strange that the fact of our spiritual status should lie far beyond the common grasp. If we cannot really enter into and appreciate the dim surrounding life of animals and plants, how can we hope to enter into and appreciate the vivid and intense reality of higher levels of being; above all, of that Life within which all condition and comparison cease? Here too we might expect, at least in the first instance, to depend on those who have given all their attention and love to these levels of truth, 'leaning out of themselves towards their higher life'; and only by attending to their reports and directions, gradually learn to see a little for ourselves.

I do not of course mean by this that we are committed to uncritical acceptance of the reports of the mystics: still less, that religion can safely be based on such reports alone. Here we may and must impose the same tests as those by which reason tests the reports of physical science: namely, substantial unity of witness, the absence of fundamental contradictions, and the power of uniting in one system a large number of observed facts. In their own words, the mystics may transcend reason but they must not contradict it. Neither must they contradict, though they may improve, the general religious and moral sense of the group in which they arise. Moreover, the reality disclosed by these experimental theists must in some measure be valid for all. It must be wide as well as deep: in Ruysbroeck's phrase, a 'world that is unwalled,' not a ring-fenced enclosure marked 'Saints only'. The relation which they tell us that they experience must be the intense form of a relation already implicit in the spiritual nature of man. If this experience of religious genius has value for us, it must be because it is not a thing apart; but rather represents the highest point reached in the vast upward surge of human consciousness to that which lies beyond and above itself, and for which, nevertheless, it craves.

And surely, as a matter of fact, the experimental certitude of the great contemplative does crown, and is supported by, the whole mass of that transcendental feeling, that insistent refusal to be satisfied with the here-and-now, the impermanent and the

fleeting, which takes sometimes a philosophic, sometimes an æsthetic, and sometimes a religious form. To call this ‘absolute feeling’ is to beg a great philosophic question. It seems better to mark its utter distinctness from all our reactions to the sense-world by calling it ‘supernatural feeling’: for I believe most firmly that, if we are ever to achieve a truly fruitful religious philosophy, this will only be done by bringing back into the scheme that deep sense of an independent spiritual world over against us, which this term—in spite of its many unhappy associations—still implies.

III. The Supernatural And The Natural

Tu, amor meus, in quem deficio, ut fortis sim, nec ista corpora es, quae videmus quamquam in caelo, nec ea, quae non videmus ibi, quia tu ista condidisti nec in summis tuis conditionibus habes . . . sed tu vita es animarum, vita vitarum, vivens te ipsa, et non mutaris, vita animae meae.

St. Augustine

The signs are multiplying that man will return, with such improvements as may be wisely desirable, to that wonderfully rich outlook of the Golden Middle Age, where God's outward action moves on two levels—the natural level and the supernatural level—a Good and a Better or Best—two *kinds*, and not merely two degrees, of goodness.

F. von Hügel

Lo, God's two worlds immense,
Of spirit and of sense,
Wed
In this narrow bed;
Yea, and the midge's hymn
Answers the seraphim
Athwart
Thy body's court!

Francis Thompson

I

Let us now go back to the diagram of the universe—in other words, the philosophy—which seems to be required alike by the diffuse and corporate, and by the intense and individual religious experiences of mankind: indeed, by the experience of all souls who have, under whatever symbolism, truly felt and responded to the attraction of an absolute Reality. What we have to find is a metaphysical landscape, a way of seeing the world, which shall justify the saint, the artist and the scientist, and give each their full rights. Not a doctrine of watertight compartments, an opposition of 'appearance' to 'reality'. Rather, a doctrine of the indwelling of this visible world by an invisible, yet truly existent, world of spirit; which, while infinitely transcending, yet everywhere supports and permeates the natural scene. Even to say this, is to blur the true issue by resort to the deceptive spatial language which colours and controls our thoughts, and translate the dynamic and spiritual into static and intellectual terms.

The first demand we must make of such a diagram is, that it shall at least safeguard, though it can never represent, all the best that man has learned to apprehend of the distinct and rich reality of God. This, I think, will be found to mean that it cannot be the diagram of the philosophic monist. For that which above all a genuine theism requires of our human ways of thinking, is the acknowledgment of two sorts of stages of reality, which can never be washed down into one: of a two-foldness that goes right through man's experience, and cannot without impoverishment be resolved. We may call these two sorts of reality, this two-foldness, by various names—Supernature and Nature, Eternity and Time, God and the World, Infinite and Finite,

Creator and Creature. These terms do but emphasize one or another aspect of a total fact too great for us to grasp, without infringing the central truth of its mysterious duality: for 'God', as Plotinus says, 'never was the All. That would make Him dependent on His universe'.[36]

Certainly we may, and indeed must, hold that there is intimate contact between these pairs of opposites. Spiritual reality is not, and never can be, cut off from the world of sense: were it so, we could never have guessed its existence. There is at every point and on every level a penetration of God of His world; a truth which underlies the Christian doctrines of the Holy Spirit and the sacraments. 'What place is there within me, whither my God cannot come?' says St. Augustine: 'I should not exist, were Thou not already within me.'[37] But once we are tempted to define that Absolute God and this derivative world in any sense which reduces them merely to two aspects, parts or stages of a reality that is ultimately identical—two ways of regarding one 'spiritual universe'—we are moving away from the conception of that universe which is required by all full human religion, and especially by Christianity.

'Imagine' says Plotinus again, 'that a stately and varied mansion has been built; it has never been abandoned by its Architect, who yet is not tied down to it. He has judged it worthy in all its length and breadth of all the care that can serve to its being, in so far as it can share in being, or to its beauty. . . . This gives the degree in which the cosmos is ensouled, not by a soul belonging to it, but by One present to it; it is mastered, not master, not possessor, but possessed.'[38]

Man has always dimly felt this doubleness in his experience; but has not always rightly defined its character, and put the cleavage where it really comes. He has insisted at one time or other on the distinctness and opposition between matter and spirit, between good and evil, between appearance and 'reality'. But physical science is bringing the first pair of supposed opposites into ever closer harmony; whilst the second pair, though based on a true and terrible distinction, is blurred by our unstable and childly self-interested views as to that which is evil and that which is good. The domestic proprieties and religious solemnities of Polynesia become sinful when transplanted to the European scene; popular theologians have seen in influenza an argument for original sin; and impassioned gardeners can find evidence of evil in everything that thwarts their horticultural designs. Yet if the life history of the microbe disturbs the chemical balance of its host, or the slug desires to use the delphinium for purposes of diet, and we for purposes of æsthetic contemplation, surely these misfortunes merely involve the competition of two differing wills set on one object, and no moral judgment whatever. And the third pair of opposites, logically explored, land us in philosophic scepticism. Through none of these points can we safely draw the boundary between our two experienced worlds.

In one of his last-published utterances, Baron von Hügel observed that 'Religion has no subtler and yet also no deadlier enemy in the region of the mind, than every and all monism': and this because 'The Otherness, the Prevenience of God, the One-sided Relation between God and man constitute the deepest measure and touchstone of all religion.'[39] That is of course a statement which many students of philosophy will resist; but when we consider what monism implies, and compare its declarations with those which religion requires, we begin to perceive the gulf that divides them.

[36] En. V. 5. 12.
[37] *Confessions*, Bk. I, cap. 2.
[38] En. IV. 3. 9.
[39] *The Mystical Element of Religion*, 2nd ed., vol. i. p. xvi.

Monism, says Professor Whitehead, conceives God as the 'ultimate individual entity' within which the actual world is a phase that 'apart from God is unreal. Its only reality is God's reality. The actual world has the reality of being a partial description of what God is. But in itself it is merely a certain mutuality of appearance which is a phase of the Being of God.'[40] Thus this philosophy slurs the religious distinction between Creator and Creation, and is essentially an attempt to accommodate Reality to the simplifying instinct of the childish human mind. But the persistent witness of the saints—and I do not limit this word to the canonized members of the Christian Church—to the 'otherness' and utter distinctness of God, and of that supernatural life to which at least some souls are called, can never be reconciled with a metaphysic which obliterates the fundamental distinction in kind between nature and supernature, the successive and the abiding. With the deepening of his religious sensitiveness man soon comes to feel that 'the solution of the riddle of Space and Time lies outside Space and Time';[41] and that although this solution may always be beyond him, yet the world in which it is hidden is also his home. He has an instinct for transcendence which only the Transcendent can satisfy. Hence, human religion in its fullness always requires 'A clear looking forward into an otherness or difference towards which, outside ourselves, we tend as towards our blessedness. For we feel an eternal yearning toward something other than what we are ourselves.'[42] Therefore the religious mind which capitulates to the enticing simplicities of monism, usually finds in the end that it has capitulated to pantheism in disguise; and that the richest experiences of the spiritual life are shut from those who give up this specific religious emphasis on the otherness and self-sufficing transcendence of God.

This emphasis is the unmistakable mark of first-hand spiritual experience, wherever found:

'Unlike, much unlike,' says à Kempis, 'is the savour of the Creator and of the creature, of everlastingness and of time, of light uncreate and light illuminate.'[43]

'God,' says Augustine Baker, 'is nothing of all that I can say or think, but a Being infinitely beyond it, and absolutely incomprehensible by a created understanding. He is what He is, and what Himself only perfectly knows, and so I believe Him to be, and as such I adore and love Him.'[44]

'In the Divine Nature,' says Lucie-Christine, 'is something peculiar in kind, which characterizes it, and which is infinite in its superiority to any idea which we have of spirit. How then is the soul able so to recognize that which she has never seen, exclaiming "It is God!" that it is absolutely impossible for her to doubt of it? For, not only has this mysterious Being nothing in common with created beings, but the soul sees that which He is, in a very simple way and without means of comparison. And it is this sight, however limited and imperfect, which makes her exclaim "It is God!" and this cry of the soul is enough alone to manifest the existence of God and our divine origin.'[45]

Such a modified dualism as this seems then essential to us, if man's most living apprehensions of Reality are to be given intelligible form. It is true that we are not

[40] A. N. Whitehead: *Religion in the Making*, p. 69.
[41] L. Wittgenstein: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, p. 185.
[42] Ruysbroeck: *The Sparkling Stone*, cap. 9.
[43] *De Imitatione Christi*, Bk. III. cap. 39.
[44] *Holy Wisdom*, p. 511.
[45] *Journal Spirituel de Lucie-Christine*, p. 112.

compelled to regard this duality of Nature and Supernature as ultimate: but this is of slight importance, since ultimates are beyond our grasp. At this point it is perhaps enough if we say that we are obliged to divide our apprehensions, in order the better to apprehend them. We need a philosophic scheme which marks the absolute distinctness in kind between the richly personal yet spaceless Reality of God—and, depending on this, the derived reality of the God-possessed—and all that is not God or thus God-possessed: between Supernatural and Natural worlds. All religion, in its beauty and its queerness, its noble self-oblation and perverse fanaticism, arises out of this one fact; that man really is a creature of the borderland, who without ever abandoning his utterly creaturely character, is yet inherently capable of living in both these worlds—one by 'nature', the other by 'adoption', as the theologians say.

The first clause of the Lord's Prayer at once commits us to the view that we are creatures of supernatural affinities; and that our real status cannot be understood merely as a development from within the natural order—which only tells half the truth about the soul. Man can be a clever animal, or he can become a saint. But his second possibility cannot be actualized by mere emergence and self-development from within; by any self-impelled transcendence. It requires the free 'gift of Eternal Life,' from without. In other words his spiritual life, while it unfolds within the time-stream, involves a persistent appropriation and assimilation of a non-temporal and abiding life; a 'wholly other' order, penetrating and moulding the world of succession, and found operative on all levels of history, but nowhere so clearly craved for and discovered as in the religious field. This world, this life, is for God indeed 'natural', but for man in his present status 'supernatural'. Here our laws and generalizations cease to be applicable; for we are in the presence of the perfect freedom and spontaneity of God.

Those philosophic minds which spring to arms directly the word 'dualism' is mentioned, might reflect upon the fact that nothing but our own unimaginative conceit supports the belief that the unsearchable riches of Reality are in essence as simple and as amenable to our human ways of thinking, as the monist would make them out to be. Richness, variety, subtle and unnumbered differences of degree, quality and nature, are the characters of all existence as we know it. Ultimate identity is an abstraction, which the mind tries to impose upon an obstinately and delightfully diversified and many-levelled world. But this and all other simplifications of experience seem far more likely to lead us away from, than into, the truth: and land us in an arid, clever diagram with at best a certain pantheistic flavour, but which has no food for hungry souls in which the strange passion for the Absolute is awake.

The mystics at any rate, in spite of certain excesses of language which should be read in connection with their completing opposites, steadily reject this implification. Again and again they insist on the fundamental and experienced distinction—though not the separation—between God and His world, between Spirit even at its homeliest and Nature even at its best. In so doing they appear to offer a valuable corrective to three aberrations which constantly appear in the history of religious thought, and are specially prominent at the present time. These are the tendencies, first, to demand from our religious constructions an excess of this-world utility; next, to ask of them an excess of simplicity; and finally, to concentrate on the element of succession and change, to the exclusion of the element of permanence.

(1) First, as to the utilitarian tendency in current philosophies of religion; the rejection of other-worldliness, the contempt for all that is implied in asceticism, the subordination of faith to works, the immense attention paid to man and very trifling

attention paid to God, the anxious determination that both world and individual shall get something out of religion. This progressive anthropocentricism is manifested in the almost exclusive emphasis now placed by many teachers on what is called 'social Christianity'—really altruism with a little evangelical varnish—and in the ever-increasing willingness to adopt pragmatic standards in matter of doctrine, and to reduce devotional practice to a branch of applied psychology. It can only end by taking the very heart out of religion rightly understood, and thus destroying the source of its own energies.

This temper of mind, in so far as it is allowed to be central, is decisively opposed by the impassioned theocentricism which is characteristic of all high religious experience; by the declared certitude of the mystics that there is indeed a Reality which transcends in worth and beauty, and above all in attractiveness, every lesser reality mediated by the sense-world; a reality which alone gives these lesser realities their interest and their claim. It is for this that they 'leave all things that they can think, and choose to their love that thing that they cannot think'.[46] For them, in the last resort, only God and His interests matter. As one of their latest representatives exclaimed, they 'lose themselves wondering at Him'. Their essential creed is contained in the favourite prayer of St. Francis—*Deus meus et omnia*! So the heart of human religion, wherever it appears in its strength and purity, is always adoration; and this because of that strong certitude of a one-sided relation with a transcendent Object, which is characteristic of every full awakened soul.

For religion, Becoming—even that 'becoming better' which looms so large in its exhortations—is always a secondary interest: our modern talk of self-fulfilment fades into silence before its quiet insistence that the only real fulfilment is self-loss. Its main concern is with Being: with a living and achieved Perfection within which all lesser perfections arise, and which gives to the time-process all its worth. The central aim here is therefore not the mere obtaining of some measure of the Infinite to help the best interests of the finite creature, or the finite world. It is rather such an unconditioned humble giving of the finite creature to the interests of that Infinite, as is expressed in the life of prayer, in the development of heroic virtues, and in the performance of those non-utilitarian acts of love and sacrifice which point beyond this world.

When St. Augustine said, 'This is the happy life: to rejoice concerning Thee unto Thee!'[47] he put into words a religious ideal to which neither 'social' nor 'affirmative' Christianity is able to attain. He felt, as all deeply spiritual souls have felt, that human life taken by itself is incomplete; and derives all its worth from something 'given' and other than itself. Hence the purposes of God, and of religion as a graded revelation of the things of God, infinitely transcend and perhaps radically differ from any scheme based on the perfectibility of this world. Utopia and beatitude are not the same. The true concern of religion is therefore first with this transcendent order: even though its very best apprehensions can only touch the fringe of that Reality which gives to the 'natural' such realness as it is found to possess.

Such a faith as this, finding its focal point so far beyond the natural man's horizon, could never have been conceived or practised without that overwhelming certitude of the distinct self-existence of that Infinite One, which it seems to be the special province of religious genius to bring into human thought. In so far as their spiritual

[46] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, cap. vi.
[47] *Confessions*, Bk. X, cap. 22.

outlook remains full and healthy, those who are most conscious of God and of a certain deep relation between His Spirit and man's soul, always refuse to wash down this relation to mere self-mergence, or to adopt any sort of pantheistic solution of the problem of Reality. Their spiritual greatness might almost be measured by the extent in which they realize and safeguard their own creaturely status and the pre-eminence and distinctness of God. Thus Ruysbroeck says of his own highest apprehension of Reality, that in it 'the bare understanding is drenched through by the Eternal Brightness, even as the air is drenched though by the sunshine,' yet that even here 'the creature feels in its inward contemplation a distinctness and an otherness between itself and God . . . there is here an essential tending-forward, and therein an essential and abiding distinction between the being of the soul and the Being of God. And this is the highest and finest distinction which we are able to apprehend.'[48] If we translate that from terms of religious mysticism into terms of philosophy, it surely requires an outlook which is utterly incompatible alike with monism and with subjective idealism.

(2) We are brought thus to the second point on which the findings of spiritual genius oppose prevalent tendencies in religious philosophy; that is, their firm refusal to simplify over-much their conception of God. Influenced no doubt by the successes of physical science, many thinkers now take for granted that the more spiritual facts and experiences we can assume under one so-called law, the nearer we are getting to truth: whereas the only thing to which we are actually getting nearer is philosophic tidiness—a bad trap for seekers after reality. We have no real reason, other than a scientific arrogance which has its absurd aspect, for supposing that such arbitrary simplifications are in accordance with the mind of God. Indeed, considering our limited outlook and the blurred and patchy character of our apprehensions, the insistent paradoxes and apparent contradictions of experience are surely more likely to approach objective truth, than is any neat conceptual scheme which comforts our little minds by evading these difficulties. Here the mystical witness to the richness and reality of Supernatural, the element of unsearchableness, the sense of awe, which grows ever deeper with the soul's advance, rebuke again and again our mania for simplification, our love of easy spiritual slogans, and the pious naturalism to which all this must lead. 'A comprehended God is no God' says Tersteegen.

(3) That pious naturalism seems at present to tend to such an exclusive discovery of God in Nature, such an exaggerated emphasis on process, succession, and emergence, as shall, in effect, equate the life-force with the Spirit of God; and represent the spiritual life of man as simply a natural development from within the world—the crown of creative evolution. Our generation, intoxicated by theories of evolution and development borrowed—and very often bowdlerized—from natural science, seems to have gone headlong for that which a deeper philosophy, enriched by the experiences of the saints, recognized long ago as only one of the two movements of Reality. It has developed a superstitious *cultus* of continuity; which, it is felt, must somehow be made to stretch without a break all the way from the Amœba to the Absolute. It has even brought that Absolute itself within the natural scheme, and identified it with the process of Becoming. This sort of diffuse and ill-considered immanentism, which draws its intellectual energy from the more extreme utterances of Croce and Gentile, unfortunately inspires much of that current religiosity which is occupied in converting the strong meat of religion into a patent food for hungry but dyspeptic souls. But it represents a conception of reality with

[48] Ruysbroeck: *The Book of Supreme Truth*, cap. 11.

which that concrete certitude of God which awes and delights the great mystics, or even the rudimentary life of the Spirit as most truly experienced by our struggling selves, can never come to terms. In its extreme form it is indistinguishable from pantheism—*e.g.* as when a philosophic essayist was lately betrayed by the attractions of Neo-Hegelianism into defining God as 'a self-imparting life striving upwards to full expression in the development of human consciousness', and the philosophic goal as 'the apprehension of Reality as a comprehensive unity, expressing itself in a universe that comes to consciousness in man.'

Such an assumption as this—that Infinite Holiness is finding its fullest expression in the mental development of our doubtfully satisfactory race—this masterpiece of racial conceit of course makes nonsense of all the greatest religious experiences of man. For those experiences, one and all, require the veritable existence of a real and independent Object—eternal, perfect and utterly transcendent Spirit—as their precedent cause; and steadily demand of us not only self-improvement and self-development, but an abject humility and adoration too. We are a long way here from the awestruck gladness of the supernaturalist; from the invitation of the liturgy to join with all those higher forms of consciousness beyond our ken—Angels and Archangels and all the Company of Heaven—in acknowledging that Mystery of Holiness which fills with its glory the heavens and the earth; from St. Augustine's 'My God, my Holy Joy!'; from the repeated ejaculation of St. Francis 'My God and all! what art Thou and what am I?' Yet surely it is in these—altogether apart from the theology represented by them—that we hear the real accents of the spiritual life, at once profound and naïve; grounded in humility, yet full of the delighted sense of God. And it is only this outlook, so characteristic of all sanctity, which can save us from the snares lurking in systems of 'spiritual evolution' if these are taken alone.

II

If then we allow that the persistent witness of religious genius corrects speculation on these three points, and in so doing testifies to a greater, deeper and richer interpretation of the Universe as possible to the human soul—if we accept the mystic as a Revealer, a person dealing in his own way with genuine realities, and offering, no less than the mathematician or the scientist, genuine material to philosophy—if his greatest declarations do constitute a damaging criticism of monism, of naturalism, of 'actual' and 'personal' idealism, and of any thoroughgoing philosophy of change—what is the positive reading of Reality which those declarations require?

They require, I think, such a two-fold scheme or diagram as shall embrace both the eternal and the successive, both Being and Becoming: in the language of religion, both Grace and Nature. Holding, not as philosophic ideas, but as dimly understood yet deeply experienced acts, those completing opposites which we call the transcendent and immanent, the personal and impersonal aspects of God, the spiritually awakened soul absolutely needs, if it is to describe its felt relation with Reality, both movements. It needs the eternal, abiding Reality, its pre-existence, perfection, beatitude, and given-ness; and also the serial changes in our finite selves which that all-penetrating Reality evokes. For the mystics, without ontology human life is meaningless. Dealing honestly and loyally with the material they give us, we shall be bound to confess that the trilogy of Matter, Life, and Mind, the whole immensely deepened and expanded reality we call Nature, still leaves out something which—though always partially, and never steadily—can be apprehended by man: something which is yet perfectly conveyed in the exclamation of the Psalmist: 'Lord, *thou* has been our dwelling place in all generations!' All the great records of

religion—whatever the language they may use—are full of this sense of the mercy, grace, generosity of the existent and living One; a Home that is a Father, and a Father that is a Home. They assert a reality truly penetrating and supporting us; and yet over against which, in all his deepest moments, man feels himself to be placed.

Perhaps at our present stage of growth, with its imperfect and unlevel consciousness, it does not much matter how this doubleness is conceived by us, so long as it is deeply and humbly felt: for the ultimate object of every religious exercise is to bring one or another aspect of it home to the soul. Perhaps too the distrust often felt by religious men for the so-called 'scientific universe' arises not so much from its apparent support of mechanistic determinism, as from its obliteration of dualism. Over and over again these persons of religious experience exist on the actual yet unknowable richness, the over-plus, of God's self-giving perfection, the smallness and relativity of man's best experiences of Him: and yet, the wonder and joy that there should be an experience at all. Reality is apprehended by them in such a manner, that awe and attraction are merged. In their own language, humility and love become inseparable aspects of one state. The *numen* of Otto, with its characters of ineffable mystery, awefulness and fascination[49] does not cover all the ground of this specific supernatural experience. It leaves out that close, all-penetrating, intimate and cherishing aspect which links the wonder of God to a heart-breaking homeliness, and transfigures awe with confident love.

'For as the body is clad in the cloth,' says Julian of Norwich, 'and the flesh in the skin and the bones in the flesh, and the heart in the whole, so are we, soul and body, clad in the Goodness of God and enclosed. Yea! and more homely; for all these may waste and wear away, but the Goodness of God is ever whole, and more near to us without any likeness.'[50]

This note is struck again and again in the genuine records of religious experience: and represents a factor in man's profoundest apprehensions of the Universe, for which monism can hardly find room.

'O God, thou are my God; early will I seek thee:
My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee
In a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.'

'I was as a beast before thee,
Yet thou art continually with me.'[51]

(Our modern knowledge of man's history has given a new poignancy to that.)

'I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said,
Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.'[52]

'He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.'[53]

Strange ideas, are they not, to be distilled from the brain of a developed vertebrate who possesses all his future possibilities packed within himself? Strange; yet so persistent that they point either to a gigantic collective hallucination, or else to the perpetual presence with and through us of a really existent and operative

[49] R. Otto: *The Idea of the Holy*, caps. ii. to vi.
[50] Julian of Norwich: *Revelations of Divine Love*, cap. vi.
[51] Psalm lxiii. 1: Psalm lxxiii. 22.
[52] Psalm cxlii. 5.
[53] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

supernatural Reality. A God whose Being is distinct from that natural world of succession which is the apparent theatre of our human life, and yet most deeply penetrates it; a free and intensely living order, a *Patria* of spirit, where the forces which we faintly know as Will and Love are present in perfection, and unlimited in power.

Thus, adopting this two-fold scheme, we provide places—as we can hardly hope to do in any other way—for all the best intuitions and discoveries of men. We escape too the temptation, inherent in naturalism, to wash down our highest values, our most mysterious other-worldly glimpses of the Perfect, to one dead level of 'Spirit in the making.' We achieve a universe in which the supreme spiritual virtue of humility can flourish. Under such a scheme we can afford to accept the fullest affirmations of naturalism, but not its negations; and by placing these majestic affirmations within the more majestic landscape of Eternal Life, we can persuade science itself to deepen our awe, and make history and development the channels of revelation of a God who transcends history and development.

It is true that our contacts with this Reality, this God, are primarily set up through history and through nature. By means of things and events, we discover That which lies beyond things and events: or, to use the language of religion, God comes to us through natural means. But the essence of the supernaturalist position is an insistence that the discovery is not merely the discovery of this world's deepened meaning: it is rather the discovery of Something other than this world, and which alone makes this world worth while. So in the wonderful passage in which St. Augustine interrogates the natural order:

'I asked the earth, and that answered me: I am not it; and whatsoever are in it made the same confession. I asked the sea and the deeps, and the creeping things, and they answered me: We are not thy God, seek above us. I asked the fleeting winds, and the whole air with his inhabitants answered me, That Anaximenes was deceived; I am not God. I asked the heavens, the sun and moon and stars: Nor, say they, are we the God whom thou seekest. And I replied unto all these, which stand so round about these doors of my flesh: Tell me concerning my God; since you are not He, tell me something of Him. And they cried out with a loud voice: "He made us!" My question was my thought; and their answer was their beauty.'[54]

And if we ask the same question of history, and the transcendent personalities emerging in it—or of such examples of moral loveliness and non-utilitarian heroism as have come within our own range—the answer is the same. They all point beyond the world; and in their beauty and self-immolation—so far exceeding the natural necessities of the case—testify to that deeper Reality in relation with which alone we can hope to develop the true meaning and capacity of human life. Of all these we can surely say:

'As in God they must have their root if their values are to survive, so in God they must find their consummation if their promise is to be fulfilled. For nature, limited by naturalism, can find for them neither a beginning nor an end which is adequate to their true reality.'[55]

Why is it that we are so strangely moved when we hear of such a life as that of Dr. Schweitzer, the brilliant scholar who heard and obeyed a supernatural call to humble

[54] *Confessions*, Bk. X, cap. 6.
[55] A. Balfour: *Theism and Thought*, p. 32.

service in the African forests; or the amazing career of Charles de Foucauld, the self-indulgent young aristocrat, called imperatively to a life and death of lonely self-immolation in the Sahara? When we think of these lives, against which common sense could say so much, most of us feel either a most poignant and admiring envy, or else that interior discomfort which leads us to turn as soon as we can to something else. Why is this, unless it be that they point decisively beyond the world, and rouse our latent sense of a supernatural call? Do they not suggest to us that we may have made the mistake of the unskilful psychoanalyst, accepted a merely natural interpretation of the assigned end of our human striving, and so harmonized our own lives at too low a level; leaving out just those objective realities towards which the mystics orientate their lives, and so missing the clue by which alone history can be understood?

Many will say that all this is in the nature of speculation and specialism; and does not bear much on the religious philosophy and needs of the ordinary man. But I do not think we can get rid of it quite so easily as that. For if it be true, as the mystics insist, that we are thus the creatures of a double order, of spirit and of sense—if the supernatural be unalterably present here and now, reaching and being reached by us in and through the visible world, setting up heroic standards, and making heavenly claims—then, this fact is true for all, though doubtless in very different degrees. The call of the Absolute is then heard in every invitation to sacrifice; and its savour is discerned in all self-oblivious deeds. 'I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me.'

Therefore the truth or falsehood of our religious constructions, from the simplest to the most complex, must be measured by their ability to minister to this double situation, and bring the supernatural life by natural channels to the soul. Our philosophy too is gravely defective if it fails to include both orders, and we are stunted and imperfect if we fail to respond to them; for our full life must consist in a balanced relation, a give-and-take, with both. It requires us to acknowledge the push of indwelling Spirit working through development, and urging all the many-graded efforts and self-expressions of men; yet also, the moulding influence of a transcendent and achieved Perfection—the inciting cause of all our deepest longings and most heroic activities. We only begin to grow up from the animal to the truly human, when forced to deal with visible facts, achievements, and difficulties outside ourselves; the things and problems of a truly objective world. So too, as regards that further stage of growth—that truer and fuller relation to Reality—to which the experiences of religion seem to point us, we can only hope to emerge from the merely individual into the fully and richly personal, in dealing with, and receiving food and stimulus from, a really existent spiritual environment truly other than ourselves.

The perpetual demands of pure religion for self-annihilation, self-loss, which sound so arid and perverse until we realize them as one half of a completed whole—surely these are simply demands for a recognition of the truth, that God alone is the meaning, origin and goal of human personality; and that any creed which puts man and man's importance at its centre, is doomed to shipwreck against the massively superhuman realities of the spiritual world.

'This Object Uncreate is so far beyond and above all created being,' says Bérulle, 'that it is for us to lose ourselves and sink ourselves in Him rather than know Him; and

rather to become His by His own secret operations than by means of our thoughts and particular conceptions.'[56]

This demand for self-naughting is present in Christianity side by side with the gentlest and most genial understanding of the weakness and unsteadiness of men. In such annihilation rightly understood not loss of individual character is contemplated, but rather the subjugation and so the enhancement of its best elements; which grow and shine the more, in all their variousness, by the mergence of their deepest being in the living Source and Food of personality. This involves a view of personality incompatible with any theory of the self as an enclosed monad; another point on which philosophers must take some account of the witness of spiritual genius. For here we are presented, within the frame of history, with the spectacle of persons in whom this self-mergence and transfiguration has been accomplished; and who show us, so far as man has yet achieved it, the result of the correct relation of finite to Infinite Spirit. It is a result best defined in the words of the New Testament: 'For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind'.[57] Not the terror-struck paralysis of the tiny creature confronted by the Holiness of God; but a wonderful enhancement of each aspect of its being, the filling up of its small capacities to the brim:

'Each faculty tasked
To perceive him, has gained an abyss, where a dewdrop was asked.'

The active and heroic careers of the greatest among the saints notoriously witness to this possible transformation of personality: to the fact that a deeply felt and trustful correspondence with that which we call the Supernatural Order is the condition under which we shall best correspond with the natural order, and do the work it demands. We may be sure that their best intuitions are relative and sidelong glimpses of a Truth we cannot see face to face, and the passion of love it inspires in them a faint shadow of the energy of love which is ceaselessly poured out upon the world; that nothing in fact which they say or feel must ever be confused with ultimates. Nevertheless, in their massive agreements, most of all in the power over circumstances which they develop, their unearthly self-forgetting charm, their transfiguring influence on other lives; in all this, they convince us of their own contact with immense spiritual realities. And these realities, though our own consciousness seldom opens wide enough to apprehend them, none the less ceaselessly condition every detail of our own lives.

In an impressive passage Baron von Hügel has observed that his long and deep studies had brought him to feel, not that we can isolate as 'mystical' any one sort of experience and awareness, but rather that all our acting and thinking, however little we may ourselves perceive it, is only fully explicable as determined by 'the actual influence of the actually present God'; as the unseen planet Neptune, truly present, was the cause of those deflections through which at last he was found.[58] This is a thought which chimes well with that idea which Lord Balfour, in his *Theism and Thought*, has called the concept of a 'guided universe'.[59] It may represent the line along which Christian philosophy will best escape the tangles of monism. The mystics, and those who share in lesser degrees their special qualities, are then those who feel and know more fully than any other type of mind the truth suggested by

[56] *Œuvres*, p. 1383.
[57] 2 Timothy i. 7.
[58] *The Mystical Element of Religion*, 2nd ed., vol. i, p. xxii.
[59] Op. cit., p. 37 etc.

these words. Such feeling and such knowledge do and must fluctuate: for here intuition moves upon those 'coasts of peace' where the historically conditioned creature touches the fringes of Eternity by means of that most actual, yet undefined *aura* of awareness, which extends beyond the sensory field. But those who have known the mysterious wonder of that contact, remembering our humble origin and half-animal status, will be the last to be disconcerted at this. What matters is, that the Eternal Fact apprehended does not fluctuate, as our chain-like lives, now dim, now vivid, pass across it. And as these lives, under the two-fold influences of spiritual food given from without and organic development working from within, expand into greater realization of their own meaning, more complete self-surrender to its purposes—so, and only so does the true human personality grow up. Thus only can it escape the childishness, pettiness and lack of direction so startlingly apparent in so many adult lives, and exhibit all its latent possibilities. Drawing strength from a source of power beyond itself, and released from its preoccupation with corporate or individual self-interest and self-preservation, it then becomes a source of power in its turn.

Lord Balfour, in the book from which I have already quoted, insists strongly on the double character of all our knowledge and convictions about life; its evolutionary and its transcendental sides. What he there says of the distinction between the historical and the 'rational' sources of such knowledges and beliefs, and the occasional collisions between them, can be applied with even greater appropriateness to the problem presented by man's spiritual life:[60] for both strands are so plainly present in it.

There is first the natural and historical strand, developing in and through the life of the race, and conditioned by our past, and very largely too by our relation with our physical surroundings; the tendencies and outlooks we all inherit. These tendencies and outlooks, as we cannot doubt if we be theists, are themselves, in so far as they be innocent, due to the guiding action of creative Spirit; truly immanent in history and the processes of growth. 'Religion', says Troeltsch, 'with its common goal in the unknown, has also a common ground in the Divine Spirit, ever pressing the finite mind onward towards further light and fuller consciousness—a Spirit which indwells our finite Spirit.'[61] Through and in history, then, Reality does come to us. Therefore such manifestations of natural religion are not to be rejected by us, even though they be inevitably mixed with outgrown primitive elements, errors, and memories. Indeed, it is in religion more than elsewhere that these primitive characteristics of our inherited knowledge are seen most plainly and sometimes painfully.

But over against this real though partial truth of immanent Spirit and organic growth, is a whole realm of belief and knowledge not to be accounted for in the terms of naturalistic development. This realm of certitude points beyond the world. It is concerned with absolute values, and that abiding Perfection in which they find their meaning and their end. Here that stream of change which is the field of our 'natural' experience is transfused and enveloped by the strange intuition of Eternity 'in which nothing is fitting but all is at once present, and out of which flows all that is past and to come'.[62] This intuition does not emerge from within man's natural experience, but rather breaks in on it from another order; and does not invite him to be merely his natural best, but something quite different. The manifestation, it is true, is given in

[60] Op. cit., p. 21 etc.
[61] *Christian Thought*, p. 32.
[62] St. Augustine: *Confessions*, Bk. XI, cap. 11.

and through history; for otherwise we, immersed in history, could not conceivably receive it. And it is given by means of great spiritual personalities—revealers, prophets, saints. But it is not conditioned or limited by history. Revelation, grace, given-ness, power, are its key-words: not merely evolution, growth, self-expression, development. In theological language, God's movement towards man is in this regard considered as the precedent cause of man's possible movement towards God. And in the degree of his response to this breaking-in of Spirit, this attraction, this grace, man discovers himself to be a spiritual thing.

'Amavit Deus Comgilum
Bene, et ipse Dominum.'

That ancient couplet, which told the whole story of a saint, tells also, in the language of our human nature, the most deeply felt relation between Supernature and the soul. Surely we have here a conception within which all levels and degrees of genuine religion, from the most naïve to the most lofty, are at home; and which still leaves room for more vivid apprehensions, more profound relations, than any which man has yet attained. For this conception looks beyond all theories of evolution or development, as telling only half the truth. It points to the direct influence and immense transfiguring possibilities of God's free action; and rebukes the human tendency to systematize the workings of His power within our world, and impose on Him the limitations of our narrow and shallow world consciousness. Thus it witnesses most splendidly to the freedom, aliveness, and spontaneity of God, the rich possibilities of His creative love, and the inadequacy of all patterns, diagrams and theories by which man, out of his tiny store of knowledge, seeks to interpret the universe and forecast His dealings with the world.

Going back then once more to the question with which we began—what philosophy, what reading of Reality is required by man's deepest experiences, and how are we to conceive the relation of that Reality with ourselves—what must the answer be? Perhaps something like this. Man's full relation with Reality, in so far as we are able to apprehend it, can only be expressed by a double formula and developed by means of a double movement. For it means his ever fuller correspondence both with Eternity and with time, and therewith a widening out of human experience and responsibility beyond the span of the 'natural'. It means the push of indwelling Spirit working through development towards an ever richer and more various inflorescence of life. But it also, and essentially, means the moulding influence of a transcendent and achieved Perfection; the inciting cause of all man's deepest longings and most heroic activities, the only source of all his keenest joys. In religious language, this means both Revelation and History, both Grace and Nature, both Prayer and Works. It declares the fundamental religious truth, that the complete redeeming of that which we call nature can only be the work of Supernature. Thus, where it is actualized, this outlook completes and unspeakably enriches the great landscape which the human soul is able, when fully awakened, to contemplate; and brings into our personal life a stimulating and humbling element. For it means the eternalizing of all our small and homely activities, placing them within an environment which gives them a dignity and a meaning beyond themselves; and it also means the humble acceptance of the food of Eternal Life in and through this-world conditions. It means in the realm of religion the sheer flight of the soul to God, its supernatural joy, home and end; and yet also the meek and patient discovery and service of that very God in natural and homely ways. Thus is our apparently aimless life of

succession redeemed by relating it with eternal facts; and, as in Herbert's poem, the swept room and the action of the sweeper are both alike 'made fine'.

IV. The Supernatural Self-Given In Process: History And Eternity

La lumière s'abaisse du plus haut des cieux jusqu'au plus bas de la terre mais sans s'aviler; elle pénètre tout mais sans s'infecter; elle s'unit à tout et s'incorpore à tout, mais sans se mêler; le pureté, la simplicité, la netteté et la dignité de son être étant telles que dans ces conditions corporelles elle a les conditions spirituelles et ne reçoit aucun intérêt et variété en soi-même par la variété des choses où elle est unie.

Pierre de Bérulle

The universal law of history consists precisely in this, that the Divine Reason, or the Divine Life within history, constantly manifests itself in always-new and always-peculiar individualizations—and hence that its tendency is not towards unity or universality at all, but rather towards the fulfilment of the highest potentialities of each separate department of life.

Ernst Troeltsch

I

If we allow that, at least for our human ways of thinking, there *are* two levels of reality, two distinct worlds; then it surely falls within the province of religion to discover those ways and degrees in which the 'supernatural' world that bathes and supports us, and which is its special subject-matter, is revealed to human consciousness and enters into relation with men. Although it is from the mystics that we get the most vivid and personal accounts of such experienced relationship, we cannot limit the workings of the Transcendent in human life to their special contacts with God. It is essential—if only as a check on subjectivism—that the special experience and declarations of these individuals be supported and corrected by some more general conception, and some more general intimations: that we should be able to think of them as somehow deeply connected with, and even supported by, the common life of average men. The spiritual peaks, however great the distance that separates them from the ordinary level, and however strange, remote and lonely they may seem, must still rise from the earth and form part of it. They must not hang like cloud mountains in the air.

This seems to mean that man's total experience from within Nature of the Reality which is other than Nature, must be an experience of which some corporate history, tradition and practice on the one hand, and yet some secret personal communion on the other hand, must each form part; but never the whole part. It must have, like other sorts of life, a growing and sensible body as well as a living soul; an organic as well as a pneumatic side. Religion therefore needs not only those individuals who are capable of Isaiah's apprehension and self-oblation, or St. Paul's energetic love: persons able to ask in its fullest sense the mighty question of St. Francis, or formulate the answer of St. Ignatius. It needs also an articulated society, and a theory of existence, from within which such individuals can emerge as specialists and not as freaks; and which can therefore support, guarantee, and be enriched by their experience. In spite of the supposed antithesis between organized and personal

religion, the supernatural life in man requires for its fullest existence and its richest unfolding both a general and a particular apprehension.

To speak for a moment the language of theology, 'natural religion' alone cannot give a complete account of our knowledge of God. It is too general, vague and dim. Yet 'revealed religion' alone loses its credentials, unless the special vivid insights and experiences of the historic Revealer be supported by the general fact of that everywhere possible if limited apprehension of God, which is the substance of 'natural' religion. And again, the intense and largely incommunicable certitudes of personal religion as seen in the saint and the mystic, require—if we are indeed to accept them as guides to Reality—the support of some general contributory consciousness; some concrete appearance, and embodiment in history, of those truths which the soul apprehends in the deep silence of contemplative prayer. These three theologies—natural, historical, mystical—are at bottom but the partial and oblique demonstrations within our little human sphere of the same august and superhuman Truth. Perhaps they are best thought of by us as the graded self-givings of that one living and eternal Spirit, Who is Light and in Whom is no darkness at all, in, through, and for our finite spirits; fragments from the richness of an infinite store, adapted to our limited human capacities and needs. Man receives authoritative news of the spiritual world through more than one channel, and must react to that world in more than one way, if he is not to cramp his soul.

We may even extend the field within which these intimations of the supernatural can operate, beyond the rich nucleus which we call 'religion'. It is reasonable and often useful, though it may not be adequate, to regard the unearthly passion of the religious genius as a response at a special level, and in a special way, to the same ultimate attraction as that which is felt in another manner by the philosopher and the artist. All three witness to the refusal of the fully awakened human spirit to be satisfied by a physical environment and an animal life; or identify reality with the time-series that conditions us.

'The approach to God,' says Professor Alexander, 'may be made in various ways: through the phenomena of nature, through the pursuit of truth, through art, or through morality. Being one function of human nature, the religious sentiment does not exist in isolation from the rest, but is blended and interwoven with them; and all our experiences may in their various degrees be schoolmasters to teach us the reality of God.'[63]

The mediæval story of the monk who wandered from his cloister into the heart of the forest, enticed by the song of an invisible bird, and listened to that music in an ecstacy which lasted for a hundred years, is the spiritual biography of many an artist and philosopher as well as of the saint. Each is struggling to convey to us, often without an adequate vocabulary, some idea of the insistent hints and glimpses he is receiving of a Reality wholly other than ourselves: the timeless *Patria* in which or Whom we live and move and are. The artist reaches out towards this Ultimate through the senses; the philosopher through the intellect; the mystic in another manner. But all three are seeking under symbols a metaphysical satisfaction: the 'only substance of That which Is'. All three bring us in the end to the profound human rejection of a universe of mere succession. To say this is not to discredit the claim of experimental religion to a more complete and valid knowledge than can be reached by any other path: for it is only the great religious revealer who has yet been

[63] S. Alexander: *Space, Time, and Deity*, vol. ii. p. 402.

able to give us an experienced principle of stability in which the human soul can fully rest, and to link this abiding reality securely with the world of change.

Perhaps at this stage we shall better understand the general reference and underlying implication of art, philosophy, and religion if we consider the special case of that which we call Romance.

Romance is the heightened significance, the glow, the 'otherness', with which human beings tend to endow the plain narrative of human life. To explain away Romance by attributing it to a naïve preference for '2d. coloured' rather than '1d. plain' is to beg one of the deepest questions raised by existence. For why, after all, does the human self like—indeed, long for—this kind of colour, unless it appeals to an appetite which nothing in the untouched natural order can satisfy? These naïve efforts to transfigure the time-world are like the first adventures of a child with a paint-box; crude intimations of the emerging passion for beauty. They have no practical value. They help neither the preservation of the individual nor the propagation of the race. They are entirely incompatible with all that we mean by 'animal' life; we need go no further than the Book of Tobit or the Odyssey to discover that man cannot be described in animal terms alone. The tendency to romanticize history is at bottom the tendency to supernaturalize it; to make it the vehicle of transcendental feeling, to achieve at least a diminished ecstacy, some contact with the Ultimate, by means of the series of changing events. For Romance is history which is suffused by eternity; and is thus a witness to that more perfect synthesis of Changeful and Unchanging which is the essence of religion. If religion requires ontology to give it meaning, Romance requires ontology too. Almost any of its characteristic products is enough to assure us of this.

'Right so departed Galahad, Percivale and Bors with him; and so they rode three days, and then they came to a rivage, and found the ship whereof the tale speaketh of tofore. And when they came to the board they found in the middes the table of silver which they had left with the maimed king, and the Sangreal which was covered with red samite. Then were they glad to have such things in their fellowship; and so they entered and made great reverence thereto; and Galahad fell in his prayer long time to Our Lord, that at what time he asked, that he should pass out of this world. So much he prayed till a voice said to him: Galahad, thou shalt have thy request; and when thou askest the death of thy body thou shalt have it, and then shalt thou find the life of the soul. Percivale heard this, and prayed him, of fellowship that was between them, to tell him wherefore he asked such things. That shall I tell you, said Galahad; the other day when we saw a part of the adventures of the Sangreal I was in such a joy of heart, that I trow never man was that was earthly. And therefore I wot well, when my body is dead my soul shall be in great joy to see the Blessed Trinity every day, and the Majesty of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. So long were they in the ship that they said to Galahad: Sir, in this bed ought ye to lie, for so saith the scripture. And so he laid him down and slept a great while; and when he awaked he looked afore him and saw the city of Sarras.'[64]

I have chosen this passage because we see in it certain well marked characters of great romantic literature, which bear out the view that we have in such literature a real product of the transcendental sense. Sensitive readers always notice in it a curious sense of slowing-down, the partial replacement of succession by duration; hints of a neighbouring deep stillness, the yet veiled presence of another kind of life.

[64] Malory: *Le Morte Darthur*, Part IV, Bk. XVII, cap. 21.

We can find these qualities conveyed in the free working of the creative imagination, as in La Belle Dame Sans Merci: or even, in a less extent and at a lower level, in some of the early plays of Maeterlinck. We also find them operating along that dangerous strip of country where fact and fact-like legend meet. Take, for instance, the story of another journey, where we surely recognize in a sublimated form the amalgam of romantic narrative and spiritual truth.

'When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came' and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his Mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.'[65]

The Bible of course provides us with some of the greatest examples of this romantic transfiguration of events; and much of its rich meaning is lost to those who refuse to apply this method of interpretation, and acknowledge the part played by it. But safer instances may be found in abundance in mediæval literature; and supremely in such a work as the *Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi*.

'St. Francis being much weakened in body through his sharp abstinence, and through the assaults of the devil, and desiring to comfort the body with the spiritual food of the soul, began to think on the immeasurable glory and joy of the blessed in the life eternal; and therewithal began to pray God to grant him the grace of tasting a little of that joy. And as he continued in his thought, suddenly there appeared unto him an Angel with exceeding great splendour, having a viol in his left hand and in his right the bow; and as Saint Francis stood all amazed at the sight of him, the Angel drew the bow once across the viol; and straightway Saint Francis was ware of such sweet melody that his soul melted away for very sweetness and was lifted up above all bodily feeling; insomuch that, as he afterwards told his companions, he doubted that, if the Angel had drawn the bow a second time across the strings, his mind would have left his body for the all too utter sweetness thereof.'[66]

Such transfigurations of the actual, such penetrations of a described series of moments by a rapture, awe, mystery and loveliness which seem to belong to another order than this, come, says one of the most profound literary critics of our day, from 'the transcendental element in human nature . . . the shadowy Companion, the invisible attendant who walks all the way beside us, though his feet are in the Other World'.[67] Here the 'programme music' of narrative literature is shot through by the 'absolute music' of spiritual literature; and, in consequence, some little hint of all that lies beyond us filters in.

God, said Brother Giles of Assisi, is like a great mountain of corn; and even the greatest of the saints is only a sparrow, picking up a grain here and there. Other birds too bring their grain from that mountain, and witness in their own manner to its richness and reality: the mysterious over-plus of Being, beyond the conceptual range of our various but limited minds. Thus we need not despise even the contributions of the tom-tit, or refuse to admit them to the total of our knowledge of the supernatural world: for 'every good gift and every perfect gift' partakes of the Ultimate and 'comes

[65] Matthew ii. 9-11.
[66] *The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi.* 'Of the second reflection on the most holy Stigmata.'
[67] Arthur Machen: *Hieroglyphics*, p. 118.

down from the Father of lights'.[68] We are obliged to think of man's access to the Infinite in these clumsy ways, to alternate between personal and impersonal, concrete and fluid image, because of our conceptual limitations. But however we think of it, we shall never escape the fact that in so far as God is known at all, He is necessarily only known because and in so far as He is experienced. And this experience is not—as realized by us through the shifting veils of creation—simple, uniform, and absolute. It is subtle, many-levelled, various and approximate; and at the best inevitably incomplete. We climb to reality by a rope of many strands, each giving strength to the rest.

Our total experience of the Supernatural, then, is both corporate and individual; both historical and metaphysical. It is sensual, intellectual and spiritual. It requires the explication within societies of truths which have first been apprehended by the special powers of individual souls; and the sharpened realization and representation by those special individuals of the general certitude latent in the crowd. It requires a race with ears to hear; and also individuals of musical genius who can select and adapt to the scale of humanity strains from that torrent of melody which is, in its wholeness, so far in excess of our span. Christianity, at once so historical yet philosophical, so personal yet institutional, so practical yet mystical, admirably demonstrates this.

All this means that, so far as man in his religion is reaching out towards the meaning of the universe, and towards a Something Other which expresses itself to him through that universe, then we may expect that he must explore more than one channel of revelation. Therefore the opposition which is often set up between these various channels of revelation is artificial, and destructive of the true balance of his spiritual life. Nevertheless man, thus receiving in more than one way intimations of that Reality which yet is One, finds, directly he tries to reduce his intuitions and experiences to order, that some division and classification is forced upon him. And we, who are now trying on a small scale to discover the character of human relation to the Infinite, must also divide before we seek to unite.

Especially four ways among the many in which the human creature experiences the fact of God, and God is self-disclosed to men, stand out before us.

First, in History we find the Supernatural penetrating Process and revealed through it.

Next, in Incarnation—and, depending from this, in the fact of sanctity—we find the Supernatural penetrating Personality and revealed through it.

Thirdly, in Sacraments and Symbols we find the Supernatural penetrating created Things, and revealed to the soul through the channels of sense.

Last, in Prayer we find the Supernatural in immediate contact with created spirit; self-revealed and self-active within the Individual Soul.

Each of these four great ways of access to God has often been embraced and explored in isolation; and exalted at the expense of the rest. The sacramental and the spiritual, the historical and mystical, the immanental and the incarnational strands of the religious complex, have been forcibly separated and placed in a false opposition. To treat them thus is to lose all hope of understanding them, for each one is only truly explained through the others, and no one of them has meaning alone; and if in this

[68] James i. 17.

book these four ways of approach are studied in succession, it is only in the hope of uniting them at last in a stable synthesis.

In such a study History must inevitably come first; since all these methods of contact between Infinite and finite are experienced and developed by growing and evolving creatures who form part of a historic process, are themselves incidents in the slow unfolding of the tale of organic life. Indeed it is easy—but probably far too easy to be accurate—to think of the relation between history and Eternity as the relation between a tale and the Teller of the tale. So now we go on to consider the way in which through History the unchanging Object of religion finds and is found by men; and the human beings borne upon the surface of one tiny cooling planet—in the truest sense 'inheritors of a dying world'—meet and lay hold of a Reality to which they can give the names of Infinite, Perfect and Eternal One.

Human life, indeed all created life, appears to us as existing in Time and conditioned by Time. It is successive: and so deeply coloured is all our thinking by succession, that the strangeness of this fact is not noticed by any but philosophic minds. Yet it may seem very strange to the angels that our life and thought consist in a ceaseless chain of mental and physical events. We cannot stop; and such identity as we possess must be an identity which endures by and through continual change. The words which cluster round the concept of life—evolution, development, growth, variation, birth, maturity, decay, death—all carry with them and develop this sense of mutability, of flux. Even the deep stillness experienced in contemplation does not constitute a true escape from the time-series; but seems to be tranquil only by contrast with the more feverish pace of our normal thought. Whilst it appears to be, and indeed may be, tasting Eternity, it remains conditioned by history and subject to time. 'Whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell,' said St. Paul of his own ecstacy; and that is the puzzle which haunts all the higher ranges of the devotional life. But we know by the felt contrast between our enslavement by succession and our incurable thirst for the Abiding, that the world of change alone cannot use or satisfy all the capacities of man.

Now religion, we have said, seems to us to begin in this intuition of the Abiding; in this metaphysical thirst, this dim yet real craving for ultimates. And this craving, if we look at its essence and not at its imperfect expressions, already involves an implicit apprehension—even a cloudy intimate knowledge—of that which we agreed to call supernatural reality: a Perfection transcending time. It is always turned in desire, in terror, or in adoration to a world that is other than this: a world in which succession has no place.

' "I see Thee without beginning or midst or end!" exclaims Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*.'[69]

'*Is* alone,' says Plato, 'may properly be attributed to the Eternal Essence.'[70]

'That alone is truly real which abides unchanged', says his pupil St. Augustine; describing, after nine unresting years of active Christian life, the essential character of his quest for God.[71]

In such words as these we have, not merely a special conclusion of philosophy, but a deep conviction renewed again and again in all great spiritual souls: in Socrates and

[69] *Bhagavad Gita*, XI. 16, 19.
[70] *Timæus*, 37*d*.
[71] *Supra*, cap. i, p. 18.

Plotinus; in Gautama and Mohamed; in the Psalmists and Prophets; above all, and in most exquisite tenderness of expression, in the Synoptic Christ. All these souls invariably and instinctively look to and adore, not some future possibility, some not-yet-finished idea of Holiness; but an already existing Perfection. This abides unchanged; but the relation of the plastic and historically conditioned soul ceaselessly changes. In the movement of St. Augustine's life and feeling through many phases of sensual and intellectual desire and satisfaction, yet never outside the field of influence of that steadfast One, 'fixed yet incomprehensible; unchangeable yet changing all'[72] we see exhibited the true relation of Historic to Eternal Life:

'The difference within affinity between two, the deepest and most real of all realities really known to us; our finite *durational* spirit and the infinite *eternal* Spirit, God.'[73]

This cloudy knowledge of Eternal Life develops on man's side through a series of experiments, and by a method of trial and error; destined to establish at least some partial truth about its nature, the relation which is possible between it and mankind. We have seen that at first he tends to incorporate it in those aspects of the physical that he does not understand; and only with deepening knowledge, and by the help of great revealing personalities, gradually learns to conceive it in terms which transcend his own immediate sensations and needs. Even so, he drags with him in his ascent plenty of furniture from his religious past, and adapts it with surprising skill to the 'more stately mansions of his soul'; thus laying himself open at every stage to the various charges of conservatism, superstition, and syncretism which formal religion always has to meet.

So plain is all this, and so profoundly is religion as we know it coloured by the historical process through which it has passed, that many sympathetic students are unable to see in it more than an immanental unfolding within the time-stream of the spiritual consciousness of man; an extension of his natural evolution, conforming to natural law. The current view of Old Testament history, tracking out the unfolding of the Hebrew religious consciousness from its first crude intuitions to the heights of prophetic inspiration in Ezekiel and Isaiah, encourages this simplification; and harmonizes well with the general outlook which is supposed by the unscientific to be characteristic of natural science. Thus one of the best exponents of Christian Modernism has said that: 'The essence of religion, of the Christian religion as of others, is Spirit working from within, not imposed from without';[74] and proceeds on this basis to develop the well-known but deceptive antithesis between the religion of authority and institutions—representing merely the conservation of outgrown forms—and that personal religion of experience and spirit in which all the seeds of progress must be sought.

But this attractive simplification already comes into conflict not only with the observed facts of religion, but also with the philosophy of history in its richest and deepest developments. For surely the *differentia* of history, that which marks it off from the general process of organic nature which we see round us, is exactly the breaking-in which we observe in it of something other than natural causation; and the difficulty of understanding it comes from this apparent breach of continuity, the resulting action and reaction of unique personalities and events. When event and process reach the human level and thus become history, they always begin to exhibit

[72] *Supra*, cap. ii, p. 23.
[73] F. von Hügel: *Eternal Life*, p. 3.
[74] Percy Gardner: *Modernism in the English Church*, p. 89.

peculiarities which point beyond themselves. Naturalism here ceases to be adequate as an explanation of the observed process of life. Historic religions, when we come to understand them, are the supreme examples of this interweaving of the entirely natural with something utterly beyond the natural; and Christianity is the most truly historical of all religions because, whilst giving fullest value to all the acts and experiences of human life, it yet insists that this human life alone is not enough to exhibit the purposes of God.

Christianity neither flees from the world, nor capitulates to the world. The double strand of which all history is woven—tradition and novelty—is present in it; and it is the vivid sense of this 'something more', the breaking-in of the Transcendent upon the temporal series, which Christian Apocalyptic is trying under its peculiar symbolism to express. In Christ's own teaching, the immanental parable of the mustard seed cannot tell all the truth about the Kingdom of God. 'Behold! the Bridegroom cometh' tells us more. So too in the Johannine vision, the pure river of the Water of Life flows out of the very heart of the Supernatural for the healing of the nations of the earth; and the New Jerusalem is not the result of even the most enlightened town-planning, but 'descends out of heaven from God'.[75]

But the Apocalyptic principle is not confined to religion. Secular history too shows us again and again sanctions and imperatives, which we cannot class as natural, emerging and exercising a determining influence on human affairs. It shows us the face of the world and the destiny of nations sharply changed by the action of minds and wills that moved to and fro between natural and supernatural regard; or obeyed an insistent push that seemed entirely unrelated to the practical needs and advantages of men. Again and again it suggests that the life of man only exhibits its full meaning, its specific character, in so far as some degree of this two-foldness appears in him; that he must partake of Eternity as well as of time. History shows us successive events contributing to the creation of heroic personality; and the building-up of rich characters who seem to exceed what nature could either produce or require, as St. Joan of Arc transcends the political scene which conditioned her career. It shows us great and daring thinkers emerging within an uncomprehending and often censorious society and making gifts to it; patient scientists who reap no personal advantage from the corner of the universe which they unveil; great men of action behaving from within history upon heroic levels, and thus witnessing to attractions and obligations beyond the level of the natural world. Plato and Marcus Aurelius—Pasteur and Darwin—Lincoln and Livingstone—all these manifest within history the supernatural life. It shows us too man's fever of creation harnessed to the service of music and of plastic art. It shows us great ideas incarnated in groups of men and in institutions; and enduring, when the groups and institutions degenerate and die.

History gets its real character from the often abrupt and inexplicable appearance of such particular individuals and unique actions and events: persons, actions, and events which contribute to no utilitarian purpose, and seem to require for their explanation something other than the orderly unpacking of the world's portmanteau. It lies before us like some closely woven fabric, in which every now and again, in defiance of the apparent pattern, there comes a tiny golden thread—some single perfect act never to be repeated, some single perfect work of art. More rarely, the texture is abruptly broken for the emergence of a wonderful gold flower: a sudden burst of beauty, heroism, or vision, involving many devoted lives. These separate

[75] Rev. xxii. 12; xxi. 10.

inspired moments of beautiful or heroic action, these great flowerings of faith, sacrifice, or art, give the little race of men their chief means of guessing the existence of the 'secret and inviolate Rose'.

We only begin to understand history, as distinct from biology, when we look at these, its noblest products; in which something of the non-successive, the Eternal, is embodied and revealed. Then we perceive it—to use another, still imperfect image—as a process which meanders along the borderland between the animal and spiritual realms; sometimes making a sudden surge into free supernature, sometimes falling back into mere nature, often exhibiting together in bewildering conjunction the characters of both worlds. History shows us a succession which is naturally conditioned, and yet is ever open to invasion from another order; a scene within which Personality—that more than natural thing—first emerges and becomes regnant.

When we try to see all this as a whole, it is too intricate for us. The woven fabric is like one of those verdures which hung below the tapestry pictures in a mediæval hall. As we look at it, we seem to be gazing into a jungle that thrills with life; life which emerges at every level, from weed to tree and from brute to angel, and is set at every pace. All there seems interdependent, yet all is not of equal significance and worth; and, gazing with a more concentrated attention, we gradually learn to distinguish those strands in history which most clearly manifest the presence of Eternal Life. In the solemn beauty of the death of Socrates, and—far off in time though very near in spirit—in the unhesitating, quiet sacrifice of Captain Oates; in the half-mystical fervour and heroic endurance of the first navigators, and in the same non-utilitarian passion driving men to suffer for the conquest of Mount Everest, we see the call of the Supernatural, variously interpreted and variously obeyed by men standing right away from a self-interested world.

Again, the age-long influence of a great political vision arising within an individual mind, as in Cæsar or Justinian; the great secular benefits and civilizing changes within the world, which trace their origin from St. Benedict's refusal of that same world; the romantic impulse to adventure which lay behind the first Crusade or the voyage of Columbus, and the immense results which flowed from these defiances of the self-preserving instinct of man: all these, in their different ways, are examples of the free emergence of novelty into history through the gateway of human character. They are genuine creations and movements of the life process; yet have in them something, some quality or incentive, that seems to enter from beyond the evolutionary scheme. Nor is the guiding presence of the Supernatural seen only in the emergence of great personalities. In the history of the Hebrew nation—so intractable to naturalistic explanation in its mysterious mingling of political disaster and spiritual growth, its bit by bit discovery of God, its deepening sense of the supernatural preparing and culminating in the appearance of Christ—we seem to see a special self-giving of the Universal by means of a particular series a true historic embodiment of Eternal Life. And summing up all this we may surely say, that whenever historic process is found thus to embody absolute value—whether in great personalities or in the great transfiguration of events—it witnesses decisively to those truths about the universe which the doctrine of supernature requires. Our instinctive grouping of history into epochs, our distinction of 'great periods' and significant moments, our description of its great figures as heroes, leaders, prophets, enlighteners of other men, are implicit acknowledgements of this. They point to a dualism even here, in the very arena of practical life; and warn us that the strange

complex, the unresting process within which we seem to be captive, has its hidden aspect—is, as it were, a dough within which some penetrating leaven is at work.

II

If this means that history cannot be reduced to mere process, but is a field in which transcendent as well as natural forces are truly active, it also means that religion—as the greatest of all embodiments of this Transcendent—does and must itself form a strand in history, and have its historic aspect; even though its objective lies beyond Time. Understood in its fullness, religion must amount to an explanation of history. Though in its inmost nature it is a response to, and even a discovery of, the Unlimited and Unchanging; yet this discovery it makes and must always make from within the limited world of succession and change, and largely by use of material found within the physical field. Full religion cannot rest in the abstract; nor is it adequately conceived as 'what the individual does with his own solitariness'.[76] It requires revealers, bridge-builders, men firmly planted in history who are yet aware of the Light bathing all history: Gautama and Socrates, Moses and Amos, Paul and Plotinus, and many more.

Here religion recapitulates, at its own level and with peculiar clearness, that double process—that interweaving of temporal and eternal realities—which gives to history its special character and to our human life all its entrancing interest and touching beauty. To the queer human creature, compounded of sense and spirit—so apparently immersed in and adapted to things, and yet so persistently haunted by the sense of a Reality other than things—the experience of mystery, which afterwards grew into the experience of God, could only come mixed with and conditioned by things and events. Thus in its origin religion was not, and could not be, a 'pure' experience; nor has it ever since become a 'pure' experience. And just where it has been most effective and most profound, there have its human limitations been most clearly and humbly felt.

St. John of the Cross, at the end of one of his great mystical poems, exclaims suddenly 'How delicately Thou teachest love to me!' Perhaps if we realized more fully all that is implied in this utterance of one of the greatest of the contemplative saints, so wide and deep in his experience of the realities of the spiritual world, we should not be quite so hurried and full of assurance in constructing our clumsy diagrams of the delicate and subtle processes of God; so rigid in our exclusions, so horribly crude in our conceptions and demands. Perhaps this saying might even give us the beginning of a vision of God, as a Presence of unchanging Love and Beauty; teaching the race through history, and each soul through and within those faculties which have been evolved from our animal past. It might persuade us that a supercilious contempt of history and the time-process, an effort to achieve the Eternal by the mere rejection of the temporal, is hostile to the truest and richest theism. Such a lofty refusal of the common experience, such an attempt to get out of our own skins and elude the discipline of our humbling limitations, merely defeats its own end. Rather the faithful acceptance of history, a genial sharing in the experience of the race, is required of an incarnational religion: a full use of, and entrance into, that general scene within which the Eternal penetrates time, and the little creature of time can ascend to consciousness of the Eternal. Thus the right attitude of religion towards history is that of complete and humble acceptance, not rejection. Indeed, all the

[76] A. N. Whitehead: *Religion in the Making*, p. 16.

greatest supernatural experiences of men are found when we investigate them, to require and arise within a rich historical environment.

We saw, in considering the witness of the mystics, how their special discoveries of the supernatural always arose within the normal historic conditions of their life; the divine communication flowing easily along the channels provided by the human and natural scene. Though their experience in its essence must be lonely because unshareable, no conscious break with history was involved in it; and if we insist on cutting them out of the historic fabric, their value for us is lost. Even Christ, in His hours of communion with the Father on the mountain, still brought to that profoundly solitary experience a mind steeped in the Jewish tradition, a religious vocabulary formed by the prophets and psalmists of His race, and an emotional life developed by human relationships and responsibilities. He was and is at once utterly the child of the Eternal, and the teacher and leader of time-conditioned men. And it always remains true that from within natural and historical conditions, not in repudiation of them, the human soul drinks deepest of the Water of Life.

So Isaiah sees the glory of God in the Temple; the very home of a developed institutional and national religion in its most rigid form. St. Francis kneels before the Crucifix; the supremely concrete symbol of a thoroughly historic yet profoundly supernatural faith. St. Thomas Aquinas, at the end of a life devoted to the intellectual analysis of Divine Mysteries and the remaking of Catholic philosophy, is suddenly lifted up to the contemplation of ineffable Reality as he stands at the altar saying Mass; the extreme expression of ceremonial and dogmatic religion. Thus convinced from within history of all that lies beyond history, he does not abandon traditional devotion, but only intellectual explanation; and, returning to his cell, quietly puts his pens and inkhorn away, saying, 'I have seen too much—I shall write no more.'[77] All these were men of their own time. The contacts of their souls with the Reality of God were conditioned by history, by their actual place in the time-process: and the material within which they found the Eternal revealed was historical material. Not historical material in its 'pure' form—for the Mass and the Crucifix are no more like the Upper Room and Calvary than the Temple of Isaiah's day was like the travelling tent in which Moses and Aaron spoke to God—but material which had been subjected to the pressure of change and development.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. But the point of that astute epigram surely is, that in order to remain the same we are compelled to move; because our natures are doubly conditioned by Eternity and by Time, and all our acts have a two-fold reference. Thus every deliberate attempt in religion to stop the clock, or reascend the time-stream, defeats its own end. The little sect which reproduces with care the methods of the Apostolic Church really reveal less of the full Christian secret than does a historic Church in the form which it has assumed under the pressure of historic change. The 'ancient wisdom' of Theosophy refuses to convey supernatural value because like well-tinned asparagus, though it may on the dish look very attractive it is only pretending to be alive. But those who accept with simplicity, and in spite of all its disconcerting features, that rich amalgam of past and present, of tradition and novelty, which provides the historic expression of man's relation with God; these will then find themselves able to press on—through the historic event or personality, and by a process appropriate to our half-animal human life—to the conviction of a spiritual and supra-sensible Reality expressing itself in that historic event. All the factors which really contribute to man's spiritual history have, like the

[77] *Acta Sanctorum.* Martii, tom. i, pp. 672*b*-711*a*.

humble rush with which Virgil girded Dante,[78] this double natural and supernatural reference.

It is surely in this amalgam of the changing and the Changeless—this interweaving of History and Eternity—that the true peculiarity and nearly all the difficulty of religion is to be found. Yet this two-fold character is essential to it, if it is fully to meet the needs of men. For were it, as George Fox believed, entirely dependent on an individual and inward light; or, as convinced traditionalists have insisted, entirely revealed in a closed series of historic events—then it would be inadequate to the fullness of human life, which is founded in the implicit conviction that there is both an outside and an inside to things. The character which most distinguishes man from all other forms of life known to us, is that he is aware of, and enticed by, both the successive and the Abiding. His spirit is so made and conditioned that it cannot be fully fed or rightly grow, unless it has some access, virtual or actual, to the Universal, Abstract and Spiritual; whilst also remaining in closest contact with the particular, historical, and sensible. 'To understand something merely in general, not in particular', says St. Thomas Aquinas, 'is to know it imperfectly'—a saying which, fully understood, covers the whole Christian scheme. The abstract idea of witness must be embodied for us in some particular thing that is white, if our mind, trained towards the concrete, is to receive it. Yet this white 'thing' depends for its quality on the universal that it represents.

Hence, in the long run, one group of experiences without the other must starve and distort the soul. For we are all immersed in nature, in history, in succession; and a great deal of our religion, like the rest of our experience, is concerned with nature, history, succession—but not all. There is always present in it the claim of an Eternal Reality which is not a reality of time and space: which stands away from, yet everywhere conditions, life, mind and change. Man has aptitude for both these levels, and will not truly find satisfaction in one alone: for he does not become a sacramentalist through peculiar and 'magical' beliefs, but is one by nature, tending always to reach out to the universal through its particular embodiments. And from this point of view, History is the major sacrament.

On the one hand in his works of art and romantic treatment of events, on the other in heroic lives lived within the world of time, man shows his virtual realization of this. Wherever we find the Transcendent, under whatever name, entering the arena of human life and inciting to disinterested contemplation or to selfless and heroic deeds—there, though not necessarily in the vestments of religion, the Supernatural truly reveals itself and gives gifts to men. Here intuition achieves a certain reconciliation of those apparent opposites, the successive and abiding, the natural and supernatural worlds. This reconciliation, then, must also be expressed in our religious constructions, if they are to be adequate to our spiritual life. These constructions must convey the eternal Form, and that eternal Form in a way in which man can apprehend it: that is, as revealed in historic happenings and sensible things. In other words, the complete religion of the human spirit must have soaring theological vision and concrete historical embodiment. It must seek and adore the Ultimate, without despising the contingent; for it is required to give one rich Reality under two aspects—the universal and achieved, the particular and emergent. *Rorate coeli desuper: aperiatur terra et germinet Salvatorem.*

[78] *Purgatorio*, i. 94-105.

'Eternal Life,' says von Hügel, 'its practice and conception can but suffer from any attempt to restrict the spirit's action to one of its two movements—to abstraction and negation only; or to cut religion loose from the mysteriously mighty stimulation accruing to it, in and through the very tension and difficulties, from historic personalities and the happenings and operations in time and space; or, above all, from the full, vivid conviction of the distinctness from our own spirits, and of the supreme, stupendous richness, of the life of the Spirit—of God, the Godhead.'[79]

Along this path a way is opened up towards a philosophy of religion which will not merely permit but require the fact and principle of incarnation, and its extension in the apparatus of institutions, symbols and sacraments. The mere existence of history witnesses to the fact that succession, the contingent, does matter—that it contains a thread of meaning, includes more than one level of reality. We insult history by regarding it as a form of *Maya*; as the sweep of varied cloud armies across an unchanging sky. This poor conception shows little understanding of the richly woven fabric of the universe. Yet we make nonsense of history if we capitulate to the philosophy of change, and try to understand it apart from that unchanging sky: or if we are tempted to shirk its difficult interpretation by holding that all its bodying-forths of the Eternal have equal rights. Surely by 'history' we mean that organic quality in the life of the world, of human society, art, or any other complex, which integrates and gives significance to the chain of events and redeems them from mere unmeaning succession. Succession is the galloping horse which bears forward a Rider whose identity is maintained throughout the time-process: who, clothed with the Past, carries that Past into the present, making of each new moment something which is richly charged with all that life has accomplished, and yet is wide open towards all its future possibilities. It is because of this character of carrying forward the achieved towards the unachieved that history requires, to make sense, a concept of End and Purpose; even as science requires belief in the rationality of the Cosmos, the uniform operation of Law. And since we are each of us a part of this history, are carried along by this process, and can never escape from it during life, it is within history and in closest connection with such End and Purpose, that God, the Supernatural, must meet us.

If we stand in a deep forest, and look up through the branches to the sunshine seen in a broken pattern between the countless leaves, it is possible to say and to feel that the foliage hides the sky. Yet perhaps the living screen lets through as much of that pure radiance as the little dwellers in the forest can bear. We, immersed in the forest, are entranced by these shining glimpses between the leaves; with their assurance of the steady presence 'yonder' of an infinite light-flooded world. Without this breaking-in, this fragmentary revelation, we should have no direct apprehension of the transcendent energy and glory over-arching us, by which the forest lives. Yet a deeper insight can learn to find that sunshine, that same unearthly radiance—seen by us in these dazzling and broken yet 'religious' glimpses—as the essential life of each one of those leaves. We can come to realize that all-pervading energy, poured in its abounding richness through space; penetrating all things yet steadfastly continuing in itself, in the dual character of a given Presence and self-imparting Power. And with the deepening of our contemplation, with an ever more complete and sympathetic entrance into the mysterious process, the cyclic births and deaths of the many-graded forest life, there comes to us a more profound sense of the 'otherness' of those

[79] F. von Hügel: *Eternal Life*, p. 120.

secret forces in which that life is bathed and by which it is continuously created and maintained.

It is truly the real radiation of the real sun, utterly distinct from the earth and the tree—a radiation undiscerned by the senses, and of which the true character remains unknown—that causes and upholds the vivid life and growth of the tree. Yet without the dazzling vision of sunlight between the leaves, the lifting up of the adoring soul to an apprehension of the 'something other', beyond and yet within each cell of the forest life, we should never have guessed that this 'something other', steadily flooding our whole world with its invisible energies, was also fully present here. Thus do the eyes of the man of prayer, turning back from Eternity to history, find in history itself a new wonder and new incentive to the deepening of his love and awe; feeling through the entangled life and growth of men the all-penetrating influence, the 'dark radiations', of God. Yet the transcendent glimmerings on the one hand, the intricate organic embodiments on the other hand, leave the over-plus of mystery, the *Deus incomprehensibilis* unimpaired.

' "Know, My dearest daughter," said the Divine Voice to St. Catherine of Siena, "that no one can escape from My hands, and you are not in yourselves, but only in so far as you act through Me . . . open thou the eye of thine intellect to gaze into My Hand and thou wilt see that the truth is as I have said to thee." Then she, lifting her eyes in obedience to the Supreme Father, saw, clenched in the hollow of His hand, the whole universe.'[80]

Thus we are bound to think of history as having, like the forest, its own, yet dependent, reality. It abides in and feeds on the Eternal, truly present in it yet utterly transcendent to it: and our chance of apprehending this Transcendent, this Supernature, is mainly through and within history. To think otherwise—to turn from God's conditioned self-disclosures in the race, and demand a separate and 'spiritual' illumination—is to fall a victim to a ludicrous individualism which the sight of the starry sky might be sufficient to rebuke. Yet though God, Supernature, be inalterably present with Nature—or rather, Nature within Him—*some* distinct religious vision of God over-against His Creation is needed, if His genuine presence in history and men's hearts is to be known at its full worth. Hence in the full life of religion, tradition and contemplation both have their rights.

This fact of the importance of history, and of our natural adaptation to its pace and its limitations, creates the conditions within which the spiritual life of man must be developed; if it is to be healthy, humble and secure. That life must have attachments to both orders, and must move with suppleness between them: a ferocious other-worldliness maims our human nature almost as seriously as a cheap capitulation to the 'world.' We know, as yet, very little about ourselves; but what we do know, if we try to be fair to all its elements, seems best expressed in the statement that man is a thoroughly natural yet also implicitly spiritual creature. At one end of the scale is the conclusion of biology that he is simply 'one of the greater ground-apes.' At the other end of the scale is the conclusion of religious philosophy, that he is a creature with a capacity for God. Both can produce evidence in support of their convictions; and both must be treated with respect. Taken together, they suggest that man's relation with Reality is to be thought of as an emergent and growing relation; a forward-moving, energetic push. He is subject to process, yet has attachments to the unchanging. Though continuous in some sense with his natural origins, in its higher

[80] *Divine Dialogue*, cap. 18.

reaches his life involves intuitions, obligations, achievements, for which biological process alone can never account. There is, it is true, no point at which we can draw a line and say with certainty: here the animal self leaves off, and the human personality begins. Yet it is equally certain that nothing in the greater ground-ape seems to lead by logical stages to the Second Isaiah, or St. Francis of Assisi.

The same paradoxical character seems to mark that stream of history in which we find ourselves; of which, indeed, we are a part. This too, in so far as we can make anything of it, appears as a mixture of determined nature and free spirit—of biological process and overruling purpose—of steady development and sudden novelty. And this stream of history, though when we try to think of it its richness and intricacy overwhelms us, is only one tiny strand, perhaps, in the great fabric of a guided universe. Yet plainly it is the strand with which we are connected; and with which, therefore, we must begin.

Thus we are faced once more by these two concepts, both needful if we are to make any sense of our crude experience: the historical, natural and contingent—the timeless, supernatural and absolute. They must be welded together, if we are to provide a frame for all the possibilities of human life; and that life, whether social or individual, must have both its historically flowing and its changelessly absolute sides. The achievement by man of self-consciousness—at first merely utilitarian, but now developed far past the practical level and its requirements—seems to be a stage in his further growth towards consciousness of this double reality and double obligation.

Such a vivid, warmly realistic consciousness of God in His untouched perfection, richness and generosity, and of the world with all its strife, demands and tensions, is put before us in its loveliest, simplest, and yet deepest form in the Synoptic portrait of Christ. It was epitomized in His two commandments, and expressed in a life which alternated between solitary communion with the Eternal and willing self-mergence in the stream of human life. And again in the Christian Apocalypse, that which entrances us and survives its mythical embodiment is surely the same deep vision of two-fold Reality; of the absolute world, the transcendent yet present ‘throne of God and the Lamb’ over against the serial changes, the conflicts and dooms of time. The eternal song of wonder, joy and praise, offered by the angelic host to God, persists through and transcends the vicissitudes of history, the fall of nations, the pouring out of the vials of wrath and suffering, the terrible working of the law of consequence. Through and within all this, the man who is ‘in the Spirit’ can yet hear the voices of adoration which ‘rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come’.[81]

Doubtless in the mass of men this balanced consciousness is still in the rudimentary stage. Yet it is implicit in every genuine religious experience, and may in some degree be made explicit by us all. Thus, when we go from the jangle of streets filled with the solid roar of succession, into the sudden hush of a silent church; there, experiencing the peculiar slowing down of consciousness, the dew-like refreshment of the soul, which comes with our surrender to its influence, we are surely tasting from within history the food of Eternity and hearing the faint rhythms of its song. If the contemplative spirit tends to place here the focus of religion, whilst the active, more deeply aware of succession, hears only the voice of the world’s need, the Christian theist—in so far as he is aware of these two levels of experience—is called upon to strike a working balance between them; to weave together Eternity and Time. Thus

[81] Rev. iv. 8.

alone can he rightly harmonize the elements of life and achieve a stable relation with reality.

If, then, we accept this view—that Divine Reality does indeed reach and teach us, not by one but by two channels—then, the man who is God-conscious (and I use this phrase in its widest, not merely its pietistic sense) is not called upon to de-naturalize in order to spiritualize himself. This mistake has often enough been made in the past; but it is an essentially un-Christian solution, and distorts our relation with reality. It is indeed the glory of Christianity that, alone among the great world-religions, it fully accepts and utilizes this mingling of eternity and history, spirit and sense. But man is most certainly called by religion to actualize his relation with the eternal order as well as with the world of succession—to be, in the succinct phrase of Aquinas, a Contemplative Animal; and it is hardly necessary to point out how seldom this obligation is understood in a literal sense. We observe that this inspired realist did not describe man as a Contemplative Spirit. His words link the natural to the supernatural; and imply that man is called to realize the infinite purposes of God up to the limit of possibility, from within the natural and historical situation in which he finds himself. 'Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.'[82] On the faithfulness and vividness of our response from within history to that which transcends history, our spiritual development ultimately depends.

But if all this be true, then to what are we brought? Surely to the position that the adequate revelation of the Supernatural to the human can only be through such a strictly equivalent series of mental and bodily events, as shall give historical expression to each eternal fact; shall relate in closest union the supernatural and the natural, and shall raise to the very highest levels of reference the implicits of our two-fold experience. But here we are led to that amalgam of history and eternity which marks the greatest creations of art, and on from creative art to sacraments; and at last to Incarnation, the supreme art-work of the Infinite Love.

[82] Psalm viii. 5.

V. The Supernatural Self-Given In Personality: Incarnation

It is a property of Love, to move and impel the will of the lover towards the object loved.

St. Thomas Aquinas

Man is *not* a reasoning animal: he is a seeing, feeling, contemplating, acting animal. . . . Christianity is a history, supernatural and almost scenic: it tells us what its Author is by telling us what He has done.

J. H. Newman

With this ambiguous earth
His dealings have been told us. These abide:
The signal to a maid, the human birth,
The lesson, and the young Man crucified.

But not a star of all
The innumerable host of stars has heard
How He administered this terrestrial ball
Our race have kept their Lord's entrusted Word. . . .

O, be prepared, my soul!
To read the inconceivable, to scan
The million forms of God those stars unroll
When, in our turn, we show to them a Man.

Alice Meynell

I

We are being taught by modern physics that 'cosmic astronomy' and 'atomic astronomy' complete and explain one another. Each atom, with its electrons revolving round the central proton, is as truly a solar system as the most majestic of the stars with its planetary train. Its minute radiations and disturbances of the ether are the same on another scale as the radiations of Betel Geuse or Arcturus. Each of these imperfect human glimpses into an inconceivable reality witnesses to the same august and fundamental design.

It is perhaps in some such way as this that we may begin to think of that which we call incarnational religion; as disclosing, at our own level and within our small planetary compass, the character and purpose of the Incomprehensible God. It is a 'Cape of Good Hope' jutting manward, in Otto's powerful metaphor, from that vast uncharted continent of the divine 'which, as it recedes, is lost to view in the *tenebrae eternae*'.[83] Because we are so nicely adjusted to our own narrow bit of the cosmic scale—our own rhythm of time and sense of place—the milky way and the electron, the speed of light and age of stars, each seem to us equally foreign and equally marvellous. Thus it is only within the tiny strip that is our own that we can ever hope

[83] Cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 208.

to establish a relation with Reality. We are parochial little creatures: God must meet us in our parish if He is ever to meet us at all. If we are to 'behold His glory,' know and love Him, He must somehow enter with His imperishable loveliness the short life-cycle of ordinary men. We cannot escape our own limitations, and go to Him beyond the spheres.

Thus the very facts of theism seem to require some revelation or self-imparting of the Ultimate in terms that we are able to understand. For since man, when spiritually awake, craves for God, but cannot know Him in His spaceless reality; then the satisfaction of that craving must be given to us here. It must come as 'a light into the world.' Only by adapting His self-disclosure to the rhythm and pace of our history, could God reveal to man the character and presence of His Eternity. The Christian formula, which declares that His creative Word 'was made flesh and dwelt among us' simply expresses this loving revelation of the Infinite in terms of the finite; and asserts that it took place, under natural and human limitations, at the very heart of history itself.

It is true that our human intuition at its highest can and does discover and deeply feel God over against us and beyond us: as the eternal and utterly superhuman Spirit of spirits, demanding our adoration and awe. This absolute sense is indeed the foundation of all mystical and philosophic religion. But if the Supernatural, the Ultimate, is ever to exert not merely its daunting and fascinating, but also its winning, redeeming and transfiguring power upon our half-real and indetermined human nature, it must be found, known and loved here: at our own level, in our own way, by means of the phenomenal and particular. The full religious outlook and true religious growth seem always to need a loving contemplation both of that transcendent Reality, and of its humble and condensed expression in space and time—*Amor Patris et Filii*. This felt need of a free movement of the Unlimited to its little and limited creatures—God Himself coming the whole way to man—is the foundation of all historical and sacramental religion. It has been expressed once for all in a phrase that is a poem: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.'[84] The utter distinction in kind between the Supernatural and natural, which is felt more and more strongly by all great spiritual souls, requires such a bridging of the gap, a willed and truly 'loving' entrance of the Supernatural into nature, if it is ever to reach and transfigure the hearts of men.

Now that which we mean by personality represents the highest form of existence which men have discovered yet: the only one which does bridge the gap between the natural and spiritual worlds. Personality is supremely that product of the time-world which stretches beyond time, and has already a certain capacity for eternal things: and its development and enrichment seem to be the very object of the disciplines and tensions of our life. For a 'person' in the full sense is a true spiritual organism capable of love and of creativity; possessing wholeness, suppleness, freedom of response on all levels, yet stretching backwards towards that mystery of Being where life inheres in God. Along this live wire, then, we might surely expect that God's fullest and most searching self-disclosure would be made to us. Christianity contends that of all the categories known to us, personality alone, because of this implicit creativity and freedom, this tendency to wholeness and perfection, lies in the direction of God; therefore only through this strange and fluid complex, so humbly conditioned and

[84] John iii. 16.

fettered by the physical, and yet so unconditioned in its possible range, could the Transcendent Other conceivably penetrate and reveal Itself with our human world.

Moreover, such a revelation of the Perfect—if the uniqueness of the Divine is not to be impaired for us by such a humble, here-and-now encounter—must be made supremely (though not exclusively) at one single point in the time-process, and in one unique person. The tendency of history, to throw up within the stream of succession great personalities in whom universals are embodied, will here provide a means for the emergence of the Eternal in terms of human life: a particular revelation in history, of the Absolute lying beyond history.

Not out of his bliss
Springs the stress felt
Nor first from heaven (and few know this)
Swings the stroke dealt—
Stroke and a stress that stars and storms deliver,
That guilt is hushed by, hearts are flushed by and melt—
But it rides time like riding a river
(And here the faithful waver, the faithless fable and miss).[85]

Thus our theism, if it is to be effective, must have the character of revelation; and further, this revelation must be made in history, and through man to men. That which theology means by incarnation is surely just this intense and concentrated disclosure of the essence of Reality in personal terms, this exhibition of God by means of human nature; an exhibition which is also an act, so that here God is not only demonstrated but given. St. John in his deep meditations saw the uttered Word or Thought of the Eternal, which is Himself, achieve complete expression once in human terms: 'and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.' And since within the Absolute Godhead, Being, Thought and Act are one—as the doctrine of the Trinity tries to tell us—this means an actual disclosure of God Himself, *Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine* fully immanent within the historic scene. Speaking thus, of course, we do but choose from among the most powerful and mysterious attributes of human nature—Love, Thought, Will—signs which point beyond themselves to the infinitely mysterious and powerful processes of God. For since, as St. Thomas reminds us, we call Him personal only by analogy; even in this His most intimate approach to us, we must ever be on our guard against equating the image with the fact.

Yet as in the wonderful poetry of Apocalyptic, when the whole natural order in its splendour and apparent stability shakes and seems to crumble before the astonished eyes of men, it is in personality that the Transcendent is at last gathered up and revealed: so too in the most profound experience of the soul. 'Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven'—such a tiny thing, over against the majesty and tragedy of the material universe, so small and creaturely an embodiment of the unsearchable mysteries of the Real. And the same lesson is driven home by that lovely sequence of Masses with which the Catholic Church ushers in Christmas Day. As the faithful draw nearer and nearer to the full Divine manifestation, so they draw nearer and nearer to the simplest human things. Where Plato declared 'the true order of going' to be a mounting up by means of the beauties of earth, step by step towards the unearthly and celestial Beauty; the Christian Church—strong in her possession of the Divine paradox—compels her children to take the opposite route. She declares

[85] Gerard Hopkins: *The Wreck of the Deutschland*.

the true movement of the religious consciousness to be inwards, not outwards. It moves from the abstract and adoring sense of God Transcendent to the homely discovery of His revelation right down in history, in humblest surroundings and most simple and concrete ways: bringing the adoring soul from the utmost confines of thought—*la forma universal di questo nodo*—to kneel before a poor person's baby born under the most unfortunate circumstances.

Thus at midnight, the Introit of the first Mass declares the ineffable generation of the Eternal Word, and the Collect gives thanks for 'the shining forth of the mysterious divine light from the bosom of Eternity.' At dawn, the second Mass brings the worshipper a little nearer to earthly needs and limitations—'To-day hath a light shined upon *us*; for the Lord is born unto us!' But when Christmas Day is fully come the note changes; and all the emphasis falls upon the realistic, human, homely side—'Unto us a *Child* is born. Sing unto the Lord a new song!'[86] So we have here a gradual condensation and a final self-revelation of the Infinite in ever more homely, conditioned, and natural ways; and in the Christmas Preface the object of all this is summed up in a single wonderful phrase:

'Quia per incarnati Verbi mysterium, nova mentis nostrae oculis lux tuae claritatis infulsit: ut dum visibiliter Deum cognoscimus, per hunc in invisibilium amorem rapiamur.'[87]

And if we ask *how* the Infinite God was made visible; the answer is, that this was not done with any mechanical completeness, but through a living, growing, human personality—that Christ, as the great Bérulle boldly declared, is 'Himself the primitive sacrament.'

In its poetic elaborations of history—and these began almost at once—Christian genius has not failed to emphasize the paradox of the Unlimited thus revealed within humblest limitations.

'O magnum mysterium et admirabile sacramentum, ut animalia viderent Dominum natum jacentem in praesepio.'[88]

A carpenter's baby. Thirty years of obscure village life. A young man, of whose secret growth nothing is revealed to us, coming with the crowd to be baptized by a religious revivalist. A refusal of all self-regarding or spectacular use of that immense spiritual power and effortless authority which the records so plainly reveal. Unlimited compassion especially extended to the most sinful, blundering, sickly, and unattractive among men. A self-oblivion so perfect that we do not even notice it. A balanced life of fellowship and lonely prayer. A genial love of, and yet a perfect detachment from, all human and natural things. Unflinching acceptance of a path that pointed to suffering, humiliation, failure and death. At last, a condemned fanatic agonizing between two thieves. These were the chief external incidents which marked the full expression of the Supernatural in terms of human personality. Yet within this sequence of transitory acts all sensitive spirits felt and still feel the eternal *state*, the interior life of Christ hidden in God, of which these 'mysteries' are the sacramental expressions in space and time. Each scene in its own manner makes a sudden rift, and discloses a new tract of the supernatural world; and this with an even greater and more humbling splendour, with each advance of the seeing soul.

[86] *Missale Romanum*: In Nativitate Domini.
[87] Ibid.
[88] *Breviarium Romanum*: In Nativitate Domini: ad Matutinum.

And indeed it is above all when we see a human spirit, knowing its own power, choose the path of sacrifice instead of the path of ambition: when we see human courage and generosity blazing out on heroic levels in the shadow of death; the human agony and utter self-surrender of Gethsemane, the accepted desolation of the Cross, that we recognize a love and holiness which point beyond the world. There we discern that mysterious identity of Revealer and Revealed, that complete appropriation of personality to the manifestation of God, which it is the special province of the Fourth Evangelist to emphasize.[89]

'Thus,' says Bérulle most justly, 'God the Incomprehensible makes Himself comprehended in our humanity: God the Ineffable makes His voice audible in an incarnate Word: God the Invisible shows Himself in the flesh which He has united to the very nature of Eternity: and God, terrible in the blaze of His splendour, makes Himself felt in His sweetness, kindness and humanity.'[90]

II

Men have learned in various ways, and we still learn, to recognize this self-expression of the Perfect in the terms of a life-process. Fusing as it does two orders of existence, it is in itself a very difficult recognition for human minds to make: nor can any one soul hope to do so with completeness. Some by re-entering history, and there finding the person and the deeds of Jesus; some by the study and practice of His teachings; some, through a sense of the continuing presence of His exalted Spirit, are led to that adoration which only the Supernatural can evoke. Along all these routes—historical, ethical and mystical—God comes 'in Christ' to the human soul. Yet all lead back to one real human figure, appearing at a given moment of history on a particular spot of this planet. Through this point passed, as through a prism, the 'shining radiance of the Father'; to spread and to become the light of men.

The strangeness, the uniqueness of impression which the Gospels manage to convey to us, abides in this natural yet supernatural quality; in the portrait which they give of a fully human nature, yet a human nature that, the more we contemplate it, seems to be filled with, and reach back into, something else. For Jesus lives within and through nature the life of Supernature: and this with a completeness in which our childish efforts, sacrifices and heroisms are wholly explained and fulfilled. We are brought into the presence of a Spirit for whom Reality Itself is the Living Father; and who exhibits within history, yet with no escape from the most dread incidents of existence, the tranquil majesty and power of the Invisible God. The human mind has circled about this historic point, has fled from it and returned to it, has found new meanings and new explanations for it; but has never, once touched, been able to escape the sense that somehow the Supernatural, the Absolute, is here revealed in terms of human nature, and that its recognition 'saves' the children of men. This felt and actual presence in history of something given from beyond history, yet in perfect union with every level of terrestrial life, is that which Christology and incarnational philosophy have been struggling for two thousand years to express.

It is essential to such a philosophy, and indeed to any realistic view of human nature, that the revelation should be regarded as given rather than achieved. So immense, so unexpected an opening up of the superhuman could only be effected by somewhat in itself superhuman: God alone could thus disclose God. Thus along the path of experience we again reach the conviction, if not the logical demonstration, of the

[89] E.g. John xiv. 20; xvi. 27; xvii. 21, 33.
[90] Bérulle: *Œuvres*, p. 218.

truth of the Johannine 'I and the Father are one.' Here the whole personality does really body forth, express, reveal in its heroic energy, its strange deep gentleness, its fortitude and love, the supernatural and eternal Reality. Studying the earliest biographers and interpreters of Jesus, we find that it was neither His moral transcendence nor His special doctrine which struck them most. It was rather the growing certitude that something was here genuinely present in and with humanity, which was yet 'other' than humanity. From the beginning, the Christian claim that Christ is 'fully human and fully Divine' meant and means the effort to formulate the deeply felt conviction that His person and life do not simply manifest the fullest possibilities of human nature evolving from within. In Him, we feel, we see beyond the world—'Jesus from the ground suspires' does not express all that the Incarnation means for us.

The prominence given in the record of Christian origins to the Virgin Birth, Transfiguration, and Ascension is not adequately explained by a reference to the human love of the marvellous, and its tendency to confuse the abnormal with the spiritual. All such episodes seem to point to a deep conviction, that in the great moments of our spiritual history something more than the normal process of life is in question; a higher term, beyond man's limited idea of causation, intervenes and does or may profoundly modify what we choose to call the 'natural' scheme of things. Thus in Christian history some means had to be found of expressing the truth, that the factor which gave and gives this history its special worth came from beyond the visible world; in other words, was 'supernatural'. Here, along the path traced by the successive and contingent, the absolute value of the universe is brought right into human life. And, as a matter of fact, the unconditional abandonment of those doctrines which safeguard these conceptions quickly reduces Christianity to the humanitarian level; and in so doing deprives it of its attracting and transfiguring power. Such a statement need involve no final decision as to which of these episodes represents spiritual, and which historical fact. But it does mean an appreciation of distance which separates the great New Testament writers, with their convinced transcendentalism and profound consciousness of God's direct action upon and through human life, from a merely ethical view of the demands and gifts of the Gospel.

Thus it makes an absolute difference to our view of the universe, whether Christ represents for us the supreme religious Object, or the supreme religious Subject. That is to say, whether 'the lonely Man on the Cross' is simply one who personifies and experiences man's greatest intuition of and surrender to God; or, whether the Absolute God is here, under temporal conditions and in intimate union with human personality, making His greatest revelation to man through man. Certainly for the Christian the Cross must be the supreme meeting-place of both these movements; and thus, in a measure, represents both God's movement to man and man's response. But we have not really progressed beyond an implicit immanentism, unless the objective view predominates; and the historic sacrifice is perceived as bringing to us a revelation of the inmost quality of the universe, the stuff of Eternal Life. If then the Christian theist be asked 'What think ye of Christ?' perhaps he is allowed to answer 'The perfect embodiment of the Unchanging and Eternal in terms of changeful human life; God's self-revelation within history, as indeed wholly other than ourselves and yet not wholly unlike ourselves.' The centrality of Jesus for the history of man abides in this fact: that in Him the life of succession is reinterpreted in the terms of the Eternal Kingdom of God.

It is true that this revelation of the Supernatural, the 'good news' of the true relation between man and God, first appears to Jesus Himself as made not primarily through His person but through His message and 'bringing in' of the Kingdom. He seems most often to conceive His office as that of a proclaimer; and the Kingdom is felt to be something proximate, about to break through from that Perfect which He realizes so keenly, to the imperfect towards which he leans with such pitying and comprehending love. It is not merely an ethic, but an utterly new life lived in relation with the Holy Reality; a life made possible by the fact that this Holy Reality has a relation of protective self-giving and fatherly love towards the souls of men. 'Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.'[91] In and through His own person Jesus reveals to human beings the closeness and dependence of their relationship to this immanent yet personal God; and requires His followers to put first that Kingdom in order that the whole of life may be ruled by its reality. It is His clear vision of the overwhelming claim and worth of this supernal treasure, this Pearl for which no price can be too great, which inspires the note of severity, of totality, in His demands. This severity, which often shocks the amiable and uninitiated, at once seems obvious to every awakened spirit. Whatever it may cost the natural creature, the supernatural call when heard must be obeyed.

'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.'[92]

'Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he *cannot* be my disciple.'[93]

At first the little company left behind continue to be dominated by this Apocalyptic hope in the here-and-now coming of the Kingdom. They inevitably translate the supernatural revelation into sensible and historical terms: and suppose the new life they experience to be a foretaste of some cataclysmic change within the world. Hence the Parousia. But after a time they begin to realize that Jesus is Himself both the revelation and the redeemer. 'In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.' By His appearance in the time-world, history is already transformed and given ultimate meaning; and by a sharing in His Spirit man already lives the supernatural life. This delighted sense of spiritually awakened souls, that in the person of Christ something was given to them which they had never had before, is reflected in the names which they so quickly gave Him; and which generations of Christians have accepted and used again, as telling at least something of the joy and wonder with which they recognize a living Revealer who is one with the Reality which He reveals. The compound Jesus-Christ, already found in St. Paul's earliest letters, expresses this sense of identity between the historic and transcendent, this natural yet supernatural quality. The name Son, applied by Jesus to Himself, describes by human analogy His own consciousness of a mysterious identity with the Ultimate; as the phrase 'I and the Father are one' gives in six words the very essence of the Christian revelation.[94]

Indeed the figure of Christ stands so exactly on the confines between divine and human—so fully radiating God, while remaining so completely man 'of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting'—that men have never been able to decide in which

[91] Luke xii. 32.
[92] Matthew xvi. 24, 25.
[93] Luke xiv. 33.
[94] On the significance of the primitive names of Jesus, see Vacher Burch: *Jesus Christ and His Revelation*.

category to place Him. Meditation seems more and more to show us the relation of history and eternity, our natural and supernatural environment, brought to a point in His person. The serial changes of man and the steadfast abidingness of God seem to co-exist in Him; and every act and word of His earthly life has, like His parables, a double reference. It shows us the perfect living-out of the life of nature, so that men have been quite satisfied to find in Him the supreme ethical teacher and model of human relationships; yet in and with this the achievement of something utterly beyond Nature—that state of soul and consequent transfiguration of existence, which He calls the Kingdom of God, and into which He brings His saints.

The brooding study of the Gospels brings us into gradual familiarity with a life so utterly supernatural that it could afford to take up and transform the least impressive elements of the natural. There is an entire avoidance here of spiritual loftiness; a deliberate condemnation of the aloof attitude of the pious. It is perhaps the homeliness and absence of fastidiousness, flashing out again and again in our fragmentary biographies of Jesus, which most truly guarantee His spiritual transcendence. These witness to a spirit so deeply rooted beyond the contingent as to flower in completest beauty in and through the contingent; bringing 'eternity interpreted by love' from the lonely mountain to the lakeside and the dinner-table, and giving it with the same gesture of peaceful generosity to the prostitute, the paralytic, the faithful disciples, the little children and the curious crowd.

Jesus could move without disharmony from the Mountain of Transfiguration to the house of Simon the Leper; could redeem the most squalid sinner by the heart-breaking device of all-pitying love. He asked for the purity of heart which alone can look upon Reality; yet behold without disgust the poor little animal sins of our half-made human nature, and in the most solemn hour of self-imparting, could kneel and wash His followers' dusty feet. 'He riseth from supper and laid aside his garments; and took a towel and girded himself,' says the Fourth Evangelist—surely here, if ever, recording a vividly remembered event.[95] That was a real washing, not a ritual pretence. So too the first Eucharist was a real eating, and Gethsemane, in which this most human and most holy day was ended, witnessed a real and bitter agony: the piercing anguish in which the creature's utter self-abandonment to the Eternal purpose must be faced and fulfilled. Did the rest of the Gospel perish, this series of events alone would be enough to give us the secret of the Supernatural disclosed through man to men.

This genius for the ordinary—this sacramental and transfiguring use of common life—which colours all the words and deeds of Jesus, was so deeply stamped upon the memories of His followers that it has triumphed over all their natural instinct for the impressive and abnormal; and has given to us, not a Hierophant of the Mysteries, but a patient Sower of the seed, a Shepherd, Healer, Comrade, loved and loving Master: a Maker of yokes on which the feeble staggering human creature can carry the balanced burden of physical and spiritual existence. Above all in the Resurrection narratives, where the human love of the sensational, even the bizarre, might surely be expected to assert itself, we are kept in closest touch with common things. The entrancing loveliness of the story abides almost wholly in its insistence on the power of the natural and ordinary to convey the supernatural Presence, by the lake, in the garden, or the quiet room: yet equally on the awed sense of 'otherness', the unworldly reality of that which is thus conveyed and 'recognized in the breaking of bread'. Moreover the fragments of our Lord's teaching preserved by the Synoptics unite in

[95] John xiii. 4.

emphasizing this stern and homely insistence on the realities of life, as the material offered to men in which to find the presence and fulfil the generous will of God. They make plain His vivid love of the living and the simple, His hatred alike of the fantasies and the formalities which come so easily to the pious, and blur their contact with facts.[96]

The word 'teaching' so constantly and inevitably applied to the great discourses and declarations of Christ, often obscures the very fact which it is supposed to describe. For 'teaching', where it is effective, is not an instruction but an exhibition and imparting of the teacher's own relation with reality. Thus Socrates is a classic example of the genuine teacher. Plainly the value of the teaching will be graded according to the extent and the richness of that spiritual reality to which the teacher is thus able to respond; the degree in which he can make the ways of God manifest to men. The teaching of Jesus is the absolute example of this irradiation of the particular by the universal light. It does not give a code, and seldom prescribes exact solutions for specific problems; but it interprets the whole of natural and human life in supernatural regard.

Over against the spiritual Kingdom, Jesus perceived men and women to be still spiritual babies; and held that a recognition of their inherent childishness and capacity for growth and chance took away the poison of their sins, tumbles and mistakes. He declared the powerful and vivid presence of the Supernatural, of God; continuously creating and cherishing, with an equal and fatherly love, the whole pageant of life. Not 'spiritual men' alone, but the immature, sinful, sick, stupid and self-interested; and not men alone, but the sparrows and the lilies of the field. The discovery of this Reality was the secret of the Kingdom; the hidden treasure that completely enriched the finder; the leaven that transformed the whole of the meal. He taught—with the authority of perfect knowledge—not only this instant dependence of the whole material scene upon the spaceless Love of God, but the demand made on every awakened soul for co-operation with it; using the talent, digging the vineyard, feeding and cherishing all who were in need. Already this Reality was fully present to man in every appeal and opportunity of self-forgetting love, from the homely cup of cold water to the heroic sacrifice of life: and every movement of the human soul towards it, every petition and faithful quest, every loving desire for communion—all asking, seeking, and knocking at the closed door of Reality—would meet with generous and self-giving response.

But as we learn most of humanity, not by listening to moral teachings, but by the living-out of our mostly vague and insignificant lives; so we learn most about God, not by listening even to the deep and gentle teachings of Jesus, but by the contemplation of the uniquely significant and supernatural life in which His personality reveals itself. It is true that the stage is narrow and the drama is brief. But each incident, as we gaze, is found more and more to body forth intense and inexhaustible meaning; whilst arising, with no straining of the situation, out of the common stuff of life. The shifting process of creation, the unescapable curve of human experience—its emergence, growth, maturity and death—is ever in the foreground. Yet now this same process is charged with supernature. It is 'fully human and fully divine,' and at every point eternalized.

In the Gospels we are made to feel—always dimly, and sometimes acutely—this eternalization of the temporal; the sweet and solemn presence of that 'holiness'

[96] Cf. among many passages, Matthew xii. 1-13; xxv. 31-46; Luke xi. 37-44.

which is more than and beyond beauty, but is yet of the same order as beauty. We saw that by the adding of beauty and strangeness to history we arrive at Romance. By the adding of holiness to history we arrive at that which Otto calls 'divination'—an embodiment of the supernatural—'incarnation'.[97] The great work of art illuminates and unifies a wide tract of experience, by exhibiting its values; and in so doing conveys to us God, confers on us a measure of the creative point of view. So does this supreme triumph of human personality illuminate and harmonize the whole range and meaning of human life; and in so doing reveals God. The consummate personality of Jesus, in all the rich fullness of His sense of reality, His inclusive hold on the rugged and the tender, His energy and His peace, stands over against our jangled human character, as a Beethoven sonata stands over against the jangled world of sound. See how every now and then, in this apparently human history, the Transcendent, the utterly unearthly, is glimpsed through Him; and the 'creature' recoils in awe. 'They were amazed', say the Evangelists again and again. 'No man durst ask him anything.' 'Verily, this man was the son of God!' says the Roman officer, watching that strange criminal die. Our blundering credal formulae, with their instinctive clinging hold upon the human—yet their sense that the human category at its highest here somehow becomes inadequate to the facts—manage little more than the constant reassertion of the paradox which has baffled, and yet enslaved, the Christian world. 'Perfect God'; the Divine Word breaking through into Its creation, the utterance in human language of Reality. 'Perfect Man'; the pattern of humanity, King of Saints. These completing opposites are here fused in one figure; perfectly historic, yet transcending the time-stream within which it emerged.

III

Here then, by a living-in towards all the homeliest aspects of earth, man obtains his deepest initiation into Reality; and so his most complete liberation from the drag of earth. We miss the whole meaning of the story if we try to wash out this supernatural colour. Then, the most perfect portrait of the Inviolate Rose ever woven into the strange brocade of history becomes nothing more than an unusually attractive combination of the warp and weft of human life.

Yet the chain of history is not broken by the emergence of the life of Jesus; for that life emerges within the thick mesh of a complex human society, at the meeting place of Roman, Hellenic, and Semitic culture. It touches homes and shops and fishing boats; fields, vineyards, villages. It is jostled by mixed crowds of Roman soldiers, Jewish peasants, priests, pietists and excise-men, traders, brigands, harlots, Hellenistic converts—Europe and Asia mixed together. Moreover, it is linked up with the whole prophetic trend of Hebrew religion, and reuses much of its material. Jewish history, which alone regards itself as the story of the dealings of the Infinite with one small tribe of men, is the scene within which this 'saving event' is prepared. Jesus is so deeply felt to be conditioned by that history, that St. Stephen, in whom the Church Catholic first comes to consciousness, can only thus present Him;[98] whilst His biographers insist that He must have been born 'in the city of David' and that He died with the words of traditional Hebrew poetry on His lips. The Christian Church, grounding her Divine Office on the Psalter, acknowledges this continuity; deliberately immersing the consciousness of her children in the poetic atmosphere into which Jesus was born, and from which He took the clothing of His revelation.

[97] Cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, caps. 18-20.
[98] Acts vii.

Nevertheless this Life, on one side so profoundly historic, manifests—in a degree untouched by any other historic life—the controlling presence of something transcending history; and, in its unfolding and its consequences, the constant double operation of tradition and of novelty. It is a truism that the fact of something utterly new entering the human world was the dominant impression made upon the early converts. This sense of novelty, of a wonderful freshness, colours the first records of the Church—the new way, the new song, the new covenant, all summed up in the great Pauline saying: 'If any man be in Christ, he is a *new* creature.' The conviction of an emergence in human terms of the Eternal and the Perfect—so unlikely an invention for the monotheistic Jew to entertain—crops up perpetually. We are given, says St. Peter, 'an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away'[99]—something 'fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but *manifest* in these last times'[100] and in consequence human beings are now being 'called out of darkness into his marvellous light'[101]—a calling of which the first faint whisperings began far back in geologic time, when the semi-human creature looked with awe at the mountain and the storm. 'Again, a *new* commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.'[102] So the religious genius who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews tries to tell us in allusive, but yet more striking language, what he thinks the life of Jesus really means:

'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son . . . the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person.'[103]

Or, as Dr. Moffatt translates it, 'reflecting God's bright glory and stamped with God's own character.' Could the emergence of the Eternal within the historic series be more clearly expressed?

Thus when human thought, warmed by human love, first got to work on the facts which were found to transfigure human life wherever received; the forced conclusion of the matter was, that here something other than the development of history was involved. Here, by all sensitive spirits, the moulding influence of the Transcendent is vividly experienced; the Supernatural reaches man, and man's world, as never before, along the path of human personality. And if this be the true way of seeing things; then, in the bold language of St. Catherine of Siena, philosophy itself can afford to regard the person of Jesus as a 'Bridge' between God and man, whereby 'the earth of humanity is joined to the greatness of the Deity.'

'So the height of the divinity, humbled to the earth, and joined with your humanity, made the Bridge and reformed the road. Why was this done? In order that man might come to his true happiness with the angels. And observe that it is not enough, in order that you should have life, that My Son should have made you this Bridge, unless you walk thereon.'[104]

There is here presented to the emergent human soul in its present close union with the physical, a Something—also in closest union with the physical—on which its

[99] Peter i. 4.
[100] Peter i. 20.
[101] Peter ii. 9.
[102] John ii. 8.
[103] Hebrews i. 1, 3.
[104] *Divine Dialogue*, cap. 22.

childish appetite for Reality can feed, its instinct of adoration be spent. Christian worship, though it has to a point its parallels in other incarnational religions, is in this respect alone in its austere beauty, completeness, and life-changing power. The soothing cults which invite us to 'get in tune with the Infinite'; the various devotional ways of escape from the fret of the ordinary, successive, and imperfect—these disclose their shallowness and implicit egoism when measured against its declarations and demands. For the Christian theist is called upon to transfigure the ordinary, successive, and imperfect; not to escape from it. He must follow the lonely path of Jesus; press on, ahead of the racial level and in constant conflict with the racial urge towards self-seeking, and eternalize each moment of succession by relating it to God. He is asked to love, and learn from, the darkest incidents and hardest demands of existence, not only its joyous and expansive stretches; to set up the Cross in the very heart of personality. For the real supernatural life requires a seizing, not a shirking of the most homely: and a using of it as the material of the most heroic.

Such is the 'following of Christ'; one of the strangest of human phenomena, which has been going on steadily for two thousand years in defiance of all those human instincts of self-preservation, self-assertion and acquisitiveness which are supposed to be most beneficial to the race. It always means the same thing, that which religion calls the 'Way of the Cross': the bringing in of happiness, security, fresh union of man with God, the doing of redeeming work, at one's own cost and commonly under stern conditions of self-renunciation. Wherever this 'gospel' has been preached—this 'good news' that man can do saving work for man—there, all the noblest of souls have responded with zest and delight. The overwhelming conviction which blossomed in the soul of Jesus, that sacrifice, the gesture of complete self-giving, is the deepest secret of life and the only gateway of the supernatural world: this has ever since been the real motive power of the saints. They have found here the strange presence of a rescuing power, in conflict with the downward trend of animal impulse and the evil deformation of nature; a power using as its tools the dedicated lives of men. Hence that close alliance of suffering and sanctity, which the cheaper type of Christian optimist finds so difficult to explain. Here that 'groaning and travailing' of creation which St. Paul so vividly realized, and which has worried his easy-going interpreters ever since, is perceived as a fundamental truth. So even were this the only gift of the Gospel, here Jesus of Nazareth transfigured our whole view of the meaning and nature of man and his relation with Reality. For He made Love the universal of personality, the absolute of soul; and in doing this, made that same principle of Love the only category under which men could think truly about God.

'Love! thou art Absolute sole Lord
Of Life and Death—'

And the witness to this conception—so trite, that we forget its real meaning and wash it down into easy sentimentality; yet so unthinkable an issue from the universe of the determinist—is not Eros but the Cross.

Christianity does not stand alone among the great religions in declaring, and satisfying, the need for such a 'Bridge'; though it states, and meets, the requirements of man's situation with a special completeness. Those requirements are also felt outside the Christian system, wherever the attraction of God, the thirst for union with Him, are deeply experienced. Thus in the Bhakti Marga of Hinduism we have a 'way of love and personal devotion' which is directed to that aspect of the Absolute God personified in Vishnu or his human incarnations Ram and Krishna. Here human

personality again becomes in some sort a bridge between the transcendent God and the desirous soul. For this cult, with all its emotional excesses, yet gives an objective related to the time-stream, through which the religious sense can find and feel at its own level that which lies beyond Time; and so balance the arid abstractions of pure Brahma-worship. And it is noticeable that the language in which the hungry soul here tells its craving and its satisfaction, comes nearer than anything else in religious literature to the temper of Christocentric devotion.

'Dark, dark the far Unknown and closed the Way
To thought and speech; silent the Scriptures; yea,
No word the Vedas say.

Not thus the Manifest. How fair! how near!
Gone is our thirst if only He appear—
He, to the heart so dear!'[105]

'This day is dear to me above all other days, for to-day the Beloved Lord is a guest in my house;
My chamber and my courtyard are beautiful with His presence.
My longings sing His Name, and they are become lost in His great beauty:
I wash His feet, and I look upon His Face; and I lay before Him as an offering my body, my mind, and all that I have.
What a day of gladness is that day in which my Beloved, who is my treasure, comes to my house!
All evils fly from my heart when I see my Lord'.[106]

'My food I'll get in serving Thee,
Thy thoughts shall be as eyes to me.
I'll live and breathe to sing Thy praise,
From this time onward all my days;
Thy feet I choose, the world resign,
For Thou, from this day on, art mine
Brother beloved, and King divine!'[107]

Buddhism too has been forced by the same intuition, and same implicit need, to abandon its first negative emphasis on mere liberation; and meet the deep-seated longing of man's soul for personal love and leadership, incentive to sacrifice, redeeming work. Thus it gives to us the strange and noble spectacle of the Buddha preaching happiness through escape from the 'wheel of things'; yet, in his *avatar* as Buddha-saviour, refusing Nirvana that he may return to the world and save the souls of men—*non necessitate sed caritate trahente*. In the figure of the Bodhisattva the great religious painters of China have managed to convey just that mysterious union of power, profound peace, and ineffable tenderness which the Christian contemplative well understands. Surely we must give, in a limited sense, the value of incarnation to such a conception as this; embodying as it does man's deep intuition of redeeming love as a constituent of Reality.[108] It is not the same thing, but it looks the same way; acknowledges the same creaturely need and divine desire.

[105] *Psalms of Maratha Saints*. Translated by J. Nichol, p. 51.
[106] *Kabir's Poems*: Song LXXXVIII.
[107] *Tilak*. Translated from the Marathi by N. Macnichol.
[108] According to the doctrine of Mahayana Buddhism, the Bodhisattva is one who has reached and deliberately renounces 'arhatship' or liberation from the wheel of life; and returns to earth in order to strive for the redemption of all living things. He is dedicated to the saving of souls, the destruction of

So we shall not limit the redemptive action of the supernatural within the human sphere to one supreme historic figure; nor shall we attach it exclusively to that experience of communion with a continuing Presence, which the religious consciousness identifies with the Exalted Christ. Not even will we limit it by that consecration of things and persons which radiates from this focal centre; and is manifested to us in the power of the sacraments, and in the redeeming energy of the saints. But we shall mean that whole movement of Spirit Creative and Complete toward spirit created and incomplete, that willing self-revelation of the Spaceless God in space and time, of which—so far as this planet is concerned—the perfect case is seen in Bethlehem and Calvary: 'the condition, the work, and the mystery wherein God reigns, and whereby He reigns, in His creatures'.[109]

IV

It is perhaps because of this felt need of mediation, of material given to us in history for the recognition of God, that Christianity has never been satisfied with an account of the Incarnation which limits it to a point of historic time. For the deepest and truest Christian feeling, that embodiment of the Infinite, that sublime interweaving of the temporal and eternal, continues and is continuously experienced; both at its centre and in its sacramental and spiritual extensions. Mysterious, even irrational as we may choose to think it, the spiritual vigour of all great Christians seems ever to spring from this intimately felt here-and-now relationship with a personal and redeeming Presence, that yet carries with it something of the unsearchable splendours of the Ultimate. From St. Paul onwards, the 'transition from God the void to God the companion'[110] is made by them 'in Christ': and in this discovery they are truly victorious over succession, and experience under living symbols the ever new impact of the supernatural world. Moreover, it is along this same path of continuous incarnation that we reach the conception of the Church as the visible garment of the Supernatural: the Body, in and by which the Spirit of Christ indwells history, and by perpetual self-disclosures within the temporal series draws souls into the supernatural life. Other great faiths, in proportion to their efficacy, have been compelled, as we have seen, to provide a bridge of the same kind: for life and renovating power seem always to go, not with a theism of the impersonal and abstractive type, but with the *cultus* by which a sense of incarnate revelation and of close personal communion is expressed.

The Presence is noumenal and outside time; though the human creature always apprehends it mixed with phenomena, and within the temporal series. But a constant return to this burning heart of spiritual experience, now in one way and now in another—however difficult it may be to give it its right place in theology—is one of the most certain and most strange facts of Christian history. So with the charismatic religion of the Apostolic age, facing a hostile and incredulous world with a courage born of the conviction which is expressed in the last words of St. Matthew and St. Mark; and rising in St. Paul to a height of assurance at which 'all things are possible' since love and courage, poetry and faith, are one. So with the beautiful mediæval cult of the Holy Name, which gathered up all that was most fervent and intimate in the

passions, the knowledge and teaching of truth, the leading of others in the Way: and exhibits the supernatural virtues of charity, moral perfection, patience, devotedness, contemplation, wisdom. Cf. W. M. McGovern: *Introduction to Mahayana Buddhism*, p. 101.

[109] Bérulle: *Œuvres*, p. 990.

[110] A. N. Whitehead: *Religion in the Making*, p. 16.

religion of its period, and finds classic expression in the pages of the *Imitatio*[111] and in the ever freshly living phrases of the Rosy Sequence: *Jesu dulcis memoria*. It is plainly from within the same circle of secret and intense experience that the great English teachers of the spiritual life are speaking, when they say:

'We should covet to feel aye the lively inspiration of grace made by the ghostly presence of Jhesu in our soul, if that we might; and for to have Him aye in our sight with reverence, and aye feel the sweetness of His love by a wonderful homeliness of His presence. This should be our life and our feeling in grace, after the measure of His gift in whom all grace is, to some more and to some less; for His presence is felt in divers manner-wise as He vouchsafe. And in this we should live, and work what longeth to us for to work on; for without this we should not be able to live. For right as the soul is the life of the body, right so Jhesu is life of the soul by His gracious presence. . . . How that presence is felt, it may better be known by experience than by any writing; for it is the life and the love, the might and the light, the joy and the rest of a chosen soul. And therefore he that hath soothfastly once felt it, he may not forbear it without pain; he may not undesire it, it is so good in itself and so comfortable. What is more comfortable to a soul here than for to be drawn out through grace from the vile noye of worldly business and filth of desires, and from vain affection of all creatures into rest and softness of ghostly love; privily perceiving the gracious presence of Jhesu, feelably fed with savour of His unseeable blessed face? Soothly nothing, me thinketh. Nothing may make the soul of a lover full merry, but the gracious presence of Jhesu as He can show Him to a clean soul.'[112]

And again:

'Christ alone did all the works that belong to our salvation and none but He; and right so He alone doeth now the last end: that is to say, He dwelleth here with us, and ruleth us and governeth us in this living, and bringeth us to His bliss. . . . For Himself is nearest and meekest, highest and lowest, and doeth all.'[113]

Precisely the same type of feeling and conviction marked the Evangelical revival of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is the source of its regenerative and saving power, of the energy and confidence with which such heroic spirits as Wesley, Brainerd, Martyn and Livingstone carried through their astonishing works. It brought back into Christian literature—as in the hymns of Charles Wesley—the same intimately realistic note. Moreover, the continuity of tradition was complete. Wesley journeyed through England with the *Imitatio* in his saddle-bag. Livingstone, alone in Africa, transcribes the *Jesu dulcis memoria* in his diary 'because I love it so.' It is not very easy to charge either of these great men of action with the mawkish sentimentality which such a devotion is often supposed to involve. We seem rather to be faced with a concrete kind of religious experience, appropriate to the creaturely status of man, and unequalled in its influence upon his behavior and character.

So in the present day, the two directions in which religion shows signs of a restored vitality—the rediscovery of the historical Jesus, and the development of Eucharistic devotion—are complementary expressions of the same incarnational trend; and seem to lead, where faithfully followed, to a spiritual experience of the same type. And again it is not to the feverish imaginings of the congenitally pious or the emotional derelicts, but to convictions wrought slowly in the souls of scholars and men of

[111] Cf. especially Book II, caps. 7 and 8.
[112] Walter Hilton: *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. II, cap. 41.
[113] Julian of Norwich: *Revelations of Divine Love*, cap. lxxx.

action, that we must go for the most impressive examples of this. I select three from among the most personal and unconventional Christian writings which the present century has produced. The first is the great passage with which that intrepid critic Dr. Schweitzer concludes his revolutionary study of the historic Christ.

'The very strangeness and unconditionedness in which He stands before us makes it easier for individuals to find their own personal standpoint in regard to Him. . . . The names in which men expressed their recognition of Him as such, Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, have become for us historical parables. We can find no designation which expresses what He is for us.

'He comes to us as One unknown, without a name; as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: "Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands and to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.'[114]

These words, as is well known, their author has worked out in terms of complete self-renunciation and heroic labour as a medical missionary in the African forest. Put beside them those of a critic and scholar of another type, whose independent study and meditation has brought him to the same point.

'That our intellects cannot conceive the nature of an objective presence which is not physical, and that a "spiritual body" remains for our minds a contradiction in terms, is only evidence that our minds are still inadequate to reality. The spiritual body of Jesus exists and is immortal. Some make their life-giving contact with it through the Eucharist; for others that contact is impossible. But they, through the effort of making the earthly life of Jesus real to themselves, find their souls possessed by love and veneration for the Prince of men. A fount of living water is unsealed in them. And it may be that this, and this alone, is the great Christian experience, ultimate and eternal, though our ways to it must be our own.'[115]

Last, I take a passage in which Dr. Grenfell, the heroic doctor-missionary of Labrador, describes the sources of his power:

'Christ means to me a living personality to-day who moves about in this world, and who gives us strength and power as we endure by seeing Him Who is invisible only to our fallible and finite human eyes; just as any other good comrade helps one to be brave and do the right thing. Faith was essential for that conviction fifty years ago. To-day with telephones and radios and X-ray, and our knowledge of matter as only energy, and now with television within our grasp, there is not the slightest difficulty in seeing how reasonable that faith is. "The body of His glorification" passed through closed doors, so the Apostles said—well, why should I be able to see it any more than I can see an ultra-violet or an ultra-red ray or molecule, an atom, an electron or a proton? All that those old fellows claimed was that "*now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face.*" '[116]

What do we find in all these testimonies—taken almost at random from the crowded literature of Christian realism, and representing a wide variety of temperament and even of belief? Surely we find a recognizable identity of experience; an experience

[114] Schweitzer: *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, pp. 399, 401.
[115] J. Middleton Murry: *Life of Jesus*, p. 316.
[116] Wilfred Grenfell: *What Christ Means to Me*, p. 95.

which again does not differ in essentials from that which the Catholic Christian means by the Real Presence or the Sacred Heart. These various souls, approaching from different angles one point, have discovered that adherence to the Holy, self-offered at this point in union with man, does actually change the world for man; raises him to a new and intimate relationship with the beloved Reality, and 'gives eternal life'.[117] And if in these different ways men have been able to lay hold on that same living Reality, healed in the same way the breach between eternity and time, experienced the same communion in suffering and in service, been flooded by the same tide of tender feeling, loyalty and breathless awe—then does it very much matter whether we do or do not manage to determine the exact proportion in which the human dramatic faculty (itself God-given) and the direct self-giving of the Holy co-operate to produce this result?

That result seems to be unlike anything else in the whole range of man's spiritual and emotional life. On the one hand it is distinct in kind from the metaphysical passion for God. On the other it is wholly different from our attachments to our fellow beings, even to those fellow beings whom we most love and revere. Drawing emotional and volitional material from both these great sources of supply it makes of them, as the primitive Christians saw clearly, a fresh creation—'if any man be in Christ, he *is* a new creature'. Christian thought has wavered in its identification and description of this experience. Already in the New Testament the line between 'Spirit' and 'Christ' grows very thin; and this especially in St. Paul, whose religious range extends, without any apparent dislocation, from a conversion which he identifies as the direct work of the risen Jesus, to a sense of indwelling Spirit which hardly depends on historic incarnation at all, and is nearer the Johannine concept of the Paraclete. But however explained and described, the experience is there. It transfigures, enobles and delights all who receive it with simplicity; and honest study of the peculiar phase of religious feeling which it represents, at least forces us to view with suspicion some of the more dogmatic conclusions of 'religious' psychology, and consider with respect the persistent and successful use by devotional souls of this intuitive pathway to Reality.

It is true that psychologists have found it easy, or think they have found it easy, to analyse the Christian's 'sense of a presence' and attendant feeling of confidence and power, and expose the disconcerting nature of its constituents. Certainly in the religious complex as elsewhere, phantasy is never wholly absent; and may easily gain control of an uncritical mind. The clergyman in *The Veil of the Temple* whose litany led up to the fervent petition: 'Hands of Mary, which drip with myrrh, fondle us!'[118] represents a type of piety that few would desire to save from the clutches of the analyst. But it is not primarily the 'sense of a presence' in its merely consoling and compensatory aspects, with which we are now concerned. It is rather the more substantial claim to a genuine contact with supernatural sources of life, given by means of this concession to our human limitations; a contract resulting in total redirection of impulse, vigorous and costly self-discipline, and consequent enhancement of power.

Once more, as in the historic incarnation, we seem to be confronted with a special self-expression of the Infinite God, in terms of a transcendent personality. We may allow that the human tendency to dramatize, personify its material, does play a part in an experience which must always remain among the most sacred mysteries of the

[117] John xvii, 2-8.
[118] W. H. Mallock: *The Veil of the Temple*, p. 137.

spiritual life. We may admit the probable influence in various degrees first of 'projection'—the externalizing of our secret longings, intuitions and beliefs—next of 'regression', the tendency to retreat from the difficulties of life and take refuge in a childlike attitude of dependence;[119] and last of the law of apperception, inevitably and ceaselessly combining each fresh precept with the content of the mind, and interpreting the present by the past. That is to say, the form taken by this, as by all our other experiences, will be governed by history, temperament, religious environment and cultural level. But that is a crude imitation of true criticism which cannot here discern a substance, in spite of the bewildering multiplicity of lowly accidents with which it is given, and the sense-conditioned mind by which it is received.

One instance among many will serve to illustrate these propositions. I deliberately choose an example which many persons will regard as extreme; the religious insights and symbolic constructions which are brought together in the popular Catholic *cultus* of the Sacred Heart. This is perhaps the most misunderstood of all modern devotions, alike by those who love it and those who are repelled by it. The unfortunate and high-coloured imagery which is familiar to all of us, and too much of the pious literature which it has inspired, now obscure the noble aims and profound intuitions of those by whom it was first proposed to the Christian mind. For the great spiritual teachers of the seventeenth century, the heart was not merely the seat of affection, but rather the vivid focal point of personality. It was there that they sought the true nature and meaning of man. Thus, by the Sacred Heart, they meant the very character of God and life-principle of the Incarnate: *Christus totus*, the divine plenitude of life, love and intelligence, ceaselessly self-given to men. This was a conception far exceeding the apparent content of that symbol of yearning affection and compassion which pictures and statues crudely and insistently suggest to the imagination.

'The Sacred Heart', said the Blessed John Eudes, one of the founders of this devotion, '*is* the Holy Spirit': that energetic divine love which links the Infinite Being of God and His creative self-expression, and in Christ becomes the supernatural principle of an action both human and divine.[120] Surely in this we have a description of the same substantial experience as that which the Cambridge Platonist was struggling to express in his own manner from the opposite edge of the theological fold:

'He is a quickening spirit, all spirit and life. His human nature is now all spirit, and by having the Godhead, hath the Fountain of Spirit and Life in itself.'[121]

Here then, under symbols which the superior often find distressing, a little homely door is opened to man which yet leads out to the Eternal Spaces; and the contemplative mind is led from the visible divine action to its origin in the invisible divine love, and from that love to the 'sacred heart' which is the Uncreated Centre of all love and all life. We here pass from 'special mysteries' which mediate the Supernatural, to the very Foundation of all mysteries; from act, to principle of action. Nevertheless we observe that, true to the principle of incarnation, this sublime conception finds its expression under the intimate human symbol of a heart burning with love for man; and offers to the simplest human feeling something that it can understand—a devotion which might even be called quasi-physical, yet is boundless

[119] On the place of these factors in religious experience, see W. Brown: *Mind and Personality*, cap. xx.
[120] Cf. H. Brémond: *Histoire Littéraire da Sentiment Religieux en France*, vol. iii, pt. 3, caps. ii and iii.
[121] Peter Sterry: *A Discourse of the Freedom of the Will*, p. 131.

in its metaphysical reach. Thus once more a bridge is made from the transitory to the Eternal; and the boundless self-giving of the Infinite is brought by the path of humanity to men.

VI. The Supernatural Self-Given In Things: Symbols And Sacraments

Adoro te devote, latens Deitas,
Quae sub his figuris vere latitas.
St. Thomas Aquinas

That all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt. For how is it possible that the faculty of cognition should be awakened into exercise otherwise than by means of objects that affect our senses? . . . But though all our knowledge begins *with* experience, it by no means follows that all arises *out* of experience.

Emmanuel Kant

The Majesty of God hath in some sort suffered itself to be circumscribed to corporall limits. His supernaturall and celestiall sacraments bear signs of our terrestriall condition.

Montaigne

This sign works *exopere operato*, but only within the limitation that the recipient be patient of the creative action.

A. N. Whitehead

With that expansion of the spiritual horizon, and that deepening of awe, which comes to the emerging religious consciousness of man, there comes too a realistic perception of our own true status over against the great reality of God. We perceive our littleness and immaturity; the uncertainty of our touch, the haziness and the narrow limits of our human understanding even at its best—all that is meant by 'creatureliness'. That human understanding may indeed seem remarkable when measured by planetary and evolutionary standards. Those who only see in man a 'greater ground-ape' have every right to regard him as a very successful and intelligent specimen of his class. But this intelligence soon reveals its inadequacy when we try to use it on the material proposed by our nascent transcendental sense. It fails us completely when we seek to apply it to ultimates, as those who have looked deepest into divine things have always been the first to realize. 'The divinest and the highest of the things perceived by the eyes of the body or the mind', says Dionysius the Areopagite, 'are but the symbolic language of things subordinate to Him who Himself transcendeth them all.'[122] Or, as his fourteenth-century follower tersely puts it, 'Of God Himself can no man think.'[123]

This limitation is as true to-day as it was when the antique and the mediæval contemplatives wrote of their ascents into the 'divine cloud'. Our brain has been developed in close association with sensory mechanisms, and sharply reminds us of the fact directly we attempt to transcend them. We cannot 'think Absolutes' save by image and analogy. Hence the large part played by symbol and image in all vigorous human religions; the thinness and dryness which afflicts those systems which insist

[122] *De Myst. Theol.*, cap. i.
[123] *Cloud of Unknowing*, cap. vi.

on their rejection, forgetting the humbling truth that the finite mind's apprehension of universals must ever be symbolic and oblique. We cannot, in fact, in our present status directly conceive or experience 'pure' spirit. The claim to do so is merely a piece of intellectual arrogance, which honest self-analysis is enough to cure. We can only experience spirit when mixed with some sense-element; and though in the highest reaches of religious experience this sense-element may become so tenuous as to be almost imperceptible, a candid examination will yet discover it. Even the Quaker's inner light, or the 'divine dark' of negative mysticism, even the contemplative's ineffable conviction of union with God, carry with them a visual or tactile reference which involves at least a faint sensual reaction. Those have not been among the least of the saints who have recognized in the Beatific Vision itself some equivalent for the sense-conditioned experiences of men; and been humble enough to accept the supernatural with and through these its natural veils.

'What do I love when I love Thee?' says St. Augustine. 'I love a certain kind of light, and voice, and fragrance, and a kind of food and embrace, when I love my God: a light, melody, fragrance, food, embrace of the inner man. Where for my soul that shines which space does not contain, that sounds which time does not sweep away, that is fragrant which the breeze does not dispel, and that tastes sweet which when fed upon is not diminished, and that clings close which no satiety disparts.'[124]

So too his English pupil:

'And we shall endlessly be all had in God, Him verily seeing and fully feeling, Him spiritually hearing and Him delectably smelling and sweetly swallowing.'[125]

'For Thou,' says Nicolas of Cusa, 'dost abide where speech, sight, hearing, taste, touch, reason, knowledge and comprehension merge in one.'[126]

Such sayings as these seem to point to a vast sublimation of that here-and-now conviction of reality which our senses give us upon levels accessible to all: to a possible stretching out and up of the soul, through sense, to that which is beyond sense—a transfiguration in which the whole of man's composite nature shall, in its own way, experience God. Hence these confessions of the saints should be enough to save us from that implicit vulgarity which despises the externals of religion and our quasi-physical responses to grace; and tries, in the true spirit of the *parvenu*, to advertise its advancement by the unworthy expedient of leaving old acquaintances behind. And as a matter of fact, I think most persons who have received direct religious impressions would probably be found to agree, that those which were condensed into some symbolic form—whether woven into words or pictures, or connected with dogmatic conceptions—were recalled far more easily than those momentarily more impressive but elusive 'pure experiences' which seem entirely independent of our sensory mechanisms. These, it is true, have the 'noetic quality'; but only those who have experienced it know how maddening the 'noetic quality' can be. In so far as our half-developed and limited minds can be said to 'know' anything of their mysterious environment, it is plain that they know the world of the senses best; and that without some sensory reference, they are incapable of conceptual thought. This at least is equally true for realists and idealists. Cut off from all sense-stimulation, conceitedly rejecting the outward as a mediation of the inward, most of us are merely left sooner or later at the mercy of the vagaries of the dream-

[124] St. Augustine: *Confessions*, Bk. X, cap. 6.
[125] Julian of Norwich: *Revelations of Divine Love*, cap. xlii.
[126] Nicolas of Cusa: *The Vision of God*, cap. x.

consciousness. We cannot in this easy way divide our bodies and our souls, and renounce our racial inheritance.

It is true that for our spiritual consciousness—or at least, that which reaches the level of mystical experience—only the immediate is recognized as truly and fully real. No symbol or particular can be identified with God: and in those rare moments when intuition seems to apprehend Him, all image appears to be banished from the mind. Nevertheless God, Who is present with all things, can be and is mediated to us by means of particular things.

'Because God is Spirit, and because man is spirit and is more and more to constitute himself a personality, it does not follow that man is to effect this solely by means of spirits and personalities, divine and human. . . . But, as in all mental apprehension and conviction there is always, somewhere, the element of the stimulation of the senses, so also does the spirit awaken to its own life and powers, on occasion of contact and conflict with material things. Hence Eternal Life will (here below at least) not mean for man aloofness from matter and the bodily senses, nor even a restriction of their use to means of spiritual self-expression; but it will include also a rich and wise contact with, and an awakening by means of, matter and *things*.'[127]

This, the truth on which sacramentalism rests, covers indeed all religious practices. It witnesses to their fruitfulness and necessity; to man's need of a concrete world in which his instinct for the Transcendent can assert itself, and, by attaching itself to symbols, achieve expression. The 'immediate experience' is rare, and because of its apparent authority is much subject to illusion. Moreover it cannot be procured at will; but is, as theology says, a 'given grace'. Without impugning its reality, we may agree that it cannot be the normal means of human intercourse with God.

In Gerhard Hauptmann's play of *Hannele* a dying child in the loveless squalor of a pauper refuge is visited and consoled by angels—which appear to her like the brightly coloured figures of a German Christmas card—and is at last received by Christ; whose face is the kindly face of the one human being who had ever shown her some compassion and love. Yet, none the less, the poet makes us feel that Hannele's experience—mediated though it be by images and symbols at the level of her understanding and desire—is in the deepest sense a true experience; and that Christ and the angels are verily with her in this quaint disguise. And theology can afford to allow this: and on the same count to throw the mantle of charity over many devotions repugnant to superior minds. For, according to the profound teaching of Nicolas of Cusa, within the Absolute Vision of God all limited modes of vision are subsumed; and every limited vision partakes of that Absolute by which it exists, and without which it could not be.[128]

Thus we need not be ashamed to admit, that there is necessarily something of Hannele in all our apprehensions of Reality. We are bound by our situation to interpret our relations with it in human, approximate, and historical ways, if we are indeed to feed our life on That which transcends yet permeates all life. 'Pure thought', 'pure conation', 'pure communion'—all these abstract and largely imaginary purities must find some expression, in the end, in particulars; because it is for the apprehension of particulars that our finite minds are framed. This embodiment, it is true, will spoil their 'pureness'; but it will give them actuality, link them with our life. Only in some such humbling limitation of the soul's freedom, such an impingement

[127] F. von Hügel: *Eternal Life*, p. 389.
[128] *The Vision of God*, cap. ii.

on *things*, can we hope to bring Reality into concrete action. The spiritual mind, impatient of limitation, tends like a comet to rush off into space. It craves 'the bare desert of the Godhead, where no one is at home'. But even so, we notice that it is still under earthly symbols that the most exalted of contemplatives describes the haven of his desire: and if he is not to be lost for ever in the Unconditioned, he is drawn back in the end to the small and ordered system of which, after all, he is a part.

Thus there is a sense in which the charge brought by psychology against religious persons, of constructing and externalizing their own objects of devotion, is often true and capable of defence. Examples of this abound. One known to us all is the ideal figure of the Madonna; which has been and is the focus of so much intense religious feeling, yet certainly is not a realistic or historical presentation of our Lord's Mother, the Galilean carpenter's wife. Christian feeling has built up this figure; but this does not mean that through it no objective spiritual fact is reached. It only means that when the mind is dealing with such difficult realities, it is driven to use to the utmost its image-making power; and that the Supernatural, which is not far from any one of us, may thus become accessible alike to the most sophisticated and most childish faith.

The situation of man is this: his contact with the world is brought about by a body. He lives and develops mainly by intercourse with, and increased understanding of, that level and aspect of the universe which we call physical. He must deal with the hard and resistant stuff of things, if he is to maintain his sense of reality. This being so, how hopeless his position would be, if God, to Whom of his own strength he can never attain, did not come to him through the very things which at every turn limit and educate him! We know now that a baby brought up on 'rational' lines, without any expression of the mother's love on the level of its own small sensory cravings and emotional understanding, will grow up in a dangerously self-centered loneliness; its potential responses perverted or undeveloped.[129] A lofty and hygienic parental affection is no more use to the lonely baby than the chilly respectabilities of Cosmic Emotion are to the lonely spirit of man. Both must be met on their own level, if they are to grow in a normal way and develop all their capacities. The humble condescension of Infinite Spirit to the infantile spirits of men—that movement in which Julian saw 'all the fair working and all the sweet natural office of dearworthy Motherhood'[130]—must reach us and be recognized even on the level of sense, if it is also to be recognized and assimilated by our babyish souls.

This necessary concomitance—the intimate relation in the compound human creature of all physical and mental events—gives great importance to the external accompaniments of spiritual experience. For the one level reacts upon the other; the sensory stimulus sets going the emotional series, and mysteriously prepares the supersensual path. 'Although we cannot reach God by the faculty of sense', says St. Thomas, 'yet through signs that can be perceived by the senses the mind is stimulated in its aim towards God.'[131] The ritual emphasis on posture and action—the bent knee, the folded hands, the shut eyes—all this prepares and deepens paths of discharge for transcendental feeling. It sets up associations between the life of soul and body; and gets ready for that inflorescence of the life of prayer, in which the whole man working in unity becomes the tool of God. How much stimulus the symbolic experience of the transcendent offered by ceremonial religion will thus give

[129] William Brown: *Mind and Personality*, p. 190.
[130] Julian of Norwich: *Revelations of Divine Love*, cap. lix.
[131] *Summa Theologica*, Pars. II, Q. 84, I.

to the soul, depends chiefly on the quality of the reference of which that soul is capable. And this quality of content and reference hinges in its turn not only on the soul's degree of maturity, purity and insight; but also on its spiritual culture, the concepts it has received through history and tradition, and through contact with more deeply spiritual selves. We have all experienced this truth, in the variation of our own susceptibility to liturgic acts and words: and in our knowledge that these same acts and words, which often turn a blank face to us, glow with celestial brightness for the saints.

Thus the external accompaniments of interior communion—each verbal formula, each organic movement and precept, inevitably carrying some mental and spiritual reference—cannot safely be disregarded or despised by us. In fact, *cultus*, exterior devotion, may rightly be considered in 'religious regard' as an actual evoker and support of the interior state. It is not only dramatic action, ritual or liturgy which does this: all concrete embodiments of the religious idea—the lit shrine, the beloved image—may do it too. Human instinct in its vague reaching-out towards the supernatural, has always tended to make special places, traps as it were for the celestial sunshine. It has always set apart and held precious, certain suggestive objects, actions, and ideas; which carry a weight of meaning, a halo of significance stretching far beyond appearance, and are able to release from succession the mind that surrenders to their appeal. Those who too hastily and contemptuously cast away all this 'ceremonial religion', 'mechanical religion', 'emotional religion', and so forth, risk the disconcerting discovery that the Inhabitant of the house has gone away with the last van-load of furniture, and nothing remains but a few empty tins and a sink.

It matters much that religious expression should weave together our visible and invisible life; that we should give the senses and the muscular system something to do which has a supernatural reference. Our experience of God—varying as it must and should between soul and soul—will not be a safe experience if it rejects all physical paths; and creates a harsh opposition between the body we cannot get rid of and the spirit by which it is informed. For the call of the Transcendent is a call to the whole man, and not to a particular distilled essence of him; and the demand made upon him is, that he shall strive to incarnate within the time series, and in closest contact with the world of the senses, the supersensual gift of Eternal Life.

It is surely the firm determination of Christianity thus to anchor the transcendental to the natural, to remind us that Mary and Martha are sisters and ought to live under the same roof, which constitutes its solid power. Christianity brings in plain fact at each stage; insists at every turn that we are human beings conditioned by the physical world, even while rising in thought and prayer above it. The Incarnation, the Christian Community, the Sacraments, are particular historical, social and sensible witnesses to that universal Reality which lies beyond the world of sense. These hold the adventurous air-ship of human religion firmly and safely to the planet to which, after all, it belongs: while allowing it to ascend to the upper air, and vastly to enlarge the scope of its outlook and experiences. Thence it returns to find new significance and true intimations of the Supernatural in the environment of common life. Christianity in fact recognizes the humbling truth that man's normal contact with Absolutes can and must only be through symbols: that is to say, particular images or objects of sense, which carry for the perceiving mind a supersensual reference.

But it is the peculiar mark of Christianity that its most significant symbols can—and at best do—retain their own full life and actuality, their factualness, without diminishment of their symbolic office. Thus the life of Jesus, in its whole drift and

incidents, is none the less a real life, entirely human and historic, because it is the supreme mode in which divine values are conveyed to men. The symbol, completely existent as a particular within the physical world, is here charged with the values of the universal; it is fully real on both planes, and hence a bridge between 'the unseen and the seen'. On this count the conviction of all great Christians, that the actual incidents in the life of Jesus have a meaning and value which transcend history, and were the exact and essential media for the conveyance of spiritual truth to the souls of men, is philosophically reasonable. It justifies that trend in mediæval thought which closely associated man's 'salvation' with a drama worked out on physical levels by means of the brute things of the earth, and found in the historic Passion the concentrated image of a vast supernatural truth.

It is this thought of the emergence in history of that which transcends time 'fore-ordained before the foundation of the world', yet entering under living symbols the successive life of one small planet and 'manifest in these last times *for you*'[132]—which gives the New Testament writers their characteristic note of joyous awe. And surely all but the most obtuse can still recognize a supernatural message on the cell-wall at Florence, where Fra Angelico has painted his strange vision of the various 'instruments of the Passion'—the scourge, the mocking face, the nails, the lance, the sponge—emerging out of the Invisible to awaken the soul's adoring grief; giving these hard material things for evermore imperial status among the means of man's actualization of the Love of God. It is here, rather than in his flowery Paradise, that Angelico proved himself a truly Christian artist. For Christianity of all religions most steadily and sternly rebukes all our attempts to get away from the concrete into a region of pious day-dream. She will not tolerate any arrogant rejection of ordinary life. She finds ineffable grace imparted through common food, a royal humility taught by a bowl of water and a towel; and at last, when the soul's self-giving must yield to the soul's endurance, and charity be made perfect in suffering, she links her spiritual victory to the pain-inflicting power of common wood and iron.

'Dulce lignum, dulces clavos,
Dulce pondus sustinent.'

This is the sufficient answer to those psychologists who regard religion as an escape from reality; and it finds its full expression in the Christian sacramental life, as really lived by the real saints.

Thus we see that we cannot properly separate incarnationalism from symbolism. They shade into one another. They are both exhibitions of the prime truth that human beings are not able to apprehend spirit unmingled with sense; that they need an embodiment for their absolute intuitions, and will seek and find the presence of the Infinite not only in personality but also in things. Here the history of religion, and an inspection of the constituents of our human nature, lead us to an identical conclusion—namely, that it will be along sensory and sacramental channels that the supersensual tide will first flood our inland souls. For, if the fullest and most intimate disclosure of the Infinite has indeed been made to us through human personality—if in the life of Jesus of Nazareth the Godhead really accomplished its supremely characteristic self-expression in relation to man—then we cannot regard such a self-manifestation of God as a solitary occurrence. If it were so, we could not recognize its real quality. It must rather be the crowning example of that many-graded Divine self-revelation, of which the visible world is the medium: summing up and explaining a

[132] Peter i. 20.

multitude of lesser theophanies. Thus regarded, the Incarnation creates for us an absolute standard; whereby spiritual facts and values can be discerned within, yet distinct from, the world of time. It assures us of the supernatural as everywhere present with, and yet other than, the natural; insisting that 'neither does God's spirit live all aloof from man's spirit, nor does man's spirit live all aloof from man's body, or from this physical body's physical environment. On the contrary, throughout reality, the greater works in and with and through the lesser, affecting and transforming this lesser in various striking degrees and ways'.[133] Physical life, the world process, the whole company of Things, are therefore given a derived sanctity, as possible *media* of the fullest and humblest self-impartings of God.

Moreover, the same law seems to be operative within the field of secret religious experience; where pure intuition cannot long maintain itself, or even become explicit, without some resort to the machinery of sense. Hence the vision seen, the voice heard, by mystics of a certain type—though in themselves capable of a wholly psychological explanation—may be the *media* of supernatural impressions of the most genuine kind; and those who dismiss them as merely pathological are guilty of an unscientific haste. In many of these reported experiences, we can almost recognize the desperate effort of the fore-conscious mind to provide an artistic framework able to carry a whole new order of perceptions: for these perceptions can only reach consciousness by way of the self's sensory mechanisms. Thus a significant picture surges up; unforgettable words, curiously charged with meaning, fall sharp upon the inward ear; a new glory suddenly lights up the external world. The picture, the phrase, the illumination, are manifestly symbolic; and many of the greatest contemplatives have recognized that they are so. They may not seem to other selves adequate to their supposed content; but the choice of the experiencing soul is inevitably restricted to its own store of images, and these images carry a different quality of significance for every mind. In any event the images, however impressive, do not constitute the essence of the experience: the essence consists in the something else, the Otherness, the Absolute Present which is conveyed by means of these auditory or visual mechanisms with their human, terrestrial, and historical attachments. Certainly self-suggestion or disease may set these mechanisms going too—even the greatest saint, as theology prudently assures us, may be 'deceived by the devil'—but then the result will not be the 'certitude, joy and peace' of Eternal Life.

In all such types of religious experience the sensory contribution is found on investigation to be drawn from the self's stock of memories and beliefs: though it may be so realistically presented as to produce genuine hallucination. Thus St. Teresa, though fully aware of the representational character of visions, sometimes thought it was Christ Himself who appeared physically to her:[134] whilst non-Christian mystics have received under forms agreeable to their own *cultus* intimations of the supersensual world. At the other extreme the sensory material may be so sublimated that it merely carries a sufficient pictorial or verbal reference to redeem the intuition from entire ineffability; as when Angela of Foligno 'saw God darkly' yet 'saw nought that can be related of the tongue nor imagined in the heart'.[135] In other words, the vision or audition may be 'exterior' or 'intellectual' in type. The distinction does not seem to be important. What does matter is the *aura* of association carried by the image or significant phrase; the extent in which it fulfils

[133] F. von Hügel: *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion*, Series I, p. 58.
[134] *Life*, cap. xxviii.
[135] Angela of Foligno: *Book of Divine Consolations*, p. 181.

the symbolic office of releasing from succession the mind that makes use of it, and opens a window upon Eternity.

Such a dependence on the physical as a channel of transcendental experience is not of course confined to the religious field. Our apprehensions of the sublime, whether in nature or art, are always of an indirect and sacramental character. A very little reflection is enough to convince us of this. When we are awed by the intolerable majesty of the Himalaya, when we look, with a sense of strangeness, at the lonely hostile beauty of the Eismeer—only water at a low temperature after all—or taste the sense of infinity which is mediated by a strictly finite desert landscape, we are merely receiving through symbols adapted to our size, intimations of the Absolute Beauty, the concrete universal, from which all our experience proceeds. With an increase in our own stature, a change in our optic nerve, or a reduction of scale in those corrugations of the planet which now evoke the emotions of reverence and joy, these symbols would cease to convey the sublime to us. Thus for most of us a thunderstorm, that unfailing witness of the 'numinous' to primitive man, has ceased to carry any supernatural reference. Ants and bees, should they ever develop the human instinct for absolutes, would find in another series of symbols the intimations we discover at our own level, and in our own way, of the Supernatural indwelling and yet transcending life. For no symbol is capable in itself of giving 'pure' beauty or holiness; any more than the easy blankness of the quietist is capable of giving 'pure' contemplation. Looking at an object which is 'beautiful' or 'sacred' for us, we are—if we receive a genuine æsthetic or religious impression—passing through and beyond this object, to the experience of an Absolute revealed in things.

It is true that the Beautiful, thus presented, seems to require of us an immediate veneration for its own sake. Here is the most perfect apparent fusion of sense and spirit: the Transcendental is given *in* the thing, and in such a manner that we cannot separate substance and accident. A Beethoven sonata, the Samothracian Nike—so too the shock of an imperial sunrise, or a suddenly discovered soldanella alone in a wilderness of icy shale—directly satisfy the feeling they evoke; which the religious symbol often fails to do. But it is a peculiarity of the religious symbol that it need not be beautiful in order to be effective; a point which its critics often fail to understand. It is only required to set going the necessary trains of association which arouse absolute feeling, and this can be done without any appeal to the æsthetic faculty: for the Holy, though manifested in the Beautiful, can be found apart from it.

Thus the crude image, the simplest suggestion, may do just as well for religion as the æsthetic masterpiece: often indeed better, because it offers a freer passage, a wider range of interpretation to the many grades of soul using this great human highway towards God—and this character alone qualifies objects of sense to be considered in supernatural regard. It is the failure of the symbol to perform this, its true office, which creates the recurrent demand for a rejection of 'outward form' in the supposed interests of pure inwardness. For there are two ways of using symbols. They may and should be gateways through which news comes to the sense-conditioned mind from the supersensual world: like the royal doors of the iconostasis, which open to reveal something of the mysteries within. But they may also become substitutes for reality; decorated screens set up between the soul and the Eternal, and merely offering to it a series of images or objects on which to spend surplus emotion in a pious way. Religious history wavers between these extremes. Where the exact form of the symbol becomes the subject of anxious thought, and the graded and poetic character of its message is ignored, we are entering the danger zone; and leaving the

atmosphere of the New Testament, with its wide and generous attitude towards the visible, its bracing reminder that all religious externals and ordinances were 'made for man'.

As a stimulant of the supernatural sense, the symbol which remains at the level of suggestion is often far more effective than that which attempts the impossible task of representation: for all efforts to conceive the Absolute by intellectual means, and give it adequate presentation, inevitably lead us to a diagrammatic view of Reality—the poorest and least adequate of all our categories. Mathematical symbols, without emotional reference, notoriously produce this result: whilst a few simple signs, carrying with them an *aura* of suitable associations—as for instance in Eucharistic worship—can at once bridge the gap between the successive and the Eternal world. Thus when the deacon on Easter Eve cries 'Lumen Christi!' and holds up his flower-wreathed taper in the lampless church, enough has been said and done.

The historic origin and exact theological justification of the chosen image here matter little, so long as the meaning it carries is accepted with simplicity: for symbols are parts of the great picture-language in which man once dealt with all his bewildering experience, and still deals best with the deepest and most mysterious levels of his life. Apprehension and sentiment alike are here given him through an object to which his perceptive powers are adjusted. Yet they are concerned with vast uncharted tracts of experience lying beyond that object; which has as its office the evocation of our interior response to what is already there. Though the degree in which each type of soul will receive its spiritual food thus mixed with sense-elements will vary greatly, yet there must plainly be some such physical reference in every healthy spiritual life. The fact that such a life seeks in its measure to incarnate, and give physical expression to the Eternal, makes this inevitable. Reflecting on these facts, we are no longer amazed that Christian initiation is accomplished by 'a little oil, a little water, some fragments of bread and a chalice of wine'.

'Genuine divination, or apprehension of the transcendent through symbols', as Otto most justly says, 'is not concerned at all with the way in which a phenomenon—be it event, person, or thing—came into existence, but with what it means; that is, with its significance as a "sign" of the holy.'[136]

Here our spiritual apprehensions seem to work upon the same lines as do our other levels of reaction to existence; where again and again, under analysis, we find a simple and significant image opening up a true experience of the unseen.

One day at the Zoo a desert antelope (probably concerned for sugar) came to the bars as I was passing and gazed into my face. And suddenly the bars, the concrete floor, and all the stable-like surroundings vanished; and I saw, through the creature so firmly fixed in those here-and-now surroundings, the wild, free and anxious life of the desert—a whole non-human world. The antelope had abruptly entered the symbolic sphere, and become capable of mediating universals. Thus to see through and beyond Things, and by their help to enter a world which transcends those particular things, is one of the queer prerogatives of man. A whole world and level of being was gathered up and made accessible to me in that tawny agile body, those soft and eager nostrils, those keen yet melancholy eyes. Yet so little does the authentic origin of the symbol matter that my antelope, as a matter of fact, was born in the Zoo.

II

[136] R. Otto: *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 149.

If by means of the symbol, and the symbolic and æsthetic use of objects, man has a certain access to the supernatural, a limited contact with the Unlimited One; in those half-physical religious deeds which we call sacraments, a further stage in his spiritual education seems to be reached. Something is here done by and to him, by means of natural objects used in supernatural regard. A gift is made to him in ways that are specially appropriate to his situation; placed as he is upon the frontiers of the natural and spiritual worlds. For if the symbol is an evoking sign, a condensed, sensible presentation of Something Other; the sacrament is an efficacious sign, whereby this Something Other is truly given. It is a genuine embodiment of the Eternal, a communication of the supernatural with and through natural accidents. '*Panem de caelo praestitisti eis: omne delectamentum in se habentem*.'[137] Thus the symbol, the thing, through which men reached out to and apprehended the Infinite, now becomes the path by which the ever-present Infinite itself, with its own fresh dower of life and grace, comes into the little lives of men. As in great poetry linked words are suffused with an unearthly glow and splendour, and carry a heightened significance far beyond their literal meaning: so in the sacraments, things and deeds which emerge from the common stock of human experience are suffused with a supernatural splendour and become for the soul genuine 'vehicles of grace'. Perhaps those who have most fully realized the latent power of conveying the supra-sensible which is possessed by certain sounds and certain things, and is evoked by their artistic use, will come nearest to understanding what the sacramental use of objects is, and tries to do—yet how truly 'given', how completely independent of the little earthly sacramentalist or artist, is the beauty and otherness thus conveyed.

The Christian theist does or should deserve the term 'sacramental' for this real self-giving of Spirit along the channels of sense; and symbol for that object or image which evokes in us an intuition of the Transcendent, or creates for religious emotion a suitable path of discharge. We ought therefore to resist the diffuse application of 'sacrament' to any and every natural act and thing which seems to carry a religious reference. Much of the vague modern talk of 'wayside sacraments' is only pantheism in a surplice and stole, and blurs the distinction between the vehicle and the gift. The genuine sacrament, whether Christian or pagan, is a condensed and dynamic exhibition and communication of the Transcendent, by means of certain deliberately chosen physical acts and things, wherein the stuff of our sensory experience becomes the stuff of our spiritual experience too. Hence while it uses symbols, it is far more than a symbol; since here the supernatural is not merely suggested but actually conveyed.

Symbols, then, suggest and represent; but sacraments work. They always have a dramatic and dynamic quality. They are special deeds, in which the action proceeds at two levels. Something genuinely done within the natural sphere by and to the body—a real washing, eating, touching or anointing—involves something genuinely done within the supernatural sphere by and to the soul. Thus we have in sacraments 'a clear manifestation of the principle which informs the whole universe, the utilization of lower grades of being for the purpose of the higher, even the highest'.[138] They give man a sensible experience of supra-sensible realities; and by means of successive and particular acts convey the unchanging Universal. For this reason, they would appear to be of all religious deeds those most perfectly adapted to our two-fold human status. The true sacramentalist humbly accepts our bodily limitations. Yet, by

[137] *Breviarium Romanum*: In Festo Corporis Christi.
[138] W. Temple: *Christus Veritas*, p. 240.

and through these very limitations and under the bewildering conditions which they impose, he does discover most vividly at work, the ceaseless and generous divine action; quickening, feeding, supernaturalizing the small emergent soul which is so intimately linked with this its bodily home.

'A thick black veil,' says Newman in a beautiful and celebrated passage, 'is spread between this world and the next. We, mortal men, range up and down it, to and fro, and see nothing. In the gospel this veil is not removed; it remains, but every now and then marvellous disclosures are made to us of what is behind it.

'At times we seem to catch a glimpse of a Form which we shall hereafter see face to face. We approach, and in spite of the darkness, our hands, or our head, or our brow, or our lips become, as it were, sensible to the contact of something more than earthly. We know not where we are, but we have been bathing in water and a voice tells that it is blood. Or we have a mark signed upon our foreheads and it spake of Calvary. Or we recollect a hand laid upon our heads, and surely it had the print of nails in it, and resembled His who with a touch gave sight to the blind and raised the dead. Or we have been eating and drinking; and it was not a dream surely that One fed us from His wounded side, and renewed our nature by the heavenly meat He gave.'[139]

Here, in special explication of the sacraments of Catholicism, a theologian who is also a poet describes—as only a poet can hope to do—the soul's veritable contact with the Supernatural through veils and by symbolic deeds. Is it wonderful that so delicate and mysterious an apprehension, wavering between the utterly intangible gift and the evidently inadequate sign, should be exposed to easy misunderstandings and little able to bear the cold glare of laboratory lights? Certainly it is in this sphere of religion that the difficult tension between the temporal and the eternal, the visible and the invisible, becomes most acute; especially on the one hand for those concrete and logical minds which are compelled to rationalize every experience, on the other for those 'mystical' souls in whom the spiritual consciousness is awake. Yet being what we are, it seems that only a religious practice into which the sacramental element enters deeply can fully protect the first type from the cramping and sterilizing effects of a merely intellectual religion, or support the second type in those recurrent periods of dereliction when the inner light seems to vanish; assuring them of a supernatural contact wholly independent of our fluctuating moods. And only this humble and willing reception of the Holy by ways and means fitted to our common condition, can save either class from an isolation from their fellows which might easily become arrogant. Only this, by its full and willing utilization of our here-and-now physical status, the interdependence of soul and body, can sufficiently accentuate the creaturely quality of man.

When we look at the whole history of redemptive religion, its gradual discovery of those profound wants which Christian supernaturalism meets, we see how homely and yet how transcendental is the ministry of its sacraments. For man, wherever awakened to ultimates, ever finds in himself two great needs, which cannot be satisfied from within; the need of purification, the need of support. He requires at the very least an initial cleansing, to mark his transference from an earthly to a heavenly citizenship; from the self-regarding and instinct-ridden life of the human animal to the free, God-regarding life of the human spirit. He needs too a constant feeding, if he is to maintain this his new status, and the germ of supernatural life within him is

[139] *Parochial Sermons*, vol. v, I.

to expand. His emerging spirit must be accompanied step by step by the ceaseless support and self-giving of the Eternal, its healing, restoring, energizing power, if it is to grow up to its full stature. Thus signs of the hidden Other, even appointed trysting-places, are not enough for him. He needs to be assured of the utter and childlike dependence of his tiny spirit on God's Being—of the fact that its very life hangs upon an actual infusion of the life of the Other—of all that religion means by 'grace'. This infusion, this gift—if it is to meet the conditions of our common nature—cannot be brought home to him by way of some 'pure' but elusive experience; only apprehensible in certain states of soul, or by certain 'spiritual' types of men. It must come by the pathways of sense, through that physical order to which every soul is attuned. By ordinary water, as well as by Spirit; by ordinary bread and wine, as well as by the supra-sensible Food.

The sacraments are a perpetual witness that man thus needs something done to him, here and now. They declare that an access of Supernature is needed, which he cannot get alone: and that this access of Supernature will reach him most easily along natural paths. Their whole emphasis is on this given-ness. They remind us that our innate thirst for the Infinite is not the governing fact of our religious life, and cannot be satisfied by any effort we are able to make. That Infinite must come to us before we can go to it; and it is within the sensory and historical frame of human experience that such supernatural gifts are best and most surely received by our successive and sense-conditioned souls. Thus the sacramental principle continues to press upon us that profound truth which the Incarnation so vividly exhibits: that the whole of man's spiritual history, both corporate and solitary, involves and entirely rests in the free self-giving of God—is conditioned from first to last by the action of His all-penetrating, prevenient and eternal love. 'He it is that desireth in thee and He it is that is desired. He is all, and He doth all, if thou might but see Him.'[140] Through the Christian sacraments that self-giving, of which the Incarnation is the supreme example, finds another and a continuous expression: sense here becoming the vehicle through which the very Spirit of Life enters into the little lives of men.

This profound truth, that the Universal is best given to men through the hallowing of particular natural acts and objects, and not by a precarious abstraction from the conditions of normal existence, already seems dimly apprehended in the Pagan sacraments of purification, feeding, and communion. It is fully explicated in the Christian scheme; where the only personal petitions of the Lord's Prayer—for food, forgiveness, deliverance from evil—receive their answer in the sacraments of the Church. Jesus Himself by His baptism accepted a sacramental dispensation: and if the brilliant suggestion of Dr. Schweitzer be adopted, and the stories of the feeding of the Four and the Five Thousand relate to a Eucharistic meal which ministered to the citizens of the Kingdom the bread of Eternal Life, His whole method is then seen to be charged with sacramentalism.[141] That this should be so is consistent with all that we know of a revelation made to men in life rather than in statement, and by One whose loving vision embraced and held together the perfection of the divine generosity and the smallest homely details of human life: a revelation which dealt little in doctrine, and much in significant deed.

For sacraments as such *tell* us little or nothing; and modern religious talk about the 'teaching' of the sacraments surely blurs their real character. They do something. They communicate 'otherness', the supernatural, in the way in which the ordinary

[140] Walter Hilton: *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. II, cap. 24.
[141] Cf. A. Schweitzer: *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God*, cap. vii, § 2.

man can best receive it: that is, through things—concrete natural things lifted up by man's hands, not by man's imagination, to meet the ceaseless self-giving of God. What is given is 'grace', the energy of God Himself; a genuine participation in Eternal Life, not information about it. Moreover, here the sense of history, of the Eternal present within succession, enters profoundly into the religious experience of man. By this humble resort in traditional bodily acts to the very source of Holiness, he does indeed, as à Kempis says, 'put his mouth to the hole of the heavenly pipe of the fountain';[142] and from within the time-stream, and under accidents which reflect the moulding influence of history, tastes of that which transcends history. The last Christian neophyte meets the first disciples at the same purifying font under symbolic veils; receives, through the hand of the accredited agent of the Supernatural Society laid upon his head, his share in the same quickening and indwelling Spirit; is fed at the altar with the mysterious and unchanging food which has nourished the souls of the saints.

The richness of meaning, the extended *aura* of significance, which has been acquired by sacramental practice in its long progress through history, now makes it possible for us to gather up and express by this method, at once so 'material' and so 'mystical', and ever more profound communion of the soul—more, of the whole man—with the substance of Eternal Life. Man's supernatural growth is therefore never to be assessed by the extent in which he can dispense with such 'outward means'; but rather by the use that he is able to make of them. As his capacity for God expands, his sense of mystery grows more delicate and deeper, so does he learn more and more to find 'the soul's life, a hunger and a satisfaction of that hunger, through the taste of feeling rather than through the sight of reason; God giving Himself through such apparently slight vehicles, in such short moments, and under such bewilderingly humble veils; and our poor *a priori* notions and *a posteriori* analysis, thus proved inadequate to the living soul and the living God.'[143]

Thus sacramental religion does open a door, through which the Infinite comes with its gifts right down into the common life of our half-animal race; and we, again, can go out towards it, so far as our love, purity and courage permit us—for this path between the soul and God is utterly misconceived by us, if we allow ourselves to think of it as a one-way street. So apparently hedged in by our most humiliating and least spiritual limitations, so full of distressing reminiscences of a racial past that we should like to ignore, it does give in human ways, and under human conditions, a veritable access to Ultimates.

Especially in the Eucharist, the *aura* of associations seems to spread to the very fringes of the created world; to include the most secret and close of all personal relationships, and plunge into those mysterious deeps of personality where the creature in its poverty and weakness feeds on a generous and abiding life. For here a frame is made within which each man, at whatever stage of growth he may be, has access to the incarnate, and thus to the transcendent, Reality. In the language of theology, he can here accomplish 'in union with Christ' the surrender of his self-hood to God. Since Christ's Incarnation stands for the Christian as the most perfect self-expression of Reality in terms of space and time, complete continuity is here established between the fullness of the supernatural generosity and the heart-breaking wonder of human sacrificial love; between every level of creation visible and invisible—the vine and wheat, the sunny terrace and ploughland, the 'star-dust and

[142] *De Imitatione Christi*, Bk. IV, cap. 4.
[143] F. von Hügel: *The Mystical Element of Religion*, vol. i, p. 241.

the planet', the Angels, Archangels and all the Company of Heaven—and the first holy feeding in the Upper Room. More, continuity between this historic yet eternal act and every little Christian altar, every adoring act of spiritual communion with the Ever-loving, accomplished within the hearts of the saints. Whilst the holy Presence is not limited by its sacramental expression, that sacramental expression is a sign which can convey to men along the channels by which they receive news from their physical environment, the assurance that this Presence is there. It is the taper in the window which tells us that the Master of the house is at home.

These various metaphors may seem upon the surface inconsistent. They must be understood as complementary descriptions of a single yet infinitely rich experience; in which gift and Giver are somehow recognized as one, and man's deepest and most diverse needs are met in a way that he can understand. He is both fed and companioned; finds something at once sensible and supra-sensible, historical and unchanging; recognizes and receives the Eternal and Universal by way of personality mediated through things. Yielding up his own small life in free oblation, he receives in so far as he can bear it, the actual life of the Other; and is woven into the mystical body which incarnates the Infinite upon earth. We sacrifice both richness and aliveness if we try to reduce all this to system and logical plan.

Sacramental communion thus seems able to meet under sensory and historical symbols the finite spirit's deepest need. It is, as Ruysbroeck has it, a Way, which 'manifests but cannot comprehend the Wayless'.[144] It communicates an already achieved, an Absolute Perfection, which that finite spirit craves but can never of itself attain. And this it does in a manner at once so profound and so simple that it can satisfy the mighty soul of Aquinas and yet meet on its own level the vague emergent cravings of primitive man. As irradiated food-stuffs conserve and convey the actual values, the life-enhancing power of the sunlight; so these visible gifts, consecrated, irradiated by the invisible glory, truly convey the supernatural and life-giving life.

'Cibavit eos ex adipe frumenti: et de petra melle saturavit eos.'[145]

Here the Fully Real with its over-plus of mystery and fascination enters humbly and completely into the tentative and many-levelled experience of the partly real. The condensed, quasi-physical act and experience open up paths along which the soul can enter into a spiritual and perpetual act and experience. The Presence specially perceived in connection with simple visible accidents, at a special point of penetration of spirit into thing, is discovered as a perpetually self-giving Food. 'Sense quenches soul' and passes through the natural dispensation created by God to a certain metaphysical tasting of God in Himself. Hence the awe and delight, the shamed penitence and loving wonder, which sweep the soul of the little creature thus met as it were on its own ground.

'Therefore,' says Angela of Foligno, 'whoever meaneth to come unto this most holy Sacrament must consider to whom he cometh, how he cometh, and for what reason. For he cometh unto a certain Good Thing, which is itself all good; yet it is Itself the only good, without which there can be none other. This Good Thing sufficeth and filleth everything, satisfying all the saints and holy spirits, all those who are justified by grace, and all the souls and bodies of the blessed who reign in everlasting

[144] *The Book of the Twelve Béguines*, cap. v.
[145] *Missale Romanum*: In Festo Corporis Christi.

glory. . . . O Good Supreme, unconsidered, unknown, unloved, but found by those who with their whole hearts entirely do desire Thee!'[146]

Moreover, if thus by things of sense we lay hold of and receive the Supernal; so too from this contact with the Supernal we come back to an entirely new and reverent apprehension of things. We learn to recognize the intimations of sense as themselves genuine if incomplete revelations of Reality: signs shown to our conditioned minds out of the infinite richness and mystery of that physical universe, of which we are ourselves a tiny part and wherein is our bodily home. Thus each smallest thing in our limited yet thickly peopled world of things becomes to us of unbounded interest and worth, and carries an eternal reference. Each single soft note falling on the ear, each delicate gradation of light received by the eye, is recognized and evaluated as a point of insertion through which man receives a message from the mysterious universe, which sometimes in its solemn wholeness he can dimly apprehend. What wonder then if this message is sometimes charged with a significance exceeding that of the apparent world; if the blackbird's song conveys melodies that lie beyond music, and the unfolding beech-leaves are fringed with celestial light?

Yet the acknowledgement of symbols and sacraments as true bridges to Reality, specially calculated to meet and satisfy the needs of the whole man, weaving together his double nature and double capacities—this must never mean for us the equation of sacraments and grace, a binding down of the soul to this one means of access to the Transcendent. Still less must it mean any arbitrary limitation of the Transcendent to this one method of self-giving to the human soul. The very gospel which shows to us Christ as the Bread of Life, gives us that same Reality under other compensating images as well. Here we need specially that humble suppleness, that delicate yet widely inclusive discrimination on which the balance, health and beauty of the spiritual life so greatly depend. We have to avoid the rough and ready solution; the crude antithesis between inward and outward, the poisonous 'either . . . or' of controversy, the doctrinaire notions of those who are certain that the same diet must be given to every child. It is only as seen within the richly various, many-graded, and intensely living world of spirit, as penetrated through and through by its generous life and bringing that life to us along quasi-sensual paths—never as a device that works with mechanical certainty, and still less as a ritual substitute for the freely willed and ardently pursued communion of prayer—that sacraments must be regarded by us.

As the growing child requires for its development food, warmth, shelter, loving intercourse, discipline, exercise and teaching, all ministering in proper measure to the expansion of its compound nature; so too the growing soul. The child, along these various channels, receives all that it needs for a full sharing of the life of the race. The conditions which govern and limit human existence, the gifts of history and tradition, the moulding influence of the corporate life—these reach and penetrate it gently and gradually along mental, physical and social routes. The harmonious growth of the child's nature depends, not on an intensive concentration on one side of existence and the rejection of the rest; but on the careful balance observed between them. It grows best by sharing the mixed experiences of its fellows; and making at least some intellectual and physical, some social and personal response to the external world. Indeed, the parallel between natural and supernatural growth goes further; for all these aspects of education point beyond themselves, and fail in their office if regarded as ends. Athletics or scholarship, hygiene or parental devotion—all these

[146] Angela of Foligno: *Book of Divine Consolations*, p. 155.

can thwart the making of personality if allowed to become excessive and usurp the central place. The real fulfilment of each child's capacity, the creation of a man or woman adequate to life, transcends all means, however sacred. It may sometimes call for the sacrifice of this or that element; always for a careful adjustment of them to individual needs.

All this is surely applicable as much to the supernatural as to the natural life of man. This too is many-stranded, fed and supported by many means of grace. We starve and arrest a growing spirit—we turn a possible saint into a probable prig—if we attempt to narrow the channels along which it shall receive the gifts of the Infinite. It too wants food, air, exercise, teaching and family affection, a social embodiment of its religious impulses, an access to Spirit through things; and also—giving life, depth and meaning to these its external actions—it needs the unwatched and solitary meditation in which it draws near in love to the transcendent Other, receives the intangible gifts, and learns the unspoken lessons, of the spiritual life.

The best, most balanced and life-giving experience of the Supernatural possible to us is therefore more likely to be compound and inclusive than abstract and exclusive in type. It will be most easily and naturally obtained from within a supporting religious tradition; and will have intellectual, practical, historical, sacramental and mystical elements. It will reflect upon spiritual levels something of the contrast, tension, joy, fellowship and loneliness of our bodily life on earth; and will thus satisfy, and include in the work of transfiguration, every element of the richly various nature of man. But the proportion in which these elements will appear in the experience of each soul, the supernatural reference which they carry for it, will differ enormously; and we must expect and desire that this should be. The symbol or sacrament, the psalm or the lesson, which for one is charged with an almost unbearable wonder, may turn a stony face to the excellent Christian in the next pew. That loving, silent, and image-less recollection in which the natural mystic breathes the bracing air of the Eternal, will give to his unwary imitators nothing more spiritual than the drowsy blankness which results from deliberate repression of discursive thinking; a practice condemned by all true contemplatives as 'nought else but an idleness . . . wholly contrary to the supernatural rest which is possessed in God'.[147]

Thus an adequate religious system must help and allow us to find Reality both incarnate and unincarnate; in nature and in supernature too. It must leave room for the full exercise of brave and faithful thought, for the mysterious apprehensions that come by the touch and taste of consecrated things, and for the soul's loving self-mergence in that unconditioned stillness which lies both within and beyond all thoughts and things.

[147] Ruysbroeck: *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*, Bk. II, cap. 66.

VII. The Supernatural In Human Life

(*a*) Prayer

La prière est en elle-même un acte tout spirituel adressé à l'Esprit par excellence, à l'Esprit qui voit tout, qui est présent à tout, et qui, comme dit Saint Augustin, est plus intime à notre âme, que ce qu'elle a de plus profond. Si nous joignons à cette prière essentielle une certaine posture du corps, des paroles, des démonstrations extérieures, tout cela par soi même ne signifie rien, et n'est agréable à Dieu qu'autant qu'il est l'expression des sentiments de l'âme.

J. N. Grou

I am Ground of thy beseeching; first it is My will that thou have it; and after I make thee to will it; and after I make thee to beseech it and thou beseechest it. How should it then be that thou shouldst not have thy beseeching?

Julian of Norwich

I

If God, the Supernatural Reality, is found to reveal Himself 'at sundry times and in divers manners' in History, Personality, and Things to those creatures who are becoming capable of a certain participation in His Life—how and when shall we find this His Life at work within our common human nature, and what are the ways in which that average human nature feels and responds to His attraction?

This attraction should surely be considered to be in some degree at work, wherever absolute value claims the devotion of man, and the 'brightness of His Glory'—whether seen in the worlds of science, thought or beauty, in sacrifice or love—over-rules self-interested desire. But here its origin in the self-giving of Creative Spirit is not always recognized by the little creature. In two great regions of life it is so recognized: in the universal activity we call Prayer, and in that remaking of character in supernatural regard which is the essence of Sanctification.[148] In Prayer, the supernatural interest, the creature's loving dependence on God, takes its place—though perhaps a major place—among the other great interests of life. Where it transcends these interests, and initiates a more and more complete surrender of personality and redirection of existence in conformity with the purposes of the Holy, we may well call this, in a general sense, Sanctification: for it has as its assigned end the production of the saint. These two great facts of Prayer and Sanctity, pointing beyond the natural order and requiring for their explanation another level of reality, are the standing witnesses of the working of the Supernatural within our human life.

From the point of view of Naturalism, the development of Prayer is surely one of the strangest and most intractable incidents in the whole strange history of man. For here we have an almost universal human activity which is solely called forth by, and directed to, the supra-sensible; which has no survival-value, and no intelligible meaning if determinism tells all the truth about the world, yet which is not confined to spiritual specialists or abnormal minds but is a constant character of developed manhood wherever found. We can trace the gradual unfolding of this peculiar activity from primitive and self-interested forms controlled by need and fear, through

[148] *Vide supra*, cap. ii, pp. 43-47.

ever higher degrees of complexity carrying an ever wider sphere of non-utilitarian reference, to a height at which the man or woman of prayer seems to experience a genuine transcendence of succession; a conscious and first-hand communion with God. Thus the development of prayer can be observed though not explained, in a biological sense; complete historic continuity can be established between the first glimmers of religious awe in primitive man, and the blaze of 'absolute feeling' in the saint. All along the path linking these two extremes we can see the emergent human instinct for God, enticed and fed by symbols, being released and expanded by the use of ritual acts and words. It is mainly through the mechanisms of speech and gesture, by which he draws closer to the souls of his fellow men, that man learns to draw closer to the Food and Father of his soul.

Broadly speaking, prayer covers the whole of the little human creature's search of and response to the Infinite, in all its kinds and degrees; from the terrified chatterings of the savage to the adoring rapture of the great contemplative. Sometimes this response is evoked within history by a personal or symbolic disclosure of the Holy, and reaches its objective by the incarnational or sacramental route. Sometimes the awakened spirit speaks to the awakening Other in a way that seems to itself to be purely spiritual or 'without means'. Sometimes in the stillness it realizes that in spite of contrary appearance, at every level of the devotional life, 'we endure His workings beyond our workings, and so enduring Him we apprehend Him and become apprehended by Him'.[149] In the language of theology, prayer in its wholeness includes all aspects and degrees of the soul's communion with God; as immanent in, yet transcendent to, the world.

The very facts of our two-fold status, our double relation with Reality, seem to require an intercourse with the Supernatural which shall be actualized both in visible and invisible ways. Since man is at once a successive yet spiritual creature, with a composite experience in which sense and spirit co-operate closely, he must seek and find the Eternal both as a child of the Eternal, and as a creature of time. This means that his life is never complete without prayer. Though this prayer must always be inadequate to its subject-matter, it is only by such small, constant, willed ascents, and such humble childish intercourse of spirit with Spirit—enabling him to find and feel something of that same Spirit along the pathways of sense—that he can give to his religious and historical constructions the genuine, though always oblique, supernatural reference in which their true value abides.

The little human soul emerges and expands, fulfils its wonderful office of incarnating the Eternal here and now, only in so far as it lives and breathes in its true *Patria*, God. Such life and breath is prayer. Whether virtual or actual, expressed in the 'simple act' which seems like quietude, in words, in gestures, or in loving deeds, this is the very substance of man's supernatural life. Its continued practice deepens no less than expands the area of our conscious personality: for the deeps of the self, the unconscious ground, where the creature subject to time has a certain contact with the Abiding, is by this brought more and more within the conscious field. The soul thus grows by appropriation of something which is already present to and with it; and growing, is able to feed more.[150] The communion thus set up seems sometimes to the self to be clearly personal, sometimes to be impersonal. By turns it speaks with its Master and rests in its Home; and through and in these completing opposites

[149] Ruysbroeck: *The Book of the Twelve Béguines*, cap. xvi.
[150] This is not 'immanentism'. Cf. St. Augustine: *Confessions*, Bk. VII, cap. 10. 'Cresce, et manducabis me', etc.

gradually develops that side of its two-fold nature which is turned towards the richness of the Eternal world. In stating this, surely we state too the capital truth which must control all our fumbling efforts to explicate the little we know about prayer: namely, the fact that it is wholly evoked by God and not produced by us. He is there first, the 'ground of our beseeching'. The given-ness which is a character of all the creature's genuine experiences of the Transcendent also obtains here.

'In our own efforts we always fail, and therein we cannot apprehend Him. But where He works and we endure, there, by that enduring, we apprehend Him beyond all our efforts.'[151]

When we grasp this, our view of prayer is transformed. Then we see its whole span, from the first naïve beginning in childish wants and dependence to those Alpine peaks where the great contemplatives dwell alone with God, as one tiny part of the vast supernatural action of God Himself, in and with His creation. The significant thing is no longer the little human soul trying by its own effort to get into touch with a supernatural landscape and power external to it. Although we are often driven thus to describe our apparent experience, that which matters and that which happens is far better conceived as the opening up of that soul to the spiritual reality and power by which it is already sustained and transfused. At all through the innocent deeds and events of our human life, so here supremely, the created soul ever acts—though often unwittingly—under the secret impulsions of the spaceless Spirit of God; who is at once the immanent cause and transcendent end of every real prayer. His presence and action are there first. He enters and affects it by ways and means both visible and invisible: ways which we, from our limited viewpoint, like to distinguish as we distinguish the west wind from the east; but which are in essence *one*.

'In the beginning,' says St. Teresa, 'it happened to me that I was ignorant of one thing—I did not know that God was in all things: and when He seemed to me to be so near, I thought it impossible. Not to believe that He was present, was not in my power; for it seemed to me, as it were, evident that I felt there His very presence. Some unlearned men used to say to me, that He was present only by His grace. I could not believe that, because, as I am saying, He seemed to me to be present Himself: so I was distressed. A most learned man, of the Order of the glorious St. Dominic, delivered me from this doubt; for he told me that He was present, and how He communed with us: this was a great comfort to me.'[152]

Prayer, then, is man's nearest approach to absolute action; it means the closest association of which any soul is at any time capable with the living and everywhere present God who is the true initiator of all that we really do. Progress in it is really a progressive surrender of the conditioned creature to that unconditioned yet richly personal Reality, who is the only source, teacher and object of prayer. Its whole wonder and mystery abide in this: that here, our tiny souls are being invited and incited to communion with God, the Eternal Spirit of the Universe.

Hence the self that fully gives its mind and will to prayer at once moves out actually if not consciously to the border between the natural and supernatural worlds, and changes its relation to both. So whether a prayer seems to him who prays to be introversive or out-flying, contemplative or intercessory in type, does not perhaps matter very much; since it is, in essence, a non-spatial activity, expressed in such particular forms or ways as lie within the limited grasp and understanding of each

[151] Ruysbroeck, loc. cit.
[152] *Life*, cap. xviii, par. 20.

soul. It may find its embodiment in gesture, action, liturgic or spontaneous words. The Catholic procession, the Quaker silence, the Methodist prayer-meeting, the Salvationist's tambourine, can all justify themselves in the presence of the one God. Prayer may equally find its fulfilment in a special use of rhythm and cadence, in phrases which direct and support attention and desire, or in a state of soul apparently unrelated to the centres of speech; the profoundly absorbed and satisfying prayer of quiet or of union, as described by the mystics.[153] Whatever its kind or degree, it means for the praying soul an interweaving in experience—not necessarily in intellectual realization—of two already present orders; and the mystics are surely right when they insist that its essence is a resort of the creature to that metaphysical 'ground of the soul', where every spirit inheres in God and already in a measure partakes of eternal life, since 'God, the ground of the soul, and grace go together.'[154]

Superior persons smile at the pious extravagance which sees in the mumbled prayers of the beggar in the porch as valuable a spiritual engine as the more cultivated devotions of a Doctor of the Church. But quite small angels are probably able to laugh heartily at the quaint planetary conceit which distinguishes these minute differences in a number of little animals equally bathed in, and utterly dependent on, the mighty torrents of the Love of God. Indeed the humble, simplified, wide-open and uncritical soul may conceivably offer a clearer pathway to that mysterious energy than the canalized channels of the 'developed mind': for prayer is simply 'that most noble and divine instrument of perfection . . . by which and in which alone we attain to the reward of all our endeavours, the end of our creation and redemption—to wit union with God, in which alone consists our happiness and perfection'.[155]

Here that noble and touching thirst for ultimates which constitutes the true dignity of human nature finds its most general and widely various expression: and a Scala Santa is set up on which every soul, at whatever degree of development, can find a place. Each disclosure to the soul of the Supernatural, whether made in mystical, personal, symbolical or sacramental ways—in company or solitude, through beauty or worship, love, penitence or grief—is an incitement and nourisher of prayer; and only in so far as that soul meets these disclosures by such deliberate ascents towards, and surrenders to, the Transcendent as it is able to achieve, will these revelations of Reality have value for its life. Man's spiritual growth seems ever to require such a collaboration of two forces. It is not due to the action of God alone, nor to the desire and effect of man alone; but to both. And the opening up in prayer of the small human personality to the quickening power of God—incited, it is true, by His prevenient grace—is yet left to the action of the will. Such willed effort is indeed essential, if spiritual realism is to be achieved. For here as elsewhere 'our belief in things of all kinds, in continuously existing self-identical realities, is founded in our experience of effort—of putting forth power and energy in pursuit of our goals'.[156]

In studying prayer, it is surely above all important to look at the flower and not at the seed. A very rough little seed, buried deep in the primitive stuff of human nature, and finding its first nourishment in our primitive terrors and needs; a flower, of which we cannot yet analyse the mysterious fragrance or estimate the healing power. Even though its first beginnings and first enticements are naïve and humble—wholly

[153] Here St. Teresa is of course the classic authority. Cf. especially *The Interior Castle*, 4th and 5th Mansions; and *Life*, caps. xv to xx.
[154] Meister Eckhart: *Sayings*, p. 418.
[155] Ven. Augustine Baker: *Holy Wisdom*, p. 341.
[156] W. McDougall: *Outline of Psychology*, p. 426.

utilitarian in their objectives, and largely dictated by the ignoble passions of fear and desire—this embryonic movement towards communion with an invisible Other must surely be judged, as we judge the beginnings of architecture, painting and music, in relation with its triumphant developments. The mud hut does not discredit the cathedral; nor does the devotee of Durga discredit the adoring prayer of the saints. 'In Him life lay, and this life was the Light for men. Amid the darkness the Light shone, but the darkness did not master it.'[157]

Thus spontaneously arising within each religious complex from the most crude to the most sublimated, prayer appears in human history as the expression of man's generalized instinct for and dependence on God; the raw stuff of his spiritual experience. But if we consent for a time to abandon the evolutionary standpoint, to stand back and look in a positive and concrete way at this general spectacle—this strange upward surge of the half-made and half-real human creature towards that Wholly Real and Changeless One, half-glimpsed but never fully seen—then surely we begin to grasp the pathos, the daring, the convincingness of that various and world-wide demonstration of man's confident instinct for God. It expresses his decisive refusal to be a clever animal and nothing more; it means the implicit discovery of his own duality, his amphibious state, his response to the attraction of the unseen.

Of course in speaking thus, we are taking refuge in suggestive metaphor. We do not yet know *what* prayer really is; any more than we yet know that which poetry and music really are, or the *whatness* of that which they give us. In all, we have a certain empirical knowledge of process, hardly any of underlying fact: for here, as ever when we touch the mysterious region where human nature fringes on the supernatural, the *aura* of intuitive yet genuine knowledge extends far beyond the nucleus of science, and we are obliged to deal with forces which we are unable to describe. Doctrines of prayer which emphasize its 'simplicity' do not really penetrate the symbolic veil which clothes and conceals the dread realities of religion. But in our actual prayer we enter with closed eyes within this veil; and are concerned with those unknown but most actual forces of spiritual world. Whilst and in so far as we truly pray, we do live according to our measure the supernatural life: and this is not 'simple', but rich and vivid beyond all our conceiving. 'Lord, I come unto Thee to the end that wealth may come unto me!'[158]

Hence the attitude toward these profound mysteries of those who know most remains humble, receptive, and agnostic. But at least their discoveries tend to assure us that we only begin to have a chance of understanding prayer, if we recognize from the first its genuinely supernatural character; and see in it the tentative and childish beginnings of an intercourse of which we do not know the laws or discern the end. Though it represents—as do music, poetry, metaphysics—a special and still unexplained expansion of the mysterious thing we call human consciousness, yet it is not a faculty of our organic nature: the most convinced evolutionist has not detected its beginning in 'the greater ground-apes' and their kin. It is a result of an incitement that comes to us from beyond the world—in religious language, of grace; and though its action upon the natural is often direct and deeply impressive, its truest concern is with the supernatural. Yet since in prayer, both virtual and actual, the created spirit has dealings with God, and He is the one God of Nature and of Supernature, we cannot fence off its sphere of interest and influence. That interest and influence cover the whole span of life. Prayer enters deeply into history, and is explicated in

[157] John i. 4, 5 (Moffat's translation).
[158] *De Imitatione Christi*, Bk. IV, cap. 3.

traditional and historic ways; and yet it transcends history. It affects our physical and mental status, transforms to its purpose and fills with new ardour the homely symbols of our emotional life, takes colour from the senses and gives a deepened significance to their reports; yet alone moves freely in the regions beyond sense. It is *with* God, and therefore omnipresent. The praying soul, the man who is really 'in the Spirit,' is experiencing human freedom in its most intense form, and realizing its latent capacity for spiritual action.

Living as we mostly do within the narrow bounds of a sense-conditioned consciousness, it is always good to remind ourselves first that this human capacity for spiritual action does exist; and next that its real nature and extent are still largely unknown to us. As the physical forces on which life depends are hidden, and known to us not in their essence but in their effects; so the life of the Spirit far exceeds in its factualness that which it seems to us to be. Its dark and powerful rays, its enlightening, quickening and attractive forces, permeate the little fragile creature; healing and supporting, inciting and preventing, at every point and in every way. This truth should surely keep up in humility as regards our tiny and limited religious apprehensions; and in delighted confidence, as regards the unmeasured possibilities opened up to us in prayer. It is at once bracing and humbling, thus to remember our relation to the unsearchable Source of that mysterious sunshine of which we sometimes feel a little, that boundless generous air which we take as it were for granted and almost unconsciously breathe. There, surrounding, bathing and transfusing us, but in its reality infinitely transcending us, is that unmeasured and living world with its powers, its beneficent influences; and here are we, capable of a certain communion with it, of action through and within it. The whole *rationale* of prayer is bound up in the belief that such action is possible, and transcends in power and obligation its mere outward or physical expression. Prayer in its fullness commits us to the belief that the eternal world of Spirit is the world of power; and that man is not fully active until he is contemplative too.

Therefore a primary duty among the great human duties—perhaps the greatest of all—is willed and faithful correspondence with that Eternal World, and action within it: a correspondence and an action which gradually spread from their focus in deliberate devotional acts, till they include and transfuse the whole of life. The capital possibility offered to man in prayer—taking this word now in its most general sense—is that he can genuinely achieve this: and that his small and derivative spirit, by such humble willed communion with the very Source of its being and power, can grow and expand into a tool of the creative love and power. Within the atmosphere of prayer, virtual and actual—but only within that atmosphere—his being can expand from a narrow individuality into a personality capable of being fully used on supernatural levels for supernatural work. This is of course the state of holiness; and holiness, the achievement of a creative supernatural personality capable of furthering the Divine action within life, is the true assigned end of the faithfully pursued and completely developed individual life of prayer.

II

The saintly M. Olier said that prayer consists in its completeness in three things—Adoration, Communion, and Co-operation;[159] and in these words gave one of the best of all definitions of the spiritual life. For that life means the ever more perfect and willing association of the invisible human spirit with the invisible Divine Spirit for all

[159] Brémond: *Histoire Littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France*, vol. iv, p. 116.

purposes; for the glory of God, for the growth and culture of the praying soul, and concurrently for the performance of that redemptive and creative work which is done by the ever-present God through and with the spirit that really prays. It has therefore three great aspects or moments; in which perhaps it is not wholly fanciful to trace a certain kinship with the three aspects under which the Christian theist seeks to apprehend God. There is first the humble, admiring adoration of the transcendent Object; next the loving personal communion with that Object found here and now in the soul's secret life; last, active self-giving to the purposes of the Object. These three together, in their fullness and variety of expression, cover all that we know of the spiritual life in man: directed as it is towards those only three realities of which we know anything—God, the Soul, and the World.

Thus prayer in its widest sense embraces first all our personal access to, and contemplation of, the Supernatural Reality of God. Next, because of this possible access, all our chances of ourselves becoming supernatural personalities, useful to God. Last, and because of this, all our capacity for exerting supernatural action on other souls. For the state of adoration opens the soul's gates to the Supernal; and that Supernal, invading and controlling more and more of its will and love, enters into a loving communion with it which issues in an ever closer co-operation, limitless in its energizing power. Hence prayer, in a soul which is completely patient of the supernatural, is literally without ceasing, because the whole of its action is supernaturalized. When we thus state the position, it becomes obvious that all these types of prayer, all the ways in which man can hope to deepen and enlarge his supernatural life, must hang utterly upon his primary relationship with God.

'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Mind, and with all thy Strength. This is the first, and great commandment because it defines the relation of man to the Abiding. As a rule we take its obligations rather lightly. For not only does it require in religion the absolute priority of the objective over the subjective point of view; but, if we translate its terms from the language of religion into that of philosophy, we see that it further entails a complete revolution on our usual attitude to life. We can hardly begin to obey it unless we give the Supernatural primacy in our thought and feeling, and work for its interests with all our power. This means, for the individual, making a place in his flowing life for a deliberate self-orientation to the unchanging and eternal: acknowledging that man is indeed a 'swinging-wicket, set between the Unseen and Seen', and being sure that our hinges are so adjusted that we move smoothly in both directions. For the organized community it means providing an environment, an institution in which that humble, complete and delighted attention to God in and for Himself which is the first point of prayer can be taught and practised. For clearly, if our deepest meaning and our fullest life do lie beyond the natural struggle; then, total concentration on the natural struggle maims us. True, it is the theatre within which every soul is placed, and gives us the raw material of experience: but in some form or degree, dim or vivid, the sense of an achieved Perfection lying ever beyond us is essential to our real growth. How can we hope to actualize this, unless we make of it an independent objective; stretching out towards it with our thought and our love, with a deliberate attention and interest at once awestruck and passionate?

Being, after all, at best half animal creatures, with a psychic machinery mainly adapted to maintaining our physical status, we cannot conceive a supernatural status and activity—much less achieve it—by ourselves. Until that secret holy energy we call 'grace' has touched and stirred us, we do not know what 'grace' is: it is a pious word,

not the name of an actual power, a free gift from the sources of Eternal Life. And unless grace continues to play upon and support us, we cannot go on knowing what it is. Therefore attention to God, adoration of God, spreading gradually from its focus in deliberate devotional acts till it colours all the activities of existence, and from His discovery and worship under particular attributes to a certain tasting of Him as He is in Himself; this must be the first and governing term of the supernatural life, the unique source of all its possibilities. The reason the saints are so winning and persuasive, and so easily bring us into the presence of God, is that their lives are steeped in this loving and selfish adoration. And in the deepening and development of such non-utilitarian prayer towards God in and for Himself, the balance which is maintained in it of docility and of effort, lies our best hope of achieving a genuine and lasting religious realism.

'Prayer,' says Angela of Foligno, 'is nothing else save the manifestation of God and oneself, and this manifestation is perfect and true humiliation. For humility consists in the soul beholding God and itself as it should.'[160]

If this great activity is to be given its place in our two-fold human outlook, this can only be done by the same process as that by which we establish any other fresh or neglected field of interest within the circle of consciousness—namely, by deliberate and repeated acts of attention. The crude instinct must be educated, must reach the level of habit and of skill, if it is to be of much use to us. Here then we find support for the drill of the religious life: too lightly condemned by some as mechanical and unreal. The daily rule, kept without regard to fluctuations in devotional feeling, the office faithfully recited, that practice of constant brief aspirations towards God—a redirection, as it were, of man's vagrant will towards eternal values—which the old masters of prayer so constantly recommend; all this had and has much to do with the formation of a solid type of spiritual character. Such formal practices, such harnessing of the speech-centres to the purposes of grace, are not to be dismissed as 'mere auto-suggestions'. They are deeds tending to increase the energy of the idea, the adoring orientation of the soul towards its assigned end. They work from without inwards; slowly educating and transforming those unconscious deeps in which the springs of conduct are hidden.

These habits, though we may not always appreciate the colour which piety has given them, are therefore justified by our psychic peculiarities, limitations and needs. By their indiscriminate rejection we should gravely impoverish ourselves; for without some such discipline it is impossible that our religious impulse will be raised to the level of real effectiveness. Though the distance which separates the best that we can say from the least that God is, becomes more and more apparent with the soul's growth; yet even the greatest mystic abandons at his own peril all use of the human resources of gesture and speech, all 'binding rules of prayer'. Psychology assures us of the need for periodic concentration on our prime interest, whatever it may be, if this is to have a radiating effect on the whole of our existence; and of the essential part played by repeated acts in the production of skill. Nowhere does this law apply more certainly than in the religious sphere. It is indeed a central function of organized religion to stimulate and give precision to such purposive acts—such self-openings in the direction of the Infinite—to foster and educate the emergent human capacity for God.

[160] Angela of Foligno: *Book of Divine Consolations*, p. 106.

The rightfulness of such a deliberate concentration of the soul on the Abiding is in some sense guaranteed, not only by the ever-deepening joy and peace, but also and chiefly by the power it brings to those who patiently undertake this slow education of their neglected spiritual sense; and thus gradually learn to see the whole sweep of existence in supernatural regard. Where that sense is allowed to atrophy, human life is reduced to mere succession and becomes flat, shallow, uncertain of its own goal: for unless we consent, by adoring resort to the Universal, to develop the spiritual side of our consciousness, and so become aware of our deepest attachments, we have no key to the problems presented by the multiplicity of experience. Life will seem to us, as it does to many people, either a rich or a baffling confusion: and although we may be immensely busy with it, the busyness will be that of the inexperienced housemaid, who cleans a room by raising clouds of dust. Much devoted social service is unfortunately of this kind: doomed to end in discouragement and exhaustion, because those who undertook it had failed to develop their power of resort to the abiding sources of man's life, and maintain an adoring relation with Reality.

It is true that this relation can be virtually present where it is not actualized under religious forms; as the moulding influence of the living and unchanging God can be and often is intuitively realized, in a greater or less degree, by the human soul. But since we are men and women, born of the sense-world and mostly conditioned by it, such intuitive perception is never constantly or fully enjoyed by use, and will hardly develop its power if we leave it to chance. It will be more and more felt, as we more and more turn to and attend to it: for, like every other faculty, it needs and is susceptible of education. Anyone who has practised landscape painting, knows the immense and unguessed transfiguration of the natural world which comes to the artist through patient, attentive and unselfish regard; how the significance and emphasis of simple objects change, how a range of beauty and reality to which the common eye is blind, is discovered in familiar things through that deliberate contemplation of his subject, that absorbed, unhurried, and largely unreflecting gaze, in which effort and docility combine. This disciplined attentiveness, which is the way to enter into communion with nature, is also one great way of entering into communion with Supernature. It is the way in which we raise our level of sensibility, make ourselves more able to receive that light and life which God is ceaselessly giving to His creation, a path along which those who submit to its disciplines may reasonably hope to discover the intense reality, the mystery and the beauty, of the world to which we turn in prayer; yet in which we live and move and have our being all the while.

'If we would *taste* God,' says Ruysbroeck, 'and feel in ourselves Eternal Life above all things, we must go forth into God with a faith that is far above our reason, and there dwell . . . and in this emptiness of spirit we receive the Incomprehensible Light, which enfolds and penetrates us as air is penetrated by the light of the sun. And that light is nothing else but a fathomless gazing and seeing.'[161]

We feel as we read these words that they represent Ruysbroeck's effort to tell us about something actual, which he has done; and which most of us have certainly not done. They give us a sense of the distance that separates the religion which dwells contentedly among symbols and ideas from the religion which has passed through and beyond image in its impassioned quest of ultimates. They oblige us to believe that in the highest regions of contemplative experience genuine results are achieved, which are beyond the normal span of our thought. Great areas of new truth may then

[161] Ruysbroeck: *The Sparkling Stone*, cap. ix.

be unveiled; and though the imaginative faculty inevitably lays hold of them, and the self's beliefs and longings enter into and modify the form in which they reach consciousness, this does not discredit the fact that fresh levels of spiritual reality are apprehended in this deep adoring attention of the Unseen.

Realizing this, we realize too the profound distinction here between vague aspirant and skilled craftsman: a distinction which is worth emphasizing, for the characteristic vice of the amateur artist or musician, of supposing himself able to appreciate all the truth and beauty that there is to see and hear, is common enough in amateurs of the spiritual life—and surely here reaches its utmost pitch of absurdity. As a matter of fact, the saints and men and women of prayer to whom we owe our deepest revelations of the Supernatural—those who give us real news about God—are never untrained amateurs or prodigies. Such men and women as Paul, Augustine, Catherine, Julian, Ruysbroeck, are genuine artists of eternal life. They have accepted and not scorned the teachings of tradition: and humbly trained and disciplined their God-given genius for ultimates. I do not suggest that all the news which they give us is of equal worth, or that it is exempt from criticism; far from it. But the best, simplest, and most restrained of them do show us, as great artists do, fresh loveliness, intense reality, and infinite possibility, in a spiritual scene on which every Christian is privileged to look. Each could say with Dante:

'. . . La mia vista, venendo sincera,
e più e più entrava per lo Raggio
dell' alta luce, che da sè è vera.'[162]

The first possibility inherent in adoring prayer—that simple, quiet yet ardent looking at and waiting upon God for His own sake—is therefore a certain real if limited knowledge of Him and of Eternal Life. This sort of prayer, persevered in, does bring a progressive discovery of the concrete reality and richness of those supernatural facts, which the doctrines and practices of formal religion are designed to express. Usually arising at the symbolic level, and first focused upon particulars, theocentric prayer can lift those doctrines, symbols and practices from the level of dreary unreality at which we too often leave them; and can make of them that which they ought to be, the transcendent art-work of the religious soul. It can inform the simplest crudest hymn or the most solemn service with vitality, and cause each to convey spiritual truth; because the persons using these forms of expression are accustomed to look through them towards the ever-present God, in love and joy. For this sort of prayer, developing as it does our spiritual sensitiveness, and releasing us from the petty falsities of a geocentric point of view, gradually discloses to us a whole new realm of reality and our own status within it: and with this a progressive sense, that the best we can ever know or experience is nothing in respect of that plenitude of being which God holds within His secret life.

'For all the torrents of the grace of God are poured forth,' says Ruysbroeck again, 'and the more we taste of them, the more we long to taste; and the more we long to taste, the more deeply we press into contact with Him; and the more deeply we press into contact with God, the more the flood of His sweetness flows through us and over us; and the more we are thus drenched and flooded, the better we feel and know that the sweetness of God is incomprehensible and unfathomable.'[163]

[162] *Paradiso*, xxxiii, 52.
[163] *The Sparkling Stone*, cap. x.

Hence this simple and adoring contemplation, which some have condemned as fostering illusion or spiritual pride, is as a matter of fact the best and gentlest of all teachers of humility. Far from leading the soul to despise 'ordinary ways', it brings it to a deeper, meeker, more gently intimate discovery of God revealed through sacramental and incarnational means. It sets the scene of the supernatural life, and helps the little human self to get its values right, to recognize its own lowliness; teaching it the utter distinction in kind between nature even at its highest, and supernature in its simplest manifestations.

'This prayer,' says a great teacher of the spiritual life, 'so stripped of images and apperceptions, idle in appearance and yet so active, is in so far as the condition of this life allows, the pure "adoration in spirit and in truth"; the adoration truly worthy of God, and in which the soul is united to Him in its ground, the created intelligence to the Intelligence Uncreate, without the intervention of imagination or reason, or of anything else but a very simple attention of the mind and an equally simple application of the will.'[164]

Most often arising from within the humble and patient use of image and formula, such a practice as this brings a gradually increased simplification of consciousness; a slowing-down of the discursive reason, a melting of each separate act and aspiration into one single movement of the soul. That movement is in essence a disinterested act of adoring self-donation; an act at once austere and ardent, which offers everything and asks for nothing, content to say with St. Francis, *Deus meus et ominia*. Whether practised in apparent solitude, or within a corporate act of worship, it forms part of the one great *Sanctus* of the universe. Because of the deep awe, the meek creaturely sense which it fosters, it is the antiseptic of the devotional life, checking those corrupting tendencies to sentimental individualism and sugary effervescence which are always ready to infect it. Christian prayer at its best always preserves this astringent quality, this paradoxical combination of intimacy and otherness; so wonderfully expressed in the opening phrase of the Lord's Prayer, where the exquisite tenderness, the confident claim of *Pater Noster* is instantly qualified by the introduction of ineffable mystery—*qui es in coelis*—opening up before the little praying soul the unmeasured spaces of the Eternal World.

III

If the instinctive awe and worship—the delighted wonder—which form the raw material of adoring prayer, represent the human sense of the Transcendent over against the created soul; this does not exhaust the rich variousness of that relation with God in which the life of prayer consists. For that Reality which is the object of religion is as truly immanent as transcendent, 'present no less than absent—near, no less than far', said St. Augustine.[165] He is intimate as well as adorable; and hence the soul's response to His attraction will include all those homely yet sacred experiences, within the normal range of our religious sensitiveness and desire, which are dependent on and express our feeling of His closeness, inseparableness, and dearness. 'The state of the inner man is to *walk* with God.'[166] The Transcendent Other is felt now in the most personal of relationships, as actually entering, accompanying and affecting the soul's life.

'Thou hast holden me by my right hand:

[164] J. N. Grou: *L'Ecole de Jésus*, ii, p. 8.
[165] St. Augustine: *Confessions*, Bk. I, cap. 4.
[166] *De Imitatione Christi*, Bk. II, cap. 6.

Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel. . . .
My flesh and my heart faileth:
But God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.'[167]

Yet this inward communion, if it is to maintain its vigorous life-giving quality and resist the tendency to slide down into pious sentimentalism, needs itself to be placed within the atmosphere of adoration. For it represents one side of that complete experience which drew from Thomas à Kempis the wonderful exclamation: 'The Heaven of Heavens cannot contain Thee, and yet Thou sayest—Come ye all unto Me!'[168] If then adoring prayer emphasized the 'otherness' of God, His untouched Perfection; here instead is emphasized His mysterious loving nearness to the soul, a certain likeness, a latent affinity between Spirit and spirit, a close here-and-now dependence. A give-and-take is set up between Infinite and finite; there is a response on the self's part to something given to it from the treasures of the supernatural world.

This response—inevitably made under symbols, and involving certain well-marked feeling-states—seems to the soul, above all else, the response of a person to a Person. We find in it a touching utilization of all the simplest aspects of man's emotional life. Here the childlike come by their own, and achieve a closeness of communion with Reality unreached by the loftiest thought. The little creature is met on its own level; the spirit that was first filled with awestruck worship is sought and won on its own ground. A strange and penetrating intercourse is established. Maintained by the periods of concentrated and loving attention in which the self 'meditates' or 'waits upon God' according to the measure of its powers, this gradually spreads to permeate the deeds of active life; bringing all external action, of whatever kind, into direct relationship with His Reality. Life is more and more felt in every detail to be overruled by the intimate moulding and cherishing action of God; opening paths, suggesting sacrifices, bringing about those unforeseen events and relationships which condition the soul's advance.

It is here, in this humble yet intimate, ardent yet little understood communion of the small human self with a present and infinite Companion—an 'immanent Ultimate' within the compass of man's heart, but beyond the span of his conceiving mind—that the transforming power exercised by prayer on human personality is most clearly seen. Here some measure of the supernatural, with its generous grace and beauty, its demand for self-donation, truly enters the life of every awakened soul. In all its kinds and degrees, from the colloquy or free conversation 'as one friend with another'[169] which results from meditation faithfully performed, through that gradual expansion and simplification of consciousness which leads to the silent yet deeply active absorption of the Prayer of Simplicity or of Quiet, this secret intercourse has marked educative and purifying effects. When we consider what such prayer involves, this can hardly surprise us: for here our small and childish spirits are being invited and incited by God's prevenient Spirit to enter into communion with Him. If this mysterious intercourse of the half-real with the Wholly Real—this give-and-take between the emergent creature and its supernatural environment—be done sincerely, humbly, simply and steadily; surely the result must at least be a fresh and ever

[167] Psalm lxxiii. 23, 24, 26.
[168] *De Imitatione Christi*, Bk. II, cap. 1.
[169] St. Ignatius Loyola: *Spiritual Exercises*, 1st week.

clearer vision of the self's true status, the vast difference between that which it is and that which it is invited to be.

'In a room into which the sunlight enters strongly', says St. Teresa, 'not a cobweb can be hid.'[170] The dust and rubbish, all the grimy corners, the hoarded unworthy possessions are ruthlessly exhibited and condemned. The essential conflict between animal impulse and spiritual demand declares itself; and with the setting up of fresh standards comes access to fresh sources of power. The soul feeds on the Invisible, and gains thus the incentive and energy for self-conquest. If the adoring vision of the Holy emphasized the difference between the sinful creature and the Perfect, this experience of a here-and-now Companion makes possible the work of transformation. Thus at the very least, such prayer can hardly fail to do that which St. Teresa demanded as the test of its efficacy: It will teach the little self to love, suffer and work on ever higher levels of reality and self-devotion. Something in fact is here effected for the soul's true being which nothing else could achieve: here, directly occasioned by the humble self-imparting of the Infinite, begins for it that growth and movement from the individual to the universal standpoint, which is the essence of the supernatural life in man.

Expressed in psychological language, the characters of this growth and movement of the human spirit come perhaps to this. Such intimate and docile communion first deepens religious sensitiveness, effecting a real cultivation of our latent capacity for God; and next involves a complete redirection of desire, a dedication of those powers of initiative and endurance which every living creature possesses in a greater or less degree, to the single purposes of God. This redirection of desire may be, and generally is, effected through the simplest devotions and in the most homely ways. But if we examine the different traditional types and degrees of prayer in which the communion of the soul with the Transcendent is embodied, we see that these too gather up and express the dedication to Reality, the Supernatural, of each aspect of man's being. Thus 'mental prayer' means the giving of thought to that ruling influence; 'affective prayer' the giving of love, 'acts of will' the steady training of volition, desire, in the one direction. In the mature and rounded spiritual life, its tranquillity and power, we see the result of that consecration of 'all the forces of the soul, gathered into the unity of the Spirit'[171] which is summed up in the great Ignatian formula: 'Take Lord and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding; all I have and I possess!'[172]

Much of the prayer of petition and surrender, which takes so large a place in the routine of the devotional life, is really an education of the human will towards this end: strengthening the sense of dependence, and persuading desire to take the channel that leads towards God. Thus the sublime 'Thy Will be done!' if regarded as a request addressed by man to the Eternal, would be an absurdity: since we are sure that the steady sweep of that Infinite Will over-rules all our individual preferences and desires. But as a means of harmonizing the childish human will to His purposes, it is one of the most powerful and searching of all prayers; a complete purgation of the mind that really means it. For it then becomes a dynamic suggestion which, if effective, does actually extend the area over which that Will has an unimpeded sway and is actively furthered by our intention.

[170] *Life*, cap. xix.
[171] Ruysbroeck: *Book of the Twelve Béguines*, cap. vii.
[172] *Spiritual Exercises*: Contemplation to obtain Love.

It is only within the atmosphere of such surrendered communion as this, such willed identity of purpose and desire, that those amazing dramas of the spiritual life which shine out in the history of religion, are carried through. Did we know more of the power of the Spirit and the mysterious energies of the invisible world, we should neither necessarily regard these histories with suspicion, nor set them apart as miraculous; but might see in them the working of consequence and law. Psychologists studying conversion sometimes fail to recognize this, and to allow for the full and gradual working out of the factors which conversion installs at the centre of life. They forget that it is not the initial crisis, but the steady continuous feeding of the soul on God, which alone makes those conversions bear their wondrous fruits. The life of communion which the conversion sets going, the humble and arduous year by year acceptance and using of every experience in supernatural regard: this it is which gradually converts the penitent into the saint, as a real garden is made, not by sticking in plants, but by long and unremitting cultivation of the soil.

We see this factor of a steadfast and docile communion at work in the movement of St. Paul's soul from the type of zeal which 'breathed forth fire and slaughter', to that which speaks in *Philippians* or the gentle little letter to Philemon; and again in the story of that immense but really gradual metamorphosis which turned Augustine from a sensual and conceited young don into one of the Fathers of the Church. It was such loving, continuous and surrendered communion with an infinite Light and Love found here and now, self-given to human life, which transformed St. Catherine of Genoa from a melancholy and disillusioned woman into a great mother of souls. The hours she spent in prayer, and the other hours that she spent in doing the things to which she was impelled in her prayer, were those that really mattered in her life. During her formative years, it is said that St. Catherine prayed for five or six hours a day. That is to say, one-third of her waking life was given to exclusive attention to God. Such a distribution of time, expected in a scholar or an artist, is surely not excessive in the scholar of eternal life. Thus was produced that habitual state of union with a living and beloved Reality, that rich consciousness of the supernatural world, which supported and governed her career.[173] Of such union, persisting in sickness and overwhelming griefs, a modern contemplative has said: 'As soon as my soul remembers God, it finds that He is already present there, more present to my heart than is the heart itself; in so much that recollection and union need not be achieved, but subsist at a certain level and continuously, below all the multiplicities, the labour and suffering, the very agitations of life.'[174] To the same influence and discipline we owe the maturing and maintenance at levels of self-oblivious serenity of such great souls as Elizabeth Fry, Henry Martyn, Charles de Foucauld, Elisabeth Leseur, and many other modern saints.

Nor does this inner transformation, this achievement of a stable love, joy and peace in strongest contrast with the jangled consciousness of "natural man" exhaust the possibilities of the prayer of communion as seen in great spiritual lives. These possibilities seem also to include a strange power of transcending circumstance, a certain control over health and sickness, an abnormal enhancement sometimes of physical powers of endurance, sometimes of intuitive powers of foresight and discernment of spirits. It seems as though the little creature obtained access, by way of its loving and confident surrender, to some genuine sources of power. Here we move in regions largely unexplored by us. We do not know the limits—if there are

[173] Cf. F. von Hügel: *The Mystical Element of Religion*, vol. i, cap. 4.
[174] *Journal Spirituel de Lucie-Christine*, p. 384.

limits—within which that ordinary sequence of events which we call natural can be overruled by a higher term. We have no such grasp upon the non-successive and the spaceless as would help us to make sense of the clairvoyant powers and knowledge of the future clearly displayed in some great spiritual lives. We must move carefully, and beware as much of overpressing as of hurriedly discrediting such evidence as we possess.

Nevertheless religious history does abound in examples of this enhancement of life; suggesting, even when its reports have been critically sifted, the presence of some unknown factor modifying the action of so-called natural law. The careers of St. Catherine of Siena and St. Joan of Arc are classic examples of such transcendence, but it is to be found at work in other and less startling lives. Thus we see George Fox passing untouched through a hostile crowd; the ship *Woodhouse* brought safely through her dangerous voyage by the piloting of a little company deliberately subdued to the suggestions of the Spirit.[175] We see Elizabeth Fry facing, dominating, and finally winning the criminal mob in Newgate Gaol; the Curé d'Ars, by a holy clairvoyance, reading in the souls of his penitents the secrets they dared not speak; David Livingstone alone in Africa, convinced of an invisible protection and therefore choosing unharmed the most perilous routes. We see Foucauld and Mary Slessor, because they held themselves to be 'in royal service', living for years in tropical countries under conditions of physical hardship which few Europeans could survive. These, chosen at random from a multitude of instances, seem to bear out the wonderful stories of the triumphs of Christianity in its charismatic stage; and hint the nature of those vast resources which await our discovery in the world of prayer. And we surely trace along another route the same power of the life of loving communion to subdue even the most dread aspects of the natural existence to the overruling purposes of Spirit, in that beautiful sublimation of suffering which—as in the life of Elisabeth Leseur—turns it from a sterile into a fertile thing.[176]

But this transfiguring and enhancing power, this achievement of creative life, is not experienced by these souls merely because they believe that it is possible for them to experience it: still less because they make such increase of power the object of their prayer. All this can and does only happen to them, in so far as they are deliberately orientated towards the Supernatural, not for their own sakes but for God alone; and in so far, too, as their attitude to Him is controlled by utter confidence and self-oblation, and not by anxious demand. Here the paradoxical character of the spiritual life, in which self-abandonment and self-fulfilment go hand in hand, and personal striving always frustrates itself, is most plainly asserted; and all theories of prayer which stress its 'usefulness' are most plainly condemned. Hence the pathetic failure and stultifying effects of much deliberately this-world spirituality; attempts to 'make prayer work' whether in the spheres of healing, influence, philanthropic action or moral reform; personal efforts, however well intentioned, to harness the majestic

[175] '. . . we were brought to ask counsel of the Lord and the word was from Him: "Cut through and steer your straightest course and mind nothing but Me"; unto which thing He much provoked us and caused to meet together every day, and He Himself met with us, and manifested Himself largely unto us, so that by storms we were not prevented (from meeting) above three times in all our voyage. 'Thus it was all the voyage with the faithful, who were carried far above storms and tempests, that when the ship went either to the right hand or to the left, their hands joined all as one and did direct her way; so that we have seen and said, we see the Lord leading our vessel even as it were a man leading a horse by the head, we regarding neither latitude nor longitude, but kept to our Line, which was and is our Leader, Guide and Rule'. Bowden: *History of the Society of Friends in America*, 1850, vol. i, pp. 64 *seq*. Quoted in *Christian Life, Faith and Thought*, p. 29.

[176] Elisabeth Leseur: *Journal et Pensées*.

powers of Supernature to the little purposes of man. In that true prayer of communion which is the only preparation for effective intercession, 'I love' obliterates 'I want'. Hence such a complete transference of the self's centre of interest is effected, such a realization of the Pauline 'I live, yet not I!' that it shares as a child of the family, and not as a beggar, in the riches and privileges, the powers and the duties, the 'more abundant life' of the supernatural world.

'When God,' says Brother Lawrence, 'finds a soul permeated with a living faith, He pours into it His graces and His favours plenteously; into the soul they flow like a torrent, which, after being forcibly stopped in its ordinary course, when it has found a passage, spreads with impetuosity its pent-up flood.'[177]

All sanctification, all supernatural growth and effectiveness, depend on the initial movements of self-oblivious and non-utilitarian worship, of disinterested faith and love, which opens up the soul of man to this supernatural torrent; and so convince him once for all, that all the possibilities of power, light, certitude and joy which he can realize in his prayer, are given and not self-chosen or self-induced. Moreover, this deep and gentle intercourse seems to effect a gradual sensitization of the spirit; bringing the real man or woman of prayer into a state in which the spiritual currents active below the surface of life—those contractions and expansions of the soul which are a sure guide to our spiritual state—and the secret impulsions of God, are actually felt. Such loving and disinterested prayer exerts a power over human character which is unique both in kind and degree. It may emerge from a type of devotion that is humble and even mechanical; and may at first be exercised in blind faith, with but little sense of reality. But as it develops, will and desire are gradually and inevitably transferred from lower to higher centres of interest; and the true life of the soul is anchored ever more firmly in the Eternal world to which it belongs.

'Do not ask such a soul,' says Grou, 'what it has been praying about. It does not know . . . all it knows is, that it began to pray, and continued to pray, as it pleased God; sometimes arid and sometimes consoled, sometimes consciously recollected, sometimes involuntarily distracted, but always peaceful and united to God in its ground.'[178]

The prayer of adoration alone, in its intense objectivity, could never have brought the soul to this close and intimate correspondence with God: for such correspondence involves the interweaving of each of the changing creature's successive deeds and states with the immanent Holy and Abiding, the quiet acceptance and use of each serial event of existence, as somehow mediating the presence of a deeper Reality. We cannot in any real sense have unmediated communion with Universals; but only with the particulars which embody and represent them. This truth, already seen to be the basis of incarnational and sacramental religion, is still operative in the secret life of prayer. It gives us an explanation, agreeable alike to faith and to psychology, of the fact that abstract contemplation and worship of the Godhead will not alone suffice to feed the hungry soul. It guarantees the validity of that personal and intimate type of devotion which has been so richly developed in Christianity: and endorses the profound Christian feeling that here, in the world of prayer no less than in the world of doctrine or of sacrament, God comes all the way to the soul under conditions of fullest self-giving, and offers it close communion with His Being in ways that human nature is able to understand.

[177] Brother Lawrence: *Practice of the Presence of God*, Letter II.
[178] J. N. Grou: *Manuel des Âmes Intérieures*, p. 328.

St. Teresa tells us in a well-known passage, that it was only when she gave concrete devotion to Christ priority in her spiritual life, and curbed the mystical inclination to 'reject all images' in favour of the formless contemplation of God, that 'her prayer began to be solid like a house'.[179] Diffuse awareness gave place to the actualized and loving communion of a person with a Person: an experience resting on the bed-rock of human nature, and using for supernatural ends Teresa's natural powers. This witness of a great and sane spiritual genius to the dangers of an unbalanced transcendentalism—to the need, for human creatures, of a religious Object fully given within the human sphere—really only endorses the fundamental principles of the Christian life of prayer. For the peculiar character of Christian prayer, as it emerges already within the New Testament, in the Fourth Gospel and St. Paul, is surely this profound, intimate and personal communion; this self-giving of the Infinite in ways at once ineffable yet human, carrying with them the utter satisfaction here and now of man's supernatural desire. Whatever the Fourth Evangelist may or may not tell us about history, he tells us much of that which the Primitive Church felt and knew about supernatural prayer. We see how deeply tranquil, how completely unecstatic yet full of peace and joy, is the religious experience which he describes. It moves securely within the finite scene, is expressed in symbols which the simplest can understand; yet mediates the Eternal in its entrancing loveliness and life-giving power. Here once for all, under homeliest images, we are shown all that the life of communion means for the awakened spirit; in food, nurture, guidance, and more abundant life.

'I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst . . . I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. . . . Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. . . . I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. . . . As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.'[180]

It is within this frame that the greatest saints have developed and satisfied their aptitude for God: discovering here a present Objective, at once mystical, personal and historical, which meets at every point the intimate needs and self-offerings of the finite soul. Not only so, but they insist that the reanimation of the past, the discovery of Christ as an intensely living fact in and through meditation on the Gospel story, which has always formed part of the Christian education in prayer, does quicken and enrich their supernatural life. Nor does this claim really require the elaborate psychological explanation which its modern apologists so anxiously provide. Still less need it be discredited as a pious illusion, or placed on a par with the emotional stimulus which we receive from painting or poetry. For in all such cases we have to remember that Spirit, God, is there first—was always there first, embracing past and present in His Eternal Now—and that He enters into communion with the human spirit truly and realistically along many routes, but always within the world of space and time. We, deliberately reascending the time-stream and utilizing in such meditations our historic inheritance, are simply finding an approved path along which our conditional minds can enter into that already waiting Presence. 'In the wall that encircles Paradise', says Nicolas of Cusa, 'Now and Then are one.'[181]

[179] *Life*, cap. xxiv, par. 2.
[180] John vi. 35: x. 14; xv. 4, 5, 9.
[181] *The Vision of God*, cap. 9.

The need of such a personal focus for the intimate life of prayer has been felt by all the great theistic religions; and has driven them to seek some way of actualizing that communion with and dependence on the Unseen which is so fully and beautifully given in Christian spirituality. Nor is it any part of Christian apologetic to discredit paths which so clearly lie in the direction of truth. After all, the communion of the Transcendent with the spirit of man is given, in all its kinds and degrees: and is surely far more likely to be given under forms that fall within the circle of human perception and love—even though the desired Object be imperfectly conceived—than to be discovered as the result of a precarious ascent into the Unknown.

'Oculi omnium in te sperant Domine: et tu das illis escam in tempore opportuno.

'Aperis tu manum tuam, et imples omne animal benedictione.'[182]

Thus 'we love Him because He first loved us' should be regarded as declaring a philosophic truth that extends far beyond the Christian field; covering the personal devotion of Bhakti Marga, the redemptive aspects of developed Buddhism, and the ardour of the Sūfi Saints.

'How could the love between Thee and me sever?

As the leaf of the lotus abides on the water: so Thou art my Lord, and I am Thy servant.

As the night-bird Chakor gazes all night at the moon: so Thou art my Lord, and I am Thy servant.

From the beginning until the ending of time, there is love between Thee and me; and how shall such love be extinguished?

Kabir says: "As the river enters into the ocean, so my heart touches Thee." '[183]

'O thou who are my soul's comfort in the season of sorrow,
O thou who are my spirit's treasure in the bitterness of dearth!

That which the imagination has not conceived, that which the understanding has not seen.

Visiteth my soul from thee; hence in worship I turn toward thee.'[184]

Surely these witness, though at different levels of reality and life-enhancing power, to the same human intuition of the nearness of the Supernatural to the soul; and to an asking, seeking and knocking both incited and answered by God.

[182] *Missale Romanum*: In Festo Corporis Christi.
[183] *Kabir's Poems*: Song XXXIV.
[184] *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabriz*: edited and translated by R. A. Nicholson, VI.

VIII. The Supernatural In Human Life

(*b*) Sanctification

La première leçon que nous donne la solitude c'est de nous apprendre que nous ne sommes pas seuls, mais, tout au contraire, emportés dans l'immense remous de l'œuvre divine.

Pierre Charles

Spirit and spirit, God and the creature, are not two material bodies, of which one can only be where the other is not: but on the contrary, as regards our own spirit, God's Spirit ever works in closest penetration and stimulation of our own; just as, in return, we cannot find God's Spirit simply separate from our own spirit within ourselves. Our spirit clothes and expresses His; His Spirit first creates and then sustains and stimulates our own.

F. von Hügel

Nec gratia Dei sola, nec ipse solus, sed gratia Dei cum illo.

St. Augustine

I

The study of Prayer, its very existence over against the rich wonder of the universe—still more, perhaps, the concrete facts disclosed by our own tiny practice—these things force upon the mind in most vivid form the full paradox of the spiritual life. Why do the mighty supernatural forces, why does the personal yet ineffable Reality, thus seize here and there upon certain crumbs of creation, certain human spirits, and compel them while still immersed in succession to recognize and adore the Eternal? Why does this news, delight, and demand—reaching them through things and through thoughts, revealed to them in various degrees of fullness by historical or dream-like figures, in personal or impersonal ways—require of these its tiny initiates a more or less complete surrender of will, a more or less drastic purification of mind and heart?

Perhaps the answer is to be found in the last of those three characters which M. Olier declared to be essential to the life of prayer, and to which he gave the strange name of Co-operation. For that word means that man's full relation to the Supernatural is a relation not only of patient, but also of agent. He is awakened, called, and trained, that he may work on spiritual levels with and for the purposes of God. We see the visible world filled with an endless variety of living growing creatures at every stage upon the ladder of being. Distinct yet interdependent, they act and react on one another in countless ways; and thus contribute to the glory and richness of the physical universe. Even so, we may think of the invisible world as filled with living intelligences, endless too in their variety of type and degree, their place on the ladder of life; but all acting and reacting on one another, and contributing to the richness of the glory of God. Within that world, so fully present with Nature yet distinct from it, every soul which has heard the supernatural call has a place to fill and work to do. Each is privileged and required to take a share in those labours and transformations which shall bring out the spiritual implicits of humanity. Each is to be transformed, not into a model devotee, but into a tool, a redeeming engine of the Holy; and only in so far as he accepts this exacting vocation, will the supernatural possibilities of his

own emergent spirit be realized. That spirit is to grow by the faithful practice and interweaving of two movements. By deepening, and by expanding; by costly interior transformation, and by uncalculating consecration to the redemptive purposes of Eternal Life. Through this parallel series of disciplines and efforts, present in one form or another in the life of every healthy soul, God's Spirit evokes in man's spirit that degree of likeness to the Holy of which it is capable. Here is the assigned end of human prayer; and by his co-operation in this work man performs his little part in the mighty process of incarnating the Eternal within the world of time.

This conception of human existence has haunted the minds of the saints, and achieves classic expression in the Pauline vision of the 'mystical Body of Christ'. A deep intuition prompts these saints to labours, renunciations and sufferings which seem meaningless to the 'natural' man; but by which they are sure that genuine work is done. Though social Christianity is far from telling all the truth about the supernatural life, and must never be allowed to discredit the high calling to an exclusive adoration and contemplation of God, nevertheless no saint—even the loneliest—is merely a self-cultivator. He is always self-given to some objective beyond the boundary of his own soul, and lives because of this concentration upon spirit a wider, richer and more creative—not a more aloof and constricted—life than other men. Sanctification means the universalizing of the creature's will and love; their dedication to the interests of Reality. Thus, if the prayer of adoration and communion brings man to an ever deeper consciousness of his own faulty nature—obliges him to work with God in the supernaturalizing of his own self-hood by the secret labours of self-conquest—this call to purgation of character is only the first point in the real sanctifying of personality. Sooner or later he will realize that this reformation is being effected for a purpose; in order that he may co-operate in the workings of the Supernatural on and in other souls.

The whole history of religious experience, as seen in the noblest spiritual personalities, makes it plain that the state of communion between the soul and the Transcendent Other is not in this life an end in itself; nor maintained for the sake of the rapturous joys which may accompany it. It is maintained in order that the little creature, through this faithful intercourse, may be woven into the organism by which the Eternal Spirit acts within the historic scene. Each soul completely given over to the interests of God is, in little, such an organism, more or less powerful, according to the purity and intensity of its invisible attachments. The society of all such souls—deeply interconnected, and devoted to the interests of one indwelling Life—is a great organism of many cells; a true 'mystical body' of the incarnate Reality.

Here we surely touch the deepest truth known to us concerning the mystery of man's supernatural life: his redemptive and creative power. We see that the very existence of this power requires of the awakened soul, if it is to grow to its full stature, not only penitence but also intercessory action: and not only an individual, but also a social relation with the supernatural world. That soul has a double obligation; to a total and solitary response to God, however felt, and to a share in the common life and mutual service of the Body which His Spirit indwells within the temporal world. Hence not only 'Prayer' but also 'Church'—not only secret adoration, but also corporate worship—is necessary to the full expression of its life. The invisible, but most actual, incorporation of all such awakened souls in one Supernatural Society embracing life and death, past and present, in its span: this is what Christianity means by the Communion of Saints. Of that vast Supernatural Society, with its countless types of soul and of vocation—active, intellectual, mystical, speculative, intercessory,

sacrificial—co-operating for one great end, the visible Church is or should be a sacramental expression. That Church draws vitality and spiritual wisdom from many sources. It is subject to succession, and partakes of the frailty and stupidity of men. Yet so deeply is it tinctured with Eternity and here, among all the hoarded and uncriticized accumulations of symbols, rite and story, men of good will can hardly miss the savour of the Ultimate. The Church, then, is an effectual sign of the embodiment of the Supernatural in a social organism; and this although the greatest single achievements of that Supernatural, man's purest acts of heroic love, may often be found outside its walls.

Thus the co-operation with the Eternal to which the awakened spirit of man is called can be thought of under three heads: Personal Transformation, Intercession, Incorporation. Through the constant interaction of these three factors, the differing contributions made by each different soul to each, the Communion of Saints is created, maintained, and does its work. One character runs through all three, everywhere latent, but for the Christian theist patent; namely, the principle of costly redemption. The first point has as its assigned end the sanctifying of character, the production of a full-grown, fully supernaturalized, creative personality capable of redeeming work. Here the human will co-operates with the energy of God in the work of transmuting human nature; re-moulding the plastic psyche nearer to the heart's desire. On the degree in which this transmutation is effected in each individual depends the worth of his or her spiritual work; the contribution made by it to the corporate life. Yet we observe that this secret co-operation of will and grace is seldom if ever effected in isolation. The supporting love and will of his fellows—intercession: the discipline and shelter of an institution and the tradition which it conserves—Church: these, in some form or degree, seem essential factors in the fullest transfiguration of man. Where they are apparently absent—e.g. the first in the emergence of a lonely spiritual genius such as Jacob Boehme or William Blake, the second in such unchurched sanctity as that of George Fox—careful inspection will commonly reveal their remote influence. The most independent, even the most illiterate, saint cannot elude all contact with those truths which the Church exists to proclaim. Thus Boehme, Blake, the early Quakers, were all fed not only by the Scriptures, but by mystical writers depending on Catholic tradition: whilst no believer in the effectiveness of spiritual action, the reality of that wide-spreading love which is poured out in intercessory prayer, can limit its possible sphere of influence to souls who wittingly receive its gifts.

We must hold, then, that God, the Supernatural, acts through personality and through history, from without and from within, by external influence and by personal striving, in the production of His Saints. What is a Saint? A particular individual completely redeemed from self-occupation; who, because of this, is able to embody and radiate a measure of Eternal Life. His whole life, personal, social, intellectual, mystical, is lived in supernatural regard. What is he for? To help, save, and enlighten by his loving actions and contemplations; to oppose in one way or another, by suffering, prayer and work upon heroic levels of love and self-oblation, the mysterious downward drag within the world which we call sin. He is a tool of the Supernatural, a 'chosen vessel', of the redeeming, transforming, creative love of God.

All this is part of the widely various work of intercession: which is quite misunderstood by us if we limit it to acts of prayer for the needs of other men. We may expect to find this work being done by many different types of soul, from the most naïve to the most subtle, both consciously and unconsciously, and in many

different ways and degrees. It will often be done in ways which our clumsy analyses fail to recognize as 'religious'; and by souls not yet continuously self-devoted, but driven by a sudden generous impulse above their average level of life. Thus even one heroic self-obvious act, one tiny work of love, one cup of cold water given with eagerness, one passionate longing to comfort or save, does to that extent incarnate the supernatural; and contributes to the slow triumph of Spirit over animal self-interest. That triumph is prepared in the laboratory as well as in the cloister; by the artist and the adventurer as well as the 'religious,' man. Every heroic devotion to beauty, truth, goodness, every ungrudging sacrifice, is a crucifixion of self-interest, and thus lies in the direction of sanctity; and wherever we find sanctity we find the transforming act of God, of supernature, upon the creature, irrespective of that creature's dogmatic belief. All Saints, that 'glorious touching Company', will doubtless include many whom the world classed among its irreligious men. Because of 'sin', because of that strange element within the world which opposes God, and perverts His gifts, all such working of the Supernatural in human life must involve suffering and tension. Real temptation, struggle, darkness, is involved in every genuine transcendence of the 'natural man'. Yet since this transcendence is the very condition of the fulfilment of personality, it brings even through effort a real and vivid joy, an ever-deepening peace and harmony, to the soul that undertakes it.

These points, in so far as they are true of the individual, are also true of that Supernatural Society of which the regenerated spirit is a unit, a cell. It too is there to embody the Eternal ever more perfectly and variously in its widely various members; and thus to become an agent of the saving and redeeming power of God. It too remains completely a part of history and of humanity: subject to frailty, fed by tradition, called to a difficult interweaving of the present and the past. It too works by the transformation of sensible material to spiritual purpose. Yet in all its visible expressions and historical developments it looks beyond the sensual and historical world. It too must be holy in essence, universe in spirit; not for its own sake, but in order that the Supernatural may have an unimpeded channel through those many and various members of which it is made.

Individual and group, then, are called, not to a rejection of the sense-world, but to its transmutation; to permeate the greatest number of successive acts, the widest area of relationships, with the living Spirit of the Infinite. Both church and soul retreat from the world only that they may in some way return to it. They must balance recollection by action, asceticism by love. The raw material to be supernaturalized is mostly found in the common ways of life. But the power of dealing with that raw material, the deep certitude in which such dealing becomes possible—these are only fully achieved in those periods of exclusive attention to God in which the growing spirit, whether alone or with its fellows, turns from succession and breathes the bracing atmosphere of the Eternal World.

II

The transforming of character, sanctification: this is for the individual the first point of that process which enthrones the Supernatural at the heart of existence. No religion has passed from idea to actuality which does not incite to this reforming and reharmonizing of the plastic human psyche in accordance with the implicits of the spiritual life. The need of such remaking has been clear to all great moral teachers. Looking at man as he is, and not merely at the inconsistent diagrams of him offered by biology, psychology, and dogmatic theology, these have mostly seen, as St. Paul saw, two distinct strivings in him. The physical life-force is ever striving to fulfil

itself. The spiritual impulse, still rudimentary save in exceptional natures, is seeking contacts with the supernatural world. With his emergent affinity for God, man is an animal still. Where the first striving triumphs completely, its assigned end is the full development of the natural man; the perfection of his this-world adjustments. Where the second triumphs completely, its assigned end is the self's real sanctification; though not necessarily the production of anything which the official mind would recognize as a saint. The first type is bent towards an ever more adequate response to the world of particulars. Its interests, however legitimate and wholesome, are those of planetary life. The second is more and more dominated by the strange human thirst for universals, and sense of their commanding claim. Its true focus of interest lies beyond, although within, the experienced world. Wittingly or unwittingly, it aims at God.

That view of human psychology which is gradually gaining acceptance, helps us to place what we know of man's spiritual craving and growth in relation with the rest of his being. This view regards the essence of our psychic life as an energy, a life-force, informed by purpose. It allows us to look upon every soul as an undeveloped entity; not yet wholly emancipated from the animal instincts which have conditioned its past, but capable of progress, of growth in real being—those developments which we call character and personality. It allows us to suppose that the purposive action which prevails right through the animal world and explains its behaviour, in some degree conditions and spiritual life too; and that here as there, this means a total direction of the organism towards the required end, and can call all the faculties of the self to its service. In fact, the most recent psychology enthrones the Will once more in the position which St. Augustine gave to it: that of primacy in the mental and spiritual life. Will is character in action; and sanctity, which is simply character transformed upon supernatural levels, means above all else the complete and unreserved collaborations of this energetic will with the active grace of God.

The human and divine elements, as Aquinas insisted, rise and fall together. Neither a mere limp surrender to the supernatural power, nor a self-dependent striving—neither Quietism nor Activism—will alone suffice for the transforming of man. A delicate harmony must be established between the moulding action of the Divine creativity and the costly deliberate effort of the soul. The little human creature is required, as a condition of growth, to work in its tiny way with the supernatural determinant; deliberately setting its active will in that direction. This it will tend to do, not merely by a desire, a general intention; but by a series of purposive acts and willingly accepted disciplines, seldom well understood in their origin by those who undertake them, but having as their term a complete and stable redirection of interest and re-education of the unconscious mind. That redirection and re-education is the essence of the Pauline change from the 'carnally minded' to the 'spiritually minded' man.[185] Here, in his transcendence of nature, man utilizes a method deeply implanted in nature: for 'the modes of purposive striving form a continuously graded series, from the pursuit of its prey by the Amœba to the moral struggles of Man'. The series begins in 'the vague almost undifferentiated striving of the animalcule in pursuit of his prey' and passes through the stage of 'strivings prompted by desire for instinctive goals' to the 'striving regulated in the choice of goals and means by the desire to realize an ideal of character and conduct'.[186]

[185] Romans viii. 2-9.
[186] McDougall: *An Outline of Psychology*, p. 248.

Such an ideal means for the consciously religious nature, a recognition of the claim and the attraction of a realized Perfection drawing the soul 'from the unreal to the real'; a recognition which is the very essence of the life of prayer. Now we find at every level, that the success of the creature's deliberate striving is proportionate: first, to the calm clearness with which the goal is realized and gazed on. Next, to the eager steady trust in its possible attainment. Last and chiefly, to the generous and self-giving ardour with which it is pursued. These conditions apply equally, whether the chosen aim be an earthly or heavenly love; a natural, intellectual or spiritual achievement. Faith, Hope and Charity—to give these states of soul their traditional names—remain the essential conditions under which man can transcend himself; the dispositions in which alone he can bear the stresses and make the sacrifices, which are involved in every increase in his knowledge of Reality. Not anxious conflicts, but a self-forgetting and all-enduring enthusiasm best draw him on; whether his assigned end be that of the discoverer, the artist, or the saint.

Formal religion has always declared that the two 'instruments of perfection' which are in themselves enough to supernaturalize human personality, are Prayer and Mortification. By this it means on the one hand an ever greater self-opening and tendence towards the Eternal, that asking, seeking and knocking which cannot fail in their effect; and on the other hand an ever greater control of our instinctive reactions to the temporal. It is another way of stating the essential co-operation of will and grace in the spiritualizing of man.

'In those two duties, therefore, of mortification and prayer, all good is comprehended; for by the exercise of mortification those two general most deadly enemies of our souls, self-love and pride, are combated and subdued, to wit, by the means of those two fundamental Christian virtues of divine charity and humility. And prayer, exercised in virtue of these two, will, both by way of impetration obtain, and also with a direct efficiency ingraft, a new divine principle and nature in us, which is the Divine Spirit; which will become a new life unto us, and the very soul of our souls.'[187]

The great masters of asceticism insist that this mortifying action is to be directed only to the affections and desires—as psychology would say, to the conative life—for that which must be changed is the powerful set of the self's interest and striving. St. Augustine described the whole process with precision when he defined virtue as 'an ordering of love'; and thus by implication declared sin to be the disordered, ill-directed action of that same desire. Love must be set in order, so that the strongest power of our nature, the true cause of all we do, may be rescued from self-squandering on unreal and fleeting objects, self-regarding ends, and may be concentrated on 'one only object which is God.'[188]

The control of unruly and self-regarding instincts—in other words, moralized behaviour—though not in itself supernatural, is therefore an essential preliminary of supernatural life. It marks the first movement towards a universalized existence, by opposing at its source the downward drag of 'sin'.

'And what sin is, we have said already; namely to desire or will anything otherwise than the One Perfect Good and the One Eternal Will, and apart from and contrary to them, or to wish to have a will of one's own. And what is done of sin, such as lies, fraud, injustice, treachery, and all iniquity, in short all that we call sin, cometh hence,

[187] Augustine Baker: *Holy Wisdom*, p. 197.
[188] Augustine Baker: *Holy Wisdom*, p. 240.

that man hath another will than God and the True Good; for were there no will but the One Will, no sin could ever be committed.'[189]

This view of sin shows us why real contrition is a supernatural state. It is evoked by measuring ourselves not against natural and human, but against more-than-human standards; by seeing the extent in which spirit, our essential reality, is degraded, smirched, and deflected from its true business, cut off from its true life by all loveless and self-interested thoughts and deeds. We may perhaps think of the human spirit as possessing, alone among the various inhabitants of this planet, a certain latent capacity for continuing the line of creation beyond nature, to more than nature. 'Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts shall have no rest save in Thee.' This line of growth proceeds from a narrow and self-regarding individualism controlled by the animal impulses to self-preservation, self-assertion and self-satisfaction, towards the production of a full, rich, warm, self-forgetful personality capable of receiving God and hence able to share His creative work. Incarnational religion points to this, as the true function of the human spirit in the economy of the spiritual universe; and the saint is the human spirit who has fully grown up to that standard, by the perfection of his adoring and courageous responses to his environment, God.

'The soul,' says Grou, 'has reached the highest degree of sanctity when, having become perfectly simple, she sees God only in all things, loves God only in all things, and has no interests but His interests.'[190]

This statement does not imply an ever-narrowing concentration on the materials of piety; but an everwidening, more disinterested, more joyous communion with every aspect of the natural and supernatural world. Thus when Walter Hilton and mystics of his school speak of man's inner growth as the abolition of the 'image of sin' and the reforming of the 'image of God',[191] they seem to be describing a costly organic process which does truly happen to those in whom the supernatural sense is active: the transformation of the individual outlook into the universal outlook, the complete surrender of man's personal striving to the overruling Will of God, and thus the linking up of all the successive acts of daily life with the Abiding. For the natural man moralized behaviour is often hard; because it involves perpetual will-decisions in opposition to the instinctive drive. For the saint it has ceased to be hard, because that instinctive drive has been re-directed at the source.

'La guerra è terminate
de le virtú battaglia
de la mente travaglia
cosa nulla contende.'[192]

The yoke is now easy and the burden light; for the self's striving is no longer merely individual. It gathers power from its mergence in the total and tranquil operation of the Divine creativity. 'The Spirit helpeth our infirmities.' 'Create and make in us new and contrite hearts', is equivalent to a prayer for this profound supernaturalizing of personality.

Psychology can thus tell part of the story of sanctification: in terms first of the control and redirection of our animal strivings and desires, and next of the enhancement of our spiritual correspondence. In other words, it can tell us something of what

[189] *Theologia Germanica*, cap. 43.
[190] *Manuel des Âmes Intérieures*, p. 330.
[191] Cf. Hilton: *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. II.
[192] Jacopone da Todi, Lauda XCI.

happens to the human psyche through mortification and prayer. It may reasonably regard the whole process from its own angle; as a further stage, sometimes and unequally achieved, in that psyche's development. But doing this, it only tells half the story. It describes an ethical and spiritual evolution; not a supernatural transmutation. For that which sets the production of sanctity aside from all other expansions of man's plastic nature, all other achievements of personal status, is the fact that it cannot be described in terms of development alone. Behind the whole region analysed by psychology, and quite unreachable by psychology, is God; indwelling the soul that He transcends. That is what the mystics, in their confusing spatial language, mean by its 'ground'. It is in the soul's ground that sanctity is prepared: and from this ground, where the creature inheres in the Changeless, that the invitations and impulsions, the anguish and blessedness come, which prepare and mature man's spiritual life.

'This truly,' says Tauler, 'is much more God's Dwelling-place than heaven or man. A man, who verily desires to enter in, will surely find God here, and himself simply in God, for God never separates Himself from this ground. God will be present with him, and he will find and enjoy eternity here. There is no past nor present here; and no created light can reach unto or shine into this divine ground; for here only is the Dwelling-place of God and His sanctuary.'[193]

This profound imbeddedness of the little human spirit in the Divine and Infinite Spirit is known to us only in naïve intuition; or in that mystical experience which is the developed form of such naïve intuition. Yet all the symbols or hints by which we try to express it, here point beyond themselves to the primal reality of our life; 'more inward than our most inward and higher than our highest'.[194] The interpenetration of spirit with spirit which is the basis of all that is perdurable in human friendship and love, is but a faint image of this interpenetration of the Spirit of God and the created spirit; the cause and support of all growth towards the supernatural life. Where that union of Spirit and spirit is perfected, we have sanctity; and the degree of such union achieved by any one soul, is the degree of this soul's sanctification. God wills that union all the time; the generous response of the creature conditions its achievement.

We see then that M. Olier was right when he declared co-operation between the soul and the Eternal to be the perfection of prayer; and that we shall make no sense of the story of human sanctification, unless we acknowledge the priority for it of the distinct and personal action of God, the Changeless, upon the changeful, fluid personality of man. For it means the turning over of the finite self, every scrap of it, in utter trust and unlimited self-giving, to the total invasion of that Holy Spirit who is Lord and Giver of its life. No unpacking and re-ordering of the soul's innate possessions, no development of its latent possibilities, will here meet the case. The mighty factor which theology calls grace, the incitement and aid of a wholly other order than the human, is required if the specific and unearthly loveliness of the supernatural personality is to be brought forth within the world of time. The play of supernatural forces on and in the soul is rich and complex. In their reality they escape us; but the little we are able to apprehend must be actualized by us as a fresh invasion from the Transcendent Holiness beyond our radius, not only as an upspringing of Spirit from within, if we are to retain and feed our filial and creaturely sense. Those who see in the religious facts of incarnational and sacramental religion a witness to the dealings

[193] *The Inner Way*, p. 98.
[194] St. Augustine: *Confessions*, Bk. III, cap. 6.

of Supreme Reality with its little creatures, can hardly refuse to bring this further instance of the creative action of the Supernatural into the scheme.

So the demand of the Ultimate on the tiny human self immersed in history seems to be on one hand a demand for full, generous and heroic action, deliberate striving, completeness of life; and on the other, for the humble acknowledgement that the incitement to this action and food of this life come from beyond the radius of the soul. A delicate balance must be found and maintained between the creature's surrender to those mighty energies which would transform and use it, and its own initiative, its active, willed response. The Teresian collaboration between Martha and Mary is everywhere needed.[195] As it advances, the soul becomes ever more flexible, more able to combine the uncalculating, genial life of service with a secret and austere renunciation; and the line between God's impulse and its own willed and generous action grows ever thinner, until at last a stable union between spirit and Spirit is achieved.

All this will be done by different spirits in an infinity of different ways; for sanctity, human self-giving to the purposes of the Holy, means the gradual and at last perfect supernaturalizing of the special material offered to any one soul, not rigid conformity to a pious convention, or the slavish imitation of a type. Included in this material are the simple daily deeds of every man and woman of good will, the whole gamut of human sufferings and renunciations, lonely study and social relationships. Thus Christ more perfectly discloses His divine character by sitting at meals with sinners—being so wide, genial, strong and pure, that He can take all human acts within His span—than by pursuing the traditional methods of ascetic saintliness.

The Christian saints have all partaken of this lovely freedom; their peculiar charm, their variousness and effectiveness, depend largely on the degree in which they avoid all strain and rigorousness, all self-conscious correctness, and give with a generous simplicity just that which they have and are. For all descriptions of sanctity are accounts of the loving reaction of a human factor which is never twice the same to a Divine factor which is always the same; but always, in its richness, exceeds the capacity of any one soul. Each soul is personal and distinct; that which it has to offer, and is able to do, will be its own. There is no such thing as one 'saintly type'. Therefore we do not discredit one by pointing out that he is not like another: and even the most apparently bizarre or 'morbid' vocation—St. Simeon Stylites on his pillar, Santa Fina on her wooden board—need not be too hurriedly condemned. Aquinas can be skilled philosopher and enraptured mystic; Francis of Assisi can be poet and penitent, troubadour and servant of the lepers; Lawrence can serve God in the kitchen and the wine-barge, and come from these homely duties to the skilled direction of souls. Santa Zita is a general servant; Margaret of Scotland is a queen. Julian of Norwich does her enduring work in the cell of an anchoress; Marie de l'Incarnation goes as a pioneer to the New World. And, in the records of modern sanctity, the Abbé Huvelin can radiate the Supernatural from a Paris confessional; his convert, Foucauld, from a lonely hut in the Sahara. Cardinal Mercier can equally manifest its power on homely and on heroic levels, in the spheres of pastoral, intellectual and political action; whilst Elisabeth Leseur gives us a perfect example of the sanctification, the universalizing of the particular life—so apparently narrow, yet so richly fertile—to which she was called.

[195] Cf. *The Interior Castle*, Seventh Habitation, cap. iv.

'I resolve,' she says in her Journal, 'to sanctify my intellectual work by giving to it a supernatural intention, performing it humbly, without personal preoccupation, for the sake of other souls.' And again, 'I only desire one thing—the accomplishment of Thy Will in me and through me; and I pursue, and desire more and more to pursue, one end alone: the gaining of Thy greater glory through the realization of Thy design for me.'[196]

Hence those desires, strivings and adjustments, those inward battles and surrenders, through which the pressure of the Holy is felt and actualized by men—the discovery that every gift of new light requires an answering movement of self-spending love—all this will not be confined to some special territory marked out as the domain of 'religion' or of 'inner life'. It will be experienced, as all the great realities of our existence are experienced, on our own humble level and in our own humble way. That is, within history, and on the plane of sense; no less than beyond history, and on the plane of spirit. God will then be felt by His awakened creature, inciting and helping the perfect performance of all mental or manual work; and not only as present in the times of solitary communion which support and explain that work. Nothing less than this integration in man of the natural and the transcendental, this supernaturalizing of the chain-like events of daily life, 'each single act, each single moment, joined directly to God—Himself not a chain, but one Great Simultaneity',[197] can, it seems to me, make Reality homely to us; whilst fully safeguarding its overwhelming mystery, distinctness and perfection, the profound reaches of Eternal Life ever hidden from the creature's furthest gaze. This means the lovely balance of detachment and attachment; detachment from all this-world demands and entanglements, but attachment to all this-world duties and self-spending loves. It means retreats and returns, prayer and work; that easy swinging of the soul between the Unseen and the Seen, which maintains within history its relation with That which transcends history and is in one form or another the very secret of Christianity, the crown of a fully harmonized life. It means finding in the particular the presence and the appeal of the Universal; and thus moving ever more and more towards that universalizing of all love and of all life, which is called union with God.

All the great presentations of achieved saintliness witness in various ways to this richly inclusive ideal. Artists have again and again captured and shown its living peacefulness; its combined character of devotion and devotedness, quietude and zest. Thus in Sebastiano del Piombo's lovely painting of 'St. Jerome in his Study,'[198] what we see is just a patient scholar, utterly lost in his work and therefore happy in it; yet with an outlook on a wide and lovely landscape. On the edge of his desk stands a crucifix; so placed, that when he raises his eyes to the landscape he must look at the Crucified too, and the most touchingly human of all self-givings of the Supernatural, the most inexorable of its demands on the love and trust of men, is brought into closest union with the natural scene. Concentrated as he is on the study of God's supreme revelation within history; yet the saint's protective, loving influence seems to radiate without effort to all his smaller or untamed relations—the quail walking about the floor in perfect security and confidence, almost within snapping distance of the peacefully snoozing lion. Nothing of him seems to be rusting; nothing is in conflict; nothing is turned inwards, to be used for his own sake. He has objectives for adoration, for homely compassion, and for thought. We feel that St Jerome is in full

[196] *Journal et Pensées*, pp. 161, 197.
[197] F. von Hügel: *Selected Letters*, p. 287.
[198] National Gallery, London.

and willing contact with all the levels and contingencies of life; all the bracing disciplines and frictions of ordinary existence, from the care of his monks and his animals to the exacting demands of textual research. He has varied and ample material for the exercise of the sacrificial will. Yet all is permeated by such an atmosphere, such a quietude of the spirit, as transmute these contingencies into sacraments of the Real.

Then balance that picture—as we must, if we are to understand it—with those other pictures of 'St. Jerome in the Desert', which show us the inevitable times of stress and solitude, when the saint must turn from the contingent and face the bare actualities of God and his own soul. There he is, in penitence—that is to say, deeply conscious of his inherent unworthiness, his creaturely imperfection—and measuring that creaturely imperfection, that nothingness, against his vision and his love. As unguessed and ever deeper reaches of the Supernatural are disclosed to that loving, awestruck vision; so must this abasement of the creature over against the Holy increase. His creative work, his spiritual authority, his kindly civilizing influence, his peaceful acceptance of life, all have their origin here. Without that meek recourse to the Unchanging Perfect, that perpetual rediscovery of his own small status, he might have been a doctor, but never a saint.

III

This saint, this more or less completely love controlled and irradiated creature, cannot be thought of as existing merely for his own sake. He only has meaning in so far as he is in some way creative; and thus becomes a channel through which God, the Abiding Perfect, acts within the successive world. This supernatural action, this ceaseless divine creativity, is still mainly uncomprehended by us. The 'tranquil operations of perpetual Providence' may be dimly recognized in particular expressions and effects. We fail to realize these expressions and effects as glimpses of a vast and hidden order; tiny ripples that witness to the subtle forces and interacting currents of the Sea Pacific in which we are immersed. Those glimpses warn us that our world will lack richness and meaning if we forget the unmeasured powers which lie beyond the fragmentary universe disclosed by science, and exclude supernatural causation from our theory of human life. And it is in the sphere of supernatural causation that we must look for the significance of the saints.

Reports of experiences and adventures which remind us of our mysterious situation, and cannot be squared with 'common sense', appear again and again in the history of religion, and in accounts of spiritual action outside the organized field. They all point to unrealized possibilities in human nature; and suggest the vast extent to which personality can stretch beyond the apparent confines of the animal, the interdependence of all spirits, the personal yet co-operative character of all spiritual life. These reports oblige us to believe that human souls are, in certain circumstances, open to each other's moulding influence and loving regard; and that the spiritual development of man is largely effected by God through such mutual influence—an influence, which transcends spatial limitations, and perhaps can even cross the chasm which seems to separate the 'living' from the 'dead'. In some this sympathetic contact reaches the conscious level; and, by its energy of love and pity, enters into, knows and shares, the secret griefs, needs, temptations and destinies of those to whom its help is sent. Thus contemporary witnesses describe St. Catherine of Siena as vividly aware of the sins, troubles and necessities of her absent sons, and drawing back with invisible cords those wanderers who had once come within her

sphere of influence.[199] Telepathic and clairvoyant ability of the same kind is claimed on good evidence for George Fox:[200] and such modern saints as the Curé d'Ars and Abbé Huvelin seem to have possessed a supernormal power of entering and reading souls.[201] Here however we move on the fringe-regions of psychology, where little that is precise is yet known. Such scattered facts as are available should only induce in us a humble suspension of judgment as to the limits of human faculty and possible interaction between souls.

If then we allow that God, the Supernatural, is ever at work upon human personality through the distinct yet deeply connected spirits of those men and women whom He creates and indwells: we may perhaps think of the saints as individuals who are so perfectly self-given to His purpose, that here in their 'intercessory action' immanent Spirit works most freely and with power. And in intercession as a whole we have the simplest example provided by the general religious life, of a vast principle which is yet largely unexplored by us. It is the principle, that man's emergent will and energy can join itself to, and work with, the supernatural forces for the accomplishment of the work of God: sometimes for this purpose even entering into successful conflict with the energies of the 'natural world'. Here the little human creature, in virtue of its mysterious power of sublimation, can use every act and intuition, every sacrifice, disability and pain for the purposes of the Eternal. Yet, so doing, it can and will come to feel more and more that all this is but a drop of water as against the ocean of supernatural power in which we live and move; and that the mercy and generosity of the redeeming saint who gladly takes the burden of another's sin, is only a hint, a microscopic expression of those saving and supernaturalizing forces which are begotten of the very essence of Reality.

Hence intercession in its widest and deepest sense is the true business of sanctity; and emerges in some way or degree in all those lives and separate acts which lie in the direction of the Holy. It completes, with Adoration and Communion, the triune life of prayer; and as that life of prayer develops, so do these its three great constituents fuse into one loving act of communion which redeems while it adores and adores while it redeems. But such adoring intercessory action cannot be limited to overtly religious desires and deeds. Since every act and thought of its members affects the whole spiritual society, there is hardly any mental or bodily action which cannot by intention gain or lose intercessory worth.

'All that you do,' says Cardinal Mercier, 'for good or for evil, either benefits or damages the whole society of souls . . . the humblest of you all, by your degree of virtue, and by the work that you are called to do even in the most obscure situation, makes his contribution to the general sanctification of the Church.'[202]

The great surge of cleansing and compelling life we call 'grace' takes and uses these men and women. Lifting them from concentration on the life of nature, it teaches them each in their own way and degree—and often in terms unconnected with theology—the supreme supernatural secret of heroic and redeeming love. As the longing for personal purification and harmony points to a deep need in the human creature, an implicit knowledge of its half-achieved status and spiritual call; so the longing to do in some way this redemptive work—distinctive of all the greatest

[199] E. Gardner: *St. Catherine of Siena*, caps. v and x.
[200] Cf. R. Knight: *The Founder of Quakerism*, Pt. 2.
[201] A. Germain: *Le Bienheureux J. B. Vianney*, p. 127, and H. Brémond: *Histoire Littéraire*, vol. iii, p. 591.
[202] *Lettre sur L'Unité Catholique*, mai 1922. Quoted in *Irénikon—Collection* No. 3, 1927.

souls—surely points to a fundamental character of the supernatural life in man. It is given a place in every great religion. Thus for Islam, the right of intercession vests in the Prophet alone, but is claimed by the Sūfi saints as part of their spiritual inheritance from him:[203] whilst the Buddhist Path of Holiness, which has as its first stage personal salvation, leads through enlightenment to the achievement of redemptive power. Doubtless this redeeming impulse is, and will be, worked out in many ways and at many different levels. The great intercessory action of the whole Supernatural Society, whether it be still within the physical world or beyond (so touchingly acknowledged in the invocation of the Saints) includes all the diverse responses to God, to Supernature, all the aspirations, all the sacrifices made by every type of soul. Both adoration and supplication, both love and renunciation, accepted suffering as well as devoted action, enter into this; and, in religious language, 'prevail with God'.

Physical and mental labour, no less than spiritual labour, can therefore become the vehicles of spiritual effectiveness: for the worth of intercession abides, not in the specific things which it can and does do for man, but in the unimpeded channel offered by its loving intention to the transforming Divine love and will. There is included in its work that strange power of one spirit to penetrate, illuminate, support and rescue other spirits, through which so much of the spiritual work of the world seems to be done; the more awful privilege of redemptive suffering, as it appears again and again in the lives of the saints; the total dedication of the contemplative, redressing in adoration the downward trend of our largely self-interested world; the strong out-streaming prayer of the cloistered nun, given for the general need. Not only these, but the scientists' costly battle with disease; the heroic reformer's struggle for social purity; the joyful endurance of physical pain and weakness which makes many a sick-bed into a radiant centre of spiritual power. By each such act and life the tiny human creature, if only for a moment, contributes to that spiritualizing of the natural order which 'takes away the sin of the world'.

'I believe,' says Elisabeth Leseur, 'that there circulates among all souls, those here below, those who are being purified, and those who have achieved the true Life, a vast and ceaseless stream made of the sufferings, the merits, and the love of all those souls: and that even our smallest pains, our least efforts can, through the divine action, reach other souls both near and distant, and bring to them light, peace and holiness.'[204]

All this must inevitably take place at a certain cost to the creature; for here the physical and mental vehicle is wrested from its normal purpose, endures fresh strains, and serves the purposes of another level of life. Much that goes to make full natural life may be sacrificed; ease and liberty, family happiness, health. Nor are the spiritual consolations of the sort which admiring outsiders often suppose. Creative and redemptive prayer, in which the human creature seems to advance to the very fringe of personality and act in dimly understood co-operation with another power, has never been regarded by those called to it as a succession of interior delights. By their universal testimony it is often full of pain, bitterness and tension; though always proceeding from a spirit which is utterly at peace. For it carries a heavy burden, but carries it with joy.

[203] R. A. Nicholson: *The Idea of Personality in Sūfism*, p. 65.
[204] *Journal et Pensées*, p. 317.

There is a drawing by Eric Gill of the Agony in Gethsemane,[205] which presents in one poignant scene the very essence of such an intercessory life. In the foreground three drowsy, earthy figures sit huddled in their cloaks in the thick darkness; comfortably somnolent, wholly insensitive to that which is being endured on their behalf. Beyond them, the prostrate figure of the agonized Redeemer lies bathed in a white celestial light which He does not see. By His costly act of immolation, He has completely entered the supernatural world. Beside Him in that changeless light, an angel holds the dark but radiant chalice of redemptive suffering; the 'cup of salvation' willingly accepted from God for other men. In their lesser degrees and ways, the intercessory saints have all sought to take their part in this supernatural action. The steadfast pressure of God, felt at different levels right through creation, finds through them a special path of discharge. Because of their burning love and limitless compassion, they have become tools of the Divine Creativity; and this in the most real and concrete sense.

Thus the prayers, tears, and secret sufferings of St. Monica avail more for St. Augustine than all his anxious studies and fervent search. His sanctification is the work of her redemptive love.[206] Thus St. Francis of Assisi, as he enters more deeply into his supernatural vocation, knows that behind the joy and expansion, the apparent simplicity of his message and life, lies the mysterious relationship with Reality which at last impressed upon his body the signature of the Cross. Thus St. Catherine of Siena, a young and untaught woman, declares that she is sent into the world 'to taste and devour souls'.[207] She awakens the sense of the supernatural, sets up the standard of Reality, wherever she appears; effects thousands of conversions in her thirty years of life, and soothes and rescues sinners by taking on herself the burden of their sins. At last, worn out by the intensity of her saving labours, which try to the utmost both her body and her soul,[208] she dies 'merry and joyous'—regretting only that she has not reverenced yet more deeply the sweet and glorious privileges of creative pain.[209] Thus the Curé d'Ars, always ailing and tortured by insomnia, offers his sufferings for the good of his parishioners and penitents, and in defiance of physical weakness accomplishes his astonishing work.[210] Thus David Brainerd, the saintly Evangelical leader, when first filled with the light and love of the mystic vision 'felt at the same time an exceeding tenderness most fervent towards all mankind'. 'God enabled me so to agonize in prayer that . . . my soul was drawn out very much for the world: I grasped for multitudes of souls.'[211]

In their fullness such dispositions as these, and such results, are doubtless the privilege of the saints. Yet they show how close and real is the interlocking of all human spirits; how far reaching the soul's force and responsibility. They suggest that we stand as it were on the verge of a world of supernatural action, and are in touch with powers of which the full span cannot be conceived by us: powers most truly

[205] In *The Passion*, published at the Golden Cockerel Press, 1926.
[206] St. Augustine: *Confessions*, Bk. III, caps, 11 and 12.
[207] E. Gardner: *St. Catherine of Siena*, p. 214.
[208] 'Her prayers were of such intensity', says an eye-witness, 'that one hour of prayer more consumed that poor little body than two days upon the rack would have done another.' Quoted by Gardner, op. cit., p. 333.
[209] Op. cit., pp. 85, 214, 349, etc.
[210] Germain: *Le Bienheureux J. B. Vianney*, p. 133.
[211] Jonathan Edwards: *An Account of the Life of David Brainerd*, quoted by C. E. Padwick: *Henry Martyn*, p. 86.

given by God to the spirit of man, a world in which creation on spiritual levels can go forward; a world of which the limitations have not been seen by any human soul.

When we reflect on these things, their steady exhibition throughout history, their perpetual emergence wherever man's love and man's religion transcend the self-regarding stage and anchor themselves upon God, we are driven towards the view that in such total self-giving to the purposes of the Eternal—at whatever level it may be actualized, and in whatever way—the human spirit lives according to its measure the supernatural life. Whether by naïve petition, by costly action, by single heroic deeds, long secret suffering and renunciation, or the disinterested and often agonizing travail of the mind—in all these we find man painfully yet willingly transcending that level of nature within which he emerges, and giving himself to a mighty purpose which he loves but does not comprehend. The sacrificial instinct, so deeply planted in his soul and finding such various and such strange expressions as it accompanies his upward path, holds within itself the secret of his correspondence with Reality. Whether that Reality, self-revealed within the life of succession, is best found by him in lonely intuition or in corporate action, along sensible or speculative paths—whether his experience of God be mainly mystical, social, sacramental or intellectual in type—the response which it asks for is always the same. This response we find made with classic completeness by the saints. In them we see the soul's deep thirst for the Perfect, satisfied in and through its own loving and creative action on the imperfect. In its service of the successive, its here and now sufferings and tensions—entinctured as they are by the ever-present sense of the Abiding—the Transcendent Other is fully known and enjoyed.

In the Christian sacraments we have compact exhibitions, suited to our comprehension, of the self-giving of that Eternal Life which is nevertheless virtually present in and with all things; and in the historic Incarnation, the summing up and explication of many lesser theophanies. So perhaps in the redemptive saints we have a succinct and vivid demonstration of the general vocation of the Race; and in the existence of sanctity a clue to the deepest mysteries of our strange human experience. For where else shall we find so fully expressed, and made so vigorously operative, that instinct of heroism and self-sacrifice, that alliance of beauty and pain which emerges in all man's freest acts and volitions, and points beyond itself to an unearthly goal? The protective pity of the intercessor, his willing suffering in and with the souls with which he is charged, the intensity of his detailed care—how close this brings the human spirit to the divine nature; how well this runs in series with the life and mind of Christ.

The physical world, with its iron laws, its apparent cruelties, its strains and conflicts; this is the theatre within which the intercessory spirit emerges. The seething pot of organic life, coloured and darkened by countless fugitive joys and agonies, creative novelty and beauty, the horrors of decay, the ceaseless cycle of birth, growth and death; this is the material with which he has to deal. The power by which alone he can deal with it—or with such scraps as are proposed to the action of his redeeming love—is the power inherent in that costly and unconditioned self-giving of the creature to the will of the Holy, which finds its supreme symbol in the Cross. And in this loving, suffering surrender to the Supernatural, the tiny human spirit achieves its glory and its rest. In so far as it is a creature of time, it suffers. In so far as it partakes of Eternity—though it may not comprehend its own experience—that suffering is transfused by a deep exultancy, a still and living peace; for beyond and within the stress and conflict, it knows the enfolding presence of an infinite and

unbreakable joy. And here it is perhaps that the changeful soul of man draws nearest to the Unchanging, and tastes the peace, the splendour and the pity that dwell together in the heart of God.

THE END

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