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**I BELIEVE IN . . .**

I  
BELIEVE  
IN...



*by*  
NORMAN SNAITH

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## P R E F A C E

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THE origin of this book is a suggestion by the editor of the *Methodist Recorder*. He suggested to me that I should write for him an article every month, going through the Creed item by item. The aim has been to set forth the meaning of the Creed in non-theological language, that is, in words readily understood by the regular reader. This I have endeavoured to do, and I trust that everywhere I have made my meaning perfectly plain.

I chose the so-called Nicene Creed, because this is the Creed with which Methodists are most familiar. The original articles have been extended, and they are printed by the courtesy of the editor of the *Methodist Recorder*. I wish to place on record my grateful thanks to him for this and other kindnesses.

It will be realized that these articles were written by a Methodist for Methodists, and it will not be expected, I hope, that the Methodist emphasis should have been excised. I am fully aware that, particularly in the last three chapters, many statements are made which invite disagreement, in my own communion and within other communions also. I trust that I have been clear and definite without being belligerent.

# I

## FAITH

'*I BELIEVE IN . . .*' It is an easy thing to say that; very easy, the easiest thing in the world. But what does it mean? I believe, for instance, in the nebula in Andromeda. I understand that it is a very good nebula, a star turn, so to speak. I once went so far as to borrow a three-inch telescope in order to have a look at it. I suppose it really is a nebula. It might have been anything so far as I could tell. But I believe in it all right. They tell me it is millions of millions of miles away. I forget how many noughts there are in it, but I believe in the figure all right. I am not in the least particular as to a dozen noughts more or less. I believe in the nebula, and I believe in the noughts as well.

All this is exactly what I do not mean when I say: 'I believe in God.' I could eat my breakfast to-morrow morning however many noughts there are in the mileage to the nebula in Andromeda, and indeed, just as well if there were no noughts, or even no nebula. But my belief in God makes all the difference to my breakfast, and to everything else. It is true that I accept the fact of the existence of God in the same way as I accept the fact of the existence of the nebula in Andromeda. To that extent, I could eat my breakfast just the same whether God were near or far. I could not eat my breakfast if there were no God at all. There would be no breakfast to eat, nor would I be here to eat it. I

suppose I could eat my breakfast if I did not accept the fact of the existence of God. Even an atheist must eat, and all of them do. But for my part there is very much more to it than that. The nebula affects nothing in my life. God affects everything.

'I believe in the nebula of Andromeda,' means that I accept it as a fact that this particular nebula is there, wherever the 'there' is. But 'I believe in God,' means not only that I accept the existence of God as a fact, but also that I trust in Him wholly. I have faith in Him. There is all the difference in the world between these two types of belief, or if you like, between belief in the broad sense, and faith in the deep sense of the word. The one may be academic only; the other is nothing if not personal.

The phrase, 'I believe in' at the beginning of the so-called Nicene Creed, therefore, means two things.

In the first place, it means that I accept what follows as being the statement of the Christian Faith. This is what Christians believe. I have heard Free-Churchmen, for instance, say that the phrase 'Free Church' means that the doctrine is free: that a man may believe pretty much as he likes, provided that in a general sort of way he is on the side of the angels. This is not the case. The phrase 'Free Church' means free from the State in a way in which the Established Church is not free. It means nothing more than that, except, of course, that it is Protestant. Apart from this latter provision, the phrase has nothing at all to do with doctrine.

It is true that in a free country a man may believe what he likes. For that matter, he may believe what he likes in any sort of a country, though if he talks or acts in a totalitarian state in ways contrary to what are allowed, he must put up with the consequences. But a man cannot believe what he likes and be a Christian. If a man believes what

Conservatives believe in politics, then he is a Conservative. A man cannot believe what Protestants believe and be a Roman Catholic. In the same way a Christian cannot believe precisely what he pleases. There is a minimum, and that minimum of belief I take to be embodied in the historic creeds of the Church—the Apostles' Creed, for instance, or the Creed that is commonly called the Nicene.

There is a certain liberty from Church to Church in the interpretation of the details of the Creeds. I like the question that is put on the Continent in Protestant circles. They ask: 'What is his Confession?' The answer may be: 'Augsburg.' This means that he accepts the particular interpretation of the historic creeds of the Church which Melancthon drew up and presented to the Emperor Charles V at Augsburg in 1530. It contains twenty-one positive articles with seven others, and is a plain and concise statement of Lutheran doctrine. In this country we have the Thirty-nine Articles of the Established Church. We have the Westminster Confession of 1646-7, which is substantially the statement of faith accepted by English-speaking Presbyterian Churches throughout the world. Similarly, there is a Methodist 'Confession'; that is, there is a particular way in which 'the people called Methodists' interpret the Nicene Creed. In general it is the Confession common to the reformed Protestant Churches, but we have our own particular emphases. These particular emphases are those matters of faith and practice which we believe God has raised us up particularly to emphasize. They are contained in *Wesley's Sermons* and in his *Notes on the New Testament*.

In the second place, the phrase 'I believe in God' means that I trust in Him, I rely upon Him wholly, I have Faith. The phrase 'believe in' has thus exactly the meaning which it has in the *Gospel according to St. John*. The Greek is *pisteuo en* (I believe in). The corresponding noun is *pistis*,

and this latter is the word of which the Apostle Paul was so fond. It is translated 'faith'. This word 'faith' means very much more than accepting the fact of the existence of God. John Wesley said that it meant a recumbency upon Him, a cleaving to Him. It involves a conscious reliance, a complete and utter trust.

Faith such as this is essential. It is of the very essence of Christianity. This is why the Lord Jesus Christ said, 'Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein.' But what does that mean? Here I offer my two favourite illustrations.

First: All fathers and mothers know how wonderful is the trust of a little child. There is a glorious game to play with a toddler. Put him on the kitchen table, stand back, and say: 'Come on.' He will stagger across the table, and stagger right off. As he falls, you catch him, and he laughs for all he is worth. Not only does he trust you completely, but he takes a positive delight in trusting you. For him it is an ecstasy of joy. That is the kind of delight which comes from trusting God wholly.

Secondly: It is good to have been happily married for one week, but it is far better to have been happily married for many years. The longer the two live together, the better they get to know each other, and the more sure they are of each other. More and more as the years pass by, they can each tell exactly what the other will do under any given set of circumstances. Each knows the strength and the weakness of the other. If they are minded to make a good job of their marriage, they act accordingly for the good of both, strengthening where that is necessary, and modifying where it is wise. This happens increasingly with the years. The result of this is that the whole home life is built upon a solid cement foundation, and there is that feeling of security which makes for happiness, not only for the parents but for the children also. A happy home is a home where there is complete trust. Trust such as this, built upon mutual love

and knowledge, is an arrow that points towards faith in God. It is something that is very solid and secure.

Where such faith exists there is an assurance of being right with God. A man can be right with God, and he can know it. We Methodists emphasize this, and we do well to do so. We are not the first to insist on this, and we hope we will not be the last. Such an assurance springs from a living reliance upon God day by day. It does not mean that we are sure of final salvation. No man can be sure of that for himself. He must keep on relying upon God every day, and a day at a time. But a man can trust God wholly now, at this present moment, and that trust can grow deeper and firmer with the years.

It is good to have faith in God as a little toddler has faith in his parent. But that is only the beginning. It is the entrance into the Kingdom of God. That small two-year-old, for instance, who once walked off the kitchen table—the time will come when he will grow independent of his father. There generally comes a time when there are no two greater strangers in the world than a father and a son. Sometimes this may last for years. But if God is good, there comes another day. The son grows up. Perhaps he comes to be as much as forty years old. Then it can come to pass that there are no two greater friends in all the world than that father and that son. Happy indeed is the father who lives to see that grand day. When that day comes, there is a grander and deeper trust than there could ever be in the days of the kitchen table. I do not mean that a man need ever wander away from God, but just that there is such a thing as a grown-up faith that runs deep and dark and strong like an underground river of elemental power.

The whole emphasis is personal. If it be asked what is the centre and core of Christianity, then the answer is that it is at root a matter of relationship with God, and that relationship one of faith. It does not consist of good con-

duct, however good and excellent that conduct may be. It does not consist of a set of propositions concerning the nature of God, the world and man, however splendidly conceived and accurately expressed. Primarily, it is this relationship with God, an attitude of personal and humble trust. This faith, this trust, must necessarily result in a Christian standard of conduct, for faith is not faith unless it produces the fruits of faith.

To say that these fruits consist of certain actions is to say much less than the truth. Even in the matter of ethics, the emphasis was laid by the Lord Jesus on intention rather than on deed. Adultery, for instance, consists not only of the act itself. From the Christian point of view, there are many adulterers who could never be caught in the act. There is no act. 'Every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.'

Yet this is not enough, for Christian ethics reach out far beyond morality. To go the mile which is laid down as being proper and legal is sound moral behaviour, but it may be unchristian. If that second mile will bring the other man to a personal knowledge of Christ, then that second mile is obligatory upon the Christian. Such conduct is no over-plus. It is a minimum of Christian conduct.

For the Christian the test of conduct is not whether this or that is morally right. If the affair is morally wrong, the Christian, God helping him, will not do it. But it may not be permissible for a Christian to do it even if it is morally right. This is because the standard of the Christian is not primarily a moral code which can be written down in black and white, or thought out with unflinching precision. His code is wrapped up with his personal relationship with the God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. The ruling factor in his living is that more and more men should be brought, himself and others, into this relationship of per-

sonal trust. If, therefore, there is any action, morally right though it may be, which is likely to turn men away from God rather than to bring them near to Him, the Christian will abstain from it. The reason is religious rather than moral.

## 2

### ONE GOD

*'I BELIEVE IN ONE GOD.'* The Jews and the Mohammedans say that we do not, because of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is a difficult doctrine, and I suppose that it, more than any other one thing, has-been responsible for that common saying: 'Away with theology; what we want is the simple Gospel.' It is a foolish cry, and I am always sorry when I hear people say that who ought to know better. It is foolish, because doing away with theology is the first step in doing away with the Gospel altogether, whether simple or profound. There is more than one reason why we are where we are to-day, hedged about with harassments, national, international, and in the Church as well. I am quite sure that this is one of them, and by no means the least of them.

I have never met anybody who really likes the doctrine, not even those who love a thing the more because it is complicated or is clothed in a cloak of contrariness. Most of us would gladly do without it, but we have got to have it. It is a biblical doctrine, but not in the sense that you can produce proof-texts for it, in the way, for instance, in which proof-texts can be produced for the doctrine of Grace. We have the baptismal formula of Matthew 28. 19, and there is the benediction at the end of Second Corinthians, but even these stop short of definite trinitarian statements. Other passages, sometimes adduced by way of support for

the doctrine, depend upon an ignorance of the original languages, and appear to be favourable only in the translations.

The doctrine of the Trinity was not produced by the philosophers and the theologians and the academically-minded generally because they had nothing better to do. I rather suspect that some of them rather liked that sort of thing, then as now, inventing complicated comprehensive formulae, trying to get everything packed tight in tabloids, and splitting hairs so as to be able to walk like Agag. But there was a great deal more in it than that. They were driven to it by practical necessity, not quite at first, but later, because the doctrine is not clearly set forth in the early Apostles' Creed, nor in the later so-called Nicene Creed. It is implicit in both, though explicit in neither. The doctrine and the formulation of it had nevertheless of necessity to come. The experience of the Christian Church during the first centuries showed unmistakably that if you are slack about the doctrine of the Trinity, you will in time get slack about the Person of Christ, and also about the Person of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, ultimately a sound evangelism depends upon the doctrine of the Trinity. I hope to make that fully clear before I have done, either in this chapter or later.

What I want to emphasize now is that the doctrine of the Trinity arose directly out of the experience of the first Christians. It is a strange anomaly, and withal a significant commentary on the perils of human speculation, that the doctrine which most is deprecated as being theoretical, is precisely the doctrine which most surely developed out of actual human experience.

It was this way. The first Christians knew well enough about God the Creator. Some of them had been good Jews, and no one brought up on the Old Testament can be any other than quite firm in the faith of the One God. Then, a large number of Paul's converts had had previous con-

tact with Judaism. In the *Acts of the Apostles* we read again and again that when Paul was travelling in Asia Minor, he went first to the synagogues. Whilst he apparently made but moderate headway amongst the fully orthodox Jews, that is, those who were Jews by race as well as by profession of faith, yet his preaching was very well received by the 'devout persons'. These were Gentiles who had accepted the monotheistic and ethical tenets of Judaism, but had not submitted to circumcision and did not keep the food rules. It was the strict and pure ethical monotheism of the Jew which had attracted them in the first place, so that when they became Christians, they had no slightest difficulty over the doctrine of God the Creator.

The remainder of Paul's converts were straight from paganism. They doubtless had difficulty at first amongst the general confusion of cults which was a feature of the religiosity of the Roman Empire of the first and second centuries A.D. There is evidence of this at Corinth, where many found themselves greatly troubled in the matter of eating meat which had been offered to idols. This meat formed the surplus from the temples, sold by the priests and resold cheaply in the public markets. If the poor of Corinth did not buy this meat, they could buy no meat at all. The Corinthian Christians were almost entirely of the depressed and unprivileged classes. They were sincere enough in their devotion to Christ, but they were hedged about by their habits of earlier days, sore let and hindered by their pagan environment. All this created difficulty for them, and they were fearful lest eating meat offered to idols should lead them back into themselves once more offering meat and worshipping at the idol-temples. But the persecutions soon drove the faithful into a firmer and clearer faith, so that generally speaking, nobody had any great difficulty in the worship of the One God over all, the Creator of the world.

But there was the problem of the Lord Jesus Christ. One

thing was fixed and certain. He lived a truly human life, was truly born, truly lived, and veritably died. There came a time when the humanity of the Lord Jesus created difficulty, but at first this was not so. If the humanity of the Lord Jesus had been all, then the whole matter would have been simple, and there would have been no problem at all. But it was not all; indeed it was very far from being all. Further, if it had been all, there would never have been any Christianity. These modern people who wish to destroy Christianity are wise in their generation when they seek to demonstrate that the Lord Jesus was a man, excellent no doubt, the best and without compare if we like, but still no more than a man. Indeed the modern, up-to-date rationalist opponent of Christianity could not be more willing to accept Jesus of Nazareth as a good man, and as an example to all and sundry of what a man should really be. Such an attack is full of wisdom, and Christians who hesitate here are lost. It is the first step to religious suicide, and after that the descent is steep and swift.

Yes, there was indeed very much more. For one thing, He definitely was raised up from the dead. Partly because of this, and partly because of what He actually did and said, the first Christians were convinced that He was God. He was not a part of God, not a phase of God, nor an activity of God, but really and truly God. In some real sense He was the whole of God, 'Very God of Very God,' as the Creed puts it, or as Paul expressed it when he wrote to the Church at Colosse, 'in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily', that is, in a human body.

And yet different.

So far, so good; or, if we are bent on finding a comparatively simple and easily understood solution and therefore go no further, so far, so bad. For the problem was still further complicated by what happened at Pentecost. The more men thought of that, the more they were convinced that here too was God. Once again, He was not part of

God, nor a phase of God, nor an activity of God, but really and truly God; in some real sense, the whole of God.

And yet again different.

The experience of Pentecost was an experience of the Power of the Living God. Some years ago, in May 1932 to be precise, I wrote an article for *The Expository Times*, in which I produced evidence to show that in Jewish tradition the Day of Pentecost was the day of the manifestation of the Power of God. This is evident in the synagogal lessons and psalm for the day, which were Exod. 19, Ezek. 1, Hab. 3, Ps. 29. All the phenomena of the lessons and the psalm are reproduced in Acts 2, except the earthquake, and that appears in Acts 4. 31. Even the hearing in many tongues is paralleled by the Rabbinic tradition that at Sinai the Law was proclaimed in all the seventy languages which were believed to comprise all earth's tongues. The disciples had been told to wait in Jerusalem until they received power from on high (Luke 24. 49), and as soon as the Day of Pentecost had fully dawned, the power came, invading, all-embracing, all-compelling. This was God, nothing less, God Himself in all His promised Power.

The problem, therefore, was: The Creator is God; Jesus is God; the Holy Spirit is God. There is a difference, each from each, but there is only One God. They are not three Separates, but one Unity. They are not three phases, three activities of the One God, for each is God, wholly God, and in no whit less than God. All this was not theory. It was the personal experience of those who were privileged to live in those times. The problem had to be solved. A formula had to be found which would ensure that these essential facts of Christian experience were maintained and preserved. And so the formula was devised: 'Three Persons in One God.' This was by no means satisfactory, but it was less unsatisfactory than any other. The word 'person' is indeed difficult, but many of us make it more difficult than we need, because we will persist in taking it to mean 'individual'.

To talk or think of 'three individuals in one' is silly, and does not mean a thing. To talk about 'three persons in one' may sound strange, but it is not silly.

Actually there is no such thing as an individual in the strictest, separatist sense of the word. I know that I am I, and that you are you, but at the same time, we are far from being isolated from each other. We are bound together in common interests. We are bound with other folks in families and groups. When things go wrong in a home, whether of a childless couple or of a family, it is invariably because one member at least has been acting as an individual, as though he is independent of the rest, and has a perfect right to do just as he pleases.

The other day I was arguing with a friend of mine, married, but childless—at least, at that particular moment, I was not arguing, but imparting information. He was insisting on the importance of strict justice as the first essential in the Nature of God. I said that there was no such thing as exact justice on particular people, and never could be, and that if he and his wife had been fortunate enough to have had at least two children, then he would have known it without being told. The point is that you cannot punish or discipline one member of a family without making the rest of the family suffer also. We are none of us individuals, separate from one another, but persons, members one of another. We suffer because of each other; we can suffer for each other. We rejoice with each other, and we can make others rejoice.

When we use the word 'persons' of God, we are trying to describe a closer identity than this. The illustration of a human family is hopelessly inadequate, but it serves as an arrow to point the way to a truth about God, a truth which, just because it is a truth about the nature of God, it is impossible to put into human words, or even to comprehend in human thought.

The essential thing to remember is that Jesus Christ is

God, and that the Holy Spirit is God. I would insist that the acceptance of these two statements is essential for salvation and conversion. I do not think there can be such an experience as conversion on any other basis, and I do not think that the word 'salvation' has any meaning on any other basis. Perhaps that is why many folks are very chary in speaking about one or the other or both.

In practice it means that whatever the Lord Jesus does, you can say 'That is God'. You see Him healing the sick and making the blind to see—that is God. You see Him eating with publicans and sinners, that is, with quisling tax-collectors and outcasts—that is God. You see Him forgiving sins—that is God. You see Him hanging on a Cross and dying there for love of men—that is God. You see Him, risen and triumphant, Lord of lords and King of kings—and that, too, is God.

You can therefore say 'the Son suffers', and you can say 'God suffers'. But you must not say 'the Father suffers'. The Son is God, and the Father is God, but the Son is not the Father. Similarly, you can say that the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, and you can say that God convicts us of sin. But you must not say this of the Father or of the Son, because the Spirit is not the Son, neither is He the Father. We must neither divide the Godhead, nor confuse the Persons.

# 3

## GOD THE FATHER

*'I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER.'* It is hard, very hard—no; it is impossible to speak of God the Father apart from the Lord Jesus Christ; for a Christian that is. It is through the Son, and through the Son alone that we come to the Father. For my part, I make no bones about that. Jesus is the only pair of spectacles through which a man can see God, and it is folly to expect to come to any proper and adequate vision of Him through any other. It is not that we cannot see something of Him in other ways, but without this Pair, we are all so short-sighted that we never get the right focus. It is all blurred and distorted.

People who say that they can find God in Nature and that they have no need of specific Christian teaching and definite Christian worship, deceive themselves and the truth is not in them. The natural world of itself can never lead a man to God. That is what the first chapter of Romans is about. If the contemplation of beauty or the pursuit of knowledge could have led a man to God, then the Greeks would have found Him long before ever Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea. Neither Praxiteles nor Plato can lead men to the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing beautiful about the Cross, and nothing wise 'after the manner of men', as Paul used to say. From the aesthetic point of view Jesus hanging on the Cross is not to be com-

pared to the Hermes of Praxiteles; and if I desire that knowledge which makes a man 'wise unto salvation' I go to Christ, and not to Plato. There is indeed in Plato a wisdom of this world, and in some ways, more than in any of the ancients, a wisdom that is beginning to lead out from this world, but, when all is said and done, it is the wisdom of this world and of the princes of this world, that come to nought.

There are two ways of using the phrase 'God the Father'. One way is a way that anybody can use—Greek, Ba-ila, Australian aborigine, modern European, Christian and non-Christian. The other way is Christian, wholly Christian, and nothing but Christian. One cause of our present-day confusion is a sentimental use of the first under the illusion that it is the second.

The first way is common to all. It has various grades, varying according to cultural development, from the crudest to the most sublime. I give the best. God is Father in the sense that He started everything and in some sort of way keeps everything going. He is responsible for what we call the Laws of Nature. Not that we know what they are, but whatever they are, He is responsible for them. What we call the Laws of Nature are generalizations which we make on the basis of observed phenomena. We are always having to revise and restate them, as we learn more and more to be precise in our observations. There have been occasions when we have had to change our minds completely, and we may have to do so again; but that is another story. God did not make these generalizations in any case; we did, and as we find out that they are wrong, we have to make new ones.

Not only so, but God went to particular pains to make man, and He has laid down certain moral laws according to which alone man must live. When men break these rules, then men must pay the price, this year, next year, sometime, but not never; themselves, their friends, their enemies; the

next generation, the next after that; somebody, sometime, and perhaps everybody all the time. There is a rigorous rightness that runs through all the world, and justice must be served. This is a moral world. God made it this way, and no other way. And men have found out, largely if not entirely by trial and error, what this way is.

And yet again, God has done more than make the world in a workaday sort of way. He has made it in a holiday sort of way as well. He has put all sorts of extras into it—lots of beauty, for instance. He might have made the sun set always like a solid white disc against a neutral sky, but He put all the colours of the rainbow in it, and made man so that he can delight in sunsets of gold and green and grey and blue. He had to make it rain on occasion, and sometimes it rains unpleasantly and without anything to be said for it; but He can put into it the storm clouds with a rugged wildness that has its own beauty. Then there are April showers and the smell of the new-mown hay, the unlocated smell of burning wood and the crispness of the fallen snow. It may well be that things are as they are, and that the beauty is mostly in our own hearts and minds, but He has put in the beauty, whether in the heart of the world or in the heart of man. It comes to much the same thing in the end. The beauty is here, and it need not have been.

And still yet again, God has put friendship and human love into the world. This is His next-to-best gift to the sons and daughters of men. It is a glorious gift. It gives a warmth and a pleasurable to life which neither morals nor beauty can give. It is not His best gift, but it is a glorious and splendid gift. Without it, this world, for all its beauty and because of its duty, would be a barracks without any leave, and men would go mad and kill each other. They do, regularly, when friendship and human love are dead.

All this world of beauty and moral truth is good, and, as the best of the Greeks conceived it, it is superb. It is a

monument to the thoroughness and integrity of human thought and speculation, but there is nothing in it which does not belong to the world of a decent, intelligent, cultured pagan. The specific Christian motif is not to be found in it, not anywhere. Let us be quite precise and wholly forthright here. The Christian does no service to Christianity when he equates Christianity with morality. Equally he must beware lest he confuse beauty in worship with the worship of beauty. By all means let us have morality, and that of the strictest. The world would die of social anarchy without it. By all means let us have beauty, and that of the truest. The world would die of dullness and boredom without it. But morality is not Christianity, and neither is beauty.

And so at last, to the second way of using the phrase 'God the Father'. This is the Christian way. It belongs to that world of personal relationship into which a man comes when he is adopted into the family of God; or, to use the other famous metaphor of speech, when he is born again into a new life. I have always found particularly helpful here the distinction which is made in the *Gospel according to Saint John*. This distinction is discussed more fully in connection with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The author used two words for 'life'. The first (*bios*) ends with death, and to it belong all the things of this life. Everything I have mentioned hitherto belongs to *bios*, all the activities of the senses and of the mind. The second (*zoë*) begins with conversion, and to it belong the things that are specifically Christian; that is, all the things which arise out of a personal relationship with God. Nothing I have mentioned so far belongs to *zoë*, though all of it can be transformed and lifted into this new and eternal life.

All this, I know very well, raises all sorts of questions and objections, especially amongst those who have had inbred in them the pagan assumption that morality is the

necessary basis of religion. But I do insist most emphatically that a distinction must be maintained. A man can know everything about morality and everything about beauty, and yet be very far from knowing God as his Father in the specific Christian meaning of the word. Aristotle has given us a framework of morals and of beauty, and a great framework it is; but Aristotle did not die on the Cross for me, and Aristotle never knew the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian knows that the most important thing about God is that He is love. But here again there is need for a sharp distinction to be made where many see no need for any distinction at all. Our English word 'love' is an omnibus word. It carries a whole range of meanings, from the best to the worst, from the filthiest to the most sublime. It would be good for us if we could here copy from first century Greek. There were men in that century who knew that three different words must be used in order to keep the distinction clear. For there are three distinct motifs, between which we must most carefully distinguish. Otherwise, one is ignored, with the result that the second comes to be obliterated until finally all is lost.

The first word is *agapë*. This word is not found in classical Greek. It is a Bible word, and was invented by the men who first translated the Old Testament into Greek. This they began to do about the middle of the third century B.C. in Egypt, and the result was the Septuagint. When the New Testament writers, Paul and John the chief of them, wanted a word to express God's love for man, a love which they knew from their own experience of it to be wholly unique and entirely unlike any other love whatever, they had a word already to hand, and it was this word *agapë*. It was a religious word from the beginning, and has always been a religious word. It stands for a love that is utterly, completely and absolutely unselfish. In the words of Saint Paul, it 'seeketh not its own', that is, seeketh not its own

good, its own benefit, and is not to the slightest degree selfish.

The second word is *philia*. This love is the ordinary give-and-take of human friendship. No human relationships can exist without it. It is the very basis of human society. The clearest example of the necessity of this give-and-take is marriage. A happy marriage is impossible without it. There can be nothing more tragic than for a husband or a wife to find out, when it is too late, that the other is a 'taker' and not a 'giver'. It is astonishing how soon this can be found out. When this is the case, there is not the slightest chance of a happy marriage. Many war marriages have been doomed from the start because neither party has had the opportunity to find out about the other this characteristic which indeed matters most.

There are many excellent people, who are as anxious as any Christian can be to establish a new world in which all men and women from birth shall have proper opportunity, and where there shall no longer be any unprivileged. They hold that what is required is that this give-and-take relationship shall be established. They are quite right, but they ignore a vital factor in the situation. This factor is bound to destroy every attempt to build a new world on the basis of *philia*.

This vital factor, which cannot be ignored, is the third type of love, which the Greeks called *eros*. This is self-love, and it is to be found at the root of human nature. It is this self-motive in human nature which ultimately breaks up every attempt to build a new world. This self-motive can be seen best in other people, in other nations, in the other class of society from that to which we belong, or in the other political party from that which claims our adherence. This does not mean that men naturally are incapable of unselfish action, or even that they are necessarily morally corrupt. We all know that men naturally are capable of the utmost self-sacrifice, and can do many good deeds. We all know

that in a time of sudden emergency—accident, battle, air-raid, or any other calamity—the one who does everything possible to help is the one who is nearest. What it does mean is that right underneath all human conduct, the arrow is steadily set towards self. For this reason all human institutions become corrupt and man's best dreams come to nothing. It is man's tragedy that he carries in his own heart the seeds of his own destruction.

I would say that, from this point of view, the essential difference between God and man is that God is *agapē* and man is *eros*. All God's efforts are to the salvation of man. All man's efforts are to his own preservation. This is why it is never enough to talk about morals. We must deal with something that is much deeper than any question of conduct, with the very mainspring of human action.

When therefore we say that God is love, we mean *agapē*. If we are allowed to use one word, and one word only about God, then this word *agapē* is the word which the Christian should use. The primary fact for me is that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. Christ died for all—and He died for *me*. And until I know that He died for me, it is just sentimental talk to keep on saying that He died for all. Unless I know for sure that He died for me, all this other tails off into a general impersonal influence that spreads out like last year's flood water—gets mixed up with everything in a general irresponsible sort of way, waters everything down and does more harm than good.

When I know that Christ died for me, then I know that the most important thing about God is that 'He desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live'. And He desired it so much that, as the hymn says, 'He emptied Himself of all but love', so as to get busy about it in His own particular way, the way of the Cross. That is where I start, when, as a Christian, I talk about God the Father, and that is what the Scripture

means when it says that no man comes to the Father except by Christ.

When Charles Wesley adds 'of all but love' to Saint Paul's original statement 'He emptied Himself', his theology is perfectly sound. This love, *agapē*, is the one thing above all which God must retain if He is still to be God. He could, so to speak (for here we have to use human words which are bound to be inaccurate) divest Himself of whatever else He pleases and still be Himself, but if He divested Himself of *agapē*, then He would deny Himself.

It seems to me that we try to read too much into Paul's original statement, when we discuss whether He surrendered His foreknowledge and this, that and the other. I would say that Paul is speaking as a Jew, trained from birth in a most rigorous monotheism. As a Jew, there would always be in his mind, as there still is in the mind of a Jew, a stop, a barrier, which would prevent him from ever thinking that to the slightest degree God could ever become man. When, therefore, Paul says that He 'emptied Himself', it seems to me that he meant that God emptied Himself of precisely that which would prevent Him also being man. Charles Wesley was quite right in maintaining that He did not divest Himself of *agapē*, and in thereby inferring that the one characteristic of humankind which He did not take over was *eros*. This is how He came to be without sin, for *eros* is the root of sin, this self-love which makes us go every one his own way instead of God's way.

For the rest, I must speak for myself, since many Christians do not care, wrongly as I think, to make these sharp distinctions. I think that many Christians put the cart before the horse. Luther did not make that mistake; and neither, as I understand him, did John Wesley, for Wesley followed Luther very closely here. The general attitude is to start with morals and beauty and then go on and add the rest. They say, for instance, that God is a God of Justice, but that He is also a God of Mercy. Or, God is a God of

Morality, but He is also the Saviour-God. Luther cut right across this way of thinking, and that, I suppose, is really why the Romanists say that he denied reason. So he did, if by reason you mean arguing like a pagan from pagan premises. But when Luther and Wesley preached, they started from the other end. They said: He is a God of Mercy, but He is also a God of Justice; He is my personal Saviour, but He is also a moral God. This, as I understand it, is what is meant by coming to the Father through Christ, and I think that there is a whole world of difference between the two. For one thing, it insists that our first duty is to preach Christ crucified in order that men may be saved; and our second duty, equally imperative, but second and not first, is to preach morals. But these morals are to be Christian morals, not pagan morals, however excellent they may be. By 'Christian morals' I mean that the crucial test is not the test of right and wrong from an ethical set of standards, but a far stricter test—'Does my doing this cause my brother (i.e. every man for whom Christ died) to stumble?'

# 4

## GOD ALMIGHTY

*'I BELIEVE IN GOD . . . ALMIGHTY.'* But what does the word 'almighty' mean when it is used of God? I find my answer by going back through the Latin and Greek to the Hebrew. We get the actual word as a more or less straight translation of the Latin *omnipotens* (all powerful), which in its turn depends on the Greek *pantokrator*, but the Hebrew word is *shaddai*. No one knows for certain what this last word means. Its origin is lost in the morning mists of man. The Rabbis said that it means 'He who is sufficient'. Whether they were right or wrong about the meaning of this particular word, they were certainly right when they said this about God.

The essential thing about this word 'almighty' is that it insists on the sufficiency of God. He is infinite in initiative. He has an answer to everything that man can do. Very many people have great difficulty over this word. The difficulty arises, as I see it, from the insistence upon the 'all'. God certainly is all-powerful, and is fully able to do whatever it is His desire to do, but the trouble arises because of a double tendency in the further development of such statements.

One tendency is to suppose that God must do all that we think He ought to do. The other is the tendency to infer that being all-powerful means that He must have His own way all the time. The two tendencies are not entirely

separable, and they coincide at the point where we think we know His business better than He does. Calvin, you remember, started from an insistence upon God's majesty and power, and concluded that God had from the beginning decided that this man is to be saved and that that man is to be damned. It is hard to see how this allows any freedom to man. A still more difficult situation is created by those who maintain that everybody must be saved at last. It seems to me that this denies freedom both to God and to man, and in so doing out-calvins Calvin. It gives man no ultimate freedom to refuse, and God no freedom either way.

The intrusion of the word 'all', which came in with the Greek, is doubtless sound enough, but it can be misleading. God cannot do everything. He cannot do contradictory things. He cannot, for instance, make a stone which, at one and the same time, is all white and all black. He can make it grey, a mixture of black and white. He can make it all one or all the other. He can make it patchy, partly white and partly black. I suppose He can change it from one to the other, but what He cannot do is to make it all both, because black and white are direct opposites. The very fact of it being one precludes it from being the other. The two stones are like the little old man and the little old woman in those little houses with the two doors by which we tell the weather. When one is in, the other is out. They cannot both be in. The contraption is made that way, and that is an end of it.

Or again, God cannot do things which are contrary to His Nature. He cannot lie, because He is a God of Truth. He cannot do what is morally wrong, because He is 'without iniquity'. He could never sit still and do nothing at all about man's misery and sin, because He is a God of Love. On the other hand, He can do many things which we cannot do, because His Nature is different from ours. We cannot be in more than one place at the same time. He can. We can make our voice to be heard all over the earth at prac-

tically the same moment of time, and some of us have done it. All that is necessary is a radio-mouth at one end, and radio-ears everywhere else. But our voice is only a very small part of us. God can actually be everywhere at once, and He is—all of Him. We cannot, because it is contrary to our nature. We have bodies and cannot go anywhere without them. It is not contrary to His Nature, because He is spirit, and therefore is not limited by either time or space. He can assuredly be everywhere at once. That, by the way, is why He can be your Saviour and mine, now, for all of us.

But concerning this freedom, for that is where the difficulties of the word 'almighty' arise. God is free. He can decide how and when and why He is going to exercise this power of His. He can change His mind, and He is always doing it. Perhaps this is where you want to argue. If it is, then wait until you have read exactly what I mean. It is true that God is unchangeable, 'the same yesterday, and to-day, yea and for ever', as the Bible phrase has it. But this does not mean He never changes His mind. You may think that this is splitting hairs. It is nothing of the kind. It is combing them out so that they do not get into a tangle. The distinction is very necessary, and a great deal depends upon it.

There are two kinds of unchangeableness. There is the unchangeableness of a thing which stays put, and there is the unchangeableness of a person who is alive and active and always on the move. He may do different things, but if the varied things he does all hang together and have the same object always in view, then he is unchangeable in his character and aim. God is unchangeable in that He is always seeking to save that which is lost. He is unchangeably the Saviour God, though He has a hundred and one ways of doing it. More accurately, He had a million and one ways of being it, because He has more than enough

initiative to match man's every move; yes, every man's every move.

What I am out to insist upon is the reality of this unchangeably active God. The only 'almighty' in which I am particularly interested is the 'almighty to save'. I believe in God the Creator, 'Maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible', but there were men who were saying that long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea, and there are many who say it to-day and flatly deny the Christian faith. The Christian faith is that this Almighty Creator is almighty to save.

If we wish to avoid unnecessary confusion, we must first realize that God is essentially an active Spirit rather than a fixed unchanging Idea. Next we must realize that He is the Saviour God, fully equipped and altogether able to be the Saviour of men. He is no fixed immovable perfection, but a perfect Spirit, always active and always matching man's need with His all-sufficient power to save.

'Almighty' means that God can do anything and everything that is not contrary to itself or contrary to His Nature. He can exercise His will in all circumstances and in all places. Two questions arise. What is His will? Does He insist upon it all the time? It is agreed that it is His wish and desire that all men should be saved; that is, brought into that full trust in Him which is the only gateway to happiness and eternal life, and so saved from sorrow and death. It is His earnest desire, and the end for which He is always active. But it is not His will in the sense that if any man does not thus come to Him, He is defeated. His will is that man has free choice in the matter, and it is a real freedom, not a mockery of it, nor any shadow of choice. This means that man's rejection of God's way can be final. God is sufficient in power and initiative to confront every man again and again with this choice, and that at every turning and cross-road of life. But there is a time, and this is plain from the Gospels—there is a time when the last

turning is past, and thenceforth the road leads on to death.

It comes to this. The almighty power of God must not be thought of as doing away with that freedom of choice which God has given to man. This is a limitation which is not in the nature of things. It is a limitation which God has imposed upon His own freedom, actually one of many. Man is free, but God is freer. God is free enough to impose upon Himself whatever limits He chooses. Man is free to choose, but he is not free enough to avoid making his choice one way or the other.

With whom then is the last word? It is with God, for all things are in His hands. That last word is Judgment, because the choice which God offers again and again, the choice which God compels man to make, this choice is again and again stated to be a choice of life and death. Life depends upon our choice of Him. That is His sovereign will. That is His gracious offer to men. And it is a gracious offer, because apart from this free gift which God offers, there is not anything for man, not anything at all.

And yet, though it is true that the last word is with God, it is equally true that the first word is with Him. This is a matter primarily of religious experience, and out of it there arises the doctrine of Election. This doctrine must be approached from the angle of religious experience; otherwise we find ourselves in deep waters from the beginning, striving to reconcile the freedom of man with the freedom of God. Not that the dilemma can be fully resolved, but we make it more difficult than we need by starting from the wrong end.

The first fact to be taken into consideration is a fact of experience. When a man first becomes a Christian, he is conscious of having quite definitely made a choice of his own. He was free to say 'Yes', and he was free to say 'No'. He chose to say 'Yes'. That is freedom, and it is as genuine and real as freedom could ever be.

So far, so good, but there is a second fact of experience which has to be taken into consideration. It is equally sound and genuine, but it emerges later. As the Christian grows in the Christian life, he realizes that after all the first move was not with him, but was with God. He knows that those very first stirrings and promptings in his own heart, those first impulses or thoughts or what you will as the outcome of which he became a Christian—he knows that these were actually the work of God the Holy Spirit. The first move after all had been with God. This double certainty is the basis of the doctrine of Election. 'You did not choose me, but I chose you.'

Not all people who call themselves Christians will agree with what has been written in the last paragraph. Such a way of thinking and talking does not belong to the thought-world of those who think of Christianity primarily as the moral life. The more Christianity is conceived of from the human point of view as a striving towards perfection, the less sense the doctrine of Election makes. On the contrary, the more Christianity is thought of as involving primarily the work of the Saviour God, the more the doctrine of Election is apprehended. Further, the doctrine depends upon a real doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It is not enough to speak of the work of the Saviour God and then to stop short at the Cross. There must be some appreciation of the effective work of God the Holy Spirit as taking hold of men and changing them, making them different from what they were before. Unless we think of God as doing for man what he cannot do for himself, the doctrine of Election makes little sense.

Probably a large part of the difficulty arises from the illusion that for man freedom can be absolute. It must always be conditioned, relative. It is indeed relative to man's desire. All that freedom involves for man is that there should be nothing to prevent him from choosing as he pleases. It is wrong to say that there was no freedom in

Germany under the Hitler regime. Some Germans were free, and some were not. Those who were in favour of Hitler were free, and the more enthusiastic their support of him, the more free they were. Not that they realized it, for a man is conscious of freedom only when he has not got it. The Germans who were not supporters of Hitler were not free, some of them shut up in prison camps and all of them restricted in speech and deed. The less they believed in Hitler, the more they were conscious of the freedom they had lost.

The man who is truly free is the man who most lives in accordance with the true way of the world. For the Christian this means living in accordance with the will of God. The freedom of the Christian is not to be found in fulfilling the commandments because they are the commandments he is bidden to fulfil. It consists in first loving the maker of those commandments with his whole heart. The extent to which the Christian loves God is the extent to which it will be his delight to do God's will. This is when and why His service is perfect freedom. The truest love for God involves fullest reliance upon Him. This is why salvation is by faith alone, for salvation in this context involves the fullest freedom.

Jesus was once asked what was the greatest commandment. His reply was, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God, the Lord is One. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy self, and with all thy strength.' He talked about loving God, and it is in this personal experience of a loving Saviour God that the whole secret of Election lies.

# 5

## ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST

*'I BELIEVE IN . . . ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD.'* Whatever that means, it certainly means that Jesus alone is Lord, and that He alone is Son of God. He is unique. There is nobody else of whom it can be said that he is Lord, and nobody else of whom it can be said that he is the Son of God.

Most people these days understand the word 'Lord' to mean lord and master of our lives—your life, my life, everybody's life. Perhaps that mainly is why the phrase 'our Lord' is more common than the phrase 'the Lord'. We acknowledge this lord and that master, but the demands of Jesus Christ are supreme, over-topping all the others. We may serve any master provided our loyalty to him can be reconciled with our chief loyalty, which is to Christ. But there are limits to this, because at root we 'cannot serve God and Mammon'; that is, there comes a point where we have to choose between 'the things of this world' (ambition, fun, property, country, and so forth) and God.

All this is sound and true. If we did better in working it all out in practice, the world would be a vastly better place than it is, and we would all know more of the joy which is the present possession of the lovers of God. There would be no need, for instance, of so much talk about armed

strength being the best guarantee for peace, and all that sort of thing.

I think, though, that even here we tend to start from the wrong end. (Here follows an excursus on Christian ethics.) The tendency is to try and do as much as we can of the things which non-Christians do, and to knock off doing them only when they are definitely anti-Christian. We talk far too much negatively of what we must not do, and not nearly enough positively of what we can do. It is not therefore in the least surprising that so many people fight shy of religion because they think it means being a kill-joy. Perhaps this, after all, is why the great majority of modern folk by-pass us entirely. They hear us talk so much of what we must not do, and what they ought not to do, that they do not believe we have any solution to the ills of this modern world. It serves us right. If we tackled the problem of Christian living from the other end, and set out to do as much as possible of the things which Christians do, we would stand a much better chance of being positive and constructive. As it is, we try to do as much as we can of the things which non-Christians do, and say 'Don't' only when we must. Such a negative attitude never got anybody anywhere that is worth getting to. It may stop us personally from finding ourselves where we never ought to be, but it cannot answer the question, 'Where do we go from here?' It involves standing still, and being left out of account; stuck in a backwater whilst the main stream goes swirling by.

For instance, the attitude of many Christian people towards the observance of Sunday leaves a very great deal to be desired. There is one group which says, 'I don't see why folks shouldn't go hiking on Sunday.' This is the attitude which I have already criticized. It is negative, unconstructive, and makes no contribution towards the solution of the problem of Sunday. The point to be considered is not what we, or others, can do and not be a non-Christian,

but rather what a Christian should do in order definitely to be a Christian. In practice, the permissive attitude steadily cuts down the margin between Christian and non-Christian, and talks more and more in terms of a minimum Christianity. If Christianity were nothing more than an imposed moral code, there might be something to be said for such an attitude. But since a Christian is a lover of God, there can be no justification for a minimum standard of Christian living. In human relationships, no lover adopts a minimum attitude towards his loved one. He would soon be sent packing, and rightly, too. Such an attitude is the very negation of love. As lovers, we do all we can in a positive way, and think nothing of it. To think in terms of the minimum is a sure sign that love is growing cold.

The other group adopts a wholly negative, and often censorious attitude. Its partisans take up the old Jewish attitude to the Sabbath, neglect all that Jesus had to say in criticism of it, and boldly transfer all that is said about the Jewish Sabbath to the Christian Sunday. For my part, I never could see what is ethically wrong with hiking, for instance, on Sunday; or indeed with a hundred and one other things which Christians bar. It seems to me that if it is ethically right to go hiking on Saturday, then it can scarcely be ethically wrong to go hiking on Sunday. The day makes no difference to a question of morals. If an action is ethically right one day, then it is ethically right every day. No; as I see it, the Christian argument concerning hiking on Sunday is a religious argument, and not ethical. It is not a matter of ethics at all. One of the things which Christians have known from the beginning is that they are a fellowship, and one of the essential things about this fellowship is the necessity of meeting together to worship God. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian. He is perforce a member of a fellowship, and that fellowship is a worshipping one. Therefore, from the beginning, Christians have set one day aside from all others as a day for the worship

of God. They took the idea of a separated day over from the Jews, but they changed it from the seventh day to the first day. This was partly to make it different, but partly also because the first day of the week is doubly an anniversary. It is the day of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and it is the day of the gift of the Holy Spirit, the day on which the Christian Church was born. And they agreed that this should be a day freed from all avoidable duty, so that all Christians of whatever status should equally be free for common worship. Sunday, therefore, is not so much a day when the Christian does not do certain things, as a day when he is able to do other things, things of great joy, things that are a privilege. It is a day of positive action.

The negative attitude is not only wrong in itself, but it lends itself easily, and with considerable justification, to the criticism often made by non-Christians, that the churches are full of folk who try to stop other people from doing what they themselves have no mind to do. The Christian, in common with all other citizens, has every right to do all he can to persuade and influence others to his way of thinking. He has every right to do all that is legitimate in such a democracy as ours to ensure that such laws and regulations are made and enforced as he believes to be best for the good of the whole community; but I do wish the churches generally would band together as often in a positive and constructive policy as they do in the negative policy of stopping things. If we want to get Sunday observed as a Christian Sunday should be observed, then the true solution is to set about making folks Christian. A purely negative attitude does but increase the opposition and hinder the main task of making the world Christian.

But to return to our main and proper theme—all this, namely the acknowledgement that Jesus is the chief Lord amongst many lords and the Master of all masters, all this was not the original meaning of the word 'Lord'. In

essence the original meaning was the exact opposite of ours to-day. We use the phrase in connection with what we ought to do. The first and true meaning was in connection with what Jesus Christ has done. More, our modern meaning involves what we do for Him. The original meaning involved what He has done for us. The explanation is that the word 'Lord' had a meaning which we have wholly forgotten.

The Greek is *Kurios*, and that was the title of Jesus Christ, not indeed at the very first, but as soon as the Gospel came to be preached outside Jewry. In the first preaching of all, the Name was 'Jesus the Messiah', Jesus the Anointed One, which, translated into Greek, became 'Jesus the Christ'. The title Messiah meant something to the Jew. It meant that He was the long-promised One, that descendant of David who was to set up the Kingdom once more, set all Jews free, and establish the Rule of God on earth. He was to come 'from above', the Saviour sent by God Himself, though to what extent that meant to the Jew that He partook of the Divine Nature is very hard to tell, and, for my part, the more I study the ancient books, the less I feel able to say about that particular point.

But the title 'Christ' meant nothing to a non-Jew, with the result that the emphasis on the title 'Messiah-Christ' became less and less pronounced, and Christ came to be another name, almost a surname. Now the title *Kurios* (Lord) did mean something when Paul went preaching to the Gentiles in Syrian Antioch, and west through Asia Minor, into Europe and on to Rome. It was the title of the Saviour-God who died for men. They had all heard of 'the Lord Serapis', with his Greek-Egyptian cult, that cult which swept through the Greek-Roman world like a forest fire, offering life to men, both this side and the other side of the grave. Later it was the Lord Mithras, the bull-god who was slain that men might be washed in his blood. The Christian claim, then and now, is that there is but One

Lord, One Saviour-God who died to cleanse men from their sin and give them life, both sides of the grave. He is the Lord Jesus Christ, the one and only *Kurios*.

The word was all the more apt because this is the word used in the Greek Bible (the Septuagint) for the Name of God. This Bible, rather than the original Hebrew Bible, was the Bible with which all converts outside Palestine were familiar, that is, if they were familiar with any Bible at all. It was the Bible with which the Jews of the Dispersion were familiar, and in the great Synagogue at Alexandria the synagogue lessons were actually read in Greek. The use of the word *Kurios* therefore made it all the more clear to both Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Lord from heaven, God Himself on earth visible amongst men.

For my part, I prefer to say 'The Lord Jesus Christ' rather than 'Our Lord Jesus Christ'. I know that there is good warrant for both, but I prefer the former mainly because it keeps the original meaning of the phrase in the Creed clearer for us in these modern times—'I believe in One Saviour-God, Jesus Christ.' To say 'our' does ensure that we think of Him as Saviour of men rather than Saviour in a theoretical sort of way. It has an advantage over 'my' because it is avoiding any self-righteous, possessive, dog-in-the-manger attitude, such as is the very negation of Christianity. On the other hand, to say 'our Saviour' easily shades off into impersonal generalizations, and comes to mean very little at all. Everybody's Saviour can easily be nobody's Saviour. He cannot be 'our Saviour' unless first He is 'my Saviour'. If I say 'one Saviour-God, Jesus Christ', then I say that He is Lord of lords and Master of masters, but I say it more effectively because He has done for me what no lord or master could ever do, and my loyalty to Him is trust, lifted to a level of devotion and love which I could never give to any human lord or master. He is the Saviour-God, and He died to save ME.

The Creed goes on to say that He was 'begotten', that He 'was made man', 'crucified . . . under Pontius Pilate', and so on. All of this is to make it plain that He did live a truly human life—not an ordinary human life, because it was extra-ordinary—no play acting, no 'seeming', but really and truly a human life.

This emphasis is essential, but perhaps more than now. In the old days, that is in the first centuries, there were all sorts of attempts to make the Lord Jesus Christ into a split personality. They said that He was two persons, or two natures, or two wills, that there was a human Jesus and a divine Christ, that the divine Christ descended on the human Jesus at the Baptism, and left Him to suffer on the Cross. The title 'Christ' thus came to have a significance wholly different from its original meaning. But the Church maintained through thick and thin that Jesus Christ was one Person, truly Man and truly God, and that, though 'in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily', yet His whole earthly life was real, historical, as firmly embedded in history as that of Julius Caesar or Herod the Great. That is why the mention of Pontius Pilate is important. The name is not put in to give Pilate the blackest of black marks, but to fix the Crucifixion firm and certain in history.

I said that the emphasis on the real human life of Jesus was perhaps more essential in the first centuries than it is now. This is a dangerous saying, because the real human life of the Lord Jesus is an integral element in our faith, and there must be no wavering in respect of it. I said it for two reasons.

The first is concerned with those who attack Christianity. A generation ago the opponents of Christianity sought to prove that Jesus never lived at all, and that the whole thing was a pious invention, or, to be more accurate, an impious invention of the pious. Such attacks on Christianity are out of date. This became very clear in the London Chris-

tian Commando Campaign of April 1947. Edward Rogers, Methodist minister now in the Southport North Circuit (Marshside Road), was engaged one evening in a public debate with a leading rationalist, thoroughly well-informed, most gentlemanly and courteous. During the debate a man from the back of the hall intervened, shouting that the whole argument was waste of time, because Jesus never really lived. He was rebuked, not by Edward Rogers, but by the rationalist, who said that there was no doubt at all about Jesus having lived. He did live, and was the best of men. The point at issue was not that, but whether He was what the Christians claimed Him to be, that is, whether He was truly God.

And I would say, too, that the emphasis is not so essential as used to be necessary among ordinary Christians. We have had, this century, a great deal of emphasis on the human Jesus, all in a laudable attempt to make Him real. The best-known, and perhaps the most influential book of this type, is the late Dr. T. R. Glover's *The Jesus of History*. The need, now, amongst the average type of Christian is to emphasize that this real Man, Jesus Christ, was also really and truly God. It is because He is God that He is what He is. He is not God because He was a perfect man, or anything like that. He is God, and always was God. This is why the Creed says that He was begotten 'before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God', and that He is 'of one substance with the Father'. All of these phrases are put in to close up every avenue and by-path by which we might try to side-step the statement that He is truly God.

I have used the phrases 'ordinary Christians' and 'average type of Christian'. This is because amongst the theologically minded recent years have turned the circle full round, and there has been a partial tendency to discount the human Jesus in favour of a divine Christ. For instance, Professor Emil Brunner says (*The Mediator*, p. 159 note)

that 'in faith we are not concerned with the Jesus Christ of history as historical science sees Him, but with the Jesus Christ of personal testimony, who is the real Christ, and whom John sees just as plainly (I could even say with Luther, still more plainly than) the Synoptists'. Professor Karl Barth writes of the human life of Jesus as a veiling of God rather than a revelation of God. These statements by themselves seem to swing right away from a proper appreciation of the human Jesus. Their justification is that they are really emphasizing the point that no man can appreciate the true significance of the life of Jesus Christ, except he first knows Christ in his own heart and experience. From this point of view the new emphasis is a necessary corrective to the 'Jesus-of-History' motif. It is necessary to insist upon His true humanity; it is also necessary to insist that He is truly God. It is, however, most dangerous to say that the proper appreciation of His manhood will lead us to the proper appreciation of His divinity.

I would not forthwith rule out the possibility that a man may come through 'the Christ in the story' to 'the Christ in the heart', but I would say that this is not nearly so sure and certain a journey as many would have us suppose. Few things in the Bible story have impressed me more than the fact of the ineffectiveness of the Gospel until Pentecost. Why did the people who heard Him in Galilee turn away from Him after the flush of the first preaching? Why did not those whom He had healed, the lame, the lepers and the lunatics, remain faithful to Him to the end? Where were the disciples in the hour of His extremity? One had betrayed Him; one had denied Him; the rest had left Him and fled. Not one was faithful, and He died alone—two brigands indeed with Him, but none of His own. There must have been many hundreds of thousands of people who actually saw Him die. Apparently they were unmoved, apart from possibly two, the thief on the next cross and the sergeant-major in charge of the execution squad, but just

what he exactly meant is uncommonly hard to say. The disciples were strangely slow to believe after the Resurrection, and it was not until the experience of Pentecost that they were convinced enough to be convincing, which is the only sort of conviction that counts. All of this I take to mean that the simple Gospel story is not enough, but that there must also be some work of God in our own hearts—doubtless on the basis of the Gospel story but certainly not necessarily involved. Few who saw Him with their very own eyes and heard Him with their very own ears, were convinced—not even those twelve who had been about with Him for the best part of three years. It is equally possible for men to read the story of the Gospels now, and yet never come to a knowledge of Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, the Saviour-God who became man for us men and for our salvation. God the Holy Spirit must accomplish His saving work in our heart, and there convince us of the things of Christ. It is because of this, I take it, that we have this renewed emphasis on the Christ of experience.

# 6

## FOR OUR SALVATION

*'I BELIEVE IN . . . JESUS CHRIST . . . WHO FOR US MEN, AND FOR OUR SALVATION, CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN.'* If you are of the opinion that the world can be put right by moral effort and efficient organization and scientific education and cultural values and so forth, then pass by on the other side. Similarly, if you think that, by any or all of these, you can put yourself right, there is nothing here for you. Go to the moralists and the philosophers and the psychologists. This is for desperate men, men who know that without God they are finished.

Salvation means nothing to men who are not in mortal peril. It means nothing to men who are in mortal peril and do not know it. You have to be in a hole, and know that you are in a hole. What is more, you must have done everything you know and can, and still be in the hole. And still yet again, you have to know that it is death to stay in, and that if ever you are going to get out, somebody else will have to pull you out. Then it is that you are able to learn the beginning of what salvation is—not all of it, because that includes not only awareness of the death you are saved from, but also experience of the life you are saved to.

The classical instance of this in the Bible is the jailer of Philippi in Macedonia. He had been specially charged to keep his two prisoners safe. He had done everything that

a good and efficient jailer could do. He had put them into the innermost cell of all, fastened their feet firmly in the stocks, locked and barred every door from inside to outside. No jailer could have done more. Not even the best jailer of all time could have made provision against such an earthquake, one that rocked the very foundations themselves of the prison, burst open all the doors, and loosed every prisoner's chains. There he was in the middle of the night in pitch darkness, and all his prisoners loose in a wide-open jail. He took it as a matter of course that they had all escaped, and he drew his sword to commit suicide. He had no alternative except death in the morning, and he preferred not to wait. But Paul the Christian remembered the jailer, and apparently thought first of him, as a true man of God should, since he now was the one man of them all in danger of death. He cried out in the darkness and bade the jailer hold his hand. Whereupon the jailer, having by this time found lights, rushed in to where Paul and Silas were, threw himself down at their feet and cried, 'What must I do to be saved?' Paul knew the answer to that question. He had not been wandering for years across Asia Minor and now across into Europe without having the answer ready. Sharp and quick it came like the snap of a fiddle string. 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' That was not exactly what the jailer meant, but one o'clock in the morning with all the prisoners running loose and a horrible draught everywhere, was no time for a theological argument. The man was desperate, and he would have clutched at any straw, and he knew very well that if Paul could not point him to the way of salvation of whatever sort, then he was doomed.

Until a man is as desperate as the jailer of Philippi, the word 'salvation' means next to nothing.

Many folk hold that talk like this is exaggerated emotionalism and extravagant metaphor. Cultured and comfortable and clever people said that of Paul and Luther and

Wesley. There were some even who said it of the Lord Jesus Himself. The common people did not, for we read that they received Him gladly. It is still those that are sick who need a physician. The Kingswood miners did not say it of John Wesley, neither did the slaves and freedmen of Rome say it of Paul. If it is silly talk, then Wesley's Sermons are silly, and so is the Methodist Hymn Book, because the sermons and hymns of both the Wesleys are full of it. And the Bible itself contains not a little of it, also. Evangelical Christianity depends entirely on the conception and experience of salvation from death into life. There is no other kind of Christianity, though many types claim the name. Faith is the complete trust of those who know themselves to be without strength in themselves. Grace is a free gift to those who know that they have no claim to it except their own desperate need. If you are a preacher and do not yourself know the truth of what I write, then you had better leave Ephesians 2. 8 alone. It is not a text for you.

Jesus Christ came down from heaven to save men from sin. If sin is concerned with morality and nothing more, then all this coming down from heaven and dying on the Cross is much ado about next to nothing. If you combine ethical ideas of sin with a belief in the essential reasonableness of human nature, then there is little need for any religion other than one of moral exhortation. You talk of the excellence of the good life, of the benefits of cultural education and a helpful environment. You think in terms of moral values; you describe Jesus as the perfect man; you may even say that He has the moral value of God (whatever exactly that may mean), and your religion has become one of self-help assisted by the best moral influences. Non-Christians stop away from church. Why should they come, if that is all there is in it?

All this is very fine. There are only three things wrong with it. It does not deal with sin, nor anywhere near it.

It does not deal with human nature, nor anything near it. It is not Christianity, nor anything like it.

Sin is not primarily, nor even principally, concerned with breaking moral rules. It includes all this, but incidentally rather than directly. The fulfilment of moral rules is not the objective at the end of the race. They are rather the hurdles which the runner takes in his stride. Not that they are easily surmounted, indeed far from it, but they are hurdles and not the winning post.

Sin is concerned with that fundamental characteristic of human nature whereby we think of things from our own point of view. This is but natural. Indeed, we cannot have any other point of view except our own. We have to use our own eyes and not the other man's, and our own brain and judgment. We may do our best to see things from the other man's point of view, but, when all is said and done, we can but deal with our view of what is his view. There is nothing wrong in every man having his own point of view. It is inevitable, and right and proper. The wrong comes in when all the emphasis is on the 'own'. Sin is that root of selfishness which is plain to be seen in the other fellow, the other nation, the other political party and class from that to which we ourselves belong.

It is possible to be highly moral and at the same time to be thoroughly selfish. I would be prepared to maintain that the greatest damage is done in the world by perfectly moral people who are also perfectly selfish. There are other sinners than burglars and adulterers, and some of them are quite respectable and highly respected. Some adulterers are, as a matter of fact. A burglar is a man who takes what he wants in his own particular way without considering other folks. That is what the adulterer does in his own particular way. That is what people do who buy in the black market, or even try to get more than their fair share of anything that is going. Such conduct is neither clever nor commendable. The people who think it clever

are the people who believe in looking out for themselves. The people who do such things are sinners, and they do as much damage to society and to the Kingdom of God as many of the men who find themselves in prison doing long sentences. The man who collects his winnings in the football pools—that man is a sinner; and so is the man who ‘keeps himself to himself’ in his pleasant home, big or little, in town or city or suburb or country. All these people are acting as though they can please themselves exactly what they do. They are saying, like Christopher Robin, ‘There’s nobody else in the world to-day, And the world was made for me.’ Which is charming in a child, but deadly in an adult. It is what the sinner says, and such an attitude is at the root of every sinful thought and deed.

If there is such a thing as ‘wishful thinking’, it is in that beautiful picture which men paint of human nature as good at heart but frustrated by environment. I know of nothing more dangerous to true religion, and indeed nothing more definitely non-Christian than all this talk of sin as frustration. That is just exactly and precisely what it is not. If ever there is such a thing as self-projection, it is to be found in this same rosy-coloured picture of human nature. Rationalist opponents of Christianity are very fond of saying that God is nothing but a self-projection of our ‘higher selves’. They do the very thing of which they so readily accuse the Christian, but they call it Human Nature.

There is little need to argue that this self-motif in human nature is the very thing that will destroy man. It is true that it has been a main element in the development of man. Without it he could never have struggled through to his present pre-eminence amongst living creatures. It is certainly true that it has brought man to where he is, the most efficient creature on the face of the earth. He has come to be capable of the utmost self-sacrifice; he can be generous in the extreme. Perhaps he always was like this. He can

see visions and dream dreams. He knows by this time precisely the sort of world this ought to be, and he can draw up first-class plans for it. But all the time, deep in the inner core of his own nature, there is this self-motif which destroys every dream and brings every human institution at last into ruin. Ever since the earliest days there has been a perpetual tug-of-war between the individual and society, lest the individual should destroy both his fellows and himself, and all in the pursuit of what he thinks is his own self-interest. Man carries in himself the seeds of his own destruction, and this is more than ever plain in our modern world.

The discovery of the internal combustion engine and the discovery of the properties of the electro-magnet gave man for the first time the command of such great power as would enable him not only to build a tower that reaches up into heaven, but equally to dig a pit as deep as hell. We have destroyed whole cities, and we have killed men and women by the million. In our time there have been further discoveries, of which jet-propulsion and nuclear fission are but the beginning. They have opened before us a prospect that is horrifying in the extreme. Not only have we created such instruments of destruction as are too terrible to contemplate, but we have also created a conscienceless creature which can and is fully prepared to use them. The individual within the society can do no great harm in these days of efficiently organized states, but we have controlled the individual only by creating a super-individual, the state, whose sovereign rights are regarded as paramount, and which is, so to speak, an individual without being a person. It has always been man's tragedy that he himself destroys the beauty and the goodness he creates. Now we have committed everything to a corporate Frankenstein that is without morals and religion, and knows no law except its own interest. This is as true of the democracies as it is true of the totalitarian states. All hopes now that man can work out his own

salvation must of necessity end in disillusion and failure. If man is ever to be saved, he must be saved from himself and from the modern state-system into which he has surrendered his all. This is why it is not silly in these days to talk about salvation. Here is where Christianity comes in. It offers a solution to this problem which otherwise is incapable of solution.

The salvation which Jesus Christ came down from heaven to offer to man involves a complete transformation, right in the heart of every separate man. It envisages a radical change in human nature, a change in this central motif. It is not denied that man knows what is right. He does know, and he knows also that he ought to do it—I speak here of the best of men—because there are men and women who do not accept any necessity in morals or any conduct which is recognized as being desirable.

It is not denied that man knows he must be, in some real sense, his brother's keeper. He does know, and there is not the slightest need for him to be a Christian in order to know it. His own selfishness will teach him that much. Christianity deals with what underlies all these ideas. It claims to be able to deal with that ingrained selfishness which is the root of all our woe. Our fathers talked of 'original sin'. This phrase makes little or no sense when 'sin' is interpreted only in such matters of conduct as are involved in the ethical items of the ten commandments. The same is true of the statement that human nature is 'wholly corrupt'. This statement is manifestly false in the sense that man never thinks good thoughts and never does good things. He does both, often. But if we interpret the word 'sin' in terms of this fundamental self-motif, then both phrases are sound and both phrases make perfectly good sense. It is precisely this inbred sin in human nature which brought disillusion to Mr. H. G. Wells in his old age. No man was more honest and sincere than he in seeking a new world, but human nature beat him, just as it will beat every re-

former who ignores this Jesus Christ who came down from heaven.

We say that all this looking out for ourselves is natural. Of course it is natural. It is so natural that it is our very nature itself. That is why we cannot change it ourselves. We can change our clothes; we can change our opinions; but we cannot change the 'we'. And changed it must be, and by some power that is other than ourselves. It was for this that He came down from heaven, 'for us men and for our salvation'.

The necessary transformation is accomplished by God in His love for you and me. This is made effective in our hearts by God the Holy Spirit. It is necessary for our salvation that we should love God with all our heart and self. Only by this means can that self-motif be transformed. It involves faith, which is complete trust and reliance not in ourselves, but upon Him. The Reformers were right when they insisted that salvation is by Faith Alone. John Wesley knew exactly what he was talking about when he wrote his First Sermon. This is his sermon on 'Salvation by Faith', and he makes it very clear that by 'faith' he means no intellectual assent only, but a full and complete reliance upon God.

# 7

## THE VIRGIN BIRTH

*'I BELIEVE IN . . . JESUS CHRIST . . . INCARNATE OF THE HOLY GHOST BY THE VIRGIN MARY.'* All matters concerning the Lord Jesus are difficult of explanation, but especially everything connected with His birth and death. Herein there is nothing in the least degree surprising, for such matters as birth and death for ordinary human kind are wrapped in mystery. How should they be less so, and not rather more so, for One who, though truly human, is yet equally truly divine?

My task here is to set forth the doctrine of the Virgin Birth in words that can be readily understood. The task is impossible of fulfilment, and I expect to satisfy no one. I am far from being satisfied myself. I trust that I can express in reasonably simple fashion anything I can understand, but here is something which by its very nature is beyond any human understanding. If any man should claim that he can give an adequate explanation, or even an adequate description of the birth of the Lord Jesus, then you can be quite sure that he has left something out. Further you can be no less sure that the something will be the most important factor of all, because it will be connected with the uniqueness of the God-Man. Here there is no place for a discussion as to whether or not a virgin can give birth to a child. That is irrelevant. The point at issue

is whether this particular Virgin gave birth to this particular Child.

Concerning the birth itself there is nothing unusual; that is, nothing contrary to ordinary human experience—the pain of a woman, the cry of a new-born child, the joy of a first-born son. The unusual element centres around the conception—again ‘unusual’ in the sense of being contrary to ordinary human experience. For my part, I note that the Creed says ‘incarnate’, and for the rest I fall back on the passage in the *Gospel according to Saint Luke*, and am quite content to leave it there. The passage is: ‘The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore that which is to be born of thee shall be called holy, the Son of God.’

I accept the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. I do not pretend to understand it. I know that it is contrary to the normal run of human experience, but, on the other hand, it seems to me to be eminently reasonable that it should be so. The Christian claim never was that the Lord Jesus lived an ordinary human life—a truly human life, if you like, but not ordinary; it was in fact wholly extra-ordinary. So why should we worry to maintain that He had an ordinary human conception and birth, as though the mystery would thereby be solved? There still remains the humanly insoluble problem of how God could ever become man.

To say that His sonship is spiritual does not help us very much, because we still have to posit some special direct action on God’s part. That, I judge, is precisely where the difficulty is in the minds of those who reject the doctrine. Indeed, such a statement is dangerous, because it is easy to infer from it that we can become sons of God just as He is Son of God. This is not so. However many Christians there may be, and however correct it may be to describe them as sons of God, the Lord Jesus remains the One and Only Son of God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father.

To say that His Sonship is moral, is definitely misleading.

I never quite know what the word 'moral' is intended to mean in this connection. I suspect that the idea involved is that the Lord Jesus achieved Sonship because of His perfect moral life. If this is indeed what is intended, then the statement is exactly and precisely wrong. And again, I suspect that another idea is involved—namely that a sound moral life is the condition of a man's acceptance by God. This is not the case. The condition of acceptance by God into the fellowship of those that believe is faith.

We must come in faith, repentant and believing. We are saved, not because of any moral excellence of our own, but because of God's grace (undeserved love and saving power) on the one hand, and our faith (complete and utter trust) on the other. I never could see any reason why the word 'moral' should be used in this context, unless in an attempt, conscious or unconscious, to do away with, or to whittle away, the doctrine of salvation by faith through grace.

The Old Testament has taught me two things, both of which predispose me to expect something wholly outside the common run of things in connection with the birth of the Lord Jesus.

The first thing is the transcendence of God, the fact of a tremendous difference between God and man. His thoughts are not as our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways. The two are poles apart; so much so that if ever the two should become one, it could only be by the most unusual and extraordinary action on the part of God. The action must be unique, an unparalleled act of supreme condescension.

Combined with this is the other thing, the 'immanence' of God, which means that God is always active and at work in His world. We speak in these days of the Laws of Nature, as though they are fixed rules which God established at the beginning and then left the whole affair alone. The Old Testament writers acknowledged no law except God's sovereign will, and they never thought of anything

happening in the world without God being in some way actually active in the doing of it. Transcendence refers to what He is. 'Immanence' refers to where He is—here, there, and everywhere.

The Jews thus maintained at one and the same time both God's nearness and God's 'away'-ness. They recognized His separateness from the world in general and man in particular, but at the same time they insisted upon His immediate and direct personal action both in controlling history in general and in inspiring individuals in particular. God is not part of the world, controlling from inside, but separate from it and always intervening. At the same time He is not a far-off cause, so much as an ever-present agent. In the same way, God is not part of man, but separate and distinct from him. At the same time, He can possess a man, change him, control him and make him different from what he was before.

The birth of the Lord Jesus is a unique intervention of the intervening God. Here, in Christ, the impassable barrier between God and man is broken down. The transcendent God becomes actually immanent in man. I have previously put the word 'immanence' in inverted commas, because strictly the Christian should not use the word apart from God in Christ, and from that transforming indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, of which more later. God was immanent in Christ, in that in Him 'dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily'. He is not immanent in the world in anything like this personal sense, but only in that impersonal rightness without which the world could never continue. He is not immanent in man until a man has consciously and fully surrendered himself to the power of the Holy Spirit.

God is the wholly Other. How should this wholly Other ever become man, except by some special and unique action which should superlatively demonstrate His nearness? What we call the Laws of Nature have to do with the normal,

regular way in which God runs His world. These laws do not apply when God becomes incarnate in the Son, nor do they apply when God the Holy Spirit accomplishes His saving work in the individual man. No adequate account of the Virgin Birth can ever be given. No adequate book on the psychology of Christian conversion can ever be written. In both cases we are dealing with a veritable work of God.

It is often pointed out that stories of a virgin birth are to be found in other religions. This is partly true, though apart from the Greek myths they are not nearly so common as is generally supposed. Further, so far as my knowledge of them goes, they are stories of a god mating with a virgin. In some cases, for example the story of the conception of Hercules, the mother was a married woman. Even in the case of the conception of Zoroaster, the virgin is impregnated by the actual semen of the god.

For my part, I find these stories a help to belief rather than a hindrance. They have one common factor in that they are all connected with the birth of one who is alleged to possess more than human characteristics. I take them to be evidence of man's conviction that if ever he is going to be saved from sorrow and sin and death, then God Himself will have to take action, special action out of the ordinary run of human affairs. Men were right. He did when Jesus was born. At the same time, I find that these stories do but emphasize the difference. The pagan stories tell of a god having sexual intercourse with a woman, generally a virgin. This story is different. It is actually a story of a Virgin bearing a child.

Again, some think that the Virgin Birth tradition has arisen from the passage in Isaiah which, in the Hebrew, is 'Behold the maiden shall conceive'. The Hebrew word is '*almah*', and it means a woman old enough to bear a child. But the Greek Bible has *parthenos*, a virgin, and this is the word used in the quotation in the Gospel. It is therefore

alleged that the whole story has arisen out of the Greek translation. This, of course, may be the case. Wonder-stories grew amazingly in the past, and still do. On the other hand, it is just as easy to suppose that the quotation is used in the same way that all the other quotations are used in the *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*. It is evident that the early Christians searched their Scriptures (the Old Testament) for any passage which seemed to them to have any connection with the Life of the Lord Jesus, and then used it as an additional confirmation of their claim that Jesus is Messiah and Saviour-God.

I have stated that I accept the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, and why. But I would allow full liberty of opinion here (as I would not, for instance, in the doctrine of the Trinity), provided always it is firmly believed that the Lord Jesus is both truly God and truly man. Christians must accept the unique Sonship of the Lord Jesus. If they can accept this without the Virgin Birth, well and good. I cannot.

# 8

## THE CROSS

*'I BELIEVE IN . . . ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST . . . (WHO) WAS CRUCIFIED ALSO FOR US UNDER PONTIUS PILATE.'* As we have said before, Pontius Pilate is mentioned to give chapter and verse, so to speak; that is, to fix the Crucifixion as a definite historical event.

The Creed says that He was crucified for us. Both pronouns are of the utmost importance. *He* was crucified; Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God living a truly human life. Other innocents have been unjustly condemned and cruelly done to death. Socrates, for instance, was one of the wisest and most upright of men. He died, as surely as any man ever died, for truth and for his fellow men, but his death is not comparable with that of Jesus. Nor is that of any man or woman we have known, whoever they are and whatever the circumstances. For all their devotion and their excellencies, they were but men. Jesus, in His perfectness, is the Lord from Heaven, the Saviour-God, and 'in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily'.

Further, the Cross as a cross, is neither here nor there. There is no magic in a cross, though there is power in this one, saving power. That is because it was Jesus who died on it. A hundred years before Jesus died on a cross outside Jerusalem, Crassus, at one time a friend of Julius Caesar, crushed the three-year-old revolt of the slaves under Sparta-

cus the gladiator. He crucified every slave he captured, six thousand of them, and the Appian Way was lined with crosses all the way to Capua. There were indeed many crosses in those days, but there is only One Cross.

Further, it was *for us*—not for humanity in general in a general sort of way, but *for us*, for you and me in particular and in a particular sort of way, a way in which no other sacrifice could be for you and for me. This is because it was Jesus and His Sacrifice. And it is for you and for me now, all these miles and years away. But how can something that happened in Palestine nineteen hundred years ago be directly and personally effective here and now for you and for me?

Throw a stone into a pond. The water which is exactly where the stone drops, is affected immediately and directly by the stone itself. All the water in the pond is affected, but neither directly nor immediately. One particle of water affects the next, and so on to the edge of the pond; then back again, I suppose, by reflexion. But it all takes time, and always longer and longer. The effect is less and less, until in time it becomes indistinguishable. When that time is, depends upon the size of the original splash. All human efforts and sacrifices are like the stone that is thrown into the pond. The Sacrifice of Jesus is everywhere and always as though the biggest of stones has just dropped here.

All human efforts and sacrifices have an effect, an undoubted effect, sometimes a very great effect, but they are necessarily limited because they belong wholly to time and place. The outstanding example of modern times is the evacuation of Dunkirk. This extraordinary operation engendered in the British people a will to resist and a zeal for ultimate victory which was an astonishment to everyone else. The reason for this was partly a realization that this was a bigger business than most of us had hitherto realized. But the seriousness of the situation was actually a minor factor, because the majority of people did not realize how

serious it was. Much more effective was the story of the heroism and the sacrifice. The doggedness of the retreat, the stand of the battalions who bought time for the rest at the cost of their own lives, the mobilization of every kind of small craft from destroyers down to nut-shells—all these and other kindred stories were an inspiration which lasted for many months. But there came a time when the more responsible began to long for a return of that 'Dunkirk feeling'. It had gone. For all its splendour and glory Dunkirk was but a deed of men—many deeds of many men—and it belonged to one time. Not so for the Sacrifice of Jesus. The effect is as direct and immediate as ever it was, now as then, here as there. The reason is that Jesus is truly God, equally as truly man. In so far as Jesus is human, He died once and for all on that Cross outside Jerusalem. In so far as Jesus is God, His death on the Cross is eternal.

That is what God is—'eternal'. This is a difficult word to explain. The idea is difficult. The word does not mean 'for ever'—that is what 'everlasting' means. It means 'now', always 'now'; 'now' then, 'now' now, always 'now'. We have to try to think of a point, always a point, and not a continuous line. This is not splitting hairs, because it means that Jesus dies for you and me, here, now, just as much as He died for anybody years ago in Palestine. And, of course, it is equally for anybody else, anywhere, any time. He can save us now. By 'save' I mean bring us immediately, here and now, into that fellowship with God which is the one thing we were ever made for, and therefore the only way in which any of us can ever find peace and happiness.

There can never be any happiness unless there is 'at-oneness'. We all know this quite well from ordinary human experience. If husband and wife, for instance, are going to be happy, then they must 'pull together', as the saying goes. And, as another saying partly goes, 'the more they pull together, the happier they will be'. It is no good when

he pulls his way, and she pulls her way. There must be an at-onement between them. They must both pull the same way. It is the same with our larger, finer happiness. If God did in truth create all things with man as the crown of His creation, if man alone of all creatures is born for fellowship with God, if God is such as is manifested to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, then it must follow that however happy otherwise a man may believe himself to be, there is a yet grander, truer, finer happiness to be found in his being at one with God. Sin is what prevents this. It makes us pull our way and not God's way. If ever we are going to know this more abundant happiness, there must be an end of sin. Then we shall be 'at-one' with God. Jesus by His death on the Cross does away with sin. That is why we use the word 'atonement' for what He did then. He makes an 'at-onement' for us with God; He brings us near to God. That there is such a thing as this superabundant happiness, realizable by those who know themselves humbly and trustfully to be at-one with God is testified by such men and women themselves out of their own experience of it. No one else can speak of it. They do not know. Anything they may have to say against it is not evidence. The fact that those who know are unable to give a fully rational explanation of it is neither here nor there. It is a matter of personal relationship. All personal relationships are, to some extent and perhaps to a major extent, emotional experiences. To that extent they lend themselves to an emotional, rather than a rational or intellectual explanation. It is not that they are contrary to reason, but outside it. The example is that of lovers. It is no good asking them why they are attracted to each other. They cannot tell, but they are none the less sure of the reality of their mutual attachment. Their very attachment itself carries its own conviction. This is a characteristic of all personal relationships where any intimate bond is established.

The word 'atonement' has a curious history. Originally

it was 'at-onement'. This latter phrase belongs to the sixteenth century, but it is found first, I believe, in the writings of Robert Mannyng, one of the early English rhyming chroniclers. He was born at Bourne in Lincolnshire, and was busy from 1303 to 1338. He used such phrases as 'make an at onement with God', and 'set at onement'. The word 'atone' is a later development, and does not occur in the Bible. Many people will find this latter statement hard to accept, but it is indeed the case. Both words properly and originally have to do with the idea of reconciliation; that is, of securing an at-onement between God and man. Such modern meanings as 'expiate', and 'appease', 'propitiate,' are due to attempts to explain how this 'at-onement' is actually secured.

But how does Jesus through His Cross do away with our sin? He takes it away. But how? In what sense? No one explanation of this is wholly adequate, but for one aspect of it, or perhaps better, for one way of describing it, I find it most helpful to go back to 2 Cor. 5. 21; 'Him who knew no sin He made (to be) sin on our behalf.' This I take to mean—Jesus was without sin. He was always at one with God and was without fault (this, by the way, is the right order), but He was made sin on our behalf. But how could Jesus become sin? This is where Greek and Hebrew come in, and here, as in many other cases, they really do help. Paul uses the Greek word *hamartia* which does indeed mean 'sin', strictly speaking, in the sense of 'missing the mark'. In the old Greek Bible (the Septuagint), this word stands for the Hebrew *chatt'ath*, for which it is an almost exact equivalent so far as the strict meaning is concerned. I am pretty sure myself that Paul was really thinking of this Hebrew word. It has three distinct meanings.

First of all, it means 'missing the mark', 'error,' and so 'sin' generally in the sense of doing what is wrong. This is the main and usual meaning of the Hebrew word, just as

it is also the main and usual meaning of the Greek word.

In the second place, it can stand for the results of sin, and in this sense can even mean 'punishment'. This is true generally of the Hebrew words for sin. The outstanding example is Gen. 4. 13; where Cain says, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear'. The Hebrew word is '*awon*', which properly means 'iniquity', the actual iniquitous act or iniquitous acts in general. The English Versions, however, rightly understood the word here to mean 'punishment for iniquity', rightly recognizing that the Hebrews tended to regard both the wrong act and its necessary consequences as an indivisible whole. It is possible that Paul had something of this in his mind, but more of that anon.

In the third place, *chatt'ath* is the word used for the sin-offering in the ritual of the Second (post-exilic) Temple. This, I think, is the meaning here.

When Paul says that Jesus was made sin for us, he can scarcely mean the first, for Jesus was no sinner. In the words of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 'he was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin'. We believe, as Paul believed, that He was without sin. Indeed Paul elsewhere was very careful to avoid even that Jesus 'was made flesh'. This is the phrase used in the prologue to the *Gospel according to Saint John*, and it is orthodox enough there. But Paul held that all flesh (that is, human nature itself) was corrupt and sinful and doomed to death. When therefore Paul wanted to say that Jesus was truly human, he had to say that He 'was made in the likeness of sinful flesh'. He was not denying that the humanity of Jesus was real when he used the word 'like'; on the contrary, he was seeking to emphasize His true humanity. Nevertheless, he was sure that he must avoid even the least suggestion that Jesus partook personally of human sin in any moral or religious sense of the word. We can therefore leave wholly out of account the first possible meaning of *hamartia*.

Paul might have meant the second, namely, that Jesus suffered as a result of our sin, bore the consequences of it, paid the price of it, in a way similar to that in which the Servant of Isaiah 53 is described as paying the price of Israel's sin. This certainly is a sound idea, as we shall see later, but I do not think it is what Paul meant here.

I think he intended the third meaning. Jesus was made a sin-offering for us, that is, His death takes away our sin. That, I think, is mainly what His sacrifice is—a sin-offering. That His death is a sacrifice, no one can deny, but it is most necessary to be quite precise and exact as to what we mean by the word. It is often used loosely, and with a whole range of confused meanings. It is easy to go into the mist meaning one thing and to come out of it meaning another, never clearly realizing that the meaning has changed.

To make myself clear—His death is a sacrifice in the sense that He surrendered Himself wholly to the will of God, He the Son to the will of the Father. For my part, I will not allow that His death was in any other sense a gift to God. But I do maintain that it was a sacrifice in the special sense of the sin-offering.

The sin-offering never went anywhere near the altar, but was deliberately kept clear of it, symbolically taking away with it the sin of the repentant sinner who brought the offering, taking it away so that it no longer stood between man and God, thus preventing an at-onement. The barrier of man's sin is so great that nothing man can do, can break it down and take it away. Christ the sinless one provides the means for taking the sin away.

If you are thinking in sacrificial terms, borrowed from the old Temple liturgy, then, as I see it, this is how you must think of it. But there is always something of which we must be wary. The prophets were always fighting against age-old ideas of magic, that we can *do* something to achieve our salvation (or at least materially help towards it), and that the very doing of it is in itself effective. No offering in

itself is effective apart from true repentance on the part of the offerer. Not even the Cross itself is effective apart from man's faith. We must come in faith, repentant and believing.

But whilst we are discussing the idea of sacrifice in connection with the death of Jesus, there is another sacrificial term that is used. It is 'Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us', and there is good New Testament warrant for the phrase.

The Passover lamb has always been 'away' from the altar even more than the sin-offering. There has always been an almost complete cleavage between the Passover rites and all the other Jewish sacrificial rites. Originally the rite was apotropaic, that is, for the warding off of evil agencies. It was essentially a house ritual, and the removal of all traces of the victim before morning, combined with the eating of bitter herbs, are both relics of the original purpose. In the last days of the Temple, the Passover lamb was slain in the sacred precincts, and the blood was passed up the line of priests to be poured out at the foot of the altar, but everything else was away from the Temple. There was here no slightest suggestion of an offering to God. For the Jews the slaying of the Passover lamb and its attendant rites had become the sign of the deliverance from Egypt, so that Paul's reference to Jesus as the Passover Lamb is really a reference to the salvation which He brought near by His death.

# 9

## THE CROSS AND SIN

IN the last chapter, I was seeking to answer the question: 'How does Jesus do away with our sin?' I said that He takes it away so that it no longer need stand between us and God. I gave the answer in Old Testament temple-ritual terms, and said that 2 Cor. 5. 21 means that Jesus Christ is a sin-offering for us, I would not admit that in any sense His death and sacrifice is a gift to God. His death takes away the sin so that it no longer blocks the way between us and God. He thus makes for us an at-onement with God. So far, so good; but such a statement does not take us very much further. It still does not tell us 'how'.

This largely is where Isaiah 53 comes in. It is a chapter which has a good deal to say about sacrifice, but does not speak in terms of the temple sacrifices. The reference to the lamb led to the slaughter is not a reference to the beasts that were slaughtered for sacrifice in the Temple, as is to be seen in the parallel reference to the sheep that is led to the shearer. Both similes go together and have the same meaning, according to the parallelism which is a feature of Hebrew poetry.

The prophet says that the Servant's death is an '*asham*, and that his sacrifice becomes effective when this is realized. This Hebrew word came later, during the days of the Second Temple, to be used for the guilt-offering, an offering which was similar in many respects to the sin-offering. Here,

however, it has its earlier meaning 'substitute', but not its later post-exilic meaning of 'substitute-offering', a much more accurate translation than guilt-offering. It was indeed an offering for guilt, but the characteristic feature of it was that it was a substitution. The meaning is clearly shown in verses four and five: 'Of a truth it was our sicknesses he bore; and as for our sorrows, he carried the heavy load of them; and we thought him to be the (deservedly) stricken one, smitten of God, and disciplined. The chastisement which brought us health fell upon him, and in his stripes there is healing for us.'

The whole incident of the Cross has no special significance for the man who does not know his need of a Saviour. He may loiter for a while, but presently he passes along on his own business. It was all very regrettable, but unfortunately that kind of thing does happen on occasion in this rough world. You cannot tear your heart-strings every time you see or hear of an innocent man done to death. There is too much of it. Life would be insupportable if we took such things too much to heart. So much for the man who is reasonably well satisfied with things as they are, and with himself as he is. But the man who is a sinner and knows it, the man who realizes that he is fast bound in sin ('we have turned everyone to his own way'), and earnestly desires to be freed from his fetters, this man needs to be assured concerning two things. He wants to know in the first place that something effective is done about his guilt, and in the second place he wants to know that something effective is being done about the consequences of his sin. Only when the sinner is convinced about these two things can the Cross become effective in his life. If God is indeed Saviour, then He must be able to deal adequately with both the guilt of the sinner and the consequences of his sin, and further, the sinner must have effective assurance that this is so.

There are many who seek to deal with themselves. They

make more earnest endeavours to lead the good life, and they show an increasing devotion to good works. Some drug themselves with cultured words set to elegant music in an aesthetic medium, and others equally with barbarous rhymes set to boisterous music in a barn. But ultimately, when they at last realize how desperately deadly sin is and are truly repentant, all men alike must come to the Cross, because the guilt and the consequences of sin can be dealt with nowhere else and by nobody else.

First, the guilt. When I was a boy and deserved it, my father dealt with me both faithfully and well. But when he was satisfied that I was truly sorry, he would say, 'Now, that's the end of it.' And I knew it would be the end of it. Why? Partly from experience and because I knew him, but mostly because I knew he loved me with the love of an only son. I can see it all more clearly now because I have an only son, and I can see now that there was more in it even than that. When my father was born, higher education was barred to Dissenters, and he suffered all his life because of these disabilities. Like many dissenting ministers of his generation, he was anxious that the dreams, of which the fulfilment was denied to him, should be realized in his son. Now that the disabilities of the Dissenters have been largely, though by no means completely, removed, we cannot understand what was involved in that pent-up longing for sound learning. It is only when some of us come up against these barriers in our own experience, that we can catch a glimpse of what was involved. All this is very personal, perhaps really too personal for print. I have written it down for two reasons. The first has nothing to do with the point at issue here. It is that it may very well be that the battle for religious liberty will have to be fought all over again. The second is that to me it is necessary to the argument. It has all of it contributed, especially these latter days, towards an understanding of what forgiveness is. It was because I knew even then that he loved me, that

I knew also that I was fully and freely forgiven. I suppose I was still guilty, and for that matter, still am; but from the moment when my father spoke, I knew that the guilt could never more stand between us.

The Cross makes me sure beyond any slightest shadow of doubt that God loves me with an even greater love than that which I knew in my father. There on the Cross the dying God declares His undying love 'for all the fallen race—and me'. I know henceforth of a surety that every guilty, but repentant, sinner can here find full assurance of forgiveness. It is no longer the case that 'your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you'. We are still guilty, and nothing can ever alter that; not all our repentance and our tears, nor all the boundless love of God. Nothing can ever wash away our guilt, but we can know for certain that our guilt need no longer stand between us and God. That is what really matters. An at-onement has been made in that dying on the Cross.

Secondly, the consequences. How can the repentant sinner know that the consequences of his sin are being dealt with adequately? He can have no peace in his heart until he is convincingly assured of this. The repentant sinner knows that there is nothing more deadly than sin, and the more truly repentant he is, the more he is concerned about the consequences of his own past sin. So far as his own relationship with God is concerned, he knows that all is well there. His guilt has been put out of the way, and its power over him is broken. By the grace of God, whatever he has done in the past, and whatever he has been in the past—none of this has any power over him now. But there are the consequences still to be dealt with, and no amount of forgiveness can do away with these. The price of sin has always to be paid, repentance or no repentance.

It is of the utmost importance for us to realize, not in this connection only but in other matters also, that the conse-

quences of sin do not fall exclusively on the sinner. Indeed, sometimes, so far as the visible consequences are concerned, the actual sinner is the one who gets off scot-free. The price has to be paid by the group, and usually by those whom the sinner loves most; for, whether we will it or not, we are all members one of another, and this for woe as well as for weal. And again, apparently the consequences of sin have to work themselves out. The world is made that way, and nobody can live long in it without realizing it. When once the stone is dropped into the pond, nothing in the pond can stop the resultant commotion until it has spent itself. The ripples go on rippling until they have rippled themselves out. Similarly, not even God Himself is able to destroy sin by cutting its consequences off short. But He has found a way, and He does it on the Cross. He destroys it by absorption.

One fact stands out stark and plain. That death on the Cross was a substitution. He was hanging on that Cross, and by rights that is where we ought to be. Most of what is said about the Cross is by way of an attempt to make this clear. God is there dealing with the results of sin. Jesus carries the load which crushes us. He pays the price which bankrupts us. He absorbs the sin which would absorb us. The repentant sinner knows that sin is so deadly in its results that it would wear us out, engulf us, absorb us. Until he is repentant, he does not realize this, and that is why he thinks all this talk about the Cross is hot-house emotion and exaggerated metaphor. But God, by His grace, does not permit us to be engulfed by the consequences of our sin. He has made the world so that turning away from Him brings with it the most appalling results, sorrow and destruction and death, but He has also provided Himself a way of dealing with these dreadful results. He gives Himself that sin may spend itself on Him, and in full working of its results it works itself right out on Him. This is what I mean by the absorption of sin.

To complete the tale—so far, that is, as it can be completed—this also must be said: The Crucifixion was historical. It happened on one particular hill and on one particular day. In this historical sense it has happened once, and neither can nor need happen again. But, as I have already pointed out, it is also eternal. Christ suffered once and for all, but what is true of Jesus Christ in first-century Palestine is true of God everywhere now. This is what we mean when we say that the Cross is eternal. (For the benefit of the theologians, this is not saying that the Father suffered. It is saying that the Son suffered, and that God suffers.) And so we come to this, that God can deal both with the guilt and with the consequences of my sin now, and of your sin now.

The idea of absorption is much to be preferred to the ideas of payment, because people will persist in carrying on the metaphor long after it ought to have been dropped. This wooden persistence has been one of the curses of theology. It has been the origin of most heresies. If we did God the honour and ourselves the kindness of remembering that His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways, we would realize that no human analogy is adequate and complete in respect of God, and that every human picture of God is valuable only, so to speak, for that particular aspect for which it is valuable.

The metaphor of payment has been fruitful of error for this reason. As soon as the question is asked, 'To whom was the payment made?', immediately we are wrong. There can be but three answers. One is 'To the Devil'. That involves God cheating the Devil, because the ancient answer continued by saying that when the Devil got Jesus, he found he could not hold Him, and therefore lost both Him and man. God cheats nobody, not even the Devil. Besides, God makes no terms with the Devil.

The second answer is 'To Moral Law'. This makes Justice (*dike*) greater than God, and that will never do.

The third answer is 'To God'. I forget in just how many ways this is wrong, but I can think of three. It splits the Godhead, because it puts the Two Persons, the Father and the Son, on opposite sides. They thus become two in a way which precludes them from being one. Again, it involves God as demanding the suffering before He forgives, whereas the one condition of forgiveness is true repentance. But queerest of all, it is a most immoral procedure. In fact it might be called 'The Immoral Theory of the Atonement'. What sort of a God is it that demands the sacrifice of an innocent victim as satisfaction for the guilty? Why cannot He forgive the repentant sinner and be done with it? Is He less forgiving than me? Or, if He demands some sort of satisfaction, and then makes this satisfaction Himself—then does not that really mean that He has to satisfy something else other than Himself? And if not, surely the whole scheme savours of unreality, as if it is the juggling of some celestial accounts, which nobody but a celestial accountant could ever understand or would ever require. Perhaps these questions all have real answers, but, as I see it, they create needless difficulties. It is all hard enough as it is. Why make it harder?

# IO

## THE RESURRECTION

*'I BELIEVE IN . . . ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST . . . HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD.'*

The main argument against the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus, so far as I am aware, is that it simply could not have happened. If it had happened then it would have been a miracle, and miracles do not happen. And that is that. This is not very good logic. It is, in fact, very bad logic, because of the uncertainty and confusion of the word 'miracle'. The argument neither proves nor disproves anything. As an argument, it is worthless.

A miracle, some will say, is an event contrary to the normal run of human experience. If this is true, then miracles happen every day. Others will say that a miracle is an event not capable of rational explanation. If this be the meaning of the word, then it is impossible for anyone to say whether or not any particular event is a miracle. All that we are able to say is whether or not, in the present state of human knowledge, an event is capable of human explanation. What is incapable of human explanation in one generation is capable of such explanation in another. Further, an explanation which is deemed to be adequate in one generation, may be thought to be so only because of ignorance. Increased precision in scientific measurement and a wider experience of phenomena, physical or psychical, have shown that our predecessors have been too easily

satisfied. To put it another way, they have been too easily convinced of their own ability in matters explicatory. Incidentally, what guarantee have we that we know as much as we think we know? And again, it is high time we rid ourselves of the illusion that nothing can be true or sound unless it is capable of a human explanation. Man is indeed a rational creature (though this is not easy to believe sometimes), and therefore he acts rationally. It is equally true that man is an irrational creature, and it therefore follows equally that he acts irrationally.

Or again, it is said that a miracle is an event which contravenes the Laws of Nature. We have discussed this matter of the Laws of Nature previously, but who are we to say what are and what are not the Laws of Nature? None but an ignorant man would venture thus far. What we call the Laws of Nature are actually generalizations made on the basis of observed phenomena. Our so-called Laws of Nature are always subject to alteration. The outstanding example of this is the Newton-Kepler Law of Gravitation. This 'law of the inverse square' was reckoned for generations to be one of the fixed laws, applicable to all concentrations of matter from the smallest speck of dust here to the largest star beyond the Milky Way. We know now that this explanation does not always explain, and thanks to Einstein and his comrades we have a new explanation, geometrical rather than dynamic, which does explain anomalies of which neither Newton nor Kepler could ever be aware. If there are any Laws of Nature, none but an all-wise Creator-God could ever say what they are.

Yet again, if it be held that Jesus could not have arisen from the dead, on the ground that such an event has never happened before or since, then the reply is that there has never been anybody comparable to Jesus, either before or since. The Christian statement is that Jesus is God living a truly human life. Nothing less than this statement is adequate. If it were true that Jesus was the best of men,

then this argument might have some justification. But since it is a fundamental fact from which the Christian will not move one inch, that Jesus is God living a truly human life, then all rational arguments against both the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection fall to the ground. They all of them apply only to an ordinary human life, and cannot apply to such an extraordinary human life as His. He is unique, and since His uniqueness is due to the fact that He is the eternal God, it is most likely to be evident, so far as this world is concerned, in His entrance to it, and His departure from it. (This is all to say that, while He was 'declared the Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection from the dead', yet He rose from the dead because He was Son of God.)

And finally, the whole conception of miracle depends upon the idea that God set this world going at the beginning, and that since then He has had nothing in particular to do with it. The idea of miracle as an intervention belongs to this 'Deist' conception of God which isolates Him from His world. We have inherited the idea from Greek philosophy in the main, but it has received new life in modern times because of the scientific outlook which seeks to explain all things in terms of cause and effect, material, economic, or psychological, all of which deliberately cuts God out, so to speak, as *ultra vires*. The Hebrew idea is of an active God, always busy in this world which He has made. God is 'One Who Does', and whatever it is that He does, He does it here. If a miracle is to be regarded as an invasion of this natural world from or by the supernatural world, then, according to the Bible point of view, everything is a miracle, for in the Bible God is certainly thought to be always touching this world and active in it at ten thousand times and places. The more outstanding and remarkable any particular event is, the more it is a miracle as being an outstanding example of the activity of God, and in general it is an outstanding example of His saving activity.

When we turn to the records themselves, we find many

strange statements in them, though I do not find anything contradictory in the accounts which have been preserved in the three eye-witness gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The difficulties arise when the Fourth Gospel tradition is placed side by side with that of the other three gospels. To me, difficulties or no difficulties, the most convincing element in the whole story is that, according to all the evidence, such an event as the Resurrection was the last thing they expected. What was it that changed these defeated, disappointed men into men who spoke of victory and of an immortal hope? Actually, as we shall see in a later chapter, it was their experience at Pentecost, but even there it rested upon their conviction that the Risen Lord had fulfilled the promise He gave. He bade them wait in Jerusalem until they received 'power from on high', and that promised power did indeed come. Their own explanation is at once the simplest and the most adequate. It is evident that the Resurrection occupied at least as large a place in the early preaching as did the Crucifixion. This can be seen in the speeches of Stephen and Peter in the first chapters of the *Acts of the Apostles*, and especially in Paul's speech at Athens. The Athenians evidently thought that he had been speaking of two gods, one of whom was called Jesus, and the other Anastasis (Resurrection).

I, therefore, believe that the Scriptures are right when they say that He rose from the dead. He was actually seen by those who are listed in 1 Cor. 15. 1-11.

## II

### THE ASCENSION

THE next statement in the Creed concerns the Ascension. He '*ascended into heaven*'. The difficulty of this statement arises from the fact that heaven is not in the sky directly above the Bethany side of the Mount of Olives, any more than it is in the sky directly above here or above Australia. The passage in the Gospels and that in the Acts are descriptions of a unique event. There was one particular occasion on which the Risen Lord appeared to the disciples. It was for the last time in visible form, and they knew it was for the last time. He 'was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight'. The important item in the description is the cloud, for it was not by any means an ordinary cloud in the sky. The cloud is the Cloud of the Presence of God. From ancient times it was the garment which wraps the Godhead round. It was the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night which protected and guided the travelling Israelites. It was the cloud which descended upon the Tent of Meeting, because of which Moses' face shone so that the children of Israel could not stand before him. It filled the house of God with smoke when Isaiah saw the vision of the heavenly Throne, just as the House was filled with the Presence at the dedication by Solomon. It was the Cloud which overshadowed the Mount of Transfiguration, out of which there spoke the Voice of God, and His garments became glistening white. Here also,

therefore, we have a description in the traditional style of the actual Presence of the Godhead. The meaning is that the little company saw the Lord Jesus depart to resume His place within the Godhead which He had since before the foundation of the world. It marked the close of the earthly ministry of Jesus. No more would He be with men in the way in which He had been with them during the past years. Whatever future manifestation or experience there might be of the Presence of God would be different.

The statement that 'He sitteth at the right hand of the Father' is another instance where we have to recognize that the Creed is using language belonging to another age than ours. To sit at the right hand of God is, from Psalm 110 onwards, the privilege of the triumphant Messiah. This is the meaning here. When His earthly life was completed, He returned to His high estate, and He returned as Conqueror. That which He had come to earth to do, He had accomplished, and He had accomplished it triumphantly.

He is conqueror—in every way conqueror. This is the first instalment, so to speak, of the victory of Messiah, for it is impossible that Messiah should not rule. This victory of Messiah must later, as we shall see, be visibly demonstrated on earth; here it is already established in heaven.

He is conqueror over sin. He had given Himself that sin might do its worst, that all the consequences of human sin might fall upon Him. Here He is, alive for evermore, and conqueror. He conquered sin on the Cross, and He conquered death at the Resurrection. Henceforth neither of these two greatest enemies of man need have dominion over us.

This then is the meaning of the phrase 'sitteth at the right hand of the Father'. We are not to think of the Father actually sitting on one throne and the Son beside Him sitting on another, for while there are Three Persons, there is but One God. The phrase 'sit at the right hand of' belongs to the picture of power, and is not to be interpreted literally.

# 12

## THE SECOND ADVENT

*'I BELIEVE IN . . . ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST . . . AND HE SHALL COME AGAIN WITH GLORY TO JUDGE BOTH THE QUICK AND THE DEAD.'*

The belief in the Second Coming is due to the firm conviction of the Christian Church from the first days that Jesus Christ must come into this world in triumph. Messiah must be born to rule. A Messiah born to suffer is an anomaly, a contradiction. The Jews have known this from of old. They said that the passages in Isaiah which speak of the suffering of the Servant refer to Israel, but that those which tell of triumph refer to Messiah. Or again, they said that there will be two Messiahs—Messiah son of Joseph born to suffer, and Messiah son of David born to rule. The one fixed and certain thing is that Messiah son of David must rule.

The first Christians were equally sure that Messiah must come in triumph. He did come once, and was born in Bethlehem. He was born in the humblest of circumstances, on the straw in a stable. He was brought up obscurely in a provincial village. He was a fugitive from the authorities for a large proportion of the time after He had emerged from obscurity, for a much larger proportion indeed than is generally realized. Finally, He was hanged. Beyond question, He came in humiliation. Therefore, said they, He

must come again, and next time in triumph. He who once stood before the judgment throne of men, must come again Himself to sit upon the judgment throne, and Himself to judge all men.

From this belief the Church has never varied. The essence of the belief in the Second Coming is the certainty of the triumph of Christ. After all, the famous chapter (Isaiah 53) which has most to say concerning the suffering and humiliation of the Servant, regards it all as the necessary preliminary to a triumph which no man will be able to deny. The whole emphasis of the chapter is that of the sixteen chapters of Second Isaiah, which is that the suffering is ended and the triumph is close at hand. This close connection between the humility of the first coming and the glory of the second coming is very clear in the Anglican collect for the first Sunday in Advent, the collect which has to be repeated with the other collects in Advent until Christmas Eve. It is a thoroughly sound tradition which connects the two.

There are great differences of opinion amongst earnest Christians as to the when and the how of Christ's Second Coming. That Jesus must reign we are all agreed, but how?

There is an early Christian addition to Psalm 96. 10, which says, 'He reigned *from the tree*'. It is found in the Veronese Psalter and in the Latin Psalters, though not in the Vulgate. But whilst this is true enough, it involves such a curious and prejudiced view of reigning that only a Christian would admit it. In any case, for Protestant Dissenters at least, the Cross has been empty since the evening of the Day of Calvary. To say that He reigns from the Cross may be true enough, but it is not enough. He must come to rule in such a way that all men will acknowledge Him as King and Judge, those that love Him and those that hate Him, as well as those that are indifferent. The same objection applies to the statement that 'He must reign in our

hearts'. That also is true, but it is not what is meant by the Second Coming. He must come and reign in such fashion that all the world will know.

Must we, therefore, look for His Coming to be heralded by fearful signs and portents in the heavens above, and by terrors and convulsions on the earth below? Or, are all these lurid pictures of the end of things to be treated as eastern metaphors with the main idea borrowed from Persian religion with its scheme of a succession of world eras, the new age being ushered in with a catastrophe of cosmic proportions? To put it in another way, did they actually mean exactly what they said?

For instance, I have many friends who often speak of being 'washed in the blood'. They do not actually mean washed in the actual blood of Christ. That has never happened to them or to anybody else. They mean that we must have a firm faith in God, a faith which involves, amongst other things, a firm assurance that Christ died for us, and that, because Christ shed His blood for us, we can know for certain that our sins need no longer stand between us and God. They are right, but they are using highly figurative language to say it. Are the vivid descriptions of Christ's Second Coming to be regarded as being equally figurative?

I think they are so to be regarded. When the Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the ass's colt on the Sunday before He died, there is no doubt but that the crowds greeted Him as Messiah. Jesus Himself definitely, and apparently deliberately, fulfilled three prophecies. His riding the colt was in accordance with Zechariah 9. 9, and the people recognized this both quickly and enthusiastically. Again; it was Passover. The belief that Messiah was to appear at Passover accounted for the extra precautions which the Romans always took in order to crush a possible rebellion almost before it had started. This accounts also for the tremendous crowds which gathered for the Passover during

the last days of the Temple. Josephus states (*Wars of the Jews*, VI, ix, 3 and II, xiv, 3) that for three years prior to the outbreak of the Jewish War of A.D. 67-70 there were over two and a half million Jews there for the Passover, whilst in the year A.D. 64 the number was three millions. The tradition is enshrined in the ancient Greek (Septuagint) Version of Jeremiah 31. 8 which reads 'in the feast of passover' instead of 'with them the blind and the lame'. And lastly, it was held that 'the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple' (Malachi 3. 1), a passage which, being read with reference to Messiah, accounts for the form of the account of Mark 11. 11. On all these counts it is clear that they recognized Him as Messiah readily and easily, although there were no catastrophic signs and phenomena. Jesus evidently intended that it should be so. The same is true of all the Jewish rebellions against Rome, ending with the last of the Roman Wars in the time of Hadrian. The vivid descriptions cannot have been taken as literally as we generally suppose.

Will He come 'on the clouds of heaven'? Many Christians believe He will so come on actual and real clouds. For myself, I do not think so; but I do not know. Who am I to say what God can or cannot do? But this much I certainly do know. There will come a day when all men will recognize Him as King and Judge. Some will greet Him with joy, and others 'Deeply wailing, shall the true Messiah see'. This will be the climax of history, and thereafter 'His Kingdom shall have no end'. This is not to be interpreted in terms of universal salvation, nor is it to be thought of as the inauguration of a Utopia. He will utter His final verdict concerning all human affairs, 'and time will be no more'.

For many people in these days, anything that savours to any degree of a visible Second Coming is put down as crude and obscurantist, and that is the end of it so far as they are concerned. They think in such evolutionary terms as in-

volve a doctrine of inevitable progress. The Second Coming thus becomes for them the onward march of civilization. Christ will have fully come when all men everywhere acknowledge what are called 'Christian principles', and the halcyon days of universal felicity are here. They receive some encouragement for this by the way in which the *Gospel according to Saint John* appears partly to equate the Second Coming of Christ with the gift of the Holy Spirit, but they go on to think of the work of the Holy Spirit in terms of cultural activities rather than in terms of personal experience of the presence of a personal God.

Concerning this attitude, there are two things to be said. The first is that the belief in the inevitability of human progress is now out of date. The leading and best-informed rationalists are as worried as anybody else about the fate of mankind, and indeed more worried than most. The second thing is that the equation of the Second Coming with the idea of human progress is not enough. The essential idea of the Second Coming must include the idea of judgment, or crisis, for the word 'crisis' is nothing but the Greek word for 'judgment'. To this extent there is a great deal to be said for the interpretation which sees the Second Coming in the major crises of history. These great wars are indeed a judgment of God on a perverse and wicked generation. But to stop here is not enough, because we must go on to speak of a last great crisis, and a final judgment on sin. This judgment marks the end of time, and the end of history. It will be a judgment on all human history, and all men will know that He alone is King and rules over all.

I find myself that the best approach to the proper understanding of what is involved in the idea of the Second Coming is through the Old Testament. That actually is its origin, for it is not an idea which came in with Greek thought. It is indeed repugnant, now as then, to all who make the ideas of the Greeks the basis of their thinking.

The idea of the Day of Judgment, which is indissolubly

joined with the Second Coming, has its origin in the 'Day of the Lord'. Our task is to work out the development of this idea without finding ourselves involved in those lurid expressions which have brought the whole idea into disrepute. For, let it be said clearly, there can be no question of being involved in these calculations of times and seasons, especially when the measurements of the pyramids are brought in. Anybody who will believe that those measurements with their arbitrary changes and revisions have anything to do with it, will believe anything. I would have thought that Mark 13. 32 would have warned them off such things for ever.

'The Day of the Lord', to adopt the theory proposed by the Swede, Sigmund Mowinckel, and others, was the annual Day of Fate, the New Year's Day. From ancient times the Jews believed, in common with most peoples, that there was a change of fate with the change of the year. Most of us still more than half believe that, and we keep up a number of traditional customs connected with it. The extent to which we believe in the effectiveness of these rites varies for each one of us, and in any case would be very hard to define. The ancient popular idea is used by the people called Methodists in the Watch-night Service and especially in the Covenant Service. Neither shows any signs of falling into disuse, but tends on the contrary to show evidence of increased devotion.

As the times grew more and more difficult for the Jews, they grew more and more to look forward to one greatest Day of the Lord, when they would find a happy issue once and for all out of all their distresses. At first they hoped that this relief would come in the ordinary course of the world's history, and they longed to see such changes in the balance of power amongst the great warring empires as would provide them with an opportunity for freedom and for a restoration of the ancient traditional glory of the House of David. But generation after generation came and

passed, and except for the Indian Summer of Jewish greatness which followed the times of the Maccabees, the prospect grew darker rather than brighter. Gradually they began to look away from man to God, believing that if the salvation of Israel was ever to come to pass, it must be 'from heaven' rather than 'of earth'. They believed that one day there would be a great Day of the Lord when all the powers of evil would be overthrown never more to rise. Then, in that great day, the rule of God would be established throughout all the world. It would be a day of joy and a day of sorrow—great joy for all who love Him and serve Him and look for His appearing; great sorrow and tribulation for all who deny Him. Here is the essence of the idea of the Second Coming, and it is the business of every Christian to make definite room for this belief in his own scheme of things. The Jews borrowed a whole wealth of eastern imagery in their description of that fearful day, and added it to an imagery which they themselves developed from the time when Amos saw the Day of the Lord as a day of darkness. They sought to describe the signs of its coming, signs in the heavens above and terrors on the earth below. Such ideas are expressed by Charles Wesley in the words:

'Plagues, earthquake, and famine, and tumult and war,  
The wonderful coming of Jesus declare.'

For our part, whilst we do realize that the judgment of God on the sinfulness of man is to be seen in the type of famine which we know in our own times, in our tumults and our wars, we regard the rest of the details as the vividness of eastern imagery, fostered in a people who could do nothing in a practical way to ensure the fulfilment of their dreams, and driven to embroider their thoughts with all the picturesqueness which eager anticipation and vigour of expression could provide.

To put it all in other terms, the Second Coming stands for

the effective breaking of eternity into time on a world-wide scale. The time of Crisis is Now, always Now. This shows itself in another, though closely-related, connection, in the apparent triple time-content of the Kingdom of God. It was and is, and is to be. God became King at the beginning, when He created the world and began to rule over it. He becomes King at each mighty act of salvation which He accomplishes, ascends His throne and establishes His royal authority. This is clear from the Exodus Song of Moses (Exodus 15), that Old Testament seed-bed for all the growth of the idea of the Kingdom of God. But He will become King at the End of Days when evil is finally overthrown.

But this is not really a triple time-content. Its real significance is expressed in the continuous truth of the saying 'The Kingdom of God is at hand'. This was indeed true in a special and unique way at the time when the Lord Jesus said it, but it is always true. The time of crisis is Now, always Now. Now is the time when God is here to accomplish His mighty salvation. But one day for you and for me, and for all the world, there will be a Now that marks the end of time, and no one of us knows when that Now will be. Therefore the call to every one of us is: Repent NOW.

# I3

## GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

*'I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST.'* This is a doctrine much misunderstood, and that to the detriment of true religion. It is safe to say that whenever the Church has been anaemic, lacking vigour and ineffective in its witness without, it has been because it has been confused and in error concerning the doctrine of the Spirit.

The two most prevalent errors both involve a belief in a 'binity' instead of in a Trinity, that is, an assumption that there are but two Persons in the Godhead instead of a belief in the Three. Sometimes the Son is confused with the Spirit, and sometimes the Spirit is confused with the Father. People say: 'What does that matter so long as you live right?' The answer is that it does matter, and that it matters a very great deal. If we get loose in our thinking, the time will surely come when we will get loose in our living also. And besides, as I have said before, this doctrine of the Trinity is not theological hair-splitting. The acceptance of the doctrine is essential to real and vital Christianity. I hope the day has passed in the churches when men are beguiled by cheap applause into sneering at theology. Such men, and those who applaud them, do grave disservice to their Lord. They stand in danger of judgment, and are certainly responsible for some of our present difficulties.

But before we say what the doctrine is not, let us make some attempt to say what it is.

God the Holy Spirit is that veritable presence of the Living God which was first fully manifest at Pentecost. Primarily, He is that personal, transforming power who can be evident in the hearts and lives of individual men. Secondly, He is the life of the Church. This order is deliberate; not that it is wholly accurate, but since the individual and the Church must both be mentioned, it is less dangerous to mention the individual first and the Church second. The reason is this. It is true that the Gospel is preached by the Church, and only by the Church, and to that extent the Holy Spirit functions through the Church. If this were all, then we would have to put the Church first and the individual second. But it is also true that the work of grace which brings the individual into the fellowship of those that believe is a direct work of the Holy Spirit in the heart and life of that individual. There is no intermediary here at all, neither preacher, nor priest, nor Church. God Himself directly and personally convicts that man of sin and directly and personally convinces him of the truth of the things of Christ. This is the primary work of the Holy Spirit, and this is why it is wiser to put the individual first in order, and the Church second. After all, at the first Pentecost after the Crucifixion, the Holy Spirit did descend upon each one, and thus the Church was born.

He has a further work, equally essential. This work is concerned with that growth which is necessary in the Christian life. This is the process of growing 'in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'. This process is known as sanctification, and it is wholly within the Church. The former function, that of bringing the individual into the fellowship of those that believe, is known as justification, because it 'justifies', or puts men right with God. It is the direct work of God in the individual. There is a practical issue here. There has been in time past far

too great a tendency amongst the more evangelically minded of us to act as if we thought that conversion itself is enough, as though all that is necessary is that a man should publicly, or perchance privately, declare his allegiance to Christ. This is a serious error, and has led, not only to the downfall of many, but also to that discredit of sound evangelical preaching which is pleasantly welcome to an age which prides itself on its intellectual and scientific approach to all problems on earth and in heaven. Conversion is not the end, but only the beginning. The Holy Spirit has not finished with a man when He has convicted him of sin. He has just begun. To think otherwise is as serious an error as the opposite, namely, to imagine that a man can be in the Church without being converted.

On the whole, I think, this latter is the more serious error. It does not affect the true Church, which is the fellowship of those that believe, united in Christ by the Holy Spirit. The only entrance into this communion and fellowship is by faith. By 'faith' I mean a full and conscious reliance upon God, and this necessarily involves conversion if only because it is the general characteristic of the natural man to rely upon himself, and he who is not self-reliant is reckoned to be no proper man. But it does affect that organization which we call the Church, those who are called 'members' or 'communicants' or whatever the word may be, because the greater the number of those who deprecate the idea of conversion, the more ineffective the Church becomes in its double task of winning those who are outside, and building up those who are inside.

But this difference of opinion as to whether a man is 'saved' on his entrance into the Church or whether he enters the Church in order ultimately to be saved is really a false antithesis. The whole matter of being a Christian is both a process and a consummation. There is a triple time-content in it, just as there is in the matter of the Kingdom of God. There, as we have seen, God became King

at the creation when He created the world and began to reign over it. He becomes King whenever He accomplishes here, in time, a wondrous act of salvation. He will become King at the End of Days, when He shall have overthrown all the powers of darkness and His Kingdom will have no end. In a somewhat similar way, the Christian was saved when he first was brought into the fellowship of those that believe. He is being saved day by day, as, day by day, he finds new joy and a richer peace in this fellowship. He will be saved, here or hereafter, when the process is complete of growing more and more into the image of Christ. There is a story told, I hope apocryphally, of an Oxford don who found himself seated on the end of the row at a revivalist meeting of the more aggressive type. After an impassioned address and appeal, the missionary came down into the audience and asked individual members of it, 'Are you saved, brother?' To which, when he was addressed, the don absent-mindedly replied, 'Do you mean *sōzomenos*, *sōsomenos*, or *sesōsmenos*?' Not exactly fair on the missionary who knew no Greek, or was it? But the distinctions are perfectly legitimate and sound. All three words are passive participles. The first is the present and means 'being saved now'; the second is the future and means 'to be saved in the immediate or remote future'; the third is the perfect and means 'in a state of having been saved'. All three tenses are sound, for salvation is a process which must be begun, must be continued, and must reach a consummation. Whoso omits one of these, is the loser thereby.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit has its roots in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for 'spirit' (*ruach*) involves the idea of power. It is the word which is used for 'wind', the powerful, sweeping wind of the desert, and not by any means at all the gentle zephyr. When the word is used of human breathing, it is not used of ordinary, quiet breathing (which is *neshamah*), but of agitated, violent breathing. As a psychological term, the word is used of a dominating

impulse, uncontrollable in its power. The classical instance is that of the man upon whom, as Num. 5. 14 puts it, there comes a *ruach* of jealousy, and it drives him on, willy-nilly, to declare the shame of his house publicly as he stands with his wife before the priest in the Gate of Nicanor. A man does not control his *ruach*; on the contrary his *ruach* controls him. Because of this, a wise man once said, 'He that controls his *ruach* (is better) than he that taketh a city' (Prov. 15. 32).

Still further, the Old Testament draws a sharp distinction between spirit and flesh. Spirit is of God and is life; flesh is of a man and is death. The difference between the two comes out in a curious semi-mythological way in the story of the irregular unions between the 'sons of God' and the 'daughters of men', as told in Gen. 6. This ancient story is that once upon a time there was on earth a race of demigods, the *Nephilim*. Their fathers were superhuman, and their mothers were human. The *Nephilim* thus had a double origin. There was thus a continual strife within them between the two elements, spirit and flesh, deathlessness and death. At last, as the ancient legend says, God fixed a limit to this strife at a hundred and twenty years. It is a queer old story, but the whole point of it lies in the fundamental difference which is manifest throughout the whole of the Bible. This is the fundamental division between the immortality of the spirit which is of God and the mortality of the flesh, which is of man. God cannot die, man must. This distinction is carried over into the New Testament, and is especially evident in the writings of Paul and John. Man born of flesh, is born to die. Man reborn of the Spirit, is born to live.

Yet again, in the Old Testament the *ruach* (spirit) of God is that power which descends on a man, and enables him to do such things as ordinarily he would be wholly incapable of doing. The crudest example is that of Samson. It was when the Spirit of the Lord leapt upon him, as the

Hebrew puts it, that Samson defended himself against the lion and 'rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand': similarly for the slaying of thirty Philistines at Askalon, and his bursting his bonds as if they were burnt with fire, and subsequently slaying a thousand Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass. At the other end of the scale we have the instance of Bezalel, who was the craftsman for all the metal work and the carving of wood and stone of the furniture of the Tabernacle (Exodus 31). This Judahite was so filled with the spirit of God that he became superlatively skilled 'in all manner of cunning workmanship'. These and other instances are examples of the *mana* of primitive religion, that more-than-human power which primitive peoples have believed to be responsible for all more-than-ordinary actions of men. But most of all the Old Testament speaks of 'The Spirit of the Lord' (*ruach-adonai*). This is the Spirit of the Lord (always distinguished even from 'the Spirit of God') which is distinctive of the Messianic King and which makes the prophets what they are, messengers of God and calling men to repentance. The verse in which this is definitely and clearly set forth is Micah 3. 8: 'For truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord and of judgment and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.' When the Creed says that the Holy Spirit 'spake by the Prophets', it means that He is that *Ruach-adonai*, that Spirit of the Lord who inspired the prophets of the Old Testament, and made them into men of God. Probably the particular emphasis intended is that, to use the words of Stephen, they 'shewed before of the coming of the Just One'. The prophets all unite in speaking of a divine compulsion of which they were immediately conscious. But the Creed also says that the Holy Spirit 'proceedeth from the Father and the Son'. The meaning of this is that after the completion of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit has His fuller and complete ministry and function. This is to wit-

ness to the things of Christ and to convince men of the truth of them. In chief, this means to bring men into that state of grace which we describe as being 'in Christ'. This work of the Holy Spirit is based upon the full revelation of God which we can see in the Lord Jesus Christ, a revelation which a man cannot see apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart.

# 14

## BORN OF THE SPIRIT

*'I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST, THE LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE.'*

The first thing that the Creed says concerning the Holy Spirit is that He is 'The Lord and Giver of Life'. Most people imagine that this describes Him as both the Lord of life and the Giver of life. This is not the case, and a truer translation of the original Greek of the Creed is 'the Holy Spirit, lordly and life-making'.

The word translated 'lordly' is the adjective derived from *Kurios*, a word which we discussed earlier in connection with the phrase 'one *Lord* Jesus Christ'. The meaning there is that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour-God. It does not mean that He is Lord and Master, though He certainly is both to a more than superlative degree, but that He is Saviour. Further He is not comparable to human kings and potentates, but He is God. Here the corresponding adjective is used to describe the nature and function of the Holy Spirit. He is always active in the work of salvation. That is what He does. The first adjective, therefore, says that He is for ever active in saving men. The second adjective, 'life-making', describes how He does it.

It is of the utmost importance for us to realize what sort of life it is that God the Holy Spirit makes, for there are two kinds of life mentioned in the New Testament, and they are quite distinct each from other. The difference be-

tween the two is made sharp and clear in the *Gospel according to Saint John*. The two words which are used, are *bios* and *zoë*. The former word, *bios*, means the life we all live in the flesh, ordinary physical life which begins at birth and ends at death. The latter word, *zoë*, stands for the life we can live in the Spirit. It begins when a man comes to be 'in Christ'. This is the 'eternal life' of the Fourth Gospel, and it is the present possession of all who know Christ as their Saviour. All men have *bios*, but not all men have *zoë*. Both kinds of life are a gift of God, but *zoë* is in a special manner the gift of God, available indeed for all, but not necessarily possessed by all, and it is particularly and specially connected with the Holy Spirit.

I hold that it is most important to realize that the life which God the Holy Spirit creates is *zoë* and not *bios*. This is what the Creed says, 'zoë-making,' not 'bios-making'. I always try myself to make a careful distinction between the Spirit of God and God the Holy Spirit. He is the same God, but not the same Spirit. I mean that He is the same God in the sense that the Father and the Son are the same God, but not the same in the sense that the Father is not the Son. What I am actually saying, as a matter of fact, is that the Father and the Holy Spirit are the same God, but that the Father is not the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God is concerned with creation generally, perhaps with worlds and things, but certainly with living creatures. When it says in the first chapter of Genesis that 'the *ruach* of God (*Elohim*) hovered (brooded)' over the primeval chaos, I think that the word *ruach* should be translated 'wind' and not 'spirit', but since the verse is late rather than early, I would not press the point unduly. I would be prepared to allow that in this particular instance we have the idea of the spirit of God associated with the creation of what we call 'dead matter', but I do not feel very happy about it, because it is so very unusual. In any case I would insist that the word 'spirit' should be printed

with a small 's', because the meaning is that God Himself is the Creator Spirit, and there is no question here of the Persons of the Godhead. The word 'spirit' stands for the creative activity of the Creator God.

The spirit of God is indeed connected with living creatures in the Old Testament, that is, with the creation of *bios*, ordinary physical life, but the connection is by no means frequent or common. The clearest case is to be found in Psalm 104. 30, which reads 'Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth'. Here the *ruach* (spirit) of God is used of the creation of all living creatures of every description, and not of any life which belongs to man in any special sense.

In the Creation-story (the Garden of Eden story) the word used for the breath of God, which He breathes into man, is *neshamah*, which means ordinary breath as against noisy breathing. The word *ruach* is used occasionally of physical life but it is not the regular word. Or again, we read in Ezekiel 37, of the *ruach* (wind, breath, spirit) which is called from the four points of the compass in order to bring to life again the re-formed bodies of dead Israel. It is the life-creating power of God, but it is not usual for *ruach* (spirit) of God to be connected with *bios*, ordinary physical life, though when it is so connected it means that life which man has in common with all other living creatures.

The Hebrew of Genesis 2 does not say that man was in any way made immortal, but rather that he was made a living mortal. In its own way the story goes out of its way to say that man neither was created immortal, nor became immortal. It is quite clear that the only life spoken about in connection with man is mortal life (*bios*) for the guardian cherubim are placed in the way that leads to the tree of immortal life. The word translated 'soul' has nothing at all to do with our English word 'soul' in the sense in which the word is commonly used. It means something that is

physically alive, and it can be used equally of animals and men. Indeed it is so used in the same chapter (verse 19).

The New Testament doctrine of Holy Spirit has its antecedents in the Old Testament, as we saw in the last chapter, in the *ruach-adonai* (the Spirit of the Lord), but in the New Testament He is concerned with that new life (*zoë*) which is born in us when we turn to God repentant and believing. It is all a personal activity within the living man, and when we speak of the Holy Spirit we are speaking of a Person in a way in which we are not speaking of a person when we refer to the creative spirit of God, that power by which He made all living creatures, including man. We speak here of the Creator of a life in man which was not in man until he is recreated a new creation in Christ Jesus. Whoever knows the joy and serenity which comes from a full and conscious reliance upon God, knows what I mean when I write of the new life in Christ. This life is *zoë* and all who know it by experience, know also that it is in a different category from *bios*. Further, like all relationships between persons (for that is what it is), it has in part an emotional content, and to that extent it carries with it its own conviction. This is a characteristic of all intimate personal relationships: the reasons for their beginning and continuance are extra-rational.

At the beginning of the last chapter, I referred to the two most prevalent errors concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, both of which involve a belief in two Persons of the Godhead instead of the Three.

One of them is the confusion of the spirit with the Father. I have been dealing with this. It permits and even encourages the use of the phrase 'The Holy Spirit in creation', meaning thereby creation in general. If this idea is admitted, it seems to me to be very difficult to find adequate room for admitting the reality of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of men, changing 'the natural man' into 'the spiritual man'. To me this means the obliteration

tion of the conception of conversion as a work of God in man. With that, as I see it, there goes the whole of evangelical religion, and we are left with a demand for a cultured morality which I find very hard to distinguish from the best thought of the Greeks and their natural successors, the Stoics. The general theory is that we must identify ourselves with the spirit and purpose of Creation, and in so doing we fulfil our true testing. I find nothing here of that possessing and controlling Power of God, who can take hold of a man and make him different from what he was before. Further, unless I misjudge the position entirely, it would admit as satisfactory the man who lives a sound moral life, and is kindly and generous. Now, I know men who have something which that generous, moral man has not got, and in my small stumbling way I would claim that I have something which he has not, and it is this. It is a consciousness of an invading controlling Power which is not of me, and it is paralleled by a reliance upon and trust in One whose strength has no limit and whose love is boundless.

The other error is the confusion of the Spirit with the Son. The identification of the Spirit of Jesus with the Holy Spirit may involve no error at all. Something of this is to be seen in the *Gospel according to Saint John*. There the second coming of Christ tends to be equated with the gift of the Holy Spirit. If this means that the God who was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself is the God who convicts men of sin, convinces them of the truth of the things of Christ, then the identification is sound. The important element here is that the idea of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit is retained. The life of the Spirit is indeed the new life 'in Christ'. But where the identification involves the substitution of some kind of moral influence for possession by the Holy Spirit, I hold that it is subversive to true religion. I would therefore hold that the equation of the Holy Spirit with the Spirit of Jesus (that is, putting them the other way round from before) is a danger-

ous approach, and may easily lead men into definite error.

My reason for saying this is that many people who talk about the Spirit of Jesus mean by it the inspiration of His example and a general collection of ideas which they call Christian principles. Christianity thus becomes doing what Jesus did in the sense of accepting His moral values and being reasonably charitable. The Holy Spirit now becomes a general influence for good, and it is recognized as being that attitude which is admired in all 'men of goodwill'. The whole thing becomes impersonal and belongs to that world of 'moral and spiritual values' which is certainly a monument to human achievement but which a man can conceive without ever having heard of Christ. Plato was a man of the highest moral and spiritual principles, but he was not a Christian. Aristotle was expert in ethics and aesthetics, but he did not know Christ. There are few books equal for moral worth to the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. He persecuted Christians.

# 15

## THE CHURCH

*'AND I BELIEVE ONE HOLY, CATHOLIC, AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH.'* But what Church is it I believe? What is this Church that is Holy and Catholic and Apostolic? Does it exist anywhere? Where can it be found? Do its boundaries coincide to any extent with those of all the communities on earth which call themselves the name of 'Church', any particular one of them, or all of them inclusively? Or is it some mystic, idealistic vision, which belongs to the world of dreams rather than to this hard and matter-of-fact world?

No man can speak or write about the nature of the Church without inviting disagreement and incurring criticism. Indeed the whole of the last paragraph of the Creed is subject to variations of opinion and interpretation on a scale not prevalent for the earlier paragraphs. A man can but state, as clearly and as precisely as he can, what he himself holds to be the truth in these matters.

For my part, I deprecate the use of the phrase 'The Methodist Church', and would prefer that we retained as our official title the ancient title 'The people called Methodists'. If that title should be deemed too clumsy for ordinary use, my second choice would be 'The Church, Methodist'. I do not agree that there can be a Methodist Church, a Presbyterian Church, or a 'Church of England,' because there is but One Church, and that is God's. Since

it is necessary that we must make distinctions (and I hope there will never be any Church union which insists on a rigid uniformity either in ritual or in government), I would prefer to use the adjective in a way that is definitive and descriptive rather than exclusive. It seems to me that this is more nearly achieved by putting the adjective after the noun either in brackets (as has been elsewhere suggested), or preceded by a comma. As soon as there is anything which sectionalizes and separates groups of Christians, there must be something wrong about it.

With respect to buildings, I would prefer always to see the phrase 'Methodist Chapel', and similarly for other communities, taking the word 'chapel' to refer to the building in which the society of Christians worships God, the society being a visible part of the Church. I often wonder why it is that Protestant Free-Churchmen in these days generally prefer to describe their places of worship as 'churches' rather than chapels. This used not to be the custom. I am tempted often to think that the change must have something to do with the connection of the word 'chapel' with Nonconformity and Dissent, though why any of us should have any objection to either name passes my comprehension. The causes both of religion and of social reform in this country owe at least as much to the Dissenters as to the Church by law established.

It is worthy of note that the preposition 'in' is not found in the last paragraph of the Creed. This I take to be significant and deliberate. Previously all the statements in the Creed have been concerned with God Himself. They have dealt in turn with the nature of the Three Persons in the Godhead. There, it is a matter of 'believing *in*', that is, as I said in the first chapter, a matter of full reliance upon, and trust in God. It is a question of faith. Here, the word is 'believe', which I take to mean 'accept'. I do not admit that a man may 'believe in' the Church. He must believe in (have faith in) God alone, and believe (accept) the Church.

Any community or organization which demands that full trust which is due to God Himself alone, is assuming an authority which is inadmissible, and is confusing the created with the Creator.

There are two main conceptions of the Church, and probably Methodism is at least as sharply divided on this issue as any other Christian community. I rather think that the two conceptions are ultimately incompatible. The one conception is that the Church is the People of God; the other conception is that it is the Body of Christ. For my part, whilst both ideas have biblical warrant, I hold the former to be much the sounder conception. It is the dominant idea of the Old Testament, and it is carried over into the New Testament. I find it hard to see how anyone who admits the Old Testament to be truly part of the scriptures can deny that the idea of Israel as the People of God is the formative conception of the Church. Israel is the People of God, the people whom God chose and redeemed to be a 'peculiar people to himself'. The Hebrew word which is translated 'peculiar' means 'that which has come to be possessed'. Israel is the people whom God purchased, ransomed, saved, or whatever the figure of speech may be. In the New Testament, the Church is the community in which the ancient promises are to be fulfilled, the New Israel redeemed by the Blood of Christ. The entrance into this community is no longer by works of the Law, by keeping the Sabbath and by circumcision, but by faith in Christ. Wherefore, as I judge, an alternative description of the Church is 'the fellowship of those that believe', using the word in the full sense of trust, faith.

As I said, the phrase 'the Body of Christ' has biblical (New Testament) warrant. It is not common, and my opinion is that those who use it to describe the Church are exalting a helpful, though occasional, metaphor into an absolute and categorical statement. It seems to me that the phrase 'the Body of Christ' is wrong theologically as

soon as it is taken out of its immediate context. (I recognize that many men wiser than I will dissent from this view, but I state my opinion about the matter, because it is by prayerful and charitable and Christian discussion of these matters that we may all be led to the truth.) I should have thought that if the Church is an incarnation of any one Person of the Trinity in particular, it is an incarnation of the Third Person rather than of the Second. The phrase, in this case, ought to be 'the Body of the Spirit', for it certainly is the community of those who are possessed and indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. The ultimate difference between the two conceptions is the division between the Protestant and the 'Catholic' points of view. I have put the word 'catholic' in commas, because I have found that the more a community claims to be catholic, the more exclusive and the less catholic it is in practice. Further, so far as my experience goes, the greater the emphasis on the Church as the Body of Christ, the greater the tendency for the Church to become both sacerdotal and authoritarian, whereas, the greater the emphasis on the Church as the People of God, the greater the tendency for the Church to realize that all is of grace, and the more room there is for the recognition of the witness of the Holy Spirit equally within every Christian man. This latter is one of the cardinal tenets of Protestantism.

There are those who hold that the observance of the Sacraments is an essential mark of the Church, the Sacraments being Baptism and the Lord's Supper. This would exclude both the Society of Friends and the Salvation Army. No one can deny that the gifts of the Spirit are manifest in both these communities. I have been in meetings of both, and nowhere could the presence of the Living God have been more evident. Wherever men meet together in true fellowship, united in a common love (*agapē*) for God, and a full trust in Him, there is the Church. The one essential condition is that the community shall be a 'household of

faith'. The official attitude of the Methodists is that Baptism is obligatory as a condition of being recognized as a member of the Church, and that the Lord's Supper is a perpetual obligation. I would say that they are both of the *bene esse* of the Church, but not of the *esse* of the Church—that is, they are advisable and desirable, but not essential. Further, the continuous tradition of their observance is a strong reason for their place in the rites of the Church, especially since the regular observance through the ages is a link between the Church Triumphant in heaven and the Church Militant here on earth. They are, however, not essential in the sense that there can be no salvation without them. Even the 'high' churchman has to say in the last resort that 'God is not bound by His own Sacraments'—which is an obvious truism, but what a curious kind of thinking and what strange assumptions, if that is the way in which a man has to say that salvation is by faith alone through grace!

There are three adjectives used in the Creed, defining the Church.

The first is 'holy'. The word is used in its true sense of belonging to God alone. The Church can give no allegiance other than to God.

The second is 'catholic'. This means that the true Church embraces all who confess that Jesus is Lord, and love God with a whole heart.

The third is 'apostolic'. This means that the Church must show the same characteristics as were manifest in the apostolic Church.

In each of these three cases, there is a great deal more that can be said, but to say any more would involve such discussion and disagreement as would be out of place in such a book as this.

# 16

## BAPTISM

### *'AND I ACKNOWLEDGE ONE BAPTISM FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS.'*

In these days, for the majority of people, both Christian and non-Christian, the whole matter of baptism is hedged about with confusion and error. In the first days of the Christian Church, things were different and the significance of the rite was clear. It was baptism of believers and it was baptism by immersion. The condition for the administration of the rite was confession of faith, and it marked the recognition of the convert as a member of the Church. It did not make a man a member of the Church of Christ, neither does it now. No rite can do that, and no man can do it, whoever he may be. Neither can any organized body, whatever it may be, and whatever its claims may be. An organization can make a man a member of that organization, but no man thereby necessarily becomes a member of the Church. Whoever comes to Christ in faith, repentant and believing, *is* a member of Christ's Church, whatever any man or any organization may or may not say. The one condition laid down for man has been fulfilled, and God by His grace does the rest. I would say that a man must definitely identify himself with a particular fellowship of believers, for there is no such thing as a solitary Christian. Solitariness is a denial of Christian love (*agapē*). The ancient custom was that the fact of entrance into the fellow-

ship of the People of God was recognized and sealed by an outward and visible act. Some such rite is definitely desirable in the interests both of the Church and of the particular individual concerned. It was a declaration in the sight and hearing of all believers that the work of grace had been accomplished in one more human heart. This new believer's sins no longer stood between him and God. They were cleansed, washed away, forgiven, remitted. This is the original meaning of the statement of the Creed. And the early Church acknowledged one such Baptism only, knowing that there is no other way by which a man can come to God except through Christ, nor any other way by which his sins can be remitted except through His death and merits.

But the original significance of the rite has now gone except amongst the Baptist communities and with the Missionary Societies and their converts. They still mean the same thing as the early Church meant—believer's baptism. If, however, any of them should say that no man is a member of Christ's Church except he has been baptized, they are 'binding God by His sacraments', and are actually making the rite a denial of grace instead of a means to it. They are maintaining a position, against which the Lord Jesus fought in respect of the Sabbath and Paul in respect of circumcision. In each case it was the issue upon which the battle was fought, and in each case the result was death by execution, Jesus on a cross, Paul by beheading.

Most communities, other than the Baptists, are confused over the whole matter, and those that are not confused, are wrong. The modern difficulties in interpretation are caused by the transference of the rite to infancy. When this change took place, it ceased to be believer's baptism, and the intention was thereby changed. With the further alteration from immersion to pouring and even more to sprinkling, the ceremony became very different from what it was originally. The conclusion is unavoidable that infant sprinkling can scarcely have the same significance as believer's baptism.

The change over to sprinkling probably began very early, doubtless in the prisons, not long before the martyrs walked out to the lions. Many a waverer there, in the hour of his extremity, found a firm faith at the last; and more than one jailer would be baptized with what odd drop of water there was available, by a martyr actually on the road to death. Still more, not only Israel of old found grace in the wilderness, and every new convert in desert places would be baptized on the spot. The spiritual heirs of the Ethiopian eunuch would not require more than a minimum of water by the wayside.

Infant baptism seems also to have developed at an early stage in the history of the Church. Indeed there are some who can find traces of it in the New Testament itself. It arose probably because earnest parents were anxious for their children to share in the blessings of their new faith. This involved the intrusion of an alien idea, that of 'magic', the notion that a ritual act is in itself effective. For if the rite of infant baptism (sprinkling) is effective then the effectiveness must be independent of the faith of the one who is baptized. An infant child has no faith, and could not express it if it had. Parents and god-parents cannot have faith for the child, since faith is a personal trust in God and full reliance upon Him. Everything in the original rite depended upon this faith, and this must always be so if the rite is to be regarded as the outward sign of entrance into the Church. Further, there is no such thing as unconscious faith, that is, not in the Protestant meaning of the word, and this is certainly the meaning in the Apostolic Church.

If there is any effectiveness achieved in the rite of infant baptism, then the effectiveness must be either an affair of magic (as defined above), or it must be guaranteed by the authority of the community under whose auspices the rite has been performed. But this magic consists of a collection of customs and beliefs against which Christianity has always fought, though not all of it with the same enthusiasm, or

with the same clear-cut understanding of the issues involved. No rite can of itself be effective, nor can any organization make it so apart from the faith of the believer. I do not believe that an infant in arms is any better or any worse for having had water sprinkled on him with or without whatever words are regarded as being proper. To say that one infant who has died after one hour of life without being baptized is any worse off than another infant who lived no longer and was baptized, is a travesty of the Christian faith. Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy* showed the foolishness of such superstitions. Such notions belong to that natural religion which has grown up with man and has always been the enemy of Christianity. It is not a baptism for the remission of sins.

With the transference of baptism from conversion to infancy, the rite has become one of dedication. My own opinion is that this should be made quite clear, and that the Christian communities should take steps to ensure a proper understanding of it both in theory and in practice. As things are now, a great deal of superstition is attached to the rite, just as there is much popular superstition involved in the Churching of Women. The practice of baptizing infants anywhere except in the chapel itself with the members there, should be discouraged, and I would apply this discouragement to christening in any section of the Sunday School. I am sorry that, in time past, I have on occasion consented to this. I was wrong.

If this is an act of dedication, then let it be understood to be such and let it be solemnly treated as such by all concerned, parents and congregation alike. It is a sound procedure that both parents together should bring their baby to chapel, and there in the presence of the assembled congregation should dedicate the child to God. They should audibly and formally promise that, God being their helper, they will place no stumbling-block in the way of the child, that they will make a Christian home for the child, and

that they will see to it that the child has proper access to the teaching of the Church. Further, the assembled congregation must also be partakers in this covenant. They, too, shall make a vow to maintain the witness and worship of the Church in that building. They must see to it that, God being their helper, a true fellowship is maintained there, within which the child may grow until he himself shall consciously and deliberately come to God in faith. All parties concerned must dedicate the child to God and themselves to this particular task. I myself would have nothing to do with infant baptism except on these conditions. This makes it a sacrament of the Church, and, as I see it, it is nonsense to call it a sacrament when the rite is observed in cases where the parents have no association with the congregation, and, so far as one can judge, do not intend to have any.

# I7

## LIFE AFTER DEATH

*'AND I LOOK FOR THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD, AND THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME.'*

The creeds all speak of a resurrection and not of a survival. Mostly it is 'of the flesh', though here in the so-called Nicene Creed it is 'of the dead'. There seems to be little doubt that the Church for centuries thought in terms of a rekindling of life in the actual body of flesh and bone. This was the belief of Clement of Rome and of Origen, but it was Augustine who was chiefly responsible for the establishment of the traditional belief. This belief is enshrined in the paraphrase of the Authorized Version of Job 19. 25-6, which is quite clearly a declaration of the resurrection of the body, and is kept fresh in public memory by the popularity of Handel's *Messiah*. Augustine said that Job 'prophesied without doubt the resurrection of the flesh', and he declared that the passage meant 'I shall be in my flesh when I shall see God'. Jerome's Latin Vulgate (contemporary with Augustine, and dated A.D. 390-405) reads: 'And on the last day, I shall arise out of the earth. And I shall be clothed again with my skin: and in my flesh I shall see God.' This is the rendering of the Roman Catholic official Douai Version, and it is an interpretation, rather than a translation, of the original Hebrew. Our Authorized Version has in some respects gone still further. In the

original Hebrew there is nothing at all to be found about a resurrection from the dead, and this is a fact generally accepted by Hebrew scholars.

I find two passages only in the Old Testament which speak of any life after death for anybody. These are Isa. 26. 19 and Dan. 12. 2. (I take such passages as Ps. 73. 23-26 and Ps. 139. 7-10 to be geographical, as is, I think, plain in the Hebrew.) Both verses are somewhat late, and both are in apocalypses. The former passage can be dated approximately about 300 B.C., and the latter about 165 B.C. The first declares that Israel's righteous dead will be raised up in order to partake of the blessings of the deliverance of Israel. The second says that 'many of them that sleep in the land of dust (so the Hebrew) will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to great shame and everlasting abhorrence'. The old idea was of Sheol, the vast, roomy underground abode of the dead, all of it negative rather than positive, and to be regarded as the persistence of death rather than of life. Attempts have been made, and sometimes still are made, to see in these shadowy thoughts of Sheol the beginnings of Hebrew ideas of a real life after death. All such attempts are misguided. The Hebrew ideas of resurrection did not come from ideas concerning Sheol, just as the Greek ideas of immortality did not arise from the traditional and popular notions of Hades. For the philosopher, the idea came through Plato, whilst for the ordinary man it came much later, and then from the mystery religions with their cults of the saviour-gods.

The Hebrew belief in life after death arose from the firm conviction that God is still the Saviour of Israel, however much the nations may rage and their rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed. There must, they believed, sometimes and somewhere, be an age of returned primeval bliss, when God shall be all in all and Israel at the head of the nations. The intense practicalness and 'this-worldliness' of the Jew demanded that this new

world should be here on earth, a transformed earth perhaps, but certainly here and real. It would be heralded by a great Day of Judgment, and after that the life of the world to come would begin. There came a time when they began to suspect that after all the Kingdom of God might not be realized here on such an earth as this, but in heavenly places, though the idea of revived bodies never wholly died, just as the idea is still maintained among some Christians to-day.

The most instructive picture of what the Jews of the time of Christ (though not the Sadducees) believed to happen after death is to be found in Enoch 22 (dated about 170 B.C.). There we find an account of the three places in Sheol where the spirits of the dead were believed to be assembled until the Day of Judgment. Between the three places great gulfs were fixed, so that any interchange was impossible. One place was for the righteous, and there they were preserved in safety until the Day of Judgment, when they were judged and entered into the bliss of the world to come which had been prepared for them. The second place was for the wicked who had suffered on earth for their sins. Nothing else happened to them. They were not raised up. They had sinned, and they had paid the penalty. That was that, and that was all. The third place was for the sinners who had not suffered on earth for their sins. This was a place of great torment; they paid the penalty for their sins. At the Day of Judgment they were judged, and destroyed.

This, as is evident, is the framework of the Dives-Lazarus story. Lazarus is in 'Abraham's bosom', that is, in the abode of the righteous awaiting the Last Day. Dives is not in the hell of popular imagination, but is paying the price in Sheol for unrequited sins committed on earth. He died unrepentant, and this is where he pays. When Jesus tells the dying thief that they will be together that day in Paradise, the reference is to the abode of the righteous. His parable of the five wise and the five foolish virgins em-

phasizes the finality of the judgment of God which comes prior to the Messianic banquet which was supposed to usher in the Messianic Kingdom. Indeed, in every way, it is evident that Jesus spoke and thought substantially as is set forth in Enoch 22. There is a Judgment Day for the righteous and for the wicked who had not repented or suffered on earth. There is a resurrection to life for the righteous, and perhaps a resurrection for the wicked, but it is a resurrection to judgment and death.

In the writings of Saint Paul, there is a sharp distinction drawn between 'the natural (*psychikos*) man' and 'the spiritual (*pneumatikos*) man'. Nothing of the natural man survives into the life of the world to come, but only the spiritual man, that is, the man who is born of the spirit (*pneuma*). The phrase 'natural man' includes everything which Paul regarded as belonging to the *psyche*. This is the word which, in Plato and amongst the Greeks, stands for the immortal *soul* of man, but the word is never so used in the Greek Bible, neither in the Old nor in the New Testament. In the Greek Old Testament the word stands for the Hebrew *nephesh*, that livingness of appetite and desire which ceases to exist at death. In Sheol there is no *nephesh*, no desire, no longing, no life. This use of the Greek word *psyche* is carried over into the New Testament, so that nowhere at all in the English Bible should the word 'soul' be understood to refer to an immortal part of man which survives death. According to the Bible, there is nothing in man *qua* man which survives death, but if he has during life been born of the spirit, then he is raised up to be partaker in the life of the world to come.

The great difference which the New Testament makes is in the matter of merit. According to contemporary Jewish thought, a man could earn his place in the world to come by fulfilling the Law. Paul makes it clear that there is no such way, but that all is of grace. What is required on man's part is faith, a full trust on and reliance upon God.

If therefore, even in the moment of death, a sinner truly repents and trusts in God, then all is well. What was true of the dying thief can be true for every living man. And no man can say that because of what he has done, he is sure of life in heaven. We every one of us have to depend wholly upon the merits and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whilst it is true that faith without works is dead, the deciding factor is the faith rather than the works. The dying thief had faith, and in the nature of things he had no time in which to show any works.

But 'how are the dead raised, and with what manner of body do they come?' In this chapter (1 Cor. 15) Paul distinguishes between a spiritual body and a natural body. To some extent he varies from the contemporary and traditional view of the revivifying of the actual body of flesh and blood. I judge that in modern phraseology his view is: All the things which belong to this physical life come to an end at death. This includes all emotional elements and all aesthetic and all mental qualities. But if a man is born again, if, that is, he is born of the spirit, then his 'body' (*soma*) acts as a sort of carrier, and the identity of the man is preserved. It is the same man who is raised up. The spirit persists; not a soul in the sense of something which was naturally his because he was a man, but a spirit which was born in him when he came to Christ in faith. Much the same teaching is to be found in the Fourth Gospel in respect of *bios* (ordinary physical life) and *zoë* (the spiritual life which begins with the new birth). The *zoë* (eternal life) is the 'carrier' into heavenly places. This I take to be the correct modern interpretation of the phrase in the creed.

I am quite clear myself that the biblical doctrine concerning life after death is that the final crisis takes place at death. This, as I understand the Gospels, is plain from the words of Jesus Himself, and I see no reason to suppose anything else except on a basis of wishful thinking or on the basis of some doctrine of personal merit which is excluded.

This is why it is so important that sinners should be converted now, before they die. Incidentally to me, this is a final argument against hanging as a penalty for murder. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, and I would not cut out any man from the opportunity of repentance. No man is so wicked and so thoroughly abandoned, but that the grace of God can accomplish its saving work in his heart and life. It is clear, too, to me, that there is a resurrection to eternal life for the repentant sinner who has what our fathers used to call 'dying faith', that is, for those who have died in the hope of the Gospel. There may be a resurrection for the unrepentant sinner, for the Bible teaching varies here, but if there is, then it is a resurrection to damnation and death. If we do depart from this doctrine, then we should recognize quite frankly that we are departing from biblical doctrine and from the teaching of the Church of the first centuries. To me it is a most remarkable thing that the early Christian thinkers kept so very clear of the Greek doctrine of the immortality of the soul. It was there, fully developed, but they kept clear of it. I think that it is significant.

What happens to the unrepentant sinner after death? I hold that either he suffers the torments of hell, or he is destroyed at death. I incline to the latter view, because I cannot conceive that God punishes any man except to bring him to repentance. If therefore there is any punishment of the wicked after death, then it must be with the object of bringing them to repentance, and the Roman doctrine of Purgatory is substantially sound.

I find nowhere in the Bible any doctrine of the necessary survival of the individual, that is, of the immortality of the soul in the sense that there is a part of every man which can never die. It certainly is the will of God that all men should be saved. It is as true now as ever it was that God 'desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live'. But it is also true, as

this prayer implies, that if he does not repent, then he dies. God has given to man this freedom to choose, and it is a real freedom. It is, in fact, a freedom to live or to die. And not even God can have it both ways. It seems to me that it is nothing but muddled, sentimental thinking to say that if one man is lost, then God is defeated. God's victory is a victory over sin. Sin will at the last be destroyed, and with it all that cling to it. No plant can live in poisoned soil, and sin poisons the life of a man so that the plant of the spirit can never grow there.

The tragedy of sin is that the sinner destroys other lives than his own. Parents can bring up their children in such a way as to blind their eyes to the truth of the Gospel. Teachers also can teach boys and girls that Christianity is an outmoded superstition, so that their minds are closed to the understanding of the truth. There are millions on earth who have never heard of the Gospel of Christ. What have Christian men been doing these nineteen hundred years that the Gospel is not yet preached in every town and village throughout the world? Nineteen hundred years is a long time. If Christian men really understood the deadly poison of sin, they would take the words of Jesus more seriously and would realize that there is a terrible judgment ordained of God for all unrepentant sinners, and that a man can indeed die eternally.

There are many problems connected with this subject which none of us can solve, and many questions for which I for one cannot provide an answer. There remains this to be said. I hope that justice for the individual is not of such supreme importance in this matter as many of my friends maintain. I, for one, most earnestly desire to be found with Christ in heavenly places, and I know for certain that if justice and deserts count, then I will be outside and not inside. I trust in Him, and in His redeeming grace; there is no One else and no thing else in which a poor sinner can trust.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

(I am indebted for this list to my colleague, the Rev. A. Raymond George, M.A., theology tutor at Wesley College, Leeds.)

These books are arranged roughly in order so as to lead up to the more difficult books, which are placed at the end. They are all suitable for the general reader who has no technical knowledge of theology. Some of the books may be out of print but can be found in libraries.

Dorothy M. Sayers, *Creed or Chaos* (Hodder and Stoughton).

C. S. Lewis, *Broadcast Talks* (Bles).

W. M. F. Scott and H. Watkin-Jones, *The Creed of a Christian* (Epworth Press).

F. A. Farley, *The Faith* (Epworth Press).

E. Brunner, *Our Faith* (Harpers).

W. Temple, *Christian Faith and Life* (S.C.M. Press).

W. Robinson, *Whither Theology?* (Lutterworth).

F. Greeves, *The Christian Way* (S.C.M. Press).

Alan Richardson, *Creeds in the Making* (S.C.M. Press).

J. G. Riddell, *What We Believe* (Church of Scotland Publications).

J. A. Mackay, *A Preface to Christian Theology* (Nisbet).

C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (Hodder and Stoughton).

N. Micklem, *The Creed of a Christian* (S.C.M. Press).

N. Micklem, *What is the Faith?* (Hodder and Stoughton).

J. S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge University Press).

O. C. Quick, *The Doctrines of the Creed* (Nisbet).

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