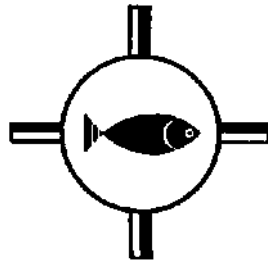


LIBERAL CATHOLIC INSTITUTE OF STUDIES



Unit 1

PREPARATORY DIALOGUE ON THEOLOGY

Paper 1

RELIGION AND CHRISTIANITY

Excerpts from the writings of R.J. Campbell

PART II



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THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD

JESUS ALL THAT CHRISTIAN DEVOTION HAS BELIEVED HIM TO BE

So far we have seen that the personality of Jesus is central for Christian faith. The practical dualism which regards Jesus as coming into humanity from something that beforehand was not humanity we declare to be misleading. Our view of the subject does not belittle Jesus but it exalts human nature. Let this be clearly understood and most of the objections to it will vanish. Briefly summed up, the position is as follows: Jesus was God, limited to human form, but so are we. He was the expression of divine love; we too are one with God in so far as our lives express the same thing. Jesus was not God in the sense that He possessed an infinite consciousness; no more are we. Jesus expressed fully and completely, in so far as a finite consciousness ever could, that aspect of the nature of God which we have called the eternal Son, or Christ, or ideal Man who is the Soul of the universe, and "the light that lighted every man that cometh into the world;" we are expressions of the same primordial being. Fundamentally we are all one in this eternal Christ. (We hold the Fatherhood of God - the Brotherhood of Man, etc.) This is the most difficult statement of all to make clear, for the average westerner cannot grasp it; it is different from his ordinary way of looking at things. If we could only get men to do so habitually and sincerely, it would be the greatest gain to religion that could possibly be imagined!! We are beginning to see, however hard it may be to understand it, that our limited individual consciousness is no barrier to the true identification of the lesser with the larger self. Slowly, very slowly, this is coming about. This is a most helpful and inspiring truth, one of the most important that has ever found a place in Christian thought; it elucidates much that would otherwise be obscure. It enables us to see how the human and divine were blended without making Him essentially different from the rest of the human race; it enables us to realize our own true origin and to believe in the salvability of every soul that has ever come to moral consciousness, however far they stray! This truth will lift a man toward the higher life. It is the truth implied in all redemptive effort that has ever been made, and in every message that has ever gripped conscience and heart; it is, as the Nicene Creed has it, "the taking of the manhood into God".

JESUS AND THE INCARNATION

This thought at once opens up another great question to which we have alluded, that of the incarnation of this eternal Christ, the second aspect, or Son of God in the finite universe. According to the received theology the incarnation of God in human life was limited to the life of Jesus only, and through Him to mankind. We purposely say popular theology because the best Christian thought has always known better. Popular theology has it that Jesus, the only - begotten eternal Son of God, took human flesh and a human nature, was conceived by the Holy Ghost in the womb of a virgin, and was born into the world in a wholly miraculous way - a way which stamps Him as different from all that were ever born of woman before or since. It seems strange that belief in the virgin birth of Jesus should ever have been held to be a cardinal article of the Christian faith, but it is so even today. There is not much need to combat it, for most reputable theologians have not given it up, but it is still a stumbling-block to many minds. Perhaps, therefore, a brief examination of the subject may not be altogether out of place.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH NOT DEMONSTRABLE FROM SCRIPTURE

The virgin birth of Jesus was apparently unknown to the primitive church, for the earliest New Testament writings make no mention of it. Paul's letters do not allude to it; neither does the gospel of St. Mark. "In the fullness of time" says the great apostle, "God sent forth His Son born of a woman". He was "of the seed of David according to the flesh", but nowhere does Paul give us so much as a hint of anything supernatural attending the mode of His entry into the

world. Mark does not even tell us anything about the childhood of the Master; his account begins with the baptism of Jesus in Jordan. The fourth gospel, although written much later, ignores the belief in the virgin birth, and even seems to do so of set purpose as belittling and materializing the truth. The supposed Old Testament prophecies of the event have nothing whatever to do with it. The famous passage, "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel", is a reference to contemporary events, and the word translated "virgin" simply means a young woman. No Old Testament passage whatever is directly or indirectly a prophecy of the virgin birth of Jesus. To insist upon this may seem too many like beating a man of straw, but if so the man of straw still retains a good deal of vitality.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH IN THE GOSPELS

The only two gospels in which the virgin birth is alluded to are Matthew and Luke, and the nativity stories contained in these are very beautiful, especially those peculiar to Luke. But the two gospels are mutually contradictory in their account of the circumstances attending the miraculous birth. Each contains a genealogy which professes to be that of Joseph, not of Mary, and these are inconsistent with each other. What has the genealogy of Joseph got to do with the birth of Jesus if Jesus were not his own son? The conclusion seems probable that in the earlier versions of these gospels the miraculous conception did not find a place, or else that two inconsistent sources have been drawn upon without sufficient care being taken to reconcile them. But this is not the only discrepancy. Matthew gives Bethlehem as the native place of Joseph and Mary, Luke says Nazareth. Matthew says not a word about the census of Cyrenius as the motive for the journey to Bethlehem, but leads us to suppose that the holy family were already in residence there. Then again he tells us of the coming of the wise men from the East, their public inquiry as to the whereabouts of the holy child, the jealousy of Herod, the massacre of the innocents, and the flight into Egypt. Luke says nothing about these things, but gives us an entirely different set of wonders, including the attendance of an angelic host and the annunciation to the shepherds. So far from recording any massacre, or any hasty flight, he tells us that some time after His birth the babe was taken to the Temple at Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord, and that afterwards He and His parents "returned into Galilee to their own city Nazareth". According to Matthew, Nazareth was an afterthought and only became the residence of the holy family after the return from Egypt. These accounts do not tally, and no ingenuity can reconcile them. The nativity stories belong to the poetry of religion, not to history. To regard them as narrations of actual fact is to misunderstand them. They are better than that; they take us into the region of exalted feeling and give us a vision of truth too great for prosaic statement.

Christianity would be poorer by the loss of them, but they are not indigenous to Christianity. They have their parallels in other religions, some of them much older than the advent of Jesus. The beautiful legends surrounding the infancy of Gautama, for example, are startlingly similar to those contained in the first and third gospels. Like Jesus, the Buddhist messiah is stated to have been of royal descent and was born of a virgin mother. At his birth a supernatural radiance illuminated the whole district, and a troop of heavenly beings sang the praises of the hold child. Later on a wise man, guided by special portents, recognized him as the long-expected and divinely appointed light-bringer and life-giver of mankind. When but a youth he was lost for a time and was found by his father in the midst of a circle of holy men, sunk in rapt contemplation of the great mystery of existence. The parallel between these marvels attending the birth of Jesus is so close as to preclude the possibility of its being altogether accidental. There must be a connection somewhere, and indeed there is no need to think otherwise, for nothing is to be gained or lost by admitting it.

CHRISTIANITY NOT DEPENDENT ON A VIRGIN BIRTH

But why hesitate about the question? The greatness of Jesus and the value of His revelation to mankind are in no way either assisted or diminished by the manner of His entry into the world. Every birth is just as wonderful as a virgin birth could possibly be, and just as much a direct act of God. A supernatural conception bears no relation whatever to the moral and spiritual worth of the person who is supposed to enter the world in this abnormal way. The credibility and significance of Christianity are in no way affected by the doctrine of the virgin birth otherwise than that the belief tends to put a barrier between Jesus and the race and to make Him something which cannot properly be called human. Those who insist on the doctrine will find themselves in danger of proving too much, for, pressed to its logical conclusion, it removes Jesus altogether from the category of humanity in any real sense. The simple and natural conclusion is that Jesus was the child of Joseph and Mary and had an uneventful childhood.

THE TRUTH IN THE DOCTRINE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

And yet, as with every tenet which has held a place in human thought for any considerable length of time, there is a great truth contained in the idea of a virgin birth. It is the truth that the emergence of anything great and beautiful in human character and achievement is the work of the Holy Spirit operating within human limitations. This idea is very ancient, and there is no great religion which does not contain it in some form or other. One form of it, for example, can be discerned in the Babylonian creation myth with its parallel in the book of Genesis. The home of the primitive Chaldeans, the stock whence Israelites, Babylonians, Assyrians, and other Semitic communities sprang, was in the low-lying territory surrounding the Persian Gulf. During the rainy seasons these lands were flooded by the overflow of the great rivers. The sun of springtime, rising upon this mass of waters which stretched in every direction as far as the eye could see, drew forth from their bosom the life and beauty of summer flowers and fruit.

From observation of this regularly recurring phenomenon the primitive Semites constructed their creation myth, one version of which appeared in the first chapter of the book of Genesis, a version much later than the Babylonian, but an outgrowth of the same idea. They thought of a primeval waste of water covering everything. As the writer of the Genesis account has it: "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep". In the Babylonian version this primeval water was personified as a woman - Tiamat. They thought of the sun of heaven as impregnating this virgin matrix with the seeds of cosmic life - quite an accurate point of view. Later on this idea became spiritualized in a much higher degree. The religious mind came to regard the physical, mundane, or distinctively human principle as the matrix upon which the spirit of God brooded, bringing to the birth a divine idea. And this is perfectly true too, as anyone can see. Nothing great and noble in human experience can be accounted for merely in terms of atoms and molecules. That is where materialism always comes to grief, for on its own premises it cannot account for the emergence of intelligence and all the higher qualities of human nature. A divine element, a spiritual quickening, is required for the evolution of anything Godlike in our mundane sphere; it is a virgin birth. Lower acting upon lower can never produce a higher. It is the down pouring and incoming of the higher and the lower which produces through the lower the divine manhood which leaves the brute behind. This is the sense in which it is true that Jesus was of divine as well as human parentage. We do not account for Him merely by saying that He was the son of Joseph and Mary and the descendant of a long line of prophets, priests, and kings; we have to recognize that His true greatness came from above.

TRUE OF ALL HIGHER HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The same thing holds well in a lesser degree of everything worthy of Jesus in human experience. We do not account for any man's goodness or greatness by pointing to his ancestry. Heredity may account for a great deal, but it is inadequate as an explanation of genius or high moral achievement. Wherever the Christ-man appears, we have to acknowledge that the principal factor in his evolution is the incoming of the divine spirit. It is only another way of stating what has already been stated above, that the true man or higher self is divine and eternal, integral to the being of God, and that this divine manhood is gradually but surely manifesting on the physical plane. The lower cannot produce the higher, but the higher is shaping and transforming the lower; every moral and spiritual advance is therefore of the nature of a virgin birth - a quickening from above. The spiritual birth described in the conversation between our Lord and Nicodemus as given in the third of John is, properly speaking, a virgin birth. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the spirit is spirit". "Ye must be born anew" or, literally, "quickened from above". Every man who deliberately faces towards the highest, and feels himself re-enforced by the Spirit of God in so doing, is quickened from above; the divinely human Christ is born in him, the Word has become flesh and is manifested to the world.

HUMAN HISTORY ONE LONG INCARNATION

If now we can turn our thoughts away for a moment from the individual to the race and think of humanity as one being, of the expression of one being, we shall read this truth on a larger scale. All human history represents the incarnation or manifesting of the eternal Son or Christ of God. The incarnation cannot be limited to one life only, however great that life may be. It is quite a false idea to think of Jesus and no one else as the Son of God incarnate. It is easy to understand the loving reverence for Jesus which would lead men to regard Him as being and expressing something to which none of the rest of us can ever attain. In affirming this they actually rob Him of a glory He ought to receive. They make Him unreal, reduce His earthly life to a sort of drama, and affect a drastic distinction in kind between Him and themselves. Let us go on thinking of Jesus as Christ, the very Christ of glory, but let us realize that the same Christ is seeking expression through every human soul. He is incarnate in the race in order that by means of limitation He may manifest the innermost of God, the life and love eternal. This lends significance to His life and work. We can rise toward Him by trusting, loving, and serving Him; and by so doing we shall demonstrate that we too are Christ the eternal Son.

To think of all human life as a manifestation of the eternal Son, renders it sacred. Our very struggles and sufferings become full of meaning. Sin is but the failure to realize it; it is being false to ourselves and our divine origin; it is the centrifugal tendency in human nature just as love is the centripetal. There is no life, however depraved, which does not occasionally emit some sign of its kinship to Jesus and its eternal sonship to God. Wherever you see self-sacrifice at work you see the very spirit of our Lord, the spirit of the Christ incarnate. It may be seen everywhere, and it interprets life as nothing else can. Take up any work of fiction, no matter what, and you will find the author instinctively preaching this truth. Look into any commonplace, everyday life, no matter whose, and you will find it exemplified. Many a selfish bad man has one tender spot in his nature, his affection for his child, and for the sake of that child he will deny himself as he has never dreamed of doing for anything else; so far as that one influence is concerned he actually reverses the principle which governs the rest of his life.

Look abroad all through the world look back upon the slow, upward progress of humanity to its home in God, and you will read the story of the incarnation of the eternal Son. Never has there been an hour so dark but that some gleams of this eternal light have pierced the murky

pall of human ignorance and sin; never have better hate and fiendish cruelty gone altogether unrelieved by the human tenderness and self-devotion that testify of God. Indeed without the limitation, the struggle, and the pain, how would this Christ spirit ever have known itself? Granted that self-surrender had never been called for by the conditions of life, granted that our resources had always known themselves infinite, and that which is worthiest and sublimest in the nature of God and man alike could never have been revealed. This is why the Son has become incarnate; this is what we are here to do, and upon the faithful doing of it depends our experience of the joy that the world can neither give nor take away. Life and death itself are the central expression and ideal embodiment of this age-long process, a process the consummation of which will be the glorious return and triumphant ingathering of a redeemed and perfectly unified humanity to God.

"And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him that God may be all in all".

THE ATONEMENT

I. ASSOCIATION OF THE DOCTRINE WITH JESUS A TRADITIONAL VIEW

IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT

This brings us to a subject, which, more than any other, with the exception of that of the person of Jesus has come under discussion at the present time. In the course of Christian history it has created a more extensive literature than probably any other doctrine. The subject variously known as Salvation, Redemption, Atonement, and with which the terms Forgiveness, Expiation, Reconciliation, Ransom, Justification, Propitiation, Satisfaction, Sanctification, and such like have been commonly associated. The Christian doctrine of Atonement, as we may call it for convenience, bulks so large in Christian thought that all others may be held to be dependent upon it, even that of the person of Jesus; for, according to traditional theology, Jesus became incarnate for our redemption, and that redemption can only be accomplished by one who is very God.

But there is no subject upon which modern Christian thought is less coherent than this. This confession of helplessness shows that there is something seriously wrong with the conventional presentation of the doctrine. But the Atonement is not such a very great mystery after all, and it ought to be possible to get at the heart of it without stultifying the intellect.

THE USUAL THEOLOGICAL METHOD OF EXPOUNDING IT

As a rule treatises on the Atonement begin with an examination of the Scripture passages which are supposed to have a bearing upon it. Then follows a careful examination and criticism of the various theories of it which have successively held the field during its history; the author concludes by giving us his own. A better and reasonable explanation is wanted, and more than wanted; it is already taken for granted by everyone who thinks seriously about life, whether it is called by its theological name or not.

Roughly stated the "Orthodox" traditional view is as follows: Our fallen humanity is separated from and under the displeasure of God. God longs to save us from our sin, but justice demands that he must punish us. The world is already an unhappy place because of sin, but what we endure here is nothing to what we shall have to endure presently when we cross the river of death; we shall all go to hell, a place of never-ending torment, unless some means can be found of justifying us before God ere we pass over. This means has been found in the self-devotion of the second person in the Trinity. The sinless Son of God took upon Himself the likeness of sinful humanity, was born into this world, lived here for a few years, suffered a violent death, and then reascended to His Father to make unceasing intercession for mankind. It was the dying of the death that was the all-important thing. It was in consideration of this death that God agreed to pardon sin. Jesus was put to death because God had arranged that He should be put to death, and because Jesus was willing to be put to death, in order that a satisfactory offering might be made to divine justice for the sins of the world. God had to punish someone before he could be free to forgive His erring children, and therefore with the consent of Jesus He punished Him. The whole scheme was prearranged in heaven, cross and all, and therefore Jesus was not taken by surprise when the end came; He was, in fact, a party to it, and His murderers were in a sense only the instruments of a beneficent, foreordained plan. God accepts this sacrifice as a full and complete equivalent for all that humanity deserves, but we must individually appropriate it by faith or it will not avail for us; we shall go to hell all the same. If on the other hand we do claim the benefit of this finished work, the merits of the Redeemer are

imputed to us; we are held to be justified before God, and are gradually sanctified by the Holy Spirit operating within our should and fashioning us into the moral likeness of our Lord.

CONVENTIONAL VIEW BOTH TRUE AND FALSE

To say that these statements are wholly untrue is impossible, for them everyone contains a truth of considerable value, but as popularly stated they are misleading. This view of the Atonement is unethical, and, has wrought a good deal of mischief in the past and bewilderment in the present. Some readers of these pages will no doubt find fault for stating it so baldly, that they use language which implies it, and it seems impossible to resist the conclusion that they are driven to use the vaguer language because of their own feeling that the balder statement, which their predecessors made without hesitation, is intellectually and morally impossible. Traditionalists are reluctant to give up the belief that in some way or other the death of Jesus on Calvary actually effected something in the unseen by making God propitious toward us and removing the barrier which prevented Him from freely forgiving human sin. Of course they add other and valuable elements in their discussion of the theme, but this is their central idea and they seldom get away from it. The typical theologian never seems to think of looking at the death of Jesus from the purely human point of view, and yet surely this is the only legitimate thing to do when trying to get at the heart of the subject. It is what we should do in any other case of a like king; we should never dream of doing anything else. We have no business to begin speculating upon transcendental questions until we have examined the purely human causes of such an event as the crucifixion of Jesus. When an adherent of the so-called orthodox view of the doctrine of the Atonement is pressed to say just what he supposes the death of Jesus to have effected in the mind of God so as to free humanity from its curse, he usually takes refuge in phrases about the "mystery of the cross" and so on. He does not say in plain language exactly what he means, for the truth is he does not know; he only believes what he has been told, and has persuaded himself that it is of the utmost value to Christian experience, which it is not and never was. The doctrine as popularly held is not only not true but it ought not to be true; it is a serious hindrance to spiritual religion. Why should it be regarded as in any real sense a substitute for what is due from us or any equivalent for what we should otherwise have to bear? If this is the Atonement, there is little wonder that thoughtful minds will have nothing to say to it and that so many good people are puzzled to know what to think about it.

THE HUMAN CAUSES OF THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

If the death of Jesus took place under similar circumstances today, we should be in no doubt as to what to call it. It was a barbarous and wicked murder instigated by base and unscrupulous men who wanted to get rid of a dangerous teacher, whether he was crucified or stoned. We do not need to search far in order to find reasons for the tragedy. There were reasons enough in the antagonism which had long existed between Jesus and the ecclesiastical rulers of Judea. Jesus held and taught a certain ideal concerning human life and its relation to God. At the beginning of His brief public ministry He seems to have thought that His invitation to men to realize their divine sonship would meet with a ready response and that therefore the kingdom of God would without great difficulty be established upon earth through the working of the spirit of love in human hearts. At first He gained an extensive hearing because the Jewish people were willing and ready to listen to any teacher who would hold out to them some hope of a better and happier day. Consequently He was for a time extremely popular, and even the Pharisees deliberated as to whether He might prove to be the long-expected leader who should restore the kingdom to Israel. But this attitude soon changed. People and rulers alike became disappointed with Jesus. They were looking for a kingdom which should come by force, and Jesus for one which should come by love. They wanted material benefits forthwith, while to Jesus these were altogether a secondary matter. Then, too, He became an inconvenience. His

standard of rectitude was exacting. He saw through the hypocrisies and villainies of many of those who posed as the guides and directors of the nation, and He was not silent about them. He spoke out without fear or hesitation. It was in the line of His duty to go up to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover, so to Jerusalem He went. He could hardly have been under any delusion as to what awaited Him there. There was no earthly reason why dove-sellers, money-changers, priests, and Temple officials should be driven pell-mell out of precincts they had come to look upon as their own, except that they were overawed by the stern majesty of this wonderful Galilean. For a brief hour Jesus was master of the situation; the next day He was arrested.

His execution was a judicial murder done to gratify sacerdotal spite and popular passion, and the men who took part in it were guilty of what has proved to be the blackest deed in history. The same type of man exists today, as he has existed in every age. Man indeed crucifies Him daily.

THE REASON WHY THERE WAS NO SUPERNATURAL INTERFERENCE

But is this all that can be said about the matter? Where does God come in? Why was a crime of this sort ever permitted? Why has the memory of it actually become a religious dogma? Other people have been put to death quite as unjustly, and the results, though great, are not to be compared with those which have followed from the death of Jesus. Why is this? As we have already seen, the popular view of the doctrine of Atonement presumes that this foul deed was in some way, as the scripture has it, by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God". Was it really so? Was the whole dreadful drama merely a programme to be gone through in all its appointed stages, ending with the cry of the victim, "It is finished"?

The moral worth of any act of self-sacrifice, no matter on what scale it is performed, is dependent upon the fact that it is done without regard to consequences. If we could see with absolute clearness the sure and certain result of any action, if we could know, as unquestionably as that two and two make four, that it would always pay to do the right thing, the very soul of goodness would have gone out of it. It is just because we do not know, save with the deeper knowledge that is rightly termed faith, -that an unselfish action is in accord with the general rightness of the universe, and therefore must prevail in the end, that there is anything praiseworthy in it. The determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God were that this should be fully demonstrated in the experience of Jesus, as it has been in the experience of many a one of His followers since. Once more therefore we come to the last word of the cosmos, manifestation by sacrifice; and the experience of our Lord is the sum and centre of it all. The reason why the Name has such power in the world today is because a perfectly noble and unselfish life was crowned by a perfectly sacrificial death. Both were needed; either without the other would have been incomplete.

II. SEMITIC IDEAS OF ATONEMENT

ATONEMENT IN HISTORY

What, then, has this death to do with the Atonement? A great deal; but the best way to answer the question will be to obtain a clear idea as to what the Atonement really means and always has meant to Christian experience, notwithstanding the tortuous ways in which the doctrine has been articulated. The mental dialect changes from one generation to another, but truth does not. As a matter of fact, statements of truth are but conventional symbols at the best, and possess only the ethical and emotional value associated with them in our minds. This is why venerable propositions which seem obscurantist to us originally possessed vital significance to their framers; the ethical and emotional content were greater than the form of statement, as they always must be. It is much the same with the forms in which religious truth is stated from age to age. The form is no more the truth than the landscape is the emotion or recollection it excites; it is only a symbol for the truth. To grasp this clearly should not only make us more tolerant of archaic confessions of faith, but should help us to realize that truth is one even under apparently contradictory forms of statement! It is our duty in religion as in everything else to endeavour to express the content of spiritual experience in the forms which best accord with the mental dialect of our own day. I repeat, therefore, that underneath every one of the principal forms of statement in which the doctrine of Atonement has been presented in the past the same truth is to be found. It is an interesting historical and psychological study to try to find out what it is.

ATONEMENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

It is usual for writers on the Atonement to begin by taking scripture for granted and presenting an examination of the principal passages in which the Atonement is thought to be presumed or declared. But we have to get behind even the language of scripture and ask how the writers of the Old and New Testaments came to use these particular symbols and what they originally meant. The word "atonement" is not an exact translation of any one Old Testament term, but connotes a group of related religious ideas. In its Christian use other elements enter into it from Greek thought which are not to be found in the Old Testament. But the Old Testament source of the ideas as well as the term is much older than the Greek, and therefore we are right in looking to the Old Testament for the origin of the doctrine which has taken such an important place in Christianity. But here again modern research has opened up an enormous field of investigation. Israel was a member of a vast family of nations all of which had sprung from one stock, and of which the Babylonians and Assyrians were the most powerful representatives. The Israelites were, politically speaking, a comparatively insignificant folk surrounded by mighty empires which had attained a high degree of civilization. The excavations which are now proceeding in oriental lands, especially the territories occupied by ancient Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt, are bringing much valuable and interesting matter to light. We find that the civilization of these peoples was much older than up to now scholars have believed. The painstaking efforts of expert explorers are bringing vast forgotten literatures to light and reconstituting for us the religious ideas and modes of life of these people of the ancient world. One result of these researches has been to prove that Hebrew religious ideas were closely allied to those of other Semitic peoples, and even the way in which they were expressed owed not a little to older civilizations. In nothing was this more clearly the case than with the ideas included afterward in the doctrine of Atonement. The word translated Atonement in our version of the Old Testament scriptures played an important part in the Old Testament sacrificial system, and this again was closely connected with Semitic modes of worship in general.

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

There was one great day in the Jewish religious year called the Day of Atonement, when a special ritual was gone through and special offerings made to God on account of the sins of the people as a whole. The ceremonial was very elaborate and the occasion was observed with great solemnity by the whole nation. As described in the Old Testament the prescriptions for this Day of Atonement, the Good Friday of the Levitical system as it has been called, probably owe a good deal too Babylonian influences. It should be remembered that the outstanding event in later Jewish history was the carrying away of the flower of the nation by Nebuchadnezzar into Babylon, where they remained for more than two generations. It is quite likely that, in spite of their exclusiveness and their hatred of their conquerors, the Jews may have borrowed some of their religious ritual from the Babylonians, but, whether they did or not, the ideas underlying their respective modes of worship were much the same. Primitive religious sacrifice among Semitic peoples appears to have been mainly of a joyous character; worship and sacrifice went hand in hand. The worshippers were accustomed to offer to their god's sacrifices of everything which the votaries themselves valued, - the fruits of the earth, their material possessions, their flocks and herds, the prisoners they had taken in war, and occasionally even the children of their own body. It was only on great and solemn occasions, such as the necessity for staying a pestilence, or averting defeat in war, that the offering of the more terrible kinds of sacrifice was made. It would be instructive, therefore, for us to inquire what were the underlying ideas assumed in Semitic religious sacrifice.

UNDERLYING IDEAS IN SEMITIC SACRIFICE

- I. The solidarity of man with Godwin the first place there was the idea of community of life between the worshipper and his god. It is doubtful how far this can be pressed, but it is clear that in the Semitic mind there was always a conviction that the deity of the clan or tribe was the giver as well as the sustainer of its life. This did not apply to the minor divinities, the demons of wood and stream, but to the tribal deities, the Chemosh of Moab, the Dagon of the Philistines, the Jehovah of Israel. Probably the Philistines were not Semites, but no doubt ancient worship in general took for granted this community of life between any particular people and their deity. In the offering of the best of their possessions to the god the worshippers thought they were rendering to him of his own. As he was at once the giver and the guardian of life, they felt bound to render him the best of the fruits of life. This was a true thought, a principle essential to all true spiritual life, and implied in all spiritual aspiration. (You will have already seen that it is fundamental to a broader view and in keeping with the views of the Liberal Catholic Church. Ed.) However crude and even repellent some of its expression may have been in ancient modes of worship, it is the same truth all ages through—the truth that God and man are essentially one.

- II. The solidarity of the individual with the community`
A further idea underlying primitive sacrifice was that of the solidarity of the individual with the community as a whole. In the Chaldean tribes out of which Israel arose personality as we know it had not even emerged. Readers of the Old Testament will not need to be reminded that in the earlier stages of Israel's existence as a people the whole nation was repeatedly said to be punished for the behaviour of individuals, and families perished for the transgression of a father, as in the case Achan. No particular attention was ever paid to the individual as such. A man had no life of his own, and no value, apart from the life of the community. He belonged to it, not to himself. Hence, when any communal act of worship was performed, when any tribal sacrifice was made to the diety, the organic unity of

the individual with the whole was specially emphasized. Physically and spiritually the unit was held to belong to the whole, and to exist for the sake of the whole. Mankind is fundamentally one; here is morality. We are individually fulfilled in God; here is religion. These are the cognate ideas underlying all modes of sacrificial worship, ancient or modern. These are the ideas which find elaborate ceremonial expression in the Israelites Day of Atonement as described in the Old Testament. The main purpose of these observances was the desire to assert as solemnly and emphatically as possible the essential oneness of the community with God, and of every individual with all the rest. (This idea is even further emphasized in the well known contemporary words:

- hidden Love vibrant in every atom,
- hidden Light shining in every creature,
- hidden Life embracing all in oneness

May each who feels himself as one with Thee
Know he is therefore one with every other.

Everything which tended to separate between Israel and her God was ceremonially put away on this great occasion. Even today it is a Jewish custom still observed by many to pay all outstanding debts and obligations before the commencement of the festival. From the religious point of view it was the beginning of a new year. The Babylonian New Year began about the same time. It was supposed that a man's good or evil fortune was appointed on New Year's Day and settled past all possibility of revision on the tenth day after. The intervening nine days were therefore kept as a sort of Lenten season; the tenth day was the grand occasion for the making sure of the harmonious relations of the community with the deity. It will be seen, therefore, that psychologically the idea of Atonement takes precedence of the idea of sin. Most westerners are accustomed to think exactly the reverse, and that is why the various theories of Atonement which have appeared and disappeared in the course of Christian history have so generally obscured the truth. The root principle of Atonement is not that of escaping punishment for transgression, but the assertion of the fundamental oneness of God and man. This may or may not be accompanied by feelings of guilt and contrition, but it is the very marrow of religion. Atonement implies the acting-together of God and man, the subordination of the individual will to the universal will, the fulfilment of the unit in the whole.

SENSE OF SIN NOT ORIGINALLY ESSENTIAL TO ATONEMENT

It ought to be recognized that in Semitic modes of worship the idea of sin did not originally hold the place it has since come to hold in the Christian consciousness. The Babylonian and the early Israelite were greatly afraid of offending God, but they do not seem to have thought of such a transgression as being morally culpable. The profound sense of sin which characterizes so many of the psalms and prophetic writings of the Old Testament was a comparatively late development. The primitive Semites had a markedly anthropomorphic idea of their deities. They thought of any divine being as more or less like an ordinary man and liable to take umbrage at little things. It was to make sure of smoothing away all possible misunderstandings that covering sacrifices were offered from time to time; but the offering of these sacrifices did not necessarily mean that the worshipper thought he had done anything to be ashamed of and which required to be put right. This notion of the necessity for placating God is to be found in close association with the worthier spiritual instincts already covered, and it has not even yet disappeared from our thinking. We were told repeatedly in the Old Testament that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel or against this or that individual, and that the whole community had in consequence to humble itself before Him in order to avert plague, or pestilence, or some other form of general calamity. Not only was Jehovah thought of as a kind of

larger man who was at once protector and tyrant to his people, he was but the God of Israel in contradistinction to the gods of other nations, one God out of many. It was only gradually, and after the lapse of ages, that Israelites came to think of their God as the God of the whole earth and a being who must be worshipped in righteousness. Israel was fortunate in possessing what other nations had not in the same degree, a succession of specially inspired men, teachers of moral and spiritual truth called prophets. The best of these - for no doubt the generality of them spoke only the language of their time - earnestly protested against material ideas of sacrifice and inadequate notions about God. They declared that God and the moral ideal were one and that the best way to serve the former was to be true to the latter. True sacrifice, they maintained, was of a spiritual kind and ought never to be thought about in any other sense. Thus in the fifty-first psalm the writer, one of the prophetic school, thus contrasts mere ceremonialism with spiritual worship:

Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.

Or take the prophet Micah, Chapter VI, Verse 6. Here is a reference to human sacrifice, to which the Israelites were prone from time to time, following the example of their neighbours:

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the Most High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

And the answer of the prophet is:

He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Here we have a declaration in unmistakable terms that the moral ideal and the religious ideal are one, and that to worship God properly the worshipper must treat his fellow-men properly. We now get the idea that sin against God is not something into which a man may fall without knowing it, but the living of a selfish life.

ATONEMENT NEVER AN EQUIVALENT FOR PENALTY

We ought to recognize too that the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement were never held to secure a complete amnesty for all kinds of sin. If a man committed theft or murder, he had to bear the appropriate penalty of his misdemeanour because he had been guilty of an action directed against the well-being of the community and the community had to take measures to protect itself; the Day of Atonement availed nothing in such a case. Here is where many who see in the Old Testament sacrificial system a type and anticipation of the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus frequently go wide of the facts. The Day of Atonement was a ceremonial and symbolical assertion of the willingness of the individual and the nation to fulfil their true destiny by being at one with God. If some particular man had been so living as to cut himself off from the communal well-being, he had to suffer.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BLOOD

Many people seem to think that some actual saving efficacy was supposed to attach to the shedding of the blood of the victims offered on the altar of sacrifice, but that never was so. No doubt in the ignorant popular mind material sacrifices came to be looked upon as possessing some virtue in themselves, but the intelligence of the nation never regarded them in this way. In the offering of a victim the worshipper symbolically offered himself. The Semites thought that

the life of any organism was in the blood. Thus in Numbers we read, "The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the soul (or life)". When therefore, a man offered the blood of a victim upon the altar, he was symbolically declaring his recognition of the truth that the individual life belongs to the whole and must give or pour itself out to the common life and to God the source of all. Only in this way could individuality realize itself; apart from the whole it was meaningless and valueless.

THE TRUTH BENEATH ALL SACRIFICE, HOWEVER BARBAROUS

This helps us to see how, even underneath the most horrible and repellent modes of ancient religious sacrifice, there was something essentially great and noble. When a heathen mother passed her child through the fire to Moloch, did the sacrifice cost her nothing? To be sure it did. It must have been much harder to give here baby than to give herself. She did it because she had been taught to believe that to give one's best and dearest possession for the life of the whole was an action acceptable to God and worthy of our relationship to Him. We have deepened and purified that ideal, but we have not lost it; we never can. As time went on men came to see that there was a higher way of giving the self to the whole than that of immolating a physical life, and a better way of symbolizing that offering than by shedding the blood of bulls and goats; but the essential truth beneath all the intricate sacrificial systems of ancient Israel and her neighbours is one that can never perish.

To sum up. Atonement is the assertion of the fundamental unity of all existence, the unity of the individual with the race and the race with God. The individual can only realize that unity by sacrificing himself to it. To fulfil the self we must give the self to the All. This is the truth presumed in all ancient ideas of Atonement. The idea of placating a manlike God for offences committed against his dignity has been a concomitant of this perception, even a hindrance to it, but it has never wholly obscured the truth itself. That truth is constant and essential to all religion and morality, and is the coordinating principle to all between them.

III. THE DOCTRINE IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY AND EXPERIENCE

ANTIQUITY OF THE ESSENTIAL TRUTH

From what has now been said it will, we hope, be clear that the roots of the Christian doctrine of Atonement lie far back in history, especially Semitic history meditated through the Old Testament, and that its fundamental truth is one with which the world can never dispense; it is both simple and sublime. It is no paradox to say that even a morally earnest agnostic believes in the Atonement; at any rate he believes in the all-essential truth without which there would never have been such a thing as a doctrine of Atonement.

NO CONSISTENT THEORY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

But now we come to the consideration of this truth as it has passed over into Christianity. Many exegetes have undertaken to show that the various New Testament writers held one and the same theory of the relation of the death of Jesus to the forgiveness of sins; never was a task more hopeless. The Pauline, Petrine, and Johannine theories, and that of the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, are not mutually consistent, and Paul is not always consistent with himself. The principal thing they have in common is their belief that the death of Jesus was of vital efficacy in the doing away of sin. The symbolism in which they set forth this truth is borrowed mainly from the Old Testament, and we have already seen what underlay that symbolism even in its earliest use. Old Testament language about sacrifice supplies the mental dialect of the New, and now that we have the key to it we need neither be puzzled nor misled by it. Beneath all that the New Testament writers have to say about the death of Jesus there is the same grand old spiritual truth of Atonement which makes religion possible. Before we resume our examination of the connection between the death of Jesus and the doing away of sin, let us look for a moment at what post-apostolic thought has had to say about it.

THE FATHERS

From the beginning of the second century onwards the Fathers of the church and their theological successors attempted a variety of explanations of the way in which the death of Jesus achieved potentially the redemption of mankind. It is not easy to say just when one period of Christian thought closes and another begins; but, broadly speaking, we can for convenience 'classify them into the period of the Fathers, the medieval period, the Reformation and afterwards up to the eighteenth century, and the period of modern thought. The Fathers may be divided into two groups, the ante-Nicene and the post-Nicene writers, and also into the Greek and Latin Fathers. Those wishing to review these periods are referred to 160.001-6, et seq. Those who wrote previous to 325 A.D. belong to the ante-Nicene group; those who wrote after that date, to the post-Nicene group. The ante-Nicene writers, generally speaking, avoid giving any theory of the atonement at all; but two of their greatest thinkers, Origen and Irenaeus, held that mankind had fallen under the dominion of Satan, and that Jesus by His sufferings paid a ransom to Satan in order we might be freed from his power. Post-Nicene Fathers for the most part adopted this view without attempting to justify it. Amongst their statements we find the ideas that the Atonement was a ransom to Satan and also a sacrifice to God, but they offer no explanation of the necessity of either. Later on Augustine anticipated subsequent Christian thought by maintaining that the atoning work of Jesus was part of an eternal purpose.

ANSELM AND AFTER

The scholasticism of the middle Ages finds its first important expression in the illustrious Anselm, an acute thinker and a beautiful soul. Anselm rejected the idea of a ransom to Satan,

declaring that Satan had no rights over humanity, in place of this notion he put forward the theory that Jesus made to God an infinite satisfaction for an infinite debt. According to this theory the majesty of God had suffered indignity because of human sin, and yet man was unable by himself to offer an adequate satisfaction for the offence. Hence the eternal Son of God became man in order that He might offer the only satisfaction that could be considered adequate. This theory did not go unchallenged. Abelard, for example, asked the very reasonable question how the guilt of mankind could be atoned for by the greater guilt of those who put Jesus to death. Abelard's famous opponent, Bernard of Clairvaux, also repudiated Anselm's main contention and fell back upon the theory of a satisfaction to Satan.

REFORMATION THEORIES

At the time of the Reformation the question of the Atonement formed the subject of considerable controversy, and, on the whole, the Reformers were less reasonable than the Catholics, as in the case to some extent even today. The Roman doctrine of Atonement is much nearer to the truth than conventional Protestant statements about the "finished work" and so on. One considerable section of sixteenth-century Protestantism held and taught the doctrine of the total depravity of human nature, and insisted on the idea that Jesus bore the actual penal sufferings of sinners. Calvinists held that these sufferings had value for the elect only. Against these views Socinianism arose as a protest, but tended to reduce the Passion of Jesus to a sort of drama enacted by God in the presence of humanity in order to excite men's contrition and win their love.

Modern evangelical thought has done very little with all these theories except to make them impossible. The popular kind of evangelical phraseology is that which continues to represent Jesus as having borne the punishment due to human sin; salvation is spoken of as though it meant deliverance from the post-mortem consequences of misdoing.

In all these theories it is evident that the death of Jesus is closely connected with the forgiveness of sin and that the forgiveness of sin is the vital element in the Atonement. In order to understand the truth about this let us return to what has already been said on the subject of sin and pursue it a little farther. It was already pointed out that sin is selfishness pure and simple, and that that definition will cover all its manifestations. There is no sin that is not selfishness; there is no selfishness that is not sin. In essence all possible activities of the soul are between selfishness on the one hand and love on the other. Accepting this simple explanation of a great subject, it would get rid of most of the confusion of thought that exists in regard to it. The life of love is the life lived for impersonal ends; the sinful life is the life lived for self alone. The life of love is the life which does the best with the self for the sake of the whole; the sinful life is the life which is lived for the self at the expense of the whole. The desire for gratification at some one else's cost, or at the cost of the common life, is the root principle of sin. Sin against God is simply an offence against the common life; it is attempting to draw away from instead of ministering to the common good. The sinful man thinks it will pay him to be selfish; his impulse is to suppose that he can gain more happiness, can drink more deeply of the cup of life, by doing it at the expense of other people. We all do it more or less, and yet the world might have learned by this time that selfishness does not pay; the thoroughly selfish man is an unhappy man, for he has not drawn upon the source of abiding joy. Like love, selfishness is a guest of life, but whereas love obtains more abundant life by freely giving itself, sin loses hold on life by trying to grab and keep it. Every man is seeking life and seeking it in one or other of these opposite ways; he is either fulfilling the self by serving the whole, or he is trying to feed the self by robbing the whole. But life is God, and there is no life which is not God. God is the life all-abundant, the life infinite and eternal, the life that never grows old, and the life that is joy.

Every man, consciously or subconsciously, wants that life; he wants it all the time. Why does the man of business spend so many hours in his office in the effort to make money? It is because money represents power, power that can purchase "more life and fuller". Probably he does not want it all for himself; he works for love of his family or love of the community and his desire to serve them makes his work gladder, so that already he has more abundant life than he would otherwise possess. Analyse human action, no matter what, and it will be seen to point in one or other of these two directions, self-ward or all-ward. If the former, it will shrivel the soul, it makes for death; if the latter it will expand the soul, it makes for life. This is a spiritual law which knows no exception; in the long run the loving deed brings larger life and joy, the selfish deed brings pain and darkness. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap eternal life". (The Law of Compensation Ed.)

It is evident from the foregoing that even the sinful life is a quest for God, although it does not know itself to be such, for in seeking life saint and sinner alike are seeking God, the all-embracing life. And the sinner must learn that to seek life selfishly is to lose it; to seek it unselfishly is both to gain and to give it. The good man and the bad man are seeking the same thing in opposite ways.

"Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer. If a man says, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen"?

Strong language, but I suppose the man who first used it must have known what he was talking about. Pomposity is sin, because it is egoism; self-complacency and contemptuousness are sin for the same reason. Cupidity is sin whether in a burglar or a Doctor of Divinity. A bitter, grasping, cruel, unsympathetic spirit is sin, no matter who shows it. The scribe and the Pharisee are too much with us, and the religious ideal needs to be rescued from their blighting grasp today as much as ever it did. Of all forms of sin an arrogant, malignant, self-satisfied assumption of righteousness is the worst and the hardest to eradicate. The lie which is stifling religion today is the lie which crucified Jesus, the kind of lie that spiritual pride can ever interpret God to a needy world. For the truth is that if sin is selfishness - and it is nothing else - the degraded habits of people at the lower end of the social scale are no more sinful than the ordinary behaviour of most of their preceptors at the other end. What all of mankind is suffering from is selfishness. Get rid of that and there would be little left to trouble about.

ATONEMENT AND SIN

It should now be plain why the doctrine of Atonement has been so closely associated with the doing away of sin; it is because, as we have seen, the root idea of Atonement is the assertion of the fundamental oneness of man with man and all with God. Sin is the divisive separating thing in our relations with one another, and with God the source of all, so the assertion of our oneness involves getting rid of sin. If we ask how this is to be done, the answer is simple enough: the only way to get rid of selfishness is by the ministry of love. What is it that is slowly winning the world from its selfishness today and lifting it gradually into the higher, purer atmosphere of universal love? There is but one thing that is doing it, and that is the spirit of self-sacrifice. Wherever you see that, you see the true Atonement at work. There can be no doubt about the final issue, for behind the spirit of love is infinity, whereas the spirit of selfishness is essentially finite. On the field of human history the death of Jesus is the focus and concentrated essence of this age-long atoning process, whereby selfishness is being overcome and the whole race lifted up to its home in God. Not until the coming of Christianity came has self-offering been so consistent and so complete. Our Lord showed men the ideal life by living it Himself, the life

which was perfectly at one with God and man. In a selfish world that life was sure to end in forcible death, and the very fact that it did so demonstrated the completeness of its victory over all considerations of self-interest. Selfishness lost the battle by seeming to gain it. This is the Atonement and it is rightly associated with the Cross in the minds of men, for the Cross is the sum and centre of it all.

THE INCREASING ATONEMENT

But the Atonement to be effective has to be repeated on the altar of human hearts, and so it is, to a far greater extent than most people stop to think. The same spirit of sacrifice was the spirit of the true humanity, "The light that lightest every man that cometh into the world". This was the spirit of Christ, the ideal or divine manhood as it exists eternally in God. But that ideal or divine manhood, that Christ nature, is also potentially present in every human being. What needs to be done is to get it manifested or brought forth into conscious activity. The immediate effect of the life and death of Jesus upon His followers was to make them more or less like Him, and to fill them with a similar desire to get men to live the life of love which is the life of God. (Under-earthly veil now have we communion with our Lord Jesus Christ, etc. Ed.) They felt themselves inspired by the same spirit, the Holy Spirit of truth and love, and exalted above all fear for their own safety and all desire to live for them selves alone. They loved their Lord so much that their lives became one with His in the work of saving the world. They could see no difference between serving their Master and serving mankind. This love force of theirs, this intense loyalty to the Master, was, and still is, the redeeming thing in the life of mankind. There is not and never has been any other Atonement. The divine power that is breaking down selfishness, and transforming human desires in accordance with the eternal truth of things, is the spirit of self-sacrificing love. It is but a step from sinner to saviour. To cease to be a sinner is perforce to be a saviour. To escape from the dominion of selfishness is forthwith to become a power in the hand of God for the uplifting and ingathering of mankind to Himself; this is the Atonement.

If you want to outwardly see the Atonement at work, go wherever love is ministering to human necessity and you see the very spirit which heals and saves. His self-offering, and the love and devotion it awoke in human hearts, are a perpetual sacrifice, a cumulative assertion that in the presence of need love can never do anything other than give itself until the need is supplied and love is all in all. There is even a possibility of substitution here. Vicarious suffering willingly accepted becomes irresistible in the long run as a means of lifting a transgressor out of the mire of selfishness. Many a noble wife has saved her husband by remaining at his side and patiently accepting the disabilities caused by his wrong-doing. But to speak of one as bearing another's punishment is untrue; such a thing cannot be. All that love can do is to share to the uttermost in the painful consequences of sin and by so doing break their power. What other Atonement is needed than this? The heart creed is usually better than the head creed, and in great moments of stress or mortal danger, buries the latter out of sight. Such moments which bring out an unselfish nature by that vary act draws in the spirit of our Lord, the spirit of Christ, the true and eternal manhood, the spirit that seeks to save at its own cost. It is the inward perception of the fundamental oneness of all life and the recognition that the godlike thing is to seek to deliver life from impending danger.

ALL MEN INSTINCTIVELY BELIEVE IN THE ATONEMENT

This is the deepest and truest impulse of the human heart, as all men already know if they would only trust their better nature to tell them what God wants.

Hear the prayer of mother-love for the erring, wandering son, and you have the Atonement. See that grey-haired father patiently pleading with selfish, hot-headed youth, or yielding up his own hard-won possessions to pay the gambler's debts and save the family name, and you have the Atonement. Nothing can stir the human heart so much. All the great deeds of history derived their inspiration from it; all the little heroisms of our common everyday life are the declaration of it. There is not a single one of all our thoughts and activities but has some relation to it; we are either living for ourselves individually and separately or we are living for the whole. If the former, we are the servants of sin; if the latter, our lives are already part of the Atonement.

The sacrifice of the Cross is the highest expression of the innermost of God that has ever been made. If it affords an artist satisfaction to express himself in a beautiful picture, or a great thinker to express his noble thought in a book, surely the highest satisfaction that God can know must be his self-expression in the self-sacrifice of mankind. At its best, the intensest joy that can be known is the joy of giving one's self for the good of the whole. In everything grand and good in human thought and achievement God is doing just this. It is the satisfaction he receives from the Atonement and the only one.

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

ATONEMENT AND NEW TESTAMENT LANGUAGE

It will have been observed that in our examination of the subject of the Atonement we have said almost nothing about the New Testament evidence for the doctrine. This is a departure from the method usually followed by those who write upon it, and may be thought by some to vitiate the whole argument. But the omission has a purpose, because New Testament language about the Atonement, especially the language of St. Paul, has been, and still is, the prolific source of most of the mischievous misinterpretations of it which exist in the religious mind. To an extent this is the same with the Old Testament, but to a far less degree, for the language of the Old Testament is only liable to misapprehension when interpreted by the New. New bible translations are but a small contribution towards making the readers of the bible aware that there are diverse explanations possible. (Ed.) In a previous chapter we endeavoured to show the imperishable truths which underlie Old Testament symbolism in regard to the Atonement, and illustrated that these truths are as fresh and indispensable today, and play as great a part in human affairs as they ever did. Let us now consider the question of the authority of scripture as a whole.

TENDENCY TO BOW TO EXTERNAL AUTHORITY

There is always a tendency in the ordinary mind to rely upon some form of external authority in religious as in other matters. With one man it is the authority of an infallible church, or Pope, with another the authority of an infallible book, with another the authority of some infallible statement of belief which ought to hold good for all time, but never does. At the best, external authority is only a crutch, and at the worst it may become a rigid fetter upon the expanding soul. The true seat of authority is within, not without, the human soul. We are so constituted as to be able to recognize, little by little, the truth of God as it comes to us. It may come from any one of a thousand different quarters, but to be recognized and felt as truth it must awaken an echo within the individual soul. If it does not awaken such a response, it is of no effect so far as the growth of the soul is concerned. What is true in this book will not be received as true by the readers merely because we say it, but because they feel it to be true and cannot get away from it. Why should we be afraid of trusting the human soul to recognize and respond to its own truth? All truth is one, and all earnest truth-seekers are converging upon one goal. It is the divine self within every one of us which enables us to discern the truth best fitted to our needs, and this divine self is, as has already been pointed out, fundamentally one with the source of all truth, which is God.

If men could only come to see this more clearly and to trust their own divine nature to enable them to follow and express the truth as well as to receive it, they would not suffer themselves to be hampered by formal and literal statements of belief whether in the church, the Bible, or anywhere else. But this is what they seldom do. Your devout Anglican or Roman Catholic will tell you that the church teaches this or the church teaches that: as though that fact ever permanently settled anything. One cannot really begin to appreciate the value of united continuous church testimony until one is able to stand apart from it, so to speak, and ask whether it rings true to the reason and the moral sense. The real test of truth is to be found in the response it awakens within the soul.

THE SUPPOSED AUTHORITY OF THE LETTER A GREAT HINDRANCE TO TRUTH

Now one of the greatest stumbling-blocks in the way of many devout and intelligent minds today is that of the supposed binding authority of the letter of scripture. When a good

man hears some inspiring or common-sense statement of truth, - for instance, that of universal salvation - he often replies in some such way as the following: "Yes, I know it seems very plausible, and my heart desires to believe it; but then, you know, it says in the scripture, 'These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteousness into life eternal. I cannot get behind that". He will go on stringing together, passage after passage, often without the slightest suspicion that the original meaning had nothing whatever to do with the subject under discussion; as, for example, that well-known sentence in Ezekiel, "The soul that shineth, it shall die". Whatever Ezekiel originally meant by that saying, - and it is well worth examination -he was not thinking of a modern revival meeting. The plain, average, level-headed business man of religious temperament will sometimes bother himself in this way until he thinks of giving up religion altogether. The letter of scripture often seems to say one thing and the Christ like human heart another. Take, as one example out of many, that pungent passage in Psalm CXXXVII "Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones".

That passage does not breathe the spirit of Jesus, nor is it true to the best in human nature; no follower of Jesus wants to see a little one dashed against a stone. But even to do justice to a passage of this kind we have to get into intellectual and moral sympathy with the man who wrote it. It was written by one of the poor Jewish prisoners carried away captive into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar six centuries or more before Jesus was born. Try and picture the scene. Across eight' hundred miles of desert that melancholy procession winds its way, leaving the highland home behind and going into slavery in the cruel city of the plain. One by one the weakest fall and die; and where a baby is left without a mother, or the mother cannot walk with the weight of the helpless child, the cruel Babylonian ruffians riding at the side will snatch it from the anguished bosom and dash its brains out against the rocks. Should we be likely to forget that if we had ever formed part of such a procession of prisoners of war?

One can feel deep sympathy with this unknown poet and his suffering people without adopting the absurd view that this passage represents God's word to our souls It is a cry of suffering mingled with a desire for vengeance, and that is all. But when a preacher declares that he takes his stand and bases his gospel on the infallible Book, he is either a fool or a rhetorician.

BELIEF IN THE INFALLIBLE BOOK IMPOSSIBLE

There are many good people who maintain that they believe the Bible from cover to cover, and they seem to think that this is something to be proud of. But they credit themselves with an impossible feat; no one can believe contradictions, in the sense of accepting them, whether intellectual or moral. The very same people who will read with unctioin the most sanguinary exhortations from scripture are usually people who themselves would not hurt a fly. The Bible is not like a parliamentary blue book, an exact and literal statement of facts; it represents for the most part what earnest men belonging to a particular nationality in a bygone age thought about life in relation to God. Many good people talk as though the Bible were written by the finger of God Himself and let down from heaven; on the other hand there are those who think that when they have shown the inconsistencies of scripture, they have destroyed its value. But they are both mistaken. The Bible is not one book, but a collection of books, a slow growth extending over centuries. It has come to be revered not because of any supernatural attestations of its authority, but because we have found it helps us more than any other book. The fact that the best part of it was written by good and serious men, men who were living for the highest they were able to see, does not necessarily give binding authority to the opinions of these men. I question whether we should ever have heard of the Old Testament if it had not been for Jesus, and the New is only a statement of what some good men thought about Jesus and his gospel at the beginning of Christian history. Jesus knew and loved the Old Testament scriptures, but whenever He found a statement therein that jarred upon His moral

sense, He rejected it in the name of the higher truth declared by the Spirit of Truth within His own soul: "Ye have heard that it is said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause" - and even "without a cause" seems to have been interpolated in later days - "shall be in danger of the judgment." "Again ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths. But I say unto you, Swear not at all, neither by the heavens, for it is God's throne, no by the earth, for it is His footstool. Let your communication be Yea, yea, nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." Ye hath heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thine neighbour and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." Jesus knew what He was doing. In all these instances He was quoting from the Old Testament, and deliberately superseding in the name of truth certain prescriptions of the very law which He said He had come to fulfil. Matthew VII. 28, 29, says, "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching; for He taught them as one having (in Himself) authority, and not as the scribes". The people on the hillsides of Galilee knew nothing about the Godhead of Jesus. To them He was a heaven-sent teacher, a great and inspiring master, whose words carried weight. His authority, therefore, must have been self-evident in contradistinction to that of the scribes, who always began their discourses by saying, "It is written". They never seem to have thought of appealing to anything else then the authority of the letter. But we see that Jesus, notwithstanding His reverence for the scripture, handled it with perfect freedom. His authority was that of the Spirit of God speaking within His own soul, the only authority that has ever mattered in the history of religious thought, lie did not deny the authority of Scripture, but He claimed to be able to see when it rang true to His own inner experience and when it did not.

THE TRUE SEAT OF AUTHORITY

If we grasp this principle clearly and strongly, it will give a new and higher sense of freedom and of confidence in the word of God as declared in the Bible and revealed in human hearts. God has never stopped speaking to men. He speaks through us collectively and individually. "The word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thine heart, that thou Mayest do it". If we are only in earnest to listen for the divine voice and trust it when we hear it, we shall not listen in vain. To realize that God is speaking to us just as He spoke to earnest souls in the days of old will send us to the sacred scriptures with an even greater appreciation and reverence for the men of whose experience they are the expression. But they will no longer bind us; they can only help and encourage us. We shall feel that these men of faith of an earlier day and a different race were our brothers after all, men who lived a life much like our own, and who were trying to understand God as we are trying to understand Him. The Bible is not infallible for the simple reason that the human nature, even of wise and great men, is not infallible. It helps us because these men were struggling with the same problems as ourselves, and therefore what they have to say about them is valuable. But the best of them had their limitations and shortcomings. They did not know all the truth that was to be known, but they kept their faces to the light. If we allow ourselves to be fettered by their actual words, we shall be in danger of losing sympathy with them in the spirit which animated those words. We are writing a Bible with our own lives today, a Bible which may never be read in its fullness by human eyes, but every letter of which is known and read in heaven. Every noble life is a word of God to the world; every brave, unselfish deed is a ray of eternal truth. Our characters ought to become living epistles known and read of all men while we strive to express the best that God has given us to see; for the same eternal Spirit of Truth, the Spirit who has been the teacher of all the Elijah's, Isaiah's, and Pauls of history is with us today as He was with them.

THE UNITY OF TRUTH

But, someone will remonstrate, what then are we to believe? For by speaking in this way there are as many standards of truth as there are individuals. What the ordinary man wants is to be told just what to believe, so that he can settle down and be at rest. It is small comfort to tell him that every scripture statement may be more or less fallible, and that he must trust to his own perception, or perhaps to his own fancies, as to what is true. I know all that kind of argument. It is as old as, or older than, Christianity itself. A devout and earnest Roman Catholic will tell you that in Protestantism there are a thousand different creeds, all claiming to be authoritative, and that the principle of private judgment can only lead to intellectual and moral chaos. Your Protestant literalist will tell you that the Romanist criticism has a good deal in it, and that you must have a final standard of authority, either the infallible church, the infallible Book, or the infallible Confession of Faith. But notwithstanding the dogmatists the supposed infallible Confession of Faith is almost universally discredited, and common honesty is compelling Protestants to abandon the theory of an infallible Book. The subject of biblical inerrancy is still an on-going controversy today! The supposed infallible church has by no means been invariably self-consistent. Besides, the important point is this; no man really believes or can believe a thing until it becomes, so to speak, part of himself. Holding propositions does not necessarily believe them, no matter how tenaciously they may be adhered to. But all truth is really one and the same. We may be unable to take exactly our neighbour's point of view about some aspects of it, but if we are both in earnest and faithful to what we have seen, we shall arrive in the end at the same goal. Religious thinkers and teachers are never really so far apart as seems to be the case. It is in the expression of the truth that they differ, not in the truth itself. Language is never more than approximately convenient expression of the reality it is meant to declare. The man of the future will realize this better than the man of the present or the past. He will replace all external authority by the principle of spiritual autonomy. He will no longer be afraid of trusting the human spirit to recognize and respond to truth from whatsoever source it may come, for he will know that that spirit is one with the universal Spirit of all Truth, and needs not to look beyond itself for anything stronger or more divine. He will know that the Spirit of Truth in himself is the Spirit of Truth in all men, and that therefore in the end all men must know, and be, and do the Truth.

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE ATONEMENT

Now let us apply this principle to the New Testament writings about the redeeming work of Jesus. The same principle, of course, would apply to anything that the New Testament has to say about the gospel of Jesus, but perhaps the failure to recognize it has done more mischief in connection with the doctrine of Atonement than in anything else. At present Paul's opinion on this great subject is by many people supposed to be decisive: Paul says this, and Paul says that, and when Paul has spoken, there is no more to be said. But why should it be so? Paul's opinion is simply Paul's opinion, and not necessarily a complete and adequate statement of truth. It is entitled to be considered weighty because it is the utterance of a great man, and a great seer of truth, as well as being the earliest writing on the subject which we possess. Any man of the moral and intellectual eminence of Paul is entitled to reverence when he speaks, whether his views are in the Bible or not. It is one of the ironies of history that the words of this Paul who strove so hard against literalism and legalism in his day have since come to be regarded as a sort of fixed and final authority for Christian thought. He would be the first to denounce it. To him the Spirit of Christ operating within the individual soul was the true guide in matters of faith. He even made a point of the fact that in thinking out the truth about Jesus and His gospel he had "conferred not with flesh and blood".

INCONSISTENCY OF NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS WITH ONE ANOTHER

Again, it is somehow taken for granted that Paul and all the other New Testament writers agree together in their theology of the Atonement. That is quite a mistake, and the curious thing is that people should have been so slow in finding it out. (It may be an instructive assignment to give a brief survey of the main points in Paul's theory of the Atonement, and compare them with some of the others. Ed".)

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF ITS ATONEMENT ALWAYS THE SAME

It would simplify our acquaintance with Paul's modes of reasoning if we could recognize that the truth of Atonement which he has to declare, and which he associates so closely with the life and death of Jesus, is in principle precisely the same as that which the writers of the Old Testament had in mind. What that was we have already seen. It was the assertion of the fundamental oneness of God and man, and the means to it was the principle of self-sacrifice. This is just what St. Paul set himself to proclaim to the world, and to him the whole process centred in our Lord. But to his presentation of the subject Paul almost of necessity had to bring the whole apparatus of his rabbinical training. This it was which supplied him with the most of his figures, symbols, and illustrations; but his gospel was no more dependent upon these than the ancient spiritual truth of Atonement depended upon Semitic ritual sacrifices. Paul's ideas were supplied by the Old Testament and his Pharisaic education, just as the forms in which we ordinarily express our thoughts today belong to the mental atmosphere of our time. Paul spoke the language of his time, and never tried to do anything else. When, therefore, we want to get at what he meant about the death of Jesus, we have first of all to get behind the symbolism by which he illustrates it, and even when we have done this we have to make allowance for some limiting Pharisaic conceptions about justice and the punishment of sin. Every now and then he breaks through these and rises into a rarer, purer region without troubling about consistency. Paul never dreamed that he was writing theological treatises which would be numbered off into chapters and verses and lectured upon in class rooms, or perhaps he would have been more careful about being exact. How many of us could afford to have our letters, written in different times and to different readers, analyzed and dissected and taken as a full and permanent statement of our thought upon any particular subject or group of subjects?

The first important thing to be noted in Paul's thought about sin and salvation is his view that there was a vital connection between the death of the Messiah and God's forgiveness of sins. But we should be mightily mistaken if we were to understand this view to be the same as that of a modern evangelical who talks about the "fountain filled with blood," for it was quite different. The evangelical, of so-called orthodox opinions, believe that Jesus died to save all men from hell; but this was not what Paul was thinking about at all. According to Paul, the wages of sin were actually and literally death. But for sin there would have been no death, and to break the power of sin would also be to break the power of death. But in this Paul was wrong, in company with a good many of his contemporaries, and there is no reason why we should not frankly say so, for, as we shall presently see, the great apostle did not confine himself to the literal statement of this view, but gave it also a mystical form in which it becomes indisputably true. In his thought the Messiah of Jewish national expectation was the head and representative of the nation in its relation to God. For ages men had been dying because of sin--"in Adam all die"--and so when the Sinless One came into human conditions and in the likeness of sinful flesh, He also had to pass through death. But there was a difference between His death and all other deaths in that, being sinless, death could not hold Him, and so He rose again from the tomb triumphant over it. His triumph then becomes potentially the triumph of humanity - "in Christ shall all be made alive" -if only we unite ourselves to Him by faith. God will remit the death penalty to all who are "in Christ" and "justified by faith"; that is, we shall all rise from the dead as

He rose. Apparently Paul's belief was that no one would ever have died but for the sin of Adam, a taint which has affected all Adam's descendants. Death in his view was synonymous with annihilation.

The next thing to be noticed is the juridical nature of Paul's conception of the relationship of man and God. God is a lawgiver and man a transgressor, a rebel against his sovereignty. In accordance with God's law of righteousness sin is punishable by the death of the whole race. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." But when the eternal Son of God, the head and representative of the race, submits to this penalty and in so doing acknowledges the righteousness of God, justice is satisfied. "If one died for all, therefore all died." Those who claim by faith the benefits of Messiah's submission to death on behalf of the race are at peace with God. Henceforth they are not to live to themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again.

Anyone who reads Paul's words without dogmatic prejudice will see that this is not the present-day doctrine of Atonement. It takes for granted certain ideas which were current among the Jews of Paul's day, but which have since sunk into the background of Christian thought or been abandoned altogether. Paul's use of them in the framing of his theology is ingenious but not convincing, and was not essential to his gospel; in fact the juridical and the ethical elements in Paul's teaching stand in irreconcilable contrast. His theology is saved by his mysticism, for no sooner has he enunciated these unbelievable propositions about the death penalty of sin, the judicial sovereignty of God, justification by faith, the imputed merits of the Redeemer, and such like, than he proceeds to use them as symbols to illustrate a subjective change in the sinner and a mystical union between the soul and Christ. He does this so beautifully that the reader can hardly discern where Paul quits the region of literalism and takes us into that of mysticism. Hence he talks about dying with Christ, being crucified with Christ, dying to sin, and so on, evidently meaning that the whole redeeming process has to take place within the soul of the sinner who seeks God. Even the conception of the resurrection ceases to be literal and becomes the uprising of the divine man within the human soul by faith in the risen Lord. "If any man be in Christ there is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." We see from these expressions that in practice Paul transfers the whole drama of redemption from without to within the individual soul. What a pity it is that his interpreters in Christian history have so seldom thought of doing the same!

THE HEBREWS THEORY

The epistle to the Hebrews belongs to quite a different category from the writings of St. Paul. The dominant thought in this epistle is that of salvation by sacrifice, a perfectly true and spiritual idea, as we have already seen. The writer, like Paul, employs Old Testament symbolism, but in quite a different way. Probably this is due to the fact that he was an Alexandrian Jew whose thinking was shaped under the influence of Philo, whereas that of Paul was governed by the rabbinical schools of Palestinian Judaism. At this time Alexandria was the greatest intellectual center in the world, a meeting place for Greek thought and Hebrew religion as represented by Philo. The influence of Alexandria is plainly to be seen in the epistle to the Hebrews, which, possibly, was written by the learned and courtly Apollo's. Like Paul, the writer thinks of salvation as getting right with God and living a holy life, but he omits all reference to a judicial penalty, or the necessity for escaping annihilation by faith in the substitutionary work of a sinless Redeemer. In his view Christ is from first to last the priestly representative of the race, making a sacrifice to God after the Old Testament fashion, but in a more perfect way. He regards the Old Testament sacrificial offerings as being but the types and shadows of the one perfect

and eternal offering ("Types and shadows have their ending ... " Ed.) which humanity through Christ is making to God. Most readers will admit that this is not fanciful, although the language in which it is expressed is so different from our own; it is quite faithful to the spiritual meaning of Old Testament sacrifice. As a theory it is quite different from Paul's, unless we are content to shed Paul's literalism, get rid of all thought of an angry God and a physical death penalty for sin, and betake ourselves instead to the inner spiritual region where self-sacrifice is realized to be the means of saving, not only the individual, but the whole race, by uniting it to the source of all being.

THE JOHANNINE THEORY

There is a certain similarity between the view of Atonement set forth in the epistle to the Hebrews and that contained in the Johannine writings. It is easy to understand why this is so when we recognize that both are dominated by Alexandrian modes of thinking. These Johannine writings - the fourth gospel, the three epistles ascribed to St. John, and the book of Revelation - are all that have come down to us of what was at one time, no doubt, a considerable literature. How much the apostle John had to do with it cannot be determined with any certainty, but it is clear enough that these writings are not all from one hand, and that they are much later than the work of St. Paul. The all-important conception in the Johannine writings is that salvation is secured by the union of the individual soul with the eternal Christ, or Logos, or Divine Man of pre-Christian thought and experience. Here again we have a perfectly true and necessary idea, an idea implied in all spiritual experience worthy of the name; but as the root factor in a presentation of the doctrine of Atonement, it differs widely from Paul's way of putting things. When the Johannine writers speak of the blood of Christ, they mean the outpoured, forth given life of the eternal Son of God, the ideal humanity, perfectly and centrally expressed in Jesus of Nazareth. There is not from beginning to end a hint or a suggestion in these writings that a sinless being was tortured in order to appease the wrath of God against guilty ones, or that the penalty of sin in a world to come will be remitted to a penitent sinner in consideration of his faith in such an arrangement.

UNDERLYING UNITY

This is by no means an exhaustive examination of New Testament teaching on the subject of Atonement, but it should be sufficient to show two things: first, that the theories of the New Testament writers concerning the redeeming works of Christ are not, taken literally, mutually consistent; secondly, the truth implied in all the theories is precisely that truth of Atonement which we have already seen to be implied in all religion. The great thing which impressed the primitive Christian consciousness in regard to the life and death of Jesus was that this life and death were the most complete and consistent self-offering of the individual to the whole that had ever been made, and this self-offering quality is yet today the on-going process of His outpouring in all of creation and so manifest in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. In this self-offering was the one perfect manifestation of the eternal Christ, the humanity which reveals the innermost of God, the humanity which is love. To partake of the benefits of that Atonement we have to unite ourselves to it; that is, to employ the mystical language of St. Paul, we have to die to self with Christ and rise with Him into the experience of larger, fuller life, the life eternal.

It is just the same truth under every one of these different theories, but if we persist in regarding them literally we shall miss it, for by no kind of ingenuity can we square the theory of St. Paul with that of the other writers; the way of putting it is different. But once we see what the essential truth of Atonement is, we are no longer bound by the intellectual symbolism of Paul or Hebrews or any other authority; we can get beneath the symbol of the thing symbolized. The Pauline principle of dying with Christ, the Hebrews idea of the eternal sacrifice manifested in

time, the Johannine thought about the outpoured life of the eternal Christ, are all one and the same. Jesus did nothing for us which we are not also called upon to do for ourselves and one another in our degree. Faith in His atoning work means death to self that we may live to God; as selfhood perishes on its Calvary, the Christ, the true man, the divine reality, in whom we are one with all men, rises in power in our hearts and unites us to the source of all goodness and joy. Institutional, forensic, external, the Atonement never has been and never will be. But vicarious suffering, willingly accepted, is the great redeeming force by which the world is gradually being won to its true life in God, for vicarious suffering is the expression of the law that in a finite world the service of the whole involves pain, although it is also the deepest joy that the human heart can know. The sacrifice symbolized in the mystic bread and wine is the central and ideal expression of this principle on the field of time, but it only possesses meaning and value as it is repeated in our lives; the Christ has to be offered perpetually on the altar of human hearts. There is no justification except by becoming just, and no imputed righteousness which means availing ourselves of merits that are not ours. We are "justified by faith", indeed, but only in the sense that no man can become good without believing in goodness, and no man can without gradually becoming like Him. Here is Atonement, Justification, Sanctification, and all else that is needed to unite mankind to the life eternal which is to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

It can hardly be necessary to point out that there is no direct reference in the Old Testament to the atoning work of Jesus. All the beautiful passages with which we are so familiar, and which has become the language of devotion in reference to such sacred seasons as Christmas and Good Friday, can only be associated with Jesus in an ideal sense. The noble fifty-third of Isaiah, for example, and all similar passages about the prophetic conception of the suffering servant of God, have, literally understood, nothing whatever to do with Jesus. But the striking thing about such passages is that the men who wrote them were able to realize and express the very essence of the spiritual Atonement, the giving of the individual for the race. Take Jeremiah, he shared the captivity of the Jews under Nebuchadnezzar, a captivity against which he had warned them in vain. "Despised and rejected of men," he died, but in later days his name came to be revered as perhaps none had ever been before. For centuries afterwards he was referred to by the returned exiles as the prophet, in contradistinction to all other prophets. He had lived the atoning life and died a sacrificial death. The author of the fifty-third of Isaiah had a noble example in mind when he penned his deathless words, but these words were meant to have an impersonal meaning too. They stand as a description of the ideal manhood, the true servant of God, the saviour of the race in any and every generation. This kind of manhood, the true manhood, the eternal or divine manhood, must inevitably suffer in a selfish world, but these sufferings are never in vain; they are the mount from which the eternal Christ rises in redeeming might over the power of sin and death. Let any man ask himself what it is that is saving the world today, and gradually but surely lifting it out of the mire of ignorance, he cannot find a better answer than the fifth-third of Isaiah.

When we go to the Bible in this common-sense way, entering with understanding and sympathy into the thoughts and aspirations of the men who wrote it, it becomes a living book, and a real help in our endeavour to live our lives in union with Christ and our fellow man. But to regard it as a sort of official document written by the finger of God, of equal authority in every part, and containing a full and complete statement of the propositions we must accept in order to make sure of salvation, is hampering and belittling to the soul. God inspires men, not books; and He will go on inspiring men to the end of time, whether they write books or not. This idea this supposed authority of the letter of scripture is such a serious hindrance and stumbling-block to spiritual religion today. If only the average "Christian" could emancipate himself from this intellectual bondage, the gain to truth would be immeasurable. There probably are very few

persons who read these words who would make light of the religious opinions of a pious mother, but would they allow them to fetter them in the exercise of his own mature judgment? Surely your own mother stands as near to you as men who wrote centuries before she was born. If God spoke to the hearts of men centuries ago, He can and does speak to them now. If He spoke to Isaiah, He can and does speak to you. If your mother's way of stating truth is not necessarily yours, no more is Paul's. The deeper unity of the spirit forbids this blind obedience to the letter. Never mind what the Bible says if you are in search for truth, but trust the voice of God within you. The Bible will help you in your quest, just as any good man might be able to help you; but you must judge, test, and weigh the various statements it contain just as you would judge, test, and weigh the opinions of the best friend you ever had. Nothing can make up for this quiet and assured confidence in the Spirit of Truth within your own soul. If God is riot there, you will not find Him in the Bible or anywhere else.

