Christian Freedom In The Modern World

1937

J. E. Lesslie Newbigin

(London: SCM Press)

All material is reprinted with permission from the Newbigin family, the Newbigin Estate and the publisher. All material contained on the Newbigin.Net website, or on the accompanying CD, remains the property of the original author and/or publisher. All rights to this material are reserved. Materials are not to be distributed to other web locations for retrieval, published in other media, or mirrored at other sites without express written permission from the appropriate parties. The material can be used for private research purposes only.

Preface

In spite of the large part of this small book which is occupied by criticism its primary, purpose is positive – the statement of an aspect of Christian truth which seems to me to be neglected in current teaching. My own thinking on the subject began from the story in St Luke's Gospel of the woman in the house of Simon (Luke vii. 36 ff). Successive attempts to understand and to expound that passage deepened the impression of its tremendous significance and of the remoteness from it of current thinking about the Christian life. Professor Macmurray's *Freedom in the Modern World* presented such a challenging and compelling picture of the life of freedom that I could not but accept it with enthusiastic, if uncritical, gratitude. It was only later reflection, both upon the meaning of Christian freedom and upon the implications of Professor Macmurray's position, which led me to attempt what should be at once a positive statement of the Christian experience of freedom and a criticism of what I now felt to be an inadequate theory. I hope that if the book has any value it may be in forwarding that understanding of personal freedom which is also his

aim; nor do my differences from him make this a merely pious sentiment, since – as none of his readers will need to be reminded – progress is a dialectical process.

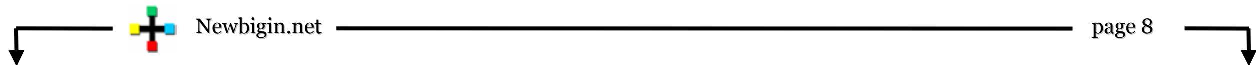
To attempt to express my obligation to those who – until a few months ago – were my teachers would perhaps have the same impropriety as if a new-born babe should employ its first breath to propose a formal vote of thanks to its parents. But one word of acknowledgment must be said. It will be obvious to those who have shared the great privilege of studying systematic theology under Professor John Oman and Professor H. H. Farmer, that much of what follows is reproduced from their teaching with only such changes as are imposed by the limits of the size of the book and the intelligence of the writer. This apparently burglarious proceeding has been necessary for the sake of completeness and coherence in the argument. Whether in this case necessity can be regarded as justification others must decide, but if I cannot adequately express all

that I owe in mind and spirit to what they have freely given, I can at least make a clean breast of what I have purloined.

I have to thank the Rev. J. L. Cottle for his generosity in undertaking the reading of the proofs.

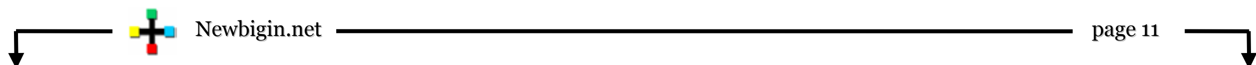
Chingleput South India

J. E. L. Newbigin



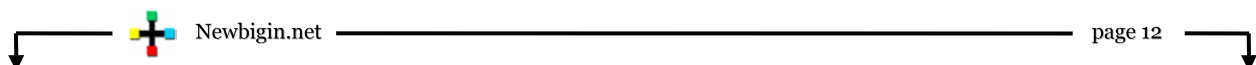
The Law is Holy.
By the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.
Now, apart from the Law, a righteousness of God hath been manifested.

St Paul



I
The Perils Of Conscientiousness

The controversies which rage around the words freedom and morality are ancient ones. There must have been few periods in human history when they were not present in some form, few times even in the long ages of apparent social stagnation, and few places even in the great lands which "have no history" when there were none to be found attacking current ideas of right and wrong in the name of freedom, and none for whom this same word freedom conjured up pictures of all that was dangerous and lawless. But we are assured by those who seem likely to know that our present age is one in which the battle is being fought with exceptional intensity, or at least in which the assault upon traditional ideas of morality in the name of freedom is exceptionally widespread and successful. So much is this so, indeed, that for many it is no longer a question of conflict between the desire for freedom and the pressure of traditional moral standards, but rather – these standards having been successfully obliterated – a question of finding one's way about the ancient battlefield at all. What has happened for many people – so it would seem – is not the



destruction of one set of moral standards by another, which is a necessary and healthy proceeding, however painful it may be at the time, but the repudiation of the belief that there are any objective moral standards at all such as can claim obedience from us even at the cost of contradicting natural desires and impulses.

This generalised account of the modern situation in relation to moral standards is of course familiar, with the kind of familiarity which breeds contempt. We must obviously state the modern criticisms of traditional morality with much more exactness if we are to say anything useful about them. Before we do so, however, we ought to take one precaution. If we come to this subject from out of the Christian tradition we shall be suspected with justice of being biased in favour of traditionalist and conservative morality. We are inclined to dismiss too easily the criticisms which are being levelled against Christian morality. We shall correct this danger if we take our bearings by the New Testament rather than by the Christian Churches as we know them. If we do so we shall find – I believe – that we must listen to these criticisms with the utmost seriousness, not merely because they are so powerfully supported and so widely accepted, but for the more important reason that they are in many respects nearer to the New Testament than a great deal of our Christian teaching on the subject. They are in certain

respects nearer to Jesus and farther from the Pharisees than we are. They are nearer to Paul, who was accused of setting law at naught, and farther from those who so accused him than we are. After all, freedom has been one of the great words of the Christian Church in the high moments of its life, and it has meant something. "With freedom did Christ set us free," says Paul. "Stand fast therefore and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage." "A Christian man," says Luther, "is the most free lord of all and subject to none." These are not accidental remarks; they are of the very core of their message. And at such moments the word freedom has been, as it is now, a sword searching, challenging, and dividing. Consider the accusation levelled against Paul by his opponents – that he encourage men to sin that grace might the more abound. Do we hear that kind of accusation being levelled against our current Christian teaching? I do not think so. I suggest that if we were more truly in line with the New Testament on this point we should be hearing more from critics of this type and less from those who accuse us of binding upon men burdens too heavy to be borne. Our real peril is the reverse of antinomianism; it is pharisaism. We shall do well to listen to our critics.

I

With certain crude forms of their criticism we are familiar. Most of us have heard the word "repression" used and abused sufficiently often to be aware that some kind of popularised version of psychological teaching is being quoted against us, and to be roughly aware of the argument. Our so-called Christian morality, it is urged, is an imposition of artificial and traditional standards of conduct on the natural and spontaneous life of man, damning back the healthy flow of instinct and emotion and turning it into all sorts of unhealthy and underground channels. It is thus not the road to the good life, but an inhibiting and enslaving thing, producing not a natural flowering of free and joyful living, but a crop of complexes, inhibitions, and maladjustments of all kinds. Even in this crude form we cannot meet this argument with mere denial. We have only to look around – or, better, within – at what passes for Christian morality to be aware that there is truth in it.

But since generalisations have a very limited value we shall make more progress by taking up the work of one thinker on the subject and examining it more closely, and for this purpose we shall select the writings of Professor John Macmurray on morality and freedom. For this choice there are two good reasons – apart from the reason of his widespread and deep influence.

The first is that what he has to say has not only the reach and grasp of a great intellect, but also the penetration and keen challenge of a profound ethical insight. It is impossible to read his criticism of traditional Christian morality, individual and social, without the awareness of being searched and challenged by the prophetic word. The second is that as a philosopher he is trying to think together man's experience as a whole, and it is therefore possible to follow out the ideas which he propounds in dealing with questions of ethics, and observe their repercussions elsewhere, and so to secure further means of estimating their truth.

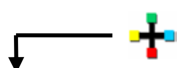
To summarise is necessarily to do some injustice, but the essential points of Macmurray's position may perhaps be indicated for those who are not familiar with it.[1] A thing is free when it spontaneously expresses its own nature. A material thing is free when it can obey the appropriate mechanical forces, as when we say that a stone is free to fall to the ground. A living organism is free when it is able to fulfil the law of its being – to develop to maturity, interact with its environment, reproduce itself, and so on. A person is free when he can enter into real communion with other persons. This point is vital, and needs some expansion: the mark of a mature person is objectivity, or reason, which is "the capacity to behave consciously in terms

[1] *Freedom in the Modern World*, chaps. vii-xi.

of the nature of what is not ourselves." [1] The opposite of reason is thus egocentricity, which is the essential obstacle to personal freedom; and the highest manifestation of reason is friendship or communion, which is the precise antithesis of egocentricity, the affirmation of the other in his totality, without any desire to use or alter him.

We shall return to this concept of reason in a moment, noting only that it is not a matter of the intellect only, but of the whole mature person in all his faculties. To continue for the present on the basis of this threefold scheme of matter, life and personality, the next essential point is that false ideas of freedom come from moving in the mechanical or organic realms instead of in the personal. Thus one type of morality thinks of goodness in terms of obedience to a moral law, on the analogy of the stone which expresses its true nature by conformity to the appropriate mechanical laws. This is mechanical morality, and whereas it is freedom for a stone, it is bondage for a man. A second type thinks of goodness in terms of service to the ends of society as a whole, on the analogy of the bee which spends its little life in utter dedication to the service of the hive. This social morality may be freedom for a bee, but again it is bondage for a man. Both these types of morality are false and treacherous to man's real freedom. At the centre of a truly

[1] *Reason and Emotion*, p.19.



personal morality obedience and service are out of place, and the true norm is that of friendship or communion.

Why is it that these false types of morality have come to exist and to have such power? To answer this we must examine further the question of reason, or objectivity. This concerns both intellect and emotion; there may be true or false thinking and so also there may be true or false feeling – the distinction in each case being between that which does and that which does not correspond with the real objective world. Growth in personal maturity is growth in this objectivity; but intellectual objectivity is achieved more easily than emotional objectivity. We are immensely concerned that we should think what is true; we are less concerned that we should really and sincerely admire what is admirable. Our emotions are crude and uneducated, and this means that right action is always in danger because the real drive behind action is emotional and not intellectual. Humanity therefore is tempted to take a short cut, to give up educating the emotions by trusting them, and to put them instead under the control of the intellect. This is what we have in fact done. We have come to regard emotion as a dangerous and essentially lawless thing, unreliable as a guide to the real objective world, requiring therefore to be sternly controlled by an intellect which has achieved a high degree of objectivity, or reason. But the

picture of the world which the intellect alone produces is the mechanical one; science is its characteristic creation. Accordingly it moulds its conception of right and wrong action on this model. Morality becomes a matter of obedience to universal moral law conceived after the manner of natural laws. "Mechanical morality" is thus an imposition of the intellect upon the emotions it is the price we pay for emotional backwardness, and it is paid in stunted life, repressed emotions, blunted sensitivity.

Upon this blind alley we must resolutely turn our backs. It has proved fatal. We must throw over the ideas of law, duty, obedience as the basis of morality, and make it our first task to educate the emotions in objectivity, taking the risks that come from trusting them. And then the good life, instead of being the deadening imposition of intellectually formulated patterns upon the

backward emotions, will be the spontaneous, natural, immediate response of our whole personality to the real world as it informs our minds and stirs our emotions.

If this hasty summary has not completely obscured the force and coherence of the original, the reader will be aware that we are dealing here with something which contains profound and much neglected truth. As a criticism of much of what passes for morality we cannot but admit its truth. Let it be said clearly and at once that the truth which Macmurray has stressed, the truth

that the good life must have the whole emotional force of an integrated personality behind it, is one of the two major data of our enquiry. We shall not seek to escape it. But, in our next chapter, we shall examine certain other facts which equally refuse to be ignored, and this will lead us to a more critical examination of Macmurray's teaching. This will pave the way for an attempt at a fuller statement in the concluding chapter. The central point in Macmurray's teaching upon which we shall direct criticism is his elimination of the idea of obedience to duty from the moral life. This is the point which Macmurray holds in common with a vast amount of less penetrating and careful thinking on the subject, and the examination of it will raise the main issue of our enquiry.

And here at the very outset we must make an important distinction. Macmurray equates the morality of obedience with mechanical morality, that is to say with conformity to an impersonal law. A morality of this kind has indeed played an immensely important part in the history of man. At certain stages the conception of ultimate reality in terms of an absolute and impersonal system of justice has had a tremendous fascination for men; it has a great place in Chinese philosophy, appears in certain stages of Hinduism, and was a cardinal element in the Stoic philosophy. Nor is this faith to be despised. It was a great and decisive leap of faith to discern righteousness

on the supreme throne of the universe, to be able to say to Duty:

Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
And the most ancient heavens through thee
are fresh and strong.

In a less confident and far-reaching form the same idea of an impersonal moral law underlies all old-established and traditional moralities; and in this form it was certainly present in the later Judaism in which Christianity was cradled. But, and here our distinction appears, this is not the original and central idea underlying the Jewish Law. The Hebrew word *Torah* means originally teaching or instruction. It is a thoroughly personal word. It conjures up not the abstract conception of moral law, but the picture of a personal God forever watching over His people, teaching, guiding, rebuking, confronting them with His commands, in a most real and pungent personal directness. This picture, which is the very heart of the Old Testament, is one which the contemporary mind finds it peculiarly difficult to accept. The most incredible mythical constructions are resorted to by writers on ethics and sociology, in order to avoid this unforgivable sin of "anthropomorphic" thinking about God. We shall therefore have to discuss it more fully in the next chapter. In the meantime, however, we must ask leave to assert a real distinction between a morality of obedience to an impersonal moral

law conceived after the manner of natural laws, and a morality of obedience to a personal God, which obedience is tendered in the context of a whole living traffic of personal dealing with Him. The first kind of obedience issues in an impersonal, mechanical morality; the second – so we shall argue – is part of the very essence of a personal relationship.

For the first kind of obedience we can obviously hold no brief. It must necessarily lead to externalism and to the essential insincerity which Macmurray has discussed. There is a story which illustrates the point concisely: a lady was walking round an art gallery with a catalogue in which the most famous masterpieces were marked – one star for the well-known ones and two stars for the most famous of all. The lady dutifully went round all the pictures, and it was observed that when she reached a picture marked with one star she murmured "Wonderful!" and when one with two stars she murmured "Superb!" Much morality is of that order; but in condemning it we must beware of neglecting one essential truth which it enshrines. There is another art-gallery story which puts the point. A lady, having walked round a very famous gallery, remarked to the porter as she left, "I must say I don't think much of the stuff here." "Madam," he replied, "it is not the pictures which are on trial here; it is the visitors." We must make our own judgments; the recognition of this is a

watershed of all thinking on the subject. But equally we must know that by our judgment we are judged, because the last reality is not our judgment, but an order of values which stands in our own right above and apart from our judgments, and in the light of which our judgments are judged. That is the solemn side of the freedom which is given us in the capacity to judge. No morality is serious unless it recognises that goodness is not only a matter of our choices, but that there are certain things which – whether we choose them or not – are right, and certain things which equally objectively are wrong. There is in that sense an objective moral order, and to recognise that is one of the marks of what Macmurray calls reason. Actions are right and wrong as absolutely as beliefs are true and false. To say that there was no objective correlate to our choices would be to cut the nerve of morality as successfully as to deny that there was any objective correlate to our beliefs would eventually cut the nerve of progress in knowledge. That is the truth which the morality of obedience to law enshrines.

II

But this leads us immediately to a second all-important line of criticism of legal morality, which it is vital for us to grasp. We have seen and approved Professor Macmurray's attack on legal

morality on the ground that it is mechanical and not personal. We have now to see that legal morality itself is self-contradictory, and the examination of this self-contradiction will contribute towards an understanding of the moral needs of man.

The self-contradiction may be stated in one sentence. While, as we have seen, it is of the heart of true morality that it is aware of an objective moral order to which we ought to conform, yet to attempt to achieve that conformity by our own effort corrupts morality. Let us try to make that clear by a simple everyday example. When we have done wrong or failed in respect of some duty our ordinary natural reaction is to say, "I will make up for it by being better, kinder, more conscientious next time." (We may of course harden our hearts and invent ways of calling black white, but I am not speaking of immorality. I am speaking of our ordinary working morality, which is mainly legal morality.) I think this is a fair description of the way our minds work when we are "trying to be good." "I have done badly to-day, but I will do better to-morrow"; and the second clause is intended to compensate for the first. In other words, we find compensation for a past fault in a future merit. We have put ourselves in debt, as it were, to the moral order, but to-morrow by an extra effort of goodness we hope to make up the deficit. Even when we are Christians and have

some belief in the Atonement, our practical working belief is generally that we can atone for our sins ourselves by doing better next time.

But now let us see what we have done. In the first place we have corrupted moral motives. We are going to do better to-morrow to make up for to-day; we are going to do good deeds, not because they are good, but to justify ourselves. A fundamental selfishness has got into the very heart of our motives. We have introduced just that seed of egocentricity which turns free spontaneous self-forgetting goodness into "good works" done with an ulterior motive – between which two things there is the difference of light and darkness. And no one who knows anything of later Judaism or later medievalism needs to be reminded that this small seed can grow into a jungle of creeping and strangling vegetation.

But we have not only corrupted moral motives. We have also lowered moral standards. For if we suppose, as a legalistic morality constantly does, that we can make up for past failure by extra efforts in the future, we are acting on the assumption that it is possible to have a sort of credit balance in goodness-in other words, that it is possible to do more than our duty. If I suppose that my goodness to-day is going to compensate for my failure yesterday I am really supposing, as far as to-day is concerned, that I can be better than necessary. In fact, I have

scaled down the moral standard not only to the level of my own achievements, but to below that level. And that is what legalistic morality, which – remember– is the ordinary working morality of most of us, always does and always must do. It must shut out the terrifying vision of unscaled moral heights, such as the Sermon on the Mount opens up to us, and it must fight to the death a gospel which takes seriously the infinite love of God, and so makes infinite man's obligation to goodness. For these things make its task hopeless. Rather it must have a moral standard which it can reach, and even if necessary overtake; it must deal only with well-defined demands and manageable obligations. It started out from the recognition of an objective moral order binding upon the conscience; it is forced by the very nature of its own working to shut out of view that moral order except in so far as it is able to conform to it. It begins with the recognition that morality must use its eyes, must train conscience to an ever wider and clearer discernment of moral realities; it ends, by an ineluctable necessity, in blinkers.

This is the deepest tragedy of legalistic morality. The law is just and holy, yet to be under the law is to be in bondage. We are aware of a moral order whose claims our most sensitive insights assert to be binding upon us. But we are aware also that by that order we stand condemned. And so our moral life, instead of being motivated

by the single desire to do what is good, becomes more and more corrupted by the desire to earn acquittal, to put ourselves in the right with the moral order. And thereby our moral standards themselves are lowered. To be under the law is to be in bondage, and by the works of the law shall no man be justified. And the higher the law, and the more penetrating and sensitive the conscientiousness by which it is discerned, the more surely is this so. Could any paradox be more tragic than that? And can we wonder that so many of our contemporaries, who know this bondage and who care for freedom, are found declaring that the law is not just and holy at all, but the deadening imposition of an intellect in fear of its emotions?

III

But there is yet a third peril besetting the moral life which it is important for us to understand if we are to see our problem in all its aspects. We have considered the peril of self-justification.

There is also the peril of what we might call self-sanctification. This also may be stated in one paradoxical sentence: while the most important thing about a man is character, not good deeds, yet to make the improving of our character the direct aim of our actions corrupts morality.

On the one hand character is more important

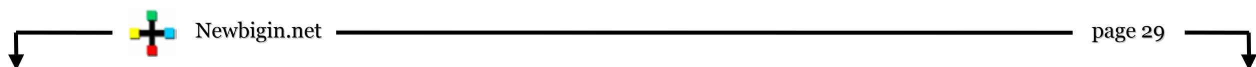
than good deeds. The real judgment of a man is not what he does but what he is. A person is more precious than a lifetime of good deeds. Indeed we principally value the good deeds because, or in so far as, they reveal the person behind them and bring us into a kind of direct personal communion with him. No criterion of goodness is finally satisfying but this. The best of good deeds may have a lurking hypocrisy in them. We value a good man more than them all.

But if we try to apply this truth directly to our own moral life, the other side of our paradox asserts itself. To make the improving of our own character our central aim is hardly the highest kind of goodness. Something very deep in us rejects the idea with loathing. True goodness forgets itself and goes out to do the right for no other reason than that it is the right. It is poles removed from this refined egotism, of which it can only be said that its end-point would be the perfection of priggishness. It is impossible to deny that there are many people within and without the Churches who are principally engaged in trying to make themselves good, or that the Church, unlike a mighty army, often appears to be a sort of perpetual convalescent home in which the patients are invited once a week to take their spiritual temperature and put out their spiritual tongue. No wonder that many people prefer to take the risks

of fresh air and exercise and – as they say – make no claim to be good.

We might summarise this chapter, then, in the Pauline phrase, “By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” The morality of obedience to a moral law resting upon our own moral efforts is by itself the way to bondage and not the way to freedom. This fact must be stated with all possible emphasis just because it is so deeply and calamitously neglected, both within and without the Church. To take the way of Jesus as our law, to make the development of Christian character our goal, to think of Christianity as something which carries us along the line of ordinary moral effort a little farther than we could otherwise have gone, these things are not on the road to freedom. Such a life is still under law, and it must meet not only the criticisms of Professor Macmurray and his like, but also the even more damaging criticisms of Paul, Luther, and all who have understood and tasted the liberty of a Christian man.

What, then, shall we say? Is the law sin? That seems the obvious way out of the paradox, to obliterate its other term, deny that the law is just and holy at all, and cancel the power of the enslaving principle once and for all. This, as we have seen, is Macmurray’s solution. He would eliminate altogether from the good life the categories of obedience, conscience, duty.



The experience of an unconditional demand upon conscience is not a guiding light to moral maturity at all, but is the product of a disintegration of the personality, of a war between intellect and emotions. In the next chapter we must look at this other term of Paul’s paradox, and see whether it will consent thus to be annihilated, or whether it continues stubbornly to assert its truth.

II
The Significance Of Conscience

We may begin from Macmurray's picture of the good life in which reason has conquered egocentricity, and intellect and feeling are alike trained to sensitive response to the real world, not prostituted to the service of private prejudice and pleasure. This is not a kind of life into which we can slip without effort. It is not just a matter of swimming with the tide. If it is achieved, it is achieved in the teeth of powerful opposing forces, not only without, but within. The ego is too doughty and well-tried a warrior to be easily put down. What shall we say, then, to the man – to the vast multitude of men who say, in their hearts if not to their neighbours: "Of course that is splendid; it's the right kind of life. But it's too much trouble; it means sacrificing pleasures and – even more enduring intolerable pains. It means taking a world of suffering upon one's shoulders. And, above all, it means a perpetual conflict with society. It means being 'at war with the whole massed forces of civilisation.' [1] It means being a stranger and a pilgrim. The price is too great. For myself, I shall carry on as I have done "?

[1] *Freedom in the Modern world*, p. 206.

What do we say, in fact, to the man who – having seen the good life – rejects it? We say, do we not, that he ought to seek it above all things? We do not merely continue a process of bargaining with him, by seeking to minimise what he is being asked to give up, or by expatiating on the true happiness which lies in store for him. To rely on this would be to compromise our own insight into the real situation. In the last resort we can only say, "You ought to put the good life above every other consideration." And if this does not move him we can – in the end – only leave him, shaking off the dust from our feet and saying, "Howbeit, know this, that the truth has been knocking at your door," believing that the dust of our feet may succeed where our words failed.

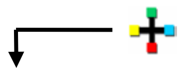
Now in introducing this word "ought" we have obviously taken a very important step. Let us examine it and see whether it is justified by the facts. We have said, in fact, that in turning away from a life recognised to be good, because it conflicted with natural desires and roused natural fears, our friend was misunderstanding the nature of what he was dealing with. In weighing up the claims of a good life upon him against the claims of comfort and peace of mind, he was showing a complete misunderstanding of what sort of a claim the good life in fact does make. That claim, we have said in fact, is absolute and not to be compared with

any claim of comfort or any threat of fear. The only counterclaim it can consider is one which arises from a new view of what the good life is. If it is weighed against the claims of pleasure or fear it has been already totally denied, and he who so weighs it shows that he does not understand what the good life is. In using the word "ought," in other words, we have introduced a category or dimension quite different from any natural category, something which claims in principle an absolute right-of-way through all the claims and counter-claims of fear and pleasure and the love of ease. And we have asserted that this category is necessarily involved when we speak about the good life.

Is this assertion justified? Clearly we cannot demonstrate its truth from data of a quite different kind. If we could demonstrate the existence of this claim from data of a non-absolute kind, it would not be absolute. We cannot demonstrate the existence of a third dimension by any feat of two-dimensional geometry.[1] We can only prove its existence by living a three-dimensional life. Similarly with this claim that a new dimension enters into the natural world in man's moral

experience. We can only prove it by taking the moral life seriously. We have seen that Macmurray's picture of the good life seems to lead us directly to the need of this new

[1] For a very clear exposition of this idea of dimensions in human experience see Karl Heim, *God Transcendent*.

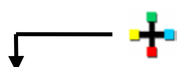


dimension, even though he seeks to eliminate it from his picture. We can only strengthen this impression by looking at further examples.

Let us take, for example, the very widespread conviction that we ought to be honest and truthful in our dealings with others. And for the moment we are not focussing attention on the particular content of this – honesty – but on the accent of "oughtness" with which it speaks. We are examining it as an example of the human experience of "oughtness" or absolute obligation. In the first place this claim for honesty is psychologically much weaker than many of our natural desires, yet it claims authority over them. It has nothing like the natural "pull" that, say, the fear of death has. Yet it is part of its very essence that it claims authority even over the fear of death. Men will meet death rather than perjure themselves. And in less heroic cases we know that even when fear is allowed to override conscience and we deceive those who trust us to save ourselves from danger, we are aware of something wrong deep in our natures, aware that we have denied something vital to ourselves and given a disastrous twist to the roots of our real being. What is the explanation of this peculiar authority which so far claims sovereignty over life that even the love of life itself, the mightiest of our natural instincts, may not deny it without corrupting life itself? Again, remember, we are dealing

not with this particular question of honesty, but with the peculiar accent of "oughtness" with which the claim of honesty comes to us. The interpretation put on the word honesty in any given social setting is dependent on a process of social development, but this peculiar accent of unconditional obligation can no more derive from merely social forces than from merely psychological ones, since when it has been at its purest it has always led men into more or less violent conflict, often almost single-handed, with the whole life of the society round about them.

In the second place, and following upon this, this unconditional claim of, for example, honesty makes a man an individual and a person. It makes him a centre of initiative and choice in the world of events. In the moment when a man is aware of and accepts this claim, "I ought to be truthful," he is an individual with the power of choice and action, in possession of a sphere which can only be ruled by him or with his consent. He cannot any longer be pushed or pulled about by circumstance or influence because, when the fear of death is overcome, all other fears are in principle overcome with it. He is aware that the future depends now on his own decision to obey or disobey, not upon external forces. He becomes a subject with the power of choice, and ceases to be merely an object, the product of natural forces. And he has become so because, for the first time, he has become free, because the pressure of this



unconditional obligation is not a mere blind psychological push, but a challenge which leaves him in the most precise and absolute sense free to accept or refuse.

The difficulty of making the point clear is the difficulty of disentangling for special study something which is completely intertwined with our whole moral experience, even though we may deny it theoretically. We gain more light on it by considering it in the early stage of its development in the taboos of primitive man. [1] Here again we must look, not at the content of any particular taboo, which may be senseless and crude in the extreme from our point of view, but at

its form as unconditional and absolute. In the fact of taboo, as something which must be obeyed at the cost of doing violence to natural instincts and even to life itself, primitive man has something which immediately and decisively raises him above the beasts. A man with a taboo has begun to rule his own instinctive life within, and begun to rule-or at least to defy-the world of circumstance and accident without. He is no longer a product of natural forces. He has become aware of, and thereby become part of, a kingdom transcending the natural. If he is not yet free his feet have at least been set upon the road of freedom.

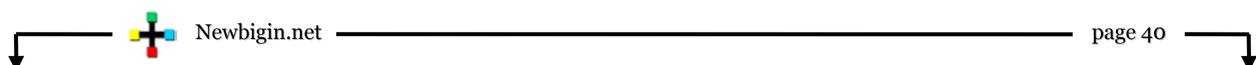
Nor do we need to go back to primitive man

[1]For the classic exposition of this point see Oman, "The Sphere of Religion" in *Science, Religion, and Reality*. Ed. J. Needham.

to understand something of the centrality of the word "ought" to a life of freedom. No one who has sought to steer a straight course through the storms of circumstance will deny to duty the title which Wordsworth gave her:

Thou who art victory and law
When empty terrors overawe.

Courage, where it is not mere natural buoyancy of spirits, has its roots in this awareness of duty as an unconditional demand upon the will. Courage is the power to be persons and not things. It is the power to steer our course in accordance with where we are bound for, not in accordance with where the waves and the winds would drive us. It is the power to set a purpose secure above the possibility of being dislodged by the threat of any circumstance however calamitous, or by the promise of any consolation however seductive. But that, in fact, does not come if we think of the purpose as merely our purpose. It must be our purpose, but if it is that alone the natural world does not shrink into insignificance before it. What alone can conquer the threats and bribes of circumstance is the constraint of an unconditional demand for obedience, of a purpose which is first of all God's and then accepted as ours. When men feel that constraint the deepest thing in them responds, and *then* all that the natural world can do seems puny by comparison. "We ought to obey God rather



than men "– it is when men can say that, simply and humbly, that the powers of force and flattery begin to look ridiculous. When that has been clearly said, there is no answer to it.

We have spoken so far of this element of unconditionality in our moral experience in an abstract, impersonal way. We have not sought to demonstrate its existence, since that is impossible, but sought simply to illustrate it as a fact of all serious moral experience – the fact that there is a constraint upon us of moral standards which – not infallible as to their content – yet claim unconditional authority over all natural desires and fears, so that while they may and must be modified at the dictate of higher moral insight, they may not, without being thereby denied, be modified at the dictate of instinct or fear. What is the nature of this unconditional demand? Is it really only an impersonal or abstract thing? The answer of the religious man is that it is not, but that it is his apprehension of the will of God. God speaks to his conscience, and that is why its accent is unconditional and absolute. His conscience is a faulty instrument, moulded by social and psychological forces, liable to misrepresent and distort God's will; but it is the only conscience he has, and he must obey it, and by obeying educate it to hear more keenly and clearly.

This claim is disputed, and therefore we must look for a moment at its grounds. But we must

beware in doing so of slipping into the thought that God is arrived at by a train of reasoning from the data of conscience. This reasoning is a reflective process necessitated by the challenge of those who deny that God speaks in the conscience, just as the denial that the eye gives us a real knowledge of objects may give rise to a process of reflective reasoning on the theory of vision. But sight is not therefore a process of argument and postulation from the data of optics. In both cases the immediate apprehension is primary and the reasoning secondary.

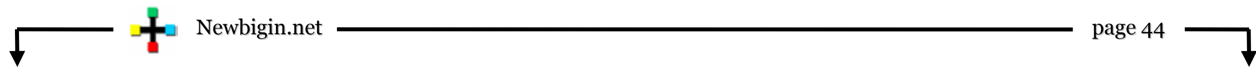
We shall look for a brief moment at the two most common alternative explanations of the nature of conscience. In the first place, there is the theory that conscience is the registration in consciousness of the pressure of social custom and necessity. Conscience, it is said, is not the voice of God, but the voice of society. Clearly we must agree there is truth in this: the content of conscience at any moment is profoundly dependent upon social factors, and the strength of conscience is often partly derived from the pressure of society. But we must absolutely deny that conscience can be completely reduced to a matter of social forces, on the ground that conscience has been time and again the means of sending a man to fight single-handed against the whole pressure of society, and that the more mature and developed conscience becomes, the more independent of social forces it becomes.

Luther before the Diet of Worms is a good example: a profoundly conservative monk is led step by step, because he dared not disobey conscience, to a point where he challenges alone the whole might of a society which for a thousand years had represented to its members the temporal and spiritual universe. “Here I stand; I can do no other” – it is the sense of absolute obligation at its maximum, throwing him in the face of the whole pressure of a society more all inclusive and venerable than any that has existed before or since. And no one understands what the word conscience means who does not know that it is part of its very nature to claim that every man must follow it to that point if the need arise. The sociological theory of conscience comes to fatal shipwreck on what we might call – using the phrase in a wider sense than the usual – the fact of the nonconformist conscience; and it can, never extricate itself except by illegitimately importing into the idea of society elements borrowed from the experience of religion.

In the second place, there is the theory that conscience is purely an imposition of the intellect upon the emotions. As we have seen, Professor Macmurray has worked out this view, in great detail and with great force. There is obviously a very large measure of truth in his exposition. The content of duty is in large degree dependent upon intellectual factors. But again we deny that the phenomena of conscience can possibly

be explained entirely as products of the intellect. Macmurray, it will be remembered, explains the sense of duty as being an awareness of the world mediated by the intellect in essentially mechanical terms and imposed upon the emotional life by the pressure of fear. Against this there are three fatal objections. Firstly, we must note there is a vital distinction between the awareness mediated by intellect and the awareness mediated by conscience. The intellect brings us knowledge simply of what is, the empirical world around us; the very essence of the sense of duty is that it claims to mediate awareness of what is not yet, but ought to be. The order revealed by intellect is one thing – the completely realised system of natural relations – physical, chemical, biological, etc. The order which conscience claims to reveal is an order not yet realised, which calls upon us to play our part in realising it. This central element in the idea of duty will occupy us later; we only note it here as constituting a vital distinction between conscience and intellect.

Secondly, we must observe, the sense of moral obligation and the fear of the consequences of action are most emphatically not the same thing. They can only be equated by an absolutely unwarranted denial of elementary experience in the interests of a theory. We know what it is to calculate consequences in an intellectual way and to allow our actions to be governed by the fear



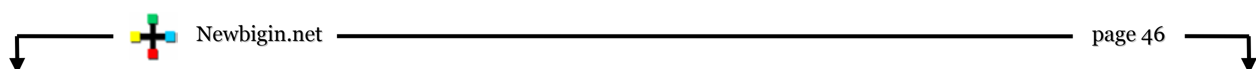
of such consequences; and we know also what it is to feel and obey the constraint of a moral obligation, whatever the consequences of obedience may be. And we know, as surely as we know anything, that they are not the same thing, and that neither of them is a variety of the other. They are, of course, connected in that the intellect is involved in both, but to assert that the sense of moral obligation is at bottom a matter of intellectually calculated consequences would be to contradict absolutely the evidence of those very cases which have always been thought to reveal the nature of conscience with special clarity – those in which men have said, "Let justice be done though the heavens fall."

Thirdly, we know perfectly well from common moral experience that the intellect is at least as prone to take sides with the emotions against the constraint of conscience as it is to take the side of conscience. It is not only the emotions which duty has to subdue; they may press the intellect into their service. There is none of us who has not found himself at some time or other engaged in marshalling a host of ingenious and subtle reasonings against the stubborn imperative of duty. Whatever conscience may be, and however it may be intellectually conditioned, it certainly cannot be simply explained as the imposition of the intellect upon the emotions.

Indeed the denial that this breaking in of a new kind of claim in moral experience is in fact

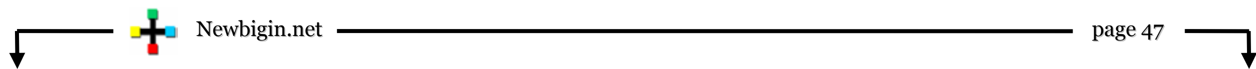
the breaking into consciousness of the word of God would be less easily made did we attend more closely to what is involved in a human personal relationship. For there is something involved in the awareness of another person which is very closely similar to what we have described as the breaking in of a new dimension in moral experience. When I turn from dealing with natural objects to dealing with another person, I am in a quite new world. I am no longer in the position of a subject dealing with objects; I am no longer the single centre of decision and action. I am now in the presence of another subject, another such centre of decision and will, and a centre which is inaccessible to my will in a way that nothing in the natural world can ever be. I am in the presence, therefore, of something which can resist me finally in a way that no natural force can, with something which can hide itself from me as no natural secret can. A secret of the natural world can in the end be wrested from it by persistent and painstaking research. The simplest secret of my friend's will towards me can never be so reached. I can only know it when he chooses to speak – he, a new subject not in my control.

It is this quality of ultimate resistance which is a big part of true friendship. Loneliness, the terrible loneliness of the egocentric man, means, above all, being without any such resistances. It means being the sole subject in a world which



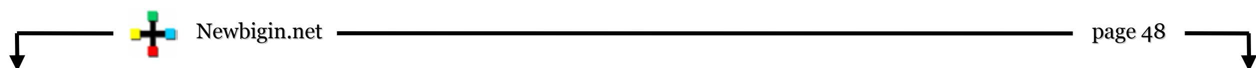
is all objects, being alone on a wide sea where one can go everywhere and see everything, where no path is closed and nothing will ever finally resist, where one is always at the centre of the world with a vast horizon all round. The joy of friendship, or a large part of it, is the knowledge that my friend is not in my power, that he is not merely one of the objects in my world, but that he can do to me what only another subject can do – challenge and resist me. There is another side to this which we shall discuss later, but for the moment the essential point is that in a true personal relation a new quality of absolute resistance breaks into life. The most precious thing in friendship

is the assurance that my friend is not a tool in my hands or a plaything of my desires, but that he is an independent subject who, if I go wrong, will confront me and challenge me from a centre of will and choice inaccessible to me, and that though I may override his will, I cannot subdue it. This is what it is to live in a world of persons, a world of friends. This is what is violated in the master-slave relationship, and in all relationships which demand blind submission of one man to another. To the slave or the devotee it means the death of personality: to the master it means, in the end, the terrible loneliness of the man who has destroyed those who might have been his friends. And this – on the other hand – is what is asserted and preserved in the relation of discussion among



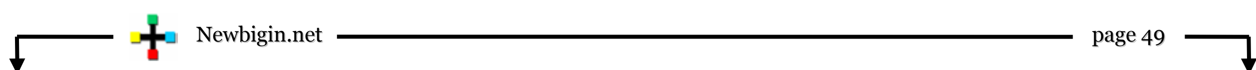
friends. Discussion is the process whereby persons confront one another, not desiring to destroy or to override one another's wills, but trusting one another to oppose what is wrong and to strengthen one another in right judgments. To the egotist it is always an incomprehensible waste of time, a mere playing with obstacles which ought to be removed as quickly as possible. But this is because he has not learnt to live in a world of persons; he is still alone in the infinite world of things, where there can be no government but dictatorship, and he has shut his mind against the breaking in of that which alone can offer a final resistance – the will of another person accepted simply for what it is.

Now it is essentially this kind of experience which – we assert – is involved in what we call conscience. As has been said already, we cannot demonstrate the assertion, but only appeal to the nature of the experience itself. In conscience we are confronted by another will, another subject challenging and resisting our own will. We are involved in a personal dealing with another will. Only it is not just one among the many human wills which confront us. It is the all-inclusive and ultimate will, by hearkening to which alone we understand that we must also accept the challenge of human wills and not seek to override them. It is that which lies behind the challenge of a human will and gives it its tremendous and inescapable quality, or else



judges another human will and gives our own will strength to resist without destroying it. It is, in one sentence, the breaking into consciousness of the new dimension of the infinite personal. It is the utterance of the divine will for us, the word of God, and it carries with it the assurance that to disobey it is to choose death.

No account of the good life which takes out of it this pungent personal sense of God speaking to us, confronting, challenging, and guiding us, can be true to our highest moral experience. We have discussed in the previous chapter the disastrous effects which flow from a morality of mere obedience to law. But we cannot escape these dangers by trying to remove the category of obedience altogether. It is too inescapable an element in any serious moral life. Legalism by itself is the way to bondage. But obedience to the word of God as He confronts us in living personal challenge is the one thing that can set us free. It is perfectly possible for us, as we have seen, to disobey or explain away the testimony of conscience. But we know, as certainly as we know anything, that by so doing we corrupt the inner springs of personality and – in the end – condemn ourselves to be mere playthings of instinct and circumstance. Conversely, when we accept conscience as the organ by which God speaks to us, obscured and confused by human sin, but capable of education as we trust and obey it, we are conscious of growing stability, growing



freedom, growing power to live by a high purpose instead of by the buffetings of circumstance, and, above all, conscious of living in a world of persons where every day and hour is a living

traffic with a personal God who is both our judge and our friend, both challenge and succour, who in asking all gives more than all. Both terms of our paradox stand. A morality of obedience to law is the way to bondage, and yet simply to deny the claim of law, to say that obedience has no place in the truly good life, is to deny the very heart of moral experience. To the resolution of this paradox we must devote our final chapter, but meanwhile we must look again at Professor Macmurray's solution. We must see what he makes of the moral life when he has removed from it something which seems to us so vital. If it is indeed vital its removal ought to inflict fatal damage upon his theory. We must see if this is so. And let us remember as we do so that if we deny his solution of the paradox we have still to find our own.

III
A False Solution

In addition to the obvious perils of criticism, there is one which here particularly requires to be noticed and guarded against if criticism is not to fail of its proper purpose. The writings of Professor Macmurray contain so much well-directed attack upon current personal and social morality, as well as upon organised religion, that there is a strong natural inclination to welcome anything which might lessen the impact of his blows. If the criticisms of certain elements in his teaching which are now to be offered should be used as a means of shielding the consciences of his readers from the sword of truth, it would be much better if they had not been made. For there is a great deal of what he has to say which, while it is undoubtedly uncomfortable, is also undoubtedly true. With this caveat in mind we shall look at five points at which it seems that his rejection of the concept of duty from the good life introduces fallacies and self-contradictions into his thinking.

I

The most important part of a religious man's philosophy is likely to be his theory of religion, and with this, therefore, we shall begin.

In his fullest treatment of the subject[1] Macmurray defines religion as "the expression of community." To the question, "What is it that human beings express always and everywhere in their religious activities at any stage of human development and in any form of religion?" he answers, "They express their sense of community." [2] Religion is an activity of men by which they express their oneness with each other, firstly as small tribes, and then as larger national or racial groups. To this definition he adheres with great consistency. And its immediate corollary is that a very great deal of what passes for religion is in fact pseudo-religion, the expression of a sense of community when in reality community does not exist. It is the mark of real religion that it expresses the existence of a real and visible community; it is the mark of pseudo-religion that it substitutes the illusion of community, dressed up as the hope of a supernatural community in heaven, for the real community – which is a matter of the ordinary material facts of human life.

Various criticisms immediately suggest them-

[1] *Creative Society*, chap iii and throughout the book.
[2] *Op. cit*., p. 32

selves with regard to this definition of religion, the most important being that it makes religion a secondary and derivative thing, instead of the primary and creative thing which it certainly is. Religion, on this view, expresses a community which is already grounded in economic and other facts; it is not in itself the ground of community. The bearing of this on Macmurray's view of

progress will concern us later. For the moment the important point is to notice the self-contradiction into which this definition immediately leads when we come to look at a universal religion such as Christianity. For on this view a universal religion which "expresses the sense of community of mankind as a whole"[1] becomes the very type and pattern of all pseudo-religion. "The assertion that there is only one God," he says, "is the assertion that there is only one community of mankind." That is to say, it "is the assertion of a most portentous falsehood, for if one thing is certain it is that mankind is not one community. According to this definition of religion, then, anything which claims to be a universal religion is proved by that very fact to be pseudo-religion.

Out of this difficulty Macmurray seeks to extricate himself, but in doing so he compromises his whole interpretation of religion. "Since religion reached universality," he says, "it has necessarily been prophetic" – that is to say, it

[1] *Creative Society*, p. 34

expresses a community which "is not yet a fact of experience, but is still to be realised in the future." Or, in other words, "religion becomes and remains partly ideal."[1] At this point, in fact, Macmurray is compelled to make terms with what he elsewhere describes as pseudo-religion. But it is a concession which he quite forgets in the later part of the book, when he is dealing with the practical duty of Christians in the present. "The first step of all," he says, "on which everything else depends, is the total rejection of idealism." [2] That this is his real faith is apparent from the greater part of the book. Idealism is, for him, practically another term for pseudo-religion. [3] And it ought to be said also that such respectability as his explanation of the "ideal" element in universal religion possesses, is lent to it by an unfair use of the word "prophetic." Universal religion, he says, has to be prophetic in the sense that it expresses, not a community which actually is, but one which is to be realised in the future. But the word "prophetic" does not make this any the less pseudo-religion by Macmurray's definition. And in fact, of course, the reality underlying the religion of the prophets was nothing so intangible as a future hope. It was the living command of God in the present moment. The hope of a future universal com

[1] *Creative Society*, p. 35.
[2] *Op cit*., p. 149.
[3] See, for example, pp. 54, 82, 149.

munity was strictly a secondary and derivative element in their faith, a deduction from what they knew of God. Macmurray is using the childish idea of the prophet as a mere forecaster, in order to lend the authority of prophetic religion to something which – by his own standard – is a particularly flagrant example of pseudo-religion. A universal religion like Christianity must – by his definition – be a pseudo-religion, since it pretends to express a universal community of mankind, while, in fact, no such community exists.

Now it is not difficult to show that this self-contradiction in his theory of religion springs precisely from the point in his view of man which we are criticising, the elimination of the category of duty, of "oughtness." Let us start from the sentence which we have already quoted in which the self-contradiction reveals itself. "The assertion that there is only one God is the assertion that there is only one community of mankind." As it stands it makes monotheism a gigantic fiction. Substitute for the word "is" the phrase "ought to be" and it becomes a statement which immediately authenticates itself as true and vitally relevant. The assertion that there is only one God is the assertion that there ought to be only one community of mankind. That is a real transcription of prophetic experience, a true account of the basis of the universal hope. It is the conviction, borne in upon the conscience, that God is one and wills all men to

be one, Which summons men forth to the struggle for universal brotherhood, and nourishes in them the hope of its realisation. This, the sense of an absolute obligation springing from the nature of God, is the basis of the matter. It is only on that basis that we can believe in the coming of a community which all the evidence of sight seems to deny.

This question is, in fact, an example of the paradox of religion that it deals with something which is real but not yet realised. It is this paradox which creates the self-contradiction in Macmurray's analysis of religion, and to which there is no solution without taking into account the experience of moral obligation. On the one hand religion must deal with what is real; if it does not do that, it is inviting men to make sand the foundation of their lives. It is pseudo-religion. On the other hand, it must deal with that which is not yet; it cannot rest content with what is, but must reach forward to a more perfect order of being. The problem is to find a true relation between these two elements, and this Macmurray fails to do. If religion is the expression of the sense of community, then either Christianity expresses the sense of the community at present existing as organised Christianity – in which case it is merely a sectional and not a universal religion; or else it expresses the sense of the universal community which does not yet exist, and of whose coming there is no guarantee

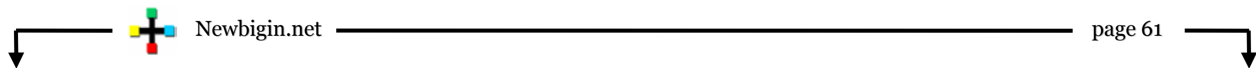
– in which case it is pseudo-religion. On these premises there is no escape from the dilemma.

But this paradox of religion is perfectly resolved, if we take as the clue to the meaning of religion the experience of the personal will of God confronting us in the summons of absolute obligation. In this experience the paradox with which we are dealing is quite central. At the very heart of it is something which is real but not yet realised. On the one hand, the good to which conscience summons us is no mere illusion but something with the unmistakable accent of reality. It is no self-imposed phantasy; for that which the self can impose it can remove, and the very nature of the demand of conscience is that it is absolute and not to be removed by us. It is something which proclaims itself to be real by the crucial test of reality – the power to resist. But, on the other hand, it is something not yet realised. The very nature of the moral demand is that it is a call to us to realise this good, to embody it in the actual world of events. If it were completely realised it would not be a summons to our will. It is real but not yet realised.

And yet for the religious man, even in the midst of circumstances which seem to deny the reality of his moral experience, the paradox never presents itself as a self-contradiction. And the reason is not far to seek as long as conscience is understood in the terms of a personal relationship as these were analysed in the last chapter.

If in moral experience we are in contact with a personal will other than our own, then we are in contact with something which is real, but with something which is not yet fully realised. It is only in a personal will that this paradox is resolved, but a moment's reflection will show that it is so resolved. I have had for some years the will to go to India. This purpose, however, is not yet realised, for as I write this I am only in the Bay of Biscay. It may never be realised, for I may fall overboard, or the ship may sink. Nevertheless it is real, as is proved by its power to alter the course of events. And its reality would not be affected if it were never to be realised. It is a real thing, but it is not yet realised – and these two truths about it do not in any way contradict one another. In moral experience we are dealing with the will of God. It is this fact which gives the accent of reality to conscience. But that will is not yet fully realised in the world. It cannot be discovered by mere examination of the world as it is, for the world partly hides it. That is why the

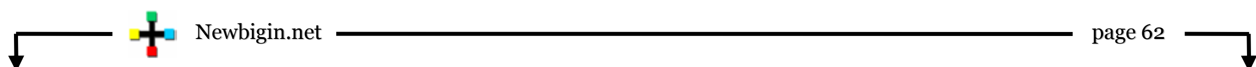
order apprehended by conscience is quite distinct from the order apprehended by intellect. We believe that this will is to be realised in future, but this is a deduction from the already known reality of the will and from what we know of the character of God; the hope that it will be realised is not the basis of our belief in the reality of the will. For the present, we must say, the natural world does



not enable us to know God's will: we can only know it by a personal self-communication of God, something which comes from beyond nature, something in the strict sense supernatural.

From this two important results follow: in the first place, the hope of a future perfect community is a secondary, not the primary, fact of religion. It is based on our knowledge of and obedience to God's will in the present. In the second place, religion may believe in and strive for the coming of such a perfect community without thereby becoming pseudo-religion. Such religion is based on reality, not on illusion or falsehood; but the reality is neither an actual present community nor a hoped-for future one. It is the present will of God. To reject this as the real self-sufficient basis of religion, and to substitute for it any kind of community, present or future, must lead to a complete impasse of thought. There can be no explanation of religion if the sense of absolute obligation to a personal God be discarded, since it is only this sense which can connect the two terms with which Macmurray is wrestling, and give religion both a basis of reality for the present and a hope of universality for the future.

It is interesting to look for a moment at the other point, where Macmurray faces this paradox of religion. After describing the dangers of idealism on the one hand and realism on the other, he says, "But religious thought, when it is real,



is always alive both to the facts of the empirical situation, and to a truth which is denied by the facts, but which is for all that their eternal essence."[1] I confess that I do not understand precisely what this means in view of Professor Macmurray's other statements about idealism. I can understand a man who says that, however bleak the world may seem, God reigns, His will is perfect, and therefore the empirical situation is not the last word. But until Professor Macmurray explains, as he does not do, what is the nature and status of this truth which is denied by the facts and is yet their eternal essence, I cannot find satisfaction in this explanation. And one cannot feel that Macmurray finds much satisfaction in it either, for only a few pages further on he is back again at the more congenial task of denouncing " that distinction between the real and the ideal which is characteristic of the religion of illusion."[2] One cannot avoid the conviction that his concession on "idealism" is one which is wrung from him unwillingly by facts for which his theory of religion has really no room.

Before leaving this matter of the nature of religion we must look for a moment more at Macmurray's attack on supernatural religion as the religion of illusion. His argument, roughly speaking, is that such religion is the substitution for the real bread-and-butter communion of which real religion is the expression, of an illusory

[1] *Creative Society*, p. 69.

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 82.

communion in an ideal heaven, divorced from the realities of everyday life. The supernatural in religion is thus a phantasy substituted for the reality which pseudo-religion cannot provide, but which it is the business of real religion to provide here on earth. The contemplation of the perfect society in heaven' becomes the substitute for the effort to achieve it on earth.

This argument is, in fact, a form of the criticism of religion propounded by Feuerbach and adopted from him by Marx. Religion, Feuerbach argued, is a kind of projection of our desires on to the clouds, a shadow cast by our own wishes, like the famous Brocken spectre which the traveller to the Brocken Mountain in Germany often sees. It seems something substantial; in fact it is simply our, own shadow cast upon the clouds, and the attention we devote to it is merely so much withdrawn from the real business of living on this solid earth. This argument fails to meet the facts of religion precisely at the point which is the focus of our attention in this inquiry-at the point where religion is the awareness of an absolute obligation. For this supernatural entity with which the religious man believes himself to be dealing is not merely a source of consolation and comfort in face of the disappointments and sorrows of life; it is only this in so far as it is at the same time a stern and inflexible summons to active goodness, an absolute obligation to labour for the coming of the perfect kingdom.

A dream picture may bring some sort of satisfaction without the effort of labouring to make the dream come true, and doubtless much degenerate religion has been and is of this kind. But the experience of a living sovereign will, haunting the conscience with its inescapable summons to costly obedience, the experience which is the living heart of religious faith in the supernatural-this is not of the stuff of dreams. Our own shadow follows us like a slave; this summons us like a king. It is because he has sought to eliminate from the good life this experience of absolute demand that Macmurray finds the supernatural only a vain shadow, whose illusory comforts and rewards can be allowed no place in a real and living religion.

II

In the second place, Macmurray's elimination of the category of duty prevents him from achieving a fully personal view of God. This will seem surprising in view of his frequent insistence upon the necessity of interpreting religion in thoroughly personal terms, but a little examination will show that it is so. For, as Professor Macmurray would be the first to agree, belief in a personal God is not just a matter of what one is prepared to say about this God in a religious context: it is a matter of the effective place which is held by the God of personal re-

ligion in one's whole understanding of the world. It is not difficult to believe in the validity of one's experience in personal relationships, or to use the word "God" in this connection. The great and difficult victory of faith is to see the God of personal religion supreme over the universe, even when it presents to us its most baffling and forbidding face, and to believe that in our response to God there is something which is not accidental and secondary in the evolution of history, but something central and primary.

When we turn to Macmurray's writings with this standard in mind we find that the God of personal religion is compelled by the nature of Macmurray's understanding of religion to play a secondary and not a primary role in the evolution of world history. Over and over again it is indicated that the real creative initiative lies with forces immanent within the world process, forces within man, blind psychological or economic urges, while religion plays a secondary and derivative role. It expresses a sense of community, the community being apparently already based on other facts, but it does not itself form the ground of community.[1] It overcomes the fear of death engendered by progress, but is not itself the creative fact in progress.[2] There is no sense of a personal God summoning men forward through the claims of duty, but rather the sense of a blind irrational urge from beneath, carrying

[1] *Creative Society*, pp. 32 f., 67 f.

[2] *Op. cit.*, 40 f.

men forward willy-nilly. Thus the growth of art and of religion is described as a "blind urge towards reason" [1] – a phrase which makes one rather doubtful as to what can be meant by "reason." Similarly religion is described as a "blind urge to realise our own natures."[2] Without the word "blind" this is an important half of the truth about religion. Why then does Macmurray put in the word "blind"? Surely because he has already excluded from conscious and deliberate religion the one thing which can make it such an urge – namely the awareness of absolute obligation.

This picture of the world in terms of an up-welling, blind process or urge is very much in the ascendant in our time. It underlies the Nazi philosophy of race and blood, and the Marxist materialist interpretation of history. It is profoundly different from the Christian understanding of progress, which is based on the awareness that God can speak to us even in the sinful present, summoning us forward through the unconditional claims of duty to a better future. For such a faith, human progress is seen as from start to finish a response to the divine summons. This is no easy faith; it exposes him who holds it to the devastating assaults of evil as it is rampant in the world around him. But it has proved its power to conquer even these. The point, however, is that this only

[1] *Reason and Emotion*, p. 53.

[2] *Op. cit*., p. 199.

is real and effective belief in a personal God. It is not belief in a personal God to acknowledge Him only in the sphere of human personal relationships and to fall back upon other explanations for the other elements in our experience. And only faith in a personal God who is really the sovereign lord of the world can guarantee to man his own personality – as current events are plainly teaching us. All philosophies of the other type which we are considering must end by depersonalising man, for the blind urge of cosmic process can take no thought for the hopes and aspirations of the individual man. Belief in a personal God must either be the governing fact of all our understanding of the world, or it must deny itself. But it can only make sense of the fact of progress as it takes seriously the experience of absolute moral obligation. 'It is because he has discarded this from his picture of the good life that Macmurray is compelled to seek for the source of progress, not in the God of personal religion, but in such shadowy and somewhat mythological conceptions as that of a blind urge towards reason.

III

Closely connected with this is a third weakness in Macmurray's position. Even apart from the question of the relation of the God of personal experience to the development of human history,

his elimination of the element of absolute demand from the good life leads him to a conception of God which is really more that of a formal category than of a personal being. Especially in reading Reason and Emotion one has the constant sense that the word "God" is used simply to express certain convictions about the centrality of the personal element in our experience, not to denote an actual living personal will who confronts us and challenges us, to whom we can pray and to whom we can surrender our lives. He defends his attempt to define religion without reference to God on the ground that the meaning of the word "God" is governed by quite human factors. "The idea of God," he says, "can have no fixed meaning of its own which is not related to our experience of human relationships; it is the significance of the term to the persons who use it that

matters, not the fact that it is used or refused." [1] But this is surely to fall into the error against which he warns us in *Creative Society*, that of confusing God with the idea of God. If God really exists, then to define religion apart from Him, because people's ideas of Him differ, is surely as foolish as to define swimming apart from water, because the significance of that term to the people who use it varies. On the following page he paraphrases his statement of the conviction that God exists as follows: "But in saying this I mean

[1] *Reason and Emotion*, p. 207

merely that the universality of reason in the personal field demands an infinite and eternal ground of the particular and limited phenomena of personal experience in the personal field." It is clear how far we are here from any radically personal sense of God, however much the adjective personal may be used. And the matter is put beyond doubt when Macmurray goes on[1] to clarify it "by reference to its analogue in the material field." Just as "matter:" is only to be known through concrete pieces of matter, of which it is the "infinite ground," so " God is the infinite ground of all finite phenomena in the personal field "and" in any particular relationship of persons, if it is truly personal, God is known as that which is partially but never completely realised in it." Thus, as plainly as it can be done, he defines "God" as an abstraction, a category. To say that "God" stands in the same relation to particular personal relationships as "matter" does to particular lumps of matter is to make God merely a category. And no man can have personal dealings with a category. Indeed the surprising thing is that the word "God" should have arisen at all; surely "Personal Relationship" would do as well to describe the "infinite ground" of particular personal relationships as "matter" does for particular pieces of matter. It is not surprising that Macmurray can define religion without reference

[1] *Reason and Emotion*, pp. 208-210.

to God; what is surprising on these premises is that the word "God" should have appeared at all.

We must acknowledge, of course, the difficulty of stating theoretically the relation between our relationship to God and our relationship to one another. But whatever theoretical statement is attempted must be tested at the bar of practical religious experience – and it is quite certain that this account of the matter, which merely merges the two things in one another, is not true to the facts. It is sufficient to point out that the phenomenon of prayer – so almost universal an element in religion – is quite inexplicable on these premises. One cannot pray to a category.

Again we are driven to the conclusion that Macmurray has lost the really pungent sense of God as personal will confronting our own wills, because he has excluded from consideration the experience in which He is chiefly known, the experience of absolute moral obligation.

IV

Fourthly, it must be said that Professor Macmurray is led by his view of the good life to a conception of moral action which is really more mechanical than personal. Having dismissed the category of duty from the good life as a symptom of a conflict between the intellect and the emotions, he sees moral action as a spontaneous response to the real situation as it is apprehended through

intellect and emotion, something which springs directly out of that sensitive awareness of the real world which is the goal of rationality. "Human life," he says, "completes itself in the connection of immediate apprehension with action which expresses what it has become aware of." This

means, as is made clear in *Creative Society*, [1] that belief is to be interpreted by action and by nothing else. To understand what a person really believes we must pay attention only to his actions, and not at all to his account of what he believes. We must turn from "ideas" to "reality." [2]

Obviously there is truth in this. A belief cannot really and deeply grip a man without vitally affecting his actions, and action is to this extent a vital index to belief. But as Macmurray has stated it there is also an important falsehood in it. To take this purely external index to belief as our only criterion, and to dismiss altogether the necessity for a sympathetic entry into and understanding of a man's own account of what he believes, requires the acceptance of a view of morality which is really mechanical and not personal. It is to make action a resultant of forces and not a personal choice. If we are really to take literally this picture of right action as springing spontaneously out of our apprehension of the world, then right action is not a matter of choice at all. Strictly speaking, I myself

[1] Especially chap. ii.

[2] *Creative Society*, p. 24.

have no control over what I do; for the essence of a true apprehension of the world through intellect or feeling is that I cannot choose what I will apprehend, but must lay myself open to the whole witness of the facts as they are, and not as I would choose them to be. And, if action is a purely spontaneous consequence of this apprehension, then personal choice has no place in action at all.

The matter may be put less aridly in terms of a practical example. A man will often shut out of his mind the appeal of need and suffering, because to pay heed to it would mean costly self-giving. When he comes to himself and realises what he has done he cannot soothe his sense of guilt by saying that his actions were based on an inadequate apprehension of the facts. He knows that this is to neglect a vital factor in the situation, namely, that he *ought* to have apprehended the facts rightly. There is another factor in the situation besides that of mere apprehension. Macmurray in practice admits this. We blunt our sensitivity, he says, because we wish to avoid the pain which it must bring. Profoundly true; but surely it gives his case away, for it admits that there is another factor in right action besides knowledge and feeling, that the witness of knowledge and feeling may be disregarded, and – by implication – that they *ought* to be heeded. But if the word "ought" is to be excluded from the moral vocabulary, then there is no means by

which the light which we are shutting out may reach us, and even Professor Macmurray's appeal must leave us in the dark.

Surely it is a plain fact of religious experience that we may believe in God and yet disobey Him. That is the essence of what is meant by sin. It is significant that Professor Macmurray introduces the word "sin" precisely at the point[1] (to which we have referred already) where his rejection of "idealism" wavers. "Human beings," he says, "behave actually in a way which denies the reality of their own nature," and this "reality" – as the context makes clear – is not merely "the facts of the empirical situation," but "a truth which is denied by the facts, but is for all that their eternal essence." Why does he elsewhere deny this plain fact of human experience? The answer again is, because he thinks of belief in God entirely in terms of belief in a fully realised natural order instead of in terms of a personal will standing above nature, real but not yet fully realised. If belief in God were strictly analogous to belief in the law of gravitation then Macmurray's equation of what we believe with what we do would hold completely. If a man believes in the law of gravitation he will not leave hold of fragile articles in mid-air nor walk out of first-floor windows. His belief about the world on this point can be entirely and accurately judged by his actions. But a man may believe, like the

[1] *Creative Society*, pp. 68-69.

prophet Jonah, that God wills him to go preaching in Nineveh, and actually run away to Tarshish. This does not prove that he did not believe in God, or believe that God wished him to go to Nineveh, for a personal will always leaves open the possibility of disobedience. We could never discover whether it was that he had heard and disobeyed or that he had not heard, except by listening to his own account of the matter.

If belief in the supernatural were belief in a completely realised order, like the order of nature, in spite of the fact that the existence of such an order is denied by the facts of this evil world and by the actions of religious people, then it would indeed deserve all that Macmurray has to say about pseudo-religion. But if it is belief in a will of God standing above nature and confronting us with the necessity of choice, then the failures of religious people, while they are a terrible impeachment of the believers, are no impeachment of the belief.

V

Finally, we have to criticise Macmurray's position on the ground that it leads him to a false idea of what is involved in a personal relationship. This is both important and remarkable in view of the centrality which he gives to friendship in his whole understanding of the world. One speaks with especial diffidence here

in view both of the danger of having misunderstood, and of all that one has learned from Macmurray's deeply illuminating writings concerning the meaning of a personal relationship. He defines friendship as essentially a relationship in which we trust one another sufficiently to be ourselves with one another, without pretence or subterfuge of any kind, and he distinguishes it sharply from the relationship we have to material things, in that while the material world derives its trustworthiness from its conformity to natural laws, personal trust is not a matter of obedience to law at all. It is a matter of accepting people and loving people for what they are.

Now surely this is a half-truth. One half of the relationship of trust is the complete acceptance of the independence of the other's will, and the rejection of all efforts to manipulate or control it. It is the joyful acceptance of the mystery of a source of activity which is inaccessible to us, and may hide itself from us completely. The other half, without which the first would be impossible and meaningless, is the conviction that the other person's will is awake to the world of values which we recognise as absolute. Without this community of values not only would our wills be independent, but there would be no possibility of communion at all. If we both do not accept an absolute obligation to be honest there cannot be full trust between us. Moreover, it is this acceptance of an absolute obligation which itself

makes possible independence. Apart from it the will of the other person is not independent, but is liable to be moved by the strongest pressure which is brought to bear on it. These two elements of obedience and independence are so intertwined that no element in friendship can exist without them both. My friend can help me and have fellowship with me in the deepest reaches of personal communion precisely because – unlike a slave or a sycophant – he has something which he loves and honours more than he does me. If it were not so he would be no friend, for he would forward me as much in wrong courses as in right, and his power to challenge and resist me, which is one of the most precious privileges of friendship, is derived from the fact that his will is not merely independent of mine, but also bound by an absolute obligation to set what is true above all else. If

it were not so, his will could not be the challenge to me which it is. It could only be another opinion.

Once again, we conclude, Macmurray has distorted his picture of the good life because he has taken out of it something which is in fact implicated in every phase of it, the recognition of the absolute imperative of duty.

IV
Christian Freedom

Let us remind ourselves of the stage which we have now reached in our argument. We began with certain criticisms of what passes for Christian morality, and this led us on to criticism of all morality of the legalistic type. At the end of this we were compelled to agree with St Paul that to be under the law is to be in bondage. From this we naturally turned to look more carefully at the concepts of moral law and duty, and found reason to believe that the category of duty, so far from being inconsistent with a personalist view of the world, was absolutely vital to it. Recognising, however, that Professor Macmurray had sought to construct a picture of the world and of the good life without allowing a place for duty, we spent the last chapter in an examination of this picture. We found, however, that it contained various fallacies and self-contradictions, all traceable to one root – his elimination of the category of duty.

We are therefore left face to face with the paradox with which we started: the morality of obedience to duty by itself leads to bondage, and yet simply to eliminate obedience to duty from the good life is impossible. We find ourselves

unable to get rid of either of the two terms of our paradox. Whatever be our final solution it must do justice to both of them. Is there such a solution? The Christian claim is that there is. "Now apart from law a righteousness of God has been revealed, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ, whom God set forth, a propitiation by faith. . . . We reckon, therefore, that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Do we then make law of none effect? God forbid; nay, we establish law." The remainder of our space must be spent in seeking to understand this quite new and distinct and unique thing, the life of a Christian, and the claim that it really does solve the paradox of law and freedom, by taking account of the reality which underlies the idea of moral law without falling into the self-contradiction of legalism.

The claim is in fact a threefold one corresponding to the three criticisms of legalistic morality which occupied us in the first chapter; but for our present purpose we shall take them in a different order

1. It entirely delivers us from the motive of self-justification before law, yet it fulfils law.

2. It entirely delivers us from the motive of self-improvement, yet it safeguards the truth that character is more important than good works.

3. It is based as much upon emotion as upon

intellect, yet it does not seek to explain away the category of duty.

Let us examine these claims in detail.

I
It entirely delivers us from the motive of self-justification before law, yet it fulfils law.

We saw that it is of the very nature of our moral experience that it is an awareness of an objective moral order to which we ought to conform, yet that the moment we make it our direct aim to achieve that conformity we corrupt morality. Out of this self-contradiction of morality there is, strictly speaking, no way which can be devised by the human mind. Until that fact is grasped the real meaning of the Christian gospel of freedom will always be missed. A moments reflexion will make clear that it must be so. Faced by the fact of his own inability to conform to what he knows of the moral order, man really seeks to adjust the moral order to his own standards. This is the root of corruption in legalistic morality, and it must in strict logic infect any and every attempted solution of the paradox from the human side. For man, who proposes the solution, is himself the problem. The solution can only come from the other side, from the side of the objective moral order, in one word – from God. The Christian Gospel is good news precisely because at this

point it announces that God has done something which in the nature of the case man could never do for himself. It proclaims a quite new fact as the basis of a quite new motive. The new fact is forgiveness, and the new motive is gratitude.

We are beset here by the difficulty that the words we must use are so familiar that the revolutionary significance of what they stand for is missed or forgotten. The reader's patience must be asked while we look into these two words with some care. First of all, forgiveness. What can the word mean except a mere contradiction of what has gone before? What can it mean except a mere admission that the moral order is not objectively real after all, the moral demand not absolute? It is tragically true that this is in fact the sense in which the word is often used, so that forgiveness becomes a mere qualification of the seriousness of the business of goodness., The Christian proclamation of forgiveness is of a different order. It does not lessen, but rather deepens and intensifies in the hearts of those who accept it, the conviction of the reality and seriousness of the moral demand. To accept forgiveness as it is offered on Calvary is not to make our conscience less searching and active in its condemnation of us, but to make it infinitely more so. God is not one among the forces operating in the world, but the Creator and Ruler of the world, whose will is what we call the moral order, and whose wrath this dark

world reveals because He will not allow sin to go on its way forever unchecked. Yet Christianity announces that God Himself came down amongst us and shared to the uttermost the bitter fruit which in His government of the world is the harvest of sin – shared its agony and suffering and even desolation. Christ died for our sins – that is the new fact, the new datum which Christian morality has to work upon. It cannot be stated with exact logical self-consistency; the centuries of Christian thinking on the atonement are proof enough of that. And its illogicality reaches a piercing climax in the cry of Christ on the Cross – "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" God bereft of God that He might bridge the chasm created by sin. About that illogicality only this can be said here; that if it were not there the fact of sin would not have been dealt with. For sin is the supreme illogicality: in a rational and moral universe it must always be an irreducible surd. And therefore foregiveness, which is the divine dealing with sin, must take account of that illogicality also. The point is that what cannot be bridged by human thought was bridged in history by an act of God which offered men forgiveness and yet reasserted – instead of weakening – the sense of the reality of the moral order and the absoluteness of the moral demand.

The new fact of forgiveness is the basis of a quite new motive for the moral life – gratitude.

In the first place, the old motive is completely destroyed. A man who has once accepted the gift of forgiveness at the Cross must give up the effort to achieve the status of a righteous man who needs no forgiveness. A man who has once acknowledged so vast a debt as to have needed the Cross to meet it, can never again regard himself as solvent in his own right. A man who has shared the experience of Peter can never again seek satisfaction in the thought of his own goodness – much less can he imagine that any good deeds of his could put anything in the balance against his sins. When he has done all, he must still call himself an unprofitable servant.

The Christian is one who has forever given up the hope of being able to think of himself as a good man. He is forever a sinner for whom the Son of God had to die because by no other means could he be forgiven. In a sense we can say that he has given up the effort to be good; that is no longer his aim. He is seeking to do one thing and one thing only – to pay back something of the unpayable debt of gratitude to Christ who loved him as a sinner and gave Himself for him. And in this new and self-forgetting quest he finds that which – when he sought it directly – was forever bound to elude him, the good life.

No two motives could be more distinct from one another than these two, yet it is the

commonest thing to find them confused. How ready we are to take Christ as our pattern and teacher only, using the words of the Gospel, and yet never allowing ourselves to face the experience of forgiveness at the foot of the Cross – the humiliating discovery that, so far from our being like Jesus, there is literally no hope for us at all except that He has forgiven us. There is a whole universe of moral and psychological difference between saying, “Christ is my pattern, and if I try I can be like Him” and saying, “I am so far from goodness that Christ had to die for me that I might be forgiven.” The one is still in the world of legalism, and its centre of attention is still the self. The other is in the world of grace, and its centre of attention is another to whose love it is our whole and only aim to give ourselves. The one must always lack what the other increasingly has, the spontaneity and whole-heartedness that come when there is the whole force of an emotionally integrated life behind action.

And not only is the motive of goodness quite different in the two cases; so also is the sanction against evil. In the one case sin is thought of and felt as that which damages our own reputation, stains our record, and lowers our opinion of ourselves. In the other, sin is, above all, that which crucified Christ. Sin hurts first of all not because it hurts the self, but because it hurts the other.

The New Testament abounds in expositions of this contrast; the arguments of St Paul about faith and works, such parables as those of the Pharisee and the Publican, or the Prodigal Son and his brother, and such historical incidents as that of the woman who burst into the house of Simon the Pharisee to pour out upon the feet of Jesus her ointment and her tears.[1] The latter incident, especially, enshrines an unforgettable picture of the two types of morality we are considering. On the one hand the Pharisee, a paragon of legalistic morality, the man to whom little is forgiven because he has fought for and won the right to regard himself as a good man; on the other the woman, who knows that the tatters of her morality can never cover her, but has met and accepted the miracle of forgiveness in Christ. His is the morality of law, with its well-defined rules and its reasonable demands; hers is the morality of gratitude, which can find no act of outpoured devotion too unreasonable or’ extravagant to express itself. “Thou gayest me no water for my feet; she hath wetted my feet with her tears. Thou gavest me no kiss; she, from the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint, but she hath anointed my

feet with ointment." Jesus the Son of Man, who knew what was in men, discerned behind the extravagant devotion of the woman the great reality

[1] St Luke, vii. 36 ff.

of a forgiven heart. Equally certainly He discerned behind the chilly courtesy of Simon the Pharisee a heart hardened and made cold by the conviction that it needed no forgiveness. The Christian life is not morality pushed a little further than would otherwise be possible. It is a new growth springing from a new root. It is the outpoured gratitude of a forgiven sinner. And it is thereby freed from the bondage of law in which the old morality struggled. Yet because it springs from the Cross of Christi it carries with it the assurance that the law was no mere human imagining, but the true expression of God's mind, so that God Himself could only forgive us at this tremendous cost. It is a righteousness which is freed from the bondage of law, and yet in no wise makes void the law. And apart from it there is no answer whatever to the self-contradiction of legalism.

II

We must look for a moment at the second claim made for the Christian gospel – that it entirely delivers us from the motive of self-improvement, yet safeguards the truth that character is more important than good deeds. On the one hand the centre of gravity is still – as it should be – character, and not good deeds. And yet this does not mean that the improvement of our own character has to be our conscious aim,

because, when we have accepted the single allegiance of Christ's bondmen, the developing and perfecting of character is something which can be left in God's hands. Given that decisive self-committal, then we can be certain that such purifying and deepening as our character needs will be found through the duties and disciplines which in God's providence are appointed for us. We can cease to fret ourselves with anxieties about our spiritual state, or confuse and adulterate the good life by devices for self-improvement and self-discipline, because we can be sure that the tasks and disciplines which meet us daily as we live a life of obedience are those which God – in His much deeper wisdom – has appointed for us. We can throw the whole weight of our energy and attention into the task of daily and hourly obedience to His calls as they come to us in the concrete situations of practical life, undistracted by any anxiety to add cubits to our moral stature. Yet by so doing we shall not be making good works a substitute for a good life or supposing that we can have good fruit without making the tree good.

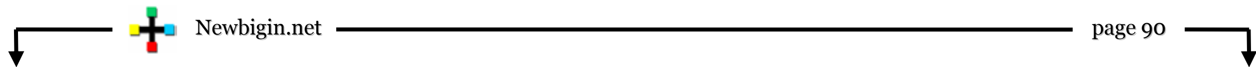
Once again the Christian gospel offers the solution of what must otherwise be an insoluble self-contradiction in the very heart of the moral life.

III

It is based as much upon emotion as upon intellect, yet it does not seek to explain away the category of duty. We have seen that duty so far from being a mechanical idea is essentially a personal one. The experience of the demand of duty, if taken seriously, is found to be God Himself speaking to us in the most intensely personal and intimate of human experiences. Nevertheless a morality founded simply upon this experience would eventually fall a prey to the perils of legalism, and – in particular – would fail to achieve the spontaneity and whole-heartedness which come when the full power of harmonised emotions is behind action. The Christian gospel liberates, as we have seen, great emotional energies of love and gratitude and

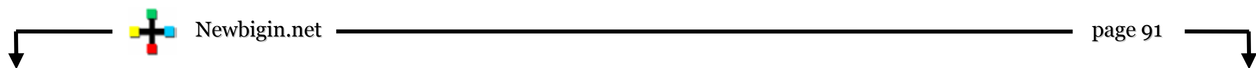
directs them towards one end – the service of Christ. That is the secret of the attractiveness and infectiousness of true saintliness. Its good deeds are doubly effective because they seem to spring directly out of a good heart. Its joy is to give all to Christ, and joy doubles the value of what it gives.

But this does not mean that the word "duty" is simply removed from the Christian vocabulary. We have already seen reason to think that it represents far too vital an element in life for that. What place, then, does duty



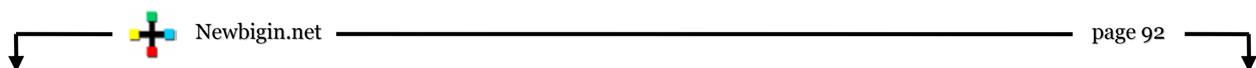
hold in the life of a Christian? Consider two characteristic utterances from outside and inside of Christianity. "Thou shalt not covet"; there we have the sheer bare statement of absolute demand as it is apprehended in the conscience apart from the divine gospel of forgiveness. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another"; there we have the forgiven man's sense of absolute obligation. Clearly there is a tremendous difference. The Christian statement has an emotional energy behind it which the other lacks. It shines in a different light. And yet the word "ought" cannot be excluded. There is still the sense of an obligation which is absolute, and yet upon which we can turn our backs. The love of one another does not spring up in us willy-nilly as a result of God's love for us; it passes through by way of the human conscience and the human will.

But – and here is the clue which we are seeking – while the word " ought " cannot be simply discarded, it can be transcended in so far as, in any particular moral issue, it is taken fully and seriously for what it is. The newly converted or newly awakened Christian cannot simply and forthwith neglect the stern and uncomfortable summons of conscience and swim with the newly released flood of emotion. But if he accepts the challenges of conscience as they come with all the added force of his new



found obligation, "if God so loved us," he will find that duties which before required an individual and perhaps painful act of obedience, will gradually come to require it no longer. The deepening and strengthening energy of love in him, which the love of God has called forth, will accomplish what before required a hard decision of the will. But – so long as he is not stagnating in the moral life – this will still not mean that duty has ceased to play its part in his life, for God will have fresh battles for him to fight. A man who in the early days of his new life found that he had to say. to himself, "If God so loved me, I ought to love my family," may now find that as he has grown in grace, he has learned to love them without this conscious remembrance of his obligation. But, if he is morally awake and conscious of his own sinfulness, he will have to learn to say, "If God so loved me, I ought to love the oppressed and exploited people in my country, or my country's enemies in other lands." And this may mean hard and costly and solitary decisions of the will, till in this, too, he learns to love the will of God and not only to obey it,

Duty, in other words, belongs to the road which Christians must travel, but not to the goal to which they go. Since it concerns what ought to be, but is not yet, it belongs to the world of imperfection, but this does



not mean that it can be forthwith discarded by those who have breathed the air of the Kingdom of Heaven in which all Creation shall obey God's will as a long response in which duty need have no place. For it is still the voice of God – but now not a mere isolated fiat of an unknown absolute will, but part of a whole living communion with a personal God known to us in Christ as infinitely loving. This view of the place of duty in the Christian life accords with what we noticed

in the more theoretical discussion of Professor Macmurray's position. There we found that most of our objections to his elimination of duty turned upon the existence of a supernatural order which is real but not yet realised – that is to say, which is a personal will. But when the day comes that it is also realised, then the distinctions which were made in that discussion will have disappeared and duty will no longer have any place. This is the day of the revealing of the sons of God for which the earnest expectation of the Creation waits, and of whose liberty we have now the foretaste.

To the paradox of law and freedom there is no solution apart from the Christian gospel of forgiveness. What that gospel provides is not a solution which is here and now complete, but a new motive and a new direction, a toad on which, when once our feet are set, we travel with an ever clearer vision of the

goal. And meanwhile we have the gift of the Spirit, the first-fruits of that which is to be – and it is not a spirit of bondage again unto fear, but the Spirit of Sonship, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father."

All material is reprinted with permission from the Newbigin family, the Newbigin Estate and the publisher. All material contained on the Newbigin.Net website, or on the accompanying CD, remains the property of the original author and/or publisher. All rights to this material are reserved. Materials are not to be distributed to other web locations for retrieval, published in other media, or mirrored at other sites without express written permission from the appropriate parties. The material can be used for private research purposes only.