



Christ Our Eternal Contemporary

1968

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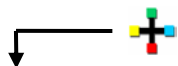
Publishers Note

These Meditations were originally given in July 1966, at the Christian Medical College, Vellore. In preparing the tape-recorded texts for publication we have made very few changes. The topical allusions and the informality of the approach have not been interfered with. We believe that these invest the meditations with a certain freshness and directness.

Their appeal is by no means confined to the context to which they were first addressed. Their theme is Jesus Christ, the eternal contemporary, whose challenge comes to us in all our varied human situations. On our response to this challenge depends our fate and the fate of our world.

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1

WE PREACH JESUS

‘Some also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers met him. And some said, "What would this babbler say?" Others said "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities" because he preached Jesus and the Resurrection.’ (Acts 17: 18).

It is a very moving experience to go to Athens today, walk up and down in the beautifully restored stoa as the philosophers and as St. Paul did, linger among the glorious ruins of the

Parthenon and then stand on the bare rocky platform where Paul is supposed to have stood and given his sermon. The goddess who was worshipped in that glorious temple is now only a name. No prayer has been offered in that name from the fifth century. But the name that those idle bystanders heard in Paul's conversation – the name Jesus – is honoured in the hearts and on the lips of millions in every corner of the world.

It is that Name – God willing – which will be put before you in these coming days. I want to begin tonight by simply asking you to face the tremendous implications of that fact, to consider what it means to give a week of your time in the midst of a crowded curriculum, in the midst of the needs of a crowded city and the urgent needs of sick men and women, to give a week for thinking about that Name which is so familiar to us, which is nevertheless a Name that comes to us out of a different world, a different language, a different age.

Anyone who is in any sense aware of the world that he lives in, knows that we are today going through a period which is not just one of the ordinary periods of human existence when things change as they always change, but a period which quite surely represents one of the great mutations, great fundamental turning points, in the story of human evolution. Let me simply remind you of the contemporary facts. Firstly, the harnessing of atomic and nuclear power,

with the unbelievable multiplication of human possibilities which that will entail of which we are only beginning to see the very beginning. Secondly, the whole development of science and technology, of cybernetics and automation by which, in a manner quite different from anything that has been conceived in human history before, it is possible for man to control, gigantic operations and incredibly complicated movements of thought from a single centre. Thirdly, perhaps the most revolutionary of all, the development in the genetics and in the biochemistry of human reproduction which make it, surely, quite certain that within a very short time we shall be having experiments in human breeding and in the development of new kinds of human beings to manipulate new instruments of control and employ the new resources of power.

These three things taken together embrace all the others and constitute something which represents a qualitative change in the whole fundamental condition of human life, and we must look forward to a world 30 years from now which will be more different from our world than our world is from that, let us say, of the Roman Empire.

We are living through a fundamental mutation in the whole condition of man. The demographers tell us that 30 years from now the population of Madras, which is at present 18 lakhs, will be 300 lakhs. In other words there will be as many people living in Madras City as there are now in the whole of Tamilnad. To put it in another way, if you still – 30 years from now – travel in an automobile from Madras to Vellore, when you reach Poonamallee you will not be half way through the built – up area. Secondly, farther away, the fact that almost certainly within the next fifty years the process of colonising the moon will have begun.

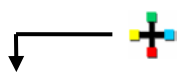
Amid these stupendous changes – which even ten years ago we would not have thought possible – what does it mean to speak the Name of Jesus? Is it a mere memory carried over from a different age of human history like the other names of the gods and goddesses that were worshipped in that temple on the Acropolis? Do we treasure the Name of, Jesus as we sing it in that song that we just sang 'Fairest Lord Jesus' – do we treasure it as something com-

forting, something that reminds us of our childhood, something that reminds us of the old securities in a world where these securities have disappeared?

When all things change at a cataclysmic speed, when the basic physical and biological conditions of human existence are being radically changed, what does it mean to speak the Name of Jesus? Let me turn right round and ask this question from another angle. One of the things that it was our job to do in the World Council Offices in Geneva was to get the official journals of the Russian Anti-God Organization and to study the latest developments of anti-God propaganda in Russia. In a country which has at its command some of the most advanced technology' in the world, for a period of fifty years a systematic effort has been made with all the resources of Government behind it to extinguish the name of Jesus, to extinguish the whole concept of faith in Him. Yet if one studies the evolution of this anti-God literature, the official publication of the anti-God movement over the past few years, one has to say that they themselves practically confess that they have come to the end of their tether, that there is nothing more that they can do, that they tried everything and that somehow or other the thing goes on. There are still, even according to the minimum estimate of the Government authorities, 30 million believers in the Union of Soviet Republic and some of the outstanding names in Russian literature to-day are Christians.

Or again, let us go to another completely different sector of the modern world – to Japan, which is making more rapid technological development than any country in the world, and which is at the same time witnessing a whole burgeoning of new religions which in one way or another are developments of Buddhism, a country in which according to the official statistics Christians represent less than 1 per cent of the population. A recent sociological survey was done in the new housing apartments in the great industrial complex of Osaka and it was found that while 20% of the new flats had in them a Buddhist or Shinto shrine, 60% of them had in them a Bible.

On the other hand, in the Western world where Christianity is more or less the established religion, where it



has behind it the privilege, the prestige of a long history, a great deal of wealth and a considerable amount of control over the means of education and propaganda, you will find that the dominant literature in these countries is informed by a total lack of faith, a total breakdown of any kind of sense of meaning in history and even the theologians are announcing that God is dead!

I say these things to remind you that if we invoke the Name of Jesus we are invoking the Name of One who is absolutely sovereign and free, who cannot be domesticated within our Christian organizations. We are talking, not about One who belongs to us or who belongs to the Christian tradition or who belongs to any of the organizations of religious life and thought which has the name 'Christian' written across it. We are talking about a living sovereign Lord who is free to act, – free to act behind the iron curtain or in the tenements of industrial quarters of a Japanese city as much as, as freely as, as sovereignly as, in an American Church or German Theological Faculty. We are talking about One who does not belong to us, One who is free, who has a life, who is sovereign and who holds all things in His hands.

We preach Jesus and the resurrection. The Jesus whom Paul preached and whom we shall preach this week is the risen Jesus. There is a way of preaching Jesus, a very familiar way which somehow stops short of that fact. Many of you will have often seen a picture which used to be very prominent in the coffee shops in the bazaar – a picture with three figures on it, in one corner Buddha under a tree, in another corner Jesus on the cross, and in the middle Gandhi. Many of you must have seen that picture. It would present a conception of Jesus which is exceedingly common and which it is if I may say so, very easy to put across, a conception of Jesus as one of the great holy men of history, one of the masters, one of the great souls. That way of preaching Jesus is popular and easy because it makes no radical commitment. It leaves the world as it was. It leaves you as you are. But if Jesus is the One who died and rose again, then the matter is quite different; the picture is quite different. You have to tear that picture up it does not fit.



If Jesus died and rose again then we are at the beginning of a new world, a new creation, everything is made new – there will be a new heaven and a new earth. He is One who has always created, who is always creating and who is moving forward with the creation to that end for which, in the beginning, He was the agent, the pioneer, the leader, going before mankind in its march. He is this because He is the One who not only died, who not only suffered, who has not only gone down to the deepest depths of human predicament who has not only known the deepest darkness of pain and despair and defeat and death, to face them, master them, conquer them – He is the One who goes before us as the pioneer, the leader of the human march. In Jesus, and in Jesus alone, the ultimate depth and height of the human situation have been measured. He is the One who alone has the keys of death and hell. He is not bound by any religious or philosophical or political system. He cannot be domesticated within any of our forms of Christianity or any of our patterns of piety. He cannot be identified with any of the systems for which we fight.

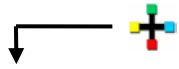
When one looks at the history of the Church, how pathetic it is to see how the Name of Jesus was invoked to defend feudalism against capitalism and then to defend oligarchy against democracy and now, in our own days, to defend democracy against Communism. What nonsense! As if we can domesticate Jesus and make Him a sort of mascot for our particular concern! Jesus is not tied to any of our systems, not even our religious systems. They will disappear but He remains. Many of our inherited forms of religious thought and piety may have to change and that is a painful thing, for we cling to them very lovingly. That Jesus is greater than them all we see over and over again in the history of the Church. The prophecy of Malachi has been fulfilled and the Lord whom we seek has come suddenly in the midst of His temple and He is like refiner's fire and there is much dross to be burnt up over and over again, even in our religion, and, indeed, precisely in our religion. He is the power that separates gold from the dross and everything – everything – in the end of the day has to be brought to the test of that fire.



Are we staggered by the speed of change in our world? Are we exhilarated by the speed of change in our world? It is Jesus that leads human history to its consummation – it is in Him that all things were made and it is He in whom all things are to, be consummated according to the teaching of the Scriptures and it is He, therefore, who drives the history of the world forward towards that consummation. It is He alone, according to the Book of Revelation, who is able to break the seals and unroll the scroll of human history. We may be breathless with the speed of change in our modern world; we may sometimes be frightened as we wonder where things are going and what is going to be left, of everything that seemed to be sure. The truth is, if we will believe it, that all this exhilaration of change is but the reflection of His urgent mission from the Father to set men free to bring them to that adult maturity in which they can answer freely and intelligently the definite invitation to be the sons of God. It is in Him alone that the true meaning and the proper use of the changes in our human situation are to be found. He is the risen Lord, He is not just a name from the past. He is our living contemporary, the One who beckons us forward into the future which He has prepared for the human race.

I am told, indeed I am sure, that this Mission has been prepared and well advertised. It may be that some of you are here this evening to find out what it is all about, to ask, 'What will this babbler say?' I have given my answer. We who have come for this Mission are going to preach Jesus, not a domesticated Jesus, not a Jesus who belongs to us, not certainly a Jesus who belongs to the past, not a character whom we have imprisoned in the religious and ecclesiastical categories of the past, but Jesus the crucified and risen Lord, Jesus the eternal contemporary, Jesus the Lord

of history, Jesus cause and corner-stone of the universe, Jesus the beginning and the end of all creation, Jesus the Lord, to whom be the glory in this week of Mission in this College and in the Hospital and in all the world for ever and ever.



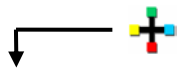
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THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORITY

I have suggested for the first of the evening series the title ‘How do we know?’ and I think that no presentation of the Christian faith can side-step that question – can side-step, in other words, the question of authority. I think we have to admit the fact that we Christians have often talked in a very authoritative way when it would have been better many times to say, ‘We do not know.’ Often, when one listens to the kind of theology which is usually called scholastic, when one hears the theologians giving the most precise and detailed accounts of what God does and does not do, or even does or does not think, one is over and over again tempted to say, ‘My dear man, how do you *know* all this that you are saying?’ Well, how *do* you know? What is the way by which we come to know anything? What gives us the authority to say about anything, ‘I know’?

I

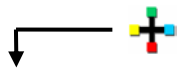
Let me first of all make a few preliminary points about knowing in general. The first one is the obvious one, that knowing is a skill. It is a skill which has to be learnt, and some people learn quicker than others; some people have apparently more of the inborn skill of learning to know than other people have. From the very beginning, learning to know is a skill, from the moment when a baby tries to make out the shapes of things, tries to distinguish amidst the buzzing, booming confusion of the world what are the distinct objects which can be separated from the background, and so on. It is true of a student learning Sanskrit or Physics. It is a skill, and there is no way of obviating the necessity for skill. There is no way by which one can learn automatically. There is no way by which the reality of things imposes itself on us so that whether we like it or not we are bound to know. Nothing imposes itself on us in that way.



Anything that goes by the name of knowledge is something that we have gone out to get, something which we have learnt. Having mastered a subject, for example a mathematical process, the results of which can be put into formulae which can in principle be fed into a computer and stored for future use, does not obviate the problem of learning for the next person who comes along. There is no formula by which the results of learning can be systematised in such a way that learning becomes unnecessary. All knowledge is acquired by the skill of learning.

Secondly, learning is a skill which is exercised only in a community. To begin with, everything that you learn you take from your parents when you are a small child. The very names by which you learn to distinguish one thing from another, are names which you simply accept uncritically from your parents. Right through to the very most advanced reaches of scientific research, learning is a communal affair. Science is an activity of scholars in a community of scholars who are working in a shared world of experiences and of beliefs and of commitments. A scholar who persists in views which are rejected by the entire judgement of the scientific community as a whole, is dismissed as a crank, and the person who continues to insist on the existence of something which everybody else denies, is put into a mental hospital. And yet, on the other hand, it is true that every new scientific view has normally had to begin as a view of the minority which had to defend itself against often violent attacks by the majority of scholars whose existing views were undermined by the new view.

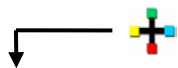
Sometimes we find the scientific community resisting successfully forms of research which seem to threaten the existing structures of thought. Consider, for instance, the reluctance of scientists to engage in really serious research on the phenomenon of extra-sensory perception, or to entertain the results of astronomical theories which seem to lead to the idea that the universe had its beginning at a certain point in time. All these things are merely reminders of the fact that right through to the most advanced reaches of scientific thought, learning is an activity of a community, and it is inconceivable without that community. A



child who could be isolated from human contacts from its birth would be an imbecile – it would not grow into a human being.

Thirdly, all knowing involves commitment and therefore an element of risk. This is true from the very simplest process of learning right up to the most advanced leaps of scientific thinking. It is true even if you frame a sentence. You cannot frame a sentence without for a moment accepting the framework of thought which has created that language. And if you are ever involved in learning a language quite different from your own mother tongue, you know this problem, that the very use of the words given to you involves ideas which you may later have to criticize, but for the moment you have to accept. You accept them, you frame ‘a sentence, you use certain words, but then a process of critical reflection grows in you about whether a certain concept can be maintained and you criticize that concept. But for the moment, while you criticize that concept, you do it by means of other concepts which you do not criticize for the moment.

Every process of thinking, every process of learning, involves commitment and the risk of using concepts, of accepting ideas, which may prove to be wrong. It is one of the things that seems rather strange to those who are not scientists, that so many popularisers of science seem to try to persuade us that this is not true, and that all scientific thinking is simply the result of the inescapable pressure of the facts. This is surely quite an untrue account of how ‘knowing’ happens. A very interesting illustration of this is given in Michael Polanyi’s book called ‘Personal Knowledge.’ He draws attention to the fact that in most of the popular books which try to explain relativity to ignorant people like myself, it is always explained that Einstein developed the theory in order to account for the fact that the Morley-Michelson experiments on the speed of light did not produce, as they should have done in accordance with the current theory. a result that the speed of light was different according to whether you were travelling towards the object emitting the light or away from it. Certainly when I first tried to understand what relativity was about; that was the explanation given: that the Morley-Michelson experiment

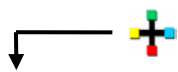


showed that such and such is the case as regards to the speed of light, and that therefore the traditional theory of lightwaves in another medium had to be abandoned, and that to meet the situation Einstein developed the theory of relativity. It has since been shown, firstly that Einstein had never heard of the Morley-Michelson experiments when he developed his theory, secondly that the Morley-Michelson experiments did not produce the results required by Einstein’s theory, and thirdly that the Morley-Michelson experiments have since been repeated several thousand times and have never yet produced the results required by Einstein’s theory. In other words, the theory of relativity to take this single example of a tremendous leap forward in human thinking, was not something imposed upon the mind of Einstein by the pressure of the so-called facts. It was an immense imaginative leap forward, a commitment to a whole concept which not only might be wrong, but was regarded as wrong by many scientists when it was first promulgated.

Knowing involves a commitment. It involves a committing of oneself to an understanding of reality which might be wrong.

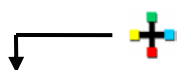
Fourthly, or rather to complete the point I am trying to make under that third heading, this means that in the process of knowing there is both creative and destructive activity – the activity which makes a leap forward and formulates experience in a completely new way and the other equally necessary activity of doubt, of scepticism, of questioning, of checking and experimenting and recasting. But the point that I am making is that knowledge does not grow simply by scepticism and doubt. It grows by the activity of these together with the creative element in the growth of knowledge, the element of commitment, the element of which in religious language we use the word ‘faith.’ To put it again in another way, if it were possible for a moment to doubt all one’s beliefs at the same time, one would be reduced to imbecility. One is only able to doubt one belief by accepting other beliefs uncritically for the moment in which one is engaged in doubt.

Does this mean then that what I have called ‘faith,’ that this process of commitment, is really just a preli-



inary stage on the way to knowing? Does it mean that while a new theory, let us say, is being tried out *we believe* it, but when it has been proved *we know* it? Does it mean that faith is, as it were, just a step on the way to knowledge, something that you have to put up with on subjects on which knowledge is not available? This is not so. Consider for a moment the following argument. Assured conclusions of scientific research, those things which find their way into the text – books, are things which, as every scientist knows, will not be there for long. They will be outdated and scientists will not fight for their retention when that time comes. In that sense of the word, they are provisional. But the thing which the scientist should fight for, if he is worth anything, will be, not something which challenges particular conclusions of the past, but something which challenges the whole scientific method as such, something which challenges the whole integrity of the scientific method. If, for instance, it should be proposed that astrology should be made a compulsory subject for B. A. in physics, the scientist who is worth his salt, will fight back, and rightly so. But this surely indicates that the thing that the scientist is really committed to is not a particular set of facts which may be outdated in a decade or two or even less. The thing that he is committed to is the validity of the whole approach, the whole structure of scientific thinking, the whole integrity of the scientific community of which he is a part. This, which is the object of faith rather than of knowledge, is the thing to which his commitment is really given.

If then, one at this moment pauses to ask the question to the scientist, ‘How do you *know*, what is the authority for this whole body of belief which we roughly call by the name science?’, the answer is surely not a simple one. Science does not claim infallibility for any of its conclusions. It does not claim to ‘know’ in that sense. It is the pseudo – scientists who have been trying to sell to us a picture of science as a structure of infallibly – guaranteed truths which simply have to be accepted. When a man who is manufacturing second-grade tooth paste wants to sell it, he hires an advertising agency to get him a picture of a very handsome scientist in a white coat with a test-



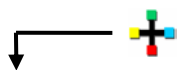
tube and says, ‘Science proves that this tooth paste will kill germs 2.3% more quickly than any other brand,’ and he hopes this word ‘scientifically proved’ will prevent people from asking questions. But this is a prostitution of science. Science does not deal with infallible truths. Everything is subject to re-testing and re-examination. The authority of science does not rest upon any supposed infallibility. The authority of science rests on the confidence that the public has in

the integrity of the scientific community, in its honesty in dealing with all the facts and in the success that scientists have had in solving the practical problems that human beings have to deal with.

To put it in another way, this whole movement which we call modern science is a vast sustained adventure of the human spirit which rests upon certain beliefs and certain commitments which themselves cannot be logically demonstrated, belief in the significance and rationality of the created world, which is by no means so evident, belief in the power of man and the right of man to control nature, belief in the fundamental integrity of other callings and other scientific disciplines resting upon the results of those on whose work one depends. All of this is a commitment to beliefs which could be mistaken. This whole vast enterprise could collapse as similar enterprises of the human spirit have collapsed in the past, and the Christian Church in whose womb this child was conceived has a special responsibility, it seems to me, to rejoice in its marvellous growth instead of constantly grumbling that the child is growing out of the clothes which Mummy knitted for it.

II

This brings me to my second point. If we are going to answer the question, 'How do we know?' We will have to come down to the fundamental underlying unquestioned beliefs which are riot logically argued but which are the commitments upon which we proceed. Where do they come from? What is their authority? It is recognised in the first place that to a very large extent we take them over without



even being conscious of them, we take them over as part of our culture, as part of all we learn without questioning. It is also recognised that our age is dominated by a particular ideal of knowledge. We are living in a time when the ideal of knowledge is a knowledge of the physical world which can in principle be reduced to mathematical formulae which can be, if necessary, stored in an electronic computer. That is the ideal of knowledge, and other knowledge is accepted as reliable in so far as it approaches that ideal. The effort all the time is to adapt and shape all knowledge to the point where it conforms to that standard.

But we have to recognise the fact that there have been in human history, other ideals of knowledge, other answers to the question 'Where do you find real assurance?' There is the ideal of knowledge which has played such a very important part in Indian classical thought where the knowledge of ultimate reality is to be found by withdrawal from all the experiences of the senses, from involvement in a world of visible and tangible and measurable things, by withdrawal into a world where, it is claimed, a deeper and truer knowledge of reality is to be found. If you ask the great tradition of Hindu spirituality the question 'How do you know?' the answer ultimately would be (would it not?) – something along these lines, 'If you will discipline yourself, if you will discipline your senses to the point where you are withdrawn from all the contacts of the sensible world into a world of pure subjectivity, you will know that there the ultimate reality is to be found that *athma* and *brahma* are one; you will *know*.' And this concept of knowledge which has been so tremendously influential in the thought of this country, finds its assurance, its force of certitude, ultimately in that mystical experience of the unity of the conscious self.

And yet again, there is another quite different ideal of knowledge which is embodied in the literature of the Hebrew people. In the Bible, as those of you who have studied it attentively will have noticed, the primary meaning of the word 'to know' is to know another person. The basic ideal of knowledge in the Bible is the mutual knowledge of persons. You will have noticed the very interesting fact that in the Bible the word 'to know' is used

of the act of love between man and woman, of the ultimate point of mutual knowledge and mutual self-revelation. There in the Bible is the point where the ultimate ideal of knowledge is found – in the deepest, truest and most intimate of personal relationships between one person and another. Here if you ask the question ‘How do you know?’, the answer is found in the experience of personal relationship, in the adventure of trust and commitment’ to another person. You do not know another person except when both of you are willing to enter upon that adventure of trust and commitment. What was said earlier to the effect that all knowledge involves commitment and risk, is supremely true here at the point where the Bible sees the ultimate ideal of knowledge. But here, in the knowledge of another person, a new dimension of knowledge opens up.

The knowledge of an object, of an inanimate object, is attained by a process of observing, experimenting and testing. It is a process in which I the researcher am the only active subject, and the object of my knowledge is a passive object, in respect of which I am completely free, which can offer me no final resistance except temporary resistance of my ignorance which it is my business to press back. The knowledge of a person is not attained in that way. There is, of course, a vast amount of knowledge about a person which can be obtained in that way. But we all know that there is a great difference between knowing *about* a person and *knowing* a person. You can engage in an exhaustive discussion and debate about another person – you can analyse his character, you can record and classify everything that he has said and done, you can have an immense scientific research on a person, but everybody knows that the moment that person himself walks into the room and begins to talk to you that a new dimension has opened up. Indeed if you happen to be engaged in an elaborate analysis of somebody else’s character and he walks into the room at that moment, you always feel very embarrassed and you change the subject because, in fact, you recognise that this is not an appropriate way to deal with the person when he is present.

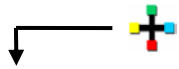
A person is known when he himself speaks. He may choose to open himself up and to talk to me, or he may

refuse to do so. He may, right up to the end, refuse to reveal himself, refuse to open his mind and heart to me, and, if so, there is an ultimate resistance which I cannot overcome. I may use every device up to and including torture, but he may still refuse to talk, and not all the electron microscopes in the world will enable me to find out what he really thinks about me.

Here is a kind of knowing which involves something more than our commitment and our investigation; a kind of knowing which only is accessible if the other person speaks, if the other person discloses his own mind and heart to me, in other words, a kind of knowing which is only available if he reveals himself to me. This is the point at which the ideal of revelation becomes essential. If we are dealing with the world of things, with the world of events, with the world which is in principle accessible to scientific investigation, then the concept of revelation has no place, and when religious people have tried to fence off one bit of the world and said ‘That is not for discovery but for revelation,’ the scientist has rightly refused to recognise the boundary, and has insisted on pushing right over it and investigating the whole field. The point at which the idea of revelation becomes not only proper but necessary is the point at which we are dealing with the knowledge of a person. A person can only be known if he reveals himself.

I think that Christians have often been in the wrong at this point by being confused about what they mean by ‘revelation.’ When they have tried to distinguish between certain propositions which can be established by a process of discovery and argument, and other propositions which can only be known by revelation. I think they have been guilty of a wrong use of the word

revelation. I think that the scientist is justified in questioning the right of certain facts or certain propositions to be exempt from the ordinary process of investigation. The scientist quite properly, is like an Income Tax Officer who insists that everybody's account must be equally open to him, whether he is a maharaja or a missionary. The Christian is wrong when he tries to suggest that there are certain parts,



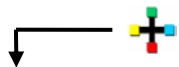
certain facts, certain propositions which are not accessible to the scientist's investigation?

The scientist is missing an essential point if he does not also recognise that there is a field in which 'revelation' is the proper word, viz., when we are speaking about self-disclosure of a person. If, as the Bible suggests, the ultimate ideal of knowledge is the mutual knowledge of persons, then the concept of revelation will have a place. If you ask the question 'How do you know?' about that kind of knowledge, the answer will always run along some such lines as these: 'I know because of what he did; I know because of what he said; because he opened up his mind to me and because his word and his deeds were consistent with each other and because they revealed the same kind of person, because over a long period what he has said and what he has done have both opened up the same kind of person to me. Because of that I know him and know that I can trust him.'

III

I come then to my third main section. If it is true that we must allow in our answer to the question 'How do you know?' a central place for the knowledge of persons and therefore for the concept of revelation, let us ask how big is the place which we ought to give to this knowledge of persons in our whole knowledge of the world. Obviously persons are only part of the world as we know it, and we do not know persons except as part of an impersonal world. We do not even have any contact with persons except by sharing in an impersonal world of visible, measurable and ponderable things. Then obviously on the other hand, persons are an important part of the world and we are ourselves persons. Is the Bible right in finding the essential key to the nature of knowledge in the mutual knowledge of persons?

Here we come, I think, to one of the great divides of human thought about God and about the world. Let me put it very schematically in this way: at a certain stage of human development, certainly, at least, in many parts of the world, mankind seems to have been content to accept



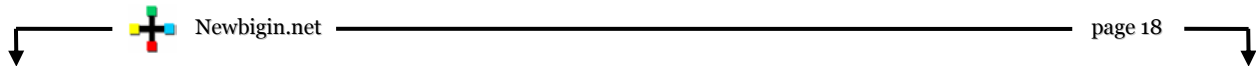
the fact of multiplicity, of incoherence, as just one of the facts of life. He believed in a multitude of gods and, goddesses each of them having independent powers in relation to the natural world and he was apparently content to live in a world in which there was this kind of incoherence. I am thinking of polytheism of the Rig Veda and of the early Greek legends and of the evidence we find in the Bible of a primitive stage of the same kind when the Baal, the local god of the land, and the various national gods of the nations round about, were all accepted as some kind of existences.

From that multiplicity and incoherence there is a road that has been travelled both by the wise men of Greece and those of India. It might be described as the road from the Rig Veda to the Vedanta, the search for coherence by withdrawal from the visible world with all its incoherence, and by seeking and finding within the mind of man the secret of unity. As I was reminding you a moment ago, at the end of that road the visible world becomes practically a veil that hides the unseen reality within it. The key which is taken to unlock the mystery of the world is the power of the human mind to transcend and unify the whole of experience in a single consciousness.

Following that road, one finds in the recesses of the self, an ultimate unity with the centre of all things – *athmabrahma*.

Three points have to be noted about this conclusion the first is that the clue to coherence is found within ourselves. It is found within the capacity of the mind of man to transcend and unify in a single consciousness the whole multiplicity of experience.

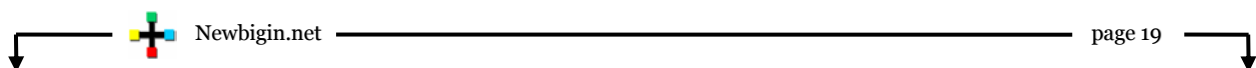
Secondly, therefore, it is characteristic of this solution to the problem that time ceases to have any ultimate significance. The coherence has already been achieved, though it is hidden, and time therefore-this appearance of motion in which we are all involved – is seen not so much as a continuous movement in one direction as a ceaselessly rotating wheel. Indeed there is obviously a great deal in this, as practically all of our experience leads us to that conclusion. The natural world is marked by a cycle of birth and growth and decay and death. Our



own lives fall within the same cycle. The histories of nations and empires and civilizations follow that same cyclical pattern and return again to the point from which they started. Is it not then rational to conceive that this whole appearance of movement in which we are involved is in truth but the movement of the circumference of a great wheel which in the end returns to the starting point? And from this point of view, therefore, the way to real knowledge is to find the way from the circumference of the wheel to the centre where everything is at rest. It follows that on this view it does not matter which of the many spokes that connect the circumference with the centre one follows; they are all equally useful if they lead to the centre and at the centre there is rest.

And the third characteristic of this way of approach is that personality, the distinction between me and you, everything that is involved in the tension and clash of a personal relationship – everything that is involved in the Hebrew conception of knowing – is seen as part of the world of unreality which ultimately is not significant. This solution to the problem of incoherence is for many people what the word ‘religion’ means, and they take it for granted both in the East and in the West, that if we talk about religion that is what we are talking about.

It is therefore all the more important that we remember that there is another road from incoherence to coherence. It is the road that was travelled by the Hebrew people and of which we have the record in the Bible. They also began, apparently, as far as we can tell, with much the same kind of polytheistic world that we saw in other places. There is plenty of evidence that the early Hebrews – the majority of people at least – thought of their god as one among the gods of the nations to look after them just as the gods of Syria and Media and Edom looked after their people, – a god who had a special care for them but was simply one of the gods. But the amazing thing is that out of that apparently unpromising beginning, there has emerged a majestic conception of a living personal God who guides and rules all the nations and who is in fact the Creator and Ruler and Consummator of the whole universe. You will note that here the clue is not found in the



power of the mind to unify and transcend experience. The clue has been found in the experience of a personal relationship of love and truth and faithfulness. And if you examine this solution to the problem of incoherence, you will see that at every point this road takes off in the opposite direction from the road that we looked at earlier.

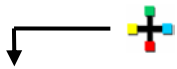
Firstly, as I have said, the secret of unity and coherence lies, not in the power of your mind to unify and transcend experience, but in the existence of a Reality which is now present behind all the confusion of the visible world. The secret is in the mind of him who has created all things

and who will bring order out of all this chaos, who is indeed ceaselessly *engaged* in bringing order out of this chaos, who will in the end sum up all things in Christ.

Secondly, from this point of view, time is of the essence of the matter. Time is something real because God is at work and doing something, and because he is doing something, the time which he takes to do it is real time. Therefore the symbol is not a wheel, but a road – a road at the end of which is the City that He has prepared for His pilgrim people.

Let me use a very simple and elementary illustration. If one finds by the roadside a heap of bricks and sand and stones, and one wants to find out exactly what it means, it would of course be possible to engage in an exact analysis of all the constituents of this pile, but in the end of it there would be no way of finding out what it means unless the architect, who is engaged in building, tells us whether he is planning to build a church or a row of shops or an office or whatever it is. If he tells us his plans we can know, otherwise we cannot possibly know, because the clue to what is happening here is not in anything which can be observed by the most exact analysis of what we have in front of us. The clue is in the mind of the one whose purpose is served, and therefore it is only when he as it were, opens up to us, when he entrusts us with his plans, that we can know what that secret is.

It is therefore in the experience of that personal relationship with him that we can know what he means. This is the third point according to the story of the Bible,



God has shared His plans with us. God has opened up to us and has made it possible for us to know what He means. That is the heart of what the Bible has to say about knowledge – that He Himself has revealed what He plans to do. How has He revealed it? By means of actions in history, by means of things which happen in this world of history that we know so well. In the Bible as we have it, there are three great decisive moments of action, the deliverance of the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt, the experience of captivity in Babylon and deliverance, and the experience of the coming of Jesus, His dying and rising again. But in each case it is events interpreted by those to whom God gave the gift to understand them, the deliverance from Egypt interpreted to the mind of Moses, captivity in Babylon and the deliverance interpreted to the minds of the prophets, the coming of Jesus, His dying and rising again, interpreted in the writings of the apostles whom He chose.

I have two points. The first is that we are talking about the real events in the history of which we are also a part, events which belong to – in one sense belong completely to – the ordinary world of political and economic and military happenings which we know so well. These events recorded in the Bible are not recorded for us as illustrative stories from which we can deduce something about the nature of God. They are not recorded as symbols of the timeless truth about God. They are recorded as the actual events by which God did the decisive things by which He has been revealed to us and we are saved. This world is the place where God is revealing Himself by these great deeds, and hence it follows that in the Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New, you will find elaborate care taken to indicate exactly when and where everything happened, because it is of the essence of the matter that we are dealing with real things which happened in the world of which" we are a part.

Secondly, the second point is that these events are summonses to people; God is said to be committing Himself to us in order that we may commit ourselves to Him. He is calling upon us to share in what He is doing. He is

showing us in order that we may share, and therefore it follows that we do not *know* except in so far as we do share. In this sense, the Marxist understanding of knowledge is correctly deduced from the Bible. We do not know simply by a pure apt of celebration. We know in this sense in the act of commitment to share in what God is doing.

This is the conception of knowledge which the Bible puts before us, which at its centre finds the clue to the whole meaning of knowledge in its relationships of mutual trust and mutual commitment. The climax and the centre of the whole story is, of course, the coming of Jesus Christ. When the Christian is asked, 'How do you know?' here is the place where he takes his stand. In all the welter and confusion of the world, when there is so much that is incomprehensible, when there is so much of which one simply has to say 'I do not know', when it is so hard to know where you can start and where you can find a firm foothold to begin the climb, so to speak, this is the place where the Christian stands. Why? The answer is not that he has decided to do this. The answer is that somehow or other Jesus has laid hold on him. 'You did not choose me, but I chose you', said Jesus to his disciples, and that is the way it is. How that happens is perhaps different, indeed surely different, for every person. But somehow or other Jesus, the Master of man, has met him and made him His own.

Tomorrow I want to try to speak a little more about that – about who He is and how it is that He lays hold on us, but tonight I conclude what I want to say by giving this short answer to the question with which I began, 'How do you know?' To that question the answer the Christian believer has to give, I think, is something like this: 'I know because of what He is; because of what He has shown Himself to be; because of what He has done; because of these things I trust Him. I do not pretend to know all about Him. I know only a little, a very very little. But what I know is enough to make me sure of Him, make me sure that everything else that there is to know about Him will be true, to make me sure that He will lead me in the end to know Him as He now knows me'. That is the only

kind of assurance that the Christian knows but it is enough. As St. Paul said at the end of his life, 'I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day'. This is the true pattern of knowledge. It is a commitment. It is a commitment in response to Him who has committed Himself to us, and it is therefore an adventure upon which I will joyfully stake all that I have.

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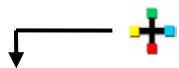
THE FACT OF CHRIST

When we begin to question our accepted beliefs, when we begin seriously to face the strange riddle of our existence. the mystery of life and death of why I am here and what I am doing, the question always has to be faced, *where do I begin?* 'The great thinkers of our time, as of other times, have found various starting places from which they have tried to think systematically through the perplexities and mysteries of human existence. Sometimes they have begun, as the great sages of India have begun, in the experience of realisation; sometimes starting with what has been called the religious consciousness of mankind, trying to find some common factor in all the varieties of human religious experience upon which one could build; sometimes perhaps, in a

more philosophical way, beginning with some extremely abstract concept like *being* with which Paul Tillich of our own time has begun his great systematic philosophy.

I intend to begin with the fact of Christ, and since I say that that is the place where I begin, I don't try to justify it by any previous arguments; that would be to contradict what I am saying. The justification of the starting point will only be at the end, if it enables us to grasp the whole of our experience truly. I begin with the fact of Christ, because in His own mysterious way, Christ laid hold upon me, because at a time when I was deeply perplexed, when I did not know which way to turn to find firm standing ground, in the midst of a time of personal humiliation and failure, I saw the cross of Christ as the one reality that can span the whole dimension, the height and the depth, the length and the breadth of human experience. From that day I have sought to find there the starting point of all my thinking.

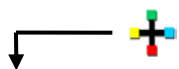
But at the very outset, there may be a difficulty that should be frankly faced. One happens because of one's



particular background to begin with the fact of Christ, but there are other backgrounds, there are other environments. Why must I go to one particular place and one particular time, to the name of a particular man, a particular race and a particular country? Is not God equally interested in all places and all peoples and all times? Why should you insist that we start at this particular place? As I said the answer will only be at the end – if this starting point enables us to grasp the whole of our experience. But let me just say three very small things in answer to that objection.

Firstly, if the starting point is to be something, a person in whom God is revealed or a deed in which God's power is manifested, then it must be a particular person or a particular deed, and that means a particular time and a particular place, and we will simply have to accept the fact that this is so. Secondly, is there any reason why human history should not have a particular centre? We accept the fact that the solar system has a particular centre, that it is here and not elsewhere. There does not seem to be any compelling reason why we should deny at the outset the possibility that human history in all its vastness and perplexity might have likewise a single centre from which alone it could all be fully understood. Thirdly, if it was God's purpose to save us, not as a lot of separate individuals, but as a family, as members of one family bound one to another, then it follows that the decisive word or deed of salvation could not be something, posted like a circular from a Government Department to every individual address, but must be something for which we depend upon one another, something which we have to learn from one another the apostles from Christ, the Church from the apostles, we from the Church, each one of us through some friends, some parents or some others. In this matter of our salvation, we are bound up one with another, because it is God's purpose to save us together and not as isolated individuals.

But these small points which might be enlarged in discussion, I make simply as the preface to what I now want to do, and that is to turn from general arguments to concrete facts.



We are to be dealing with certain facts, of which the records are preserved for us in documents which ultimately go back to manuscripts written in the second and third and fourth centuries, and which in turn go back to personal memories and records made within a few years or a few decades at most of the events which they describe. We are dealing with a piece of human history for which the records are more adequate than for any other comparable stretch of ancient history. Let us remember that in all ancient classical history, there is no period for which we have records so ancient, so close to the events and so full, as we have for these events which we are now going to discuss. It is a human record. These manuscripts that we still preserve as the earliest

records of the Gospels and the Epistles are manuscripts written by men, men, therefore, who were capable of making mistakes, manuscripts, therefore in which there are discrepancies in the texts. Modern books are reproduced by printing, and once the type is set, it is impossible for errors to creep in, and yet, as everyone of you who has had to see a book through the press knows, it is almost impossible, even with the most careful reading and re-checking of the proofs, to avoid one or two errors slipping in. If you carefully read your Tamil Bible, for instance, you will find even now a few tiny mistakes in the text. How much more when every manuscript had to be copied by hand was there the possibility of some error creeping in, and therefore of manuscripts differing one from another.

Behind these manuscripts of the Bible there lies the memory of men and women who followed Jesus. Because they are men and women, it is possible for discrepancies to occur in their record. Jesus was not like a modern politician who has a staff of short-hand typists running around after him. The records of what He said were remembered and written down many years afterwards, and therefore there are discrepancies between them. There are variations in the different traditions of memory. Yet the more you study the whole record, the more the impression is created of truth. If in a law case one is hearing an event described, one expects that the witnesses will differ a little in their account of it, and if

they all reproduce exactly the same words, we will suspect that they have been collaborating. So in the records of the events of the life of Jesus, we have that kind of unity and diversity which convinces us that here is the authentic record of things which really happened, and of words which we have in broad outline as they were spoken.

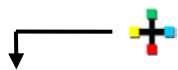
What is the impression that is made? I wonder how many of you have sat down to read right through one of the Gospels at a single sitting. It can be very easily done, St. Mark's Gospel in less than half an hour. Do it some time, if you have never done it. Sit down and read right through one of the Gospels at a single sitting. What is the impression which it makes? First of all, of a man, a human being, not a holy man in the traditional sense of the word, not a person like John the Baptist, who is much more the traditional picture of the holy man, not a super man, who is above all the ordinary troubles and weaknesses that beset human nature. On the contrary, we see one who could be hungry, who could be disappointed by the failure of his disciples to understand, one who could be utterly exhausted and asleep in the stern of a boat in the midst of a storm, one who could weep at the death of a friend, one who could rejoice when his disciples came back to him with good news, and one who could be brought to his knees in an agony of doubt and prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. A human being, and moreover a marvellous story-teller, one whose tales are indelibly printed on the mind the moment they have been heard and remembered for ever; a brilliant debator who could silence with a few sentences the clever lawyers and theologians of his time anxious to trap him in his talk; a lover of natural things, rejoicing in the beauty of the earth; a man of wonderful humour, who could coin a phrase that must surely have made his hearers roar with laughter, for example in the picture of the rich man, 'It is as easy for that man to get into heaven as for a camel to get through the eye of a needle'. Then there is the picture of the very scrupulously religious man straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel alive, and the picture of the man so anxious to put his neighbour right that he comes to him saying 'My dear friend, there is a speck in your eye, couldn't I help

to take it out?' when he has a whole plank in his own. The one who could talk about a bad tempered man in bed who does not want to get out because somebody knocks at the door, using

that as a picture for prayer. One who could be incredibly gentle and tender with the outcasts of society, with those whom the righteous men of his age would have no dealings with, with the woman taken in adultery, and could be as hard as nails, and utterly fearless in dealing with evil in high places; who could talk about the local maharajah as 'that fox', who could talk about the local ecclesiastical statesmen as 'offspring of vipers', who could talk about the lawyers of his time as 'whited sepulchres'; one who spoke in the presence of the supreme Governor with kingly authority, but who could meet with the most meek humility the rudeness of a Samaritan village which refused to offer hospitality, because he was on the way to Jerusalem.

I am saving all this, because I want you to see Jesus as a man, not just as a white sheet, not as a theological cipher. Read that story again; try to pretend that you never heard it before, and take that book and go away for half an hour and read right through the Gospel story once, and let the impression of his manhood make itself felt upon your mind. Yes, but of course, that is not all the story. Look again at the way this man speaks. Look at the incredible things that he says; this man who can take Holy Scripture, and say, 'This is what was said in olden times, but I say to you'. This one, who can say, 'The man who dies for my sake, the man who suffers for my sake, will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven'. Listen, for instance, to these, (and one could choose many others) these words that you know so well: 'On that day many will call to me and say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do mighty works in your name?" And I will declare to you, "I never knew you".' 'Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a house that was built on the rock.'

Who is this who assumes as a matter of fact that it is he who makes the final judgement upon all mankind, that the final judgement upon all men and all their deeds is



his? Or, listen again to his words about John the Baptist 'The disciples of John told him of these things and John sent two of his disciples to say, are you he who is to come, or do we look for another? And he said, Go and tell John what you have seen; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have good news preached to them, and blessed is he who takes no offence at me. And when the messengers of John had gone, he began to speak to the crowd. Who did you go out to see? But even he who is the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than John,' greater than this prophet that God has sent into the world! Or, listen again to this in Matthew, Chapter 10. 'Everyone of you who acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.' Who is it that speaks these words? Or again. 'All things have been delivered to me by my Father: no one knows the Son, except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.' Or, when Peter confesses, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' and he answers: 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, it was my heavenly Father who gave you that word.'

When He re-tells Isaiah's old parable of the vineyard, he re-tells it with a difference. You remember that Isaiah had likened Israel to a vineyard that God had planted, and God complains of it that when He expected choice fruit, He received instead wild grapes. Jesus re-tells that story, but you remember how it finishes. He sent one servant after another to the tenants to take the produce of the vineyard and they ill-treated them all. He had still one a beloved son, and he sent him. What does that mean, except that he who tells that story is putting Himself in a category, supreme and above all the prophets who went before him, the unique Son, who has come, come finally to claim the allegiance of men for God? And so one could go on with many other similar passages all of which you know.

What I am trying to bring out by these quotations is that here in this record you have this unique, quite incomparable picture set 'before us of one' who is, on the one

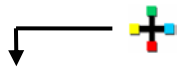
hand, completely a man in every sense of the word, a man, a human being like ourselves, and who yet speaks not in the manner of the semi-divine beings of pagan legends, but in a way which simply takes it for granted that he is the final arbiter of all things human, that by their relationship to him men's relationship to God is finally settled, that he is the judge and the Lord of all. And you will please note that in all of this I have not quoted from the fourth Gospel or St. Paul's Epistles. I have quoted simply from what are generally thought to be the earliest records as we have them in the first three Gospels. In other words, it is not that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. He did not call himself that. He was the Son of God and he left it to people to discover that for themselves. He gave them the freedom to acknowledge it, or to deny it, and those who acknowledged it, he warned not to publish it abroad. But when Peter confessed him as the Son of God, the Christ, the King who had come to bring all things under the rule of God, he rejoiced. When the high priest asked him the direct question, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' He confessed that he was. It is in the face of such facts as this that men were compelled then, as they are compelled now (when they really come face to face with the record) to make a decision. Either this claim is true, in which case we must worship him as Lord, or else this claim is false, in which case we must destroy him as a deceiver and a blasphemer.

That was a decision which men were compelled to make. They were put in a position where there was no half-way house, where it was impossible to say, 'He is a good man, but he is mistaken about some things.' You cannot possibly say that in face of the record; either he is what these claims imply or else he is the great deceiver. And so, the decision had to be made, and it was made that he should be destroyed. The neutral attitude is finally impossible. It is possible when you stand at a distance and don't take the trouble seriously to study the records. But, if you seriously confront the record, it is not possible. And I have noticed over and over again how those who are drawn nearest to Christ are brought into this agonising situation where they must either reject violently this claim and persecute the followers of Christ, or else surrender and submit. It is those

who are closest to Christ who are also persecutors of his name, because when you are close to him, there is no indifference, no neutrality possible. Either you are committed to him, or you are committed to destroy him. And so the great decision was made, 'crucify him'. And in the end, for all practical purposes, it was unanimous. He was crucified, dead, buried and sealed in the tomb. The story apparently was finished. There was a quiet sabbath. Apparently the *status quo* was restored.

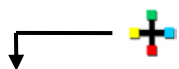
But on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, something happened which shattered the *status quo once* and for all, something which is the inauguration of a new creation, of a new age of the created universe, *the verdict was reversed*. God reversed the unanimous verdict of men and raised him from the dead. On that day a new world was born. That was an event which can never be fitted into any other picture of the universe. It can only be believed as the foundation upon which a new understanding of the universe is built. Of course, it took time to scatter the clouds of unbelief. Of course, at first even the disciples could not believe it. There was need of patience. Some news is too good to be believed immediately. Everything had to be thought out afresh in the light of this stupendous fact, but a few weeks later, in the midst of this very same city where men had shouted out for his death and seen him hanging on the Cross, his disciples affirmed that he was risen from the dead and alive and 3,000 believed it and were baptised.

This is the point at which you have to make your decision about Jesus. It is possible to read the gospel record simply as the story of a man. Certainly one may find some of the miracles a bit of a problem, but in general you can go all the way until you come to the point where he is dead and buried. But when you come to this point of the story you really have to cross a kind of boundary line. You have to make a decision. Either it is impossible in which case the world remains as it was; basically nothing has been changed by the coming of Jesus. Or, if you take that step across that boundary line, then you are committed to a radical re-thinking of the whole nature of human existence and experience.



This is what the New Testament shows us happening. The corner of the curtain has been lifted to give us a glimpse, as it were, of the new creation that God had prepared for us. To put it in the language of the First Letter of Peter, we have been ‘born again to a living hope.’ There is a death and a re-birth. The old world has ceased to be meaningful, I and everything has to be re-thought out on a new basis. The Church’s faith concerning Jesus stands on the foundation of the resurrection. It is, as I said, possible to reject it altogether. It is possible to say that Jesus was misled, that he was deceived and therefore a deceiver, misleading the human race or it is possible to accept the Christian view, the view of the New Testament. What is not possible is to find a place in between by which Jesus is a pious Jew who taught the fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of men, and died like other martyrs at the hands of this wicked world. There was no such person as that; there is no evidence that such a person ever existed. We must deal with the record as it is, the only record that we have, and make up our minds about it. Either he was deceived and therefore a deceiver, or else we must dare to accept the New Testament understanding of who he is, truly man, fully human in every sense, and yet also fully and truly God, all the divine authority present in him, so that man’s final relationship with God is in his hands.

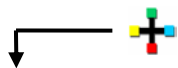
That is the New Testament faith concerning Jesus, that he is truly man and truly God, or to put it in another way, that in him the true image of God in which man was created is restored, that in him the bridge is opened between man and his maker, that in him an atonement, a reconciliation, is accomplished between man and his maker. ‘God was in Christ,’ says St. Paul, ‘reconciling the world to Himself.’ The problem of God, so to speak, if one may put it so from the human point of view, is not just the problem of man’s ignorance. It is the problem of man’s estrangement. It is not just that he does not know God; it is that he is estranged from God, that he is the enemy of God and that he needs to be reconciled, and please do let us understand that, if one says that, one is not talking about some strange esoteric religious experience that is available only to some people who have that kind of temperament. I am talking



about something which is a familiar fact of all our existence, the fact that in one sense or another, we are misfits in this world that God has made, that things do not go our way, that things in one way or another are against us, that we are engaged in a struggle, and that consequently we are always tempted to a permanent attitude of fear, of resentment, of estrangement. You can see it, can you not, in many men’s eyes? Surely you can see it also in your own minds; the sense of anxiety, of fear, of insecurity that belong to us as human beings, because we are in a world where we have a vast amount of freedom to make decisions and where, as yet, our control over the world in which we live is so small, and where we are constantly threatened with that which thwarts us and humiliates us.

We are talking about that which is the answer to this problem, that which involves our radical reconciliation to what God has given to us in the world in which He has set us. The Biblical understanding of our human situation is that we are in a world in which the great reality is God, the Creator, who is constantly pleading with all his children, constantly seeking them, constantly seeking to bring them back to himself. I remind you again of all the parables of both the Old and New Testaments which you know. And the background of that picture of the human situation is the predicament of man estranged from his world, estranged from his neighbours, estranged therefore from himself. God's answer to that predicament, according to the Bible, is that he reveals Himself, not simply that He reveals propositions which are true. He reveals himself in the sense of opening up his heart to us by an outgoing activity of reconciling – life and the centre of that reconciling action is the cross of Jesus Christ – the place at which all the issues of Jesus' earthly life came to their focus, and the point at which all the issues between man and his maker come finally to their focus, the point at which the ultimate depths of human existence are exposed.

The whole ministry of Jesus was a spending of himself for men, and this whole ministry reached its climax in the Cross. As St. John says, 'having loved His own, He loved them to the end.' In that cross there is, as it were, a blazing radiance of holy love which, when it shines into our



world, shows up for the first time the real nature of the world. It is a light which pierces through all the screens that we put up to hide our anxieties, our egotisms, our refusals to commit ourselves simply into our Father's hands as children. The coining of Christ, and above all, his death, was like the coming of a brilliant light into a dark room, which up to that moment seemed to be just an ordinary room, and now suddenly seems to be full of accumulated dirt, cobwebs, dust. Those who seemed to be the righteous, the respectable godly churchmen, resourceful statesmen, the enthusiastic crowd, yes, and even the disciples themselves were all exposed at that point. When the light finally shone naked upon them, they were all found to be on the wrong side, were all found to be part of a single murderous conspiracy against the love of God.

That is what happened. This is the event which I believe to be the centre of all human history, the point at which the reality of God met, so to say, naked, the reality of human existence, and at that point, the real character of all our human existence was exposed, that which apart from this light we pass off as ordinary human nature, something which we simply accept and take for granted. There it was exposed as it truly is. Mankind estranged from his maker, mankind deeply, irretrievably involved in a murderous hatred against his maker, that is one side of what the cross means, or is.

But of course, that is only the half of what it is, because when we look again at the cross and at him who hangs upon it, when we remember the road that he took to the cross, when we remember that he said, for instance, 'No man takes my life from me, I lay it down of myself,' when we remember that he said, 'The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many,' we see that the cross is not just the exposor of our sin against God, it is also the exposor, the deed, of his love for us. His taking the cross was not his choice, but it was that which he accepted from the Father's hand as the cost of completing what he had come to do, namely to pour himself out in love for men.

It was the path of absolute devotion to the love of God which led him. Let us never forget that as man,

through all the perplexities and doubts and agonies of man, he faced defeat and death.

Now when we see that, when we allow ourselves to be exposed to this fact, it seems to me that there are two things which happen to us. One is that, so to speak, the ground drops from under our feet. I remember that this was the first point at which the cross became a reality to me. I suddenly realised that this is the point where all the roads of human achievement in religion and politics and law lead finally to total exposure and judgement and condemnation. There I have nothing on which I can so to speak, stand. There is no possibility as I face the cross that I could ever think of myself as a good man, or a clever man, or an able man or a holy man. If you like, the first commentary on the cross was the suicide of Judas. What can a man do if he knows that he is an enemy of God? What can he do except end his life?

But the second thing is this. At that moment, when the ground drops from under your feet, something else happens. How shall we put it? It is as though he stretches out his hand and says, 'No, you shall not die. I died, so that you should not die. You shall live. That is my will; it is for that that I died. You shall live for me.' Now that, you see, is the beginning of something quite new. It is not a continuation of the old with some additional strength behind it. It is the beginning of a quite new kind of existence in which the only meaning of existence is gratitude to him, in which the only thing that you have to do, so to speak, is to pay back that debt. There is no question of justifying yourself, of establishing your position. There is no question of looking forward to the day when you could be thought of by other people or even by yourself as a good man or a holy man, or a successful man. All of that has disappeared. There is only one thing, and that is to give thanks, to give thanks with the whole of one's being, to offer back that which he has given. All of this depends upon the Christian understanding of who Jesus is. I believe that this is the point at which not only for every human life, but for the whole of human history, the decisive event happened. From this point there is a new creation, the beginning of

a new world, of which the end is, as Bible says, a new heaven and a new earth, the renewal of all things in Christ.

Look at it just before we close, in another way. You remember that Jesus was not crucified alone; there were three crosses on that hill. In those other two crosses where two men suffered for their own sins and for the sins of society, there is focussed, all the sorrow and the defeat and the frustration that have dogged human life all down the centuries – man against the world, man against his neighbour, man against himself, man suffering for his own sins and for the sins of society. And in the middle there is a cross with a sarcastic notice on the top: 'This is the King of the Jews.' On one side, there is a man bitterly resentful of this world, where everything is against him. 'If there is a God, why does He not come down and help me? If there is a God, why does He not stop all the evil in the world? If you are the Christ, why don't you come down off that cross and save us?' On the other side, there is a man who is in the same situation, who has the same evidence before him, the same cross, and the same notice, but in whom those sarcastic words on the cross in the middle have started a different train of thought: 'The King of the Jews?' Could it be that this is indeed real kingship, that this is what God means by kingship, by rule? Could it be that this is what we were waiting for all these centuries?' He does not ask to be taken down off his cross, he does not ask to be let off. He simply asks that Jesus should remember him in his kingdom. 'You are a King? I believe you are a King. Remember me when you come to your Kingdom.' And Jesus answers, 'This day you shall be with me in paradise,' and that man on the cross becomes the first of the human race to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

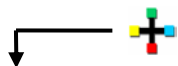
In what does this reconciliation consist? It depends wholly, as I say, upon the Christian understanding of who it is that hangs there, the Lord, the King, the Creator. He is the one who hangs there in our midst, right down at the point where our defeat, our resentment is at its bitterest. The thief did not need much convincing about that human situation. What he found was that the God against whom he had been fighting all his life was there at his side, his



comrade in suffering, not in a pious prayer meeting, or an academic study group, but there in this sordid scene of brutality and death, God was present. There at the blackest moment in human history, at the point at which above all we would be tempted to say ‘there is no God,’ at the point where, if you like, human history was at its farthest from God, at that point, the reconciliation was made. Not by our climbing up out of the pit to find God, but because He has come right down into our situation where we are, He has reconciled us to himself.

And how do we receive that reconciliation? Just as the dying thief did. Firstly, we accept that God is just. We give up complaining and evading and self-justification. We accept it that this is the kind of world that we have made, and that we deserve. Secondly, we have faith that he is beside us, that the bond of love unites us, that in everything he is our comrade at our side, that therefore we have no need to defend ourselves, no need to protect ourselves, that even at the moment (and don’t, we all know these moments!) the moment when we have been humiliated, when we have been defeated, and we try desperately to recover the situation by establishing ourselves and claiming our rights and defending ourselves – that all of that is unnecessary, that all the rights that we could ever have, have been established by him, that he is our right, our justice. Finally we share with him in the burden of the world’s sin by accepting his invitation to join with him. When we do that, we do find ‘all things work together for good,’ as St. Paul said. We do find that we begin to look upon the world in a different way, not with the eyes of resentment, watching all the time for those things that threaten us, but with the eyes of gratitude, watching all the time for the opportunities to serve him.

As we do that, we begin to find, that all things are made new.



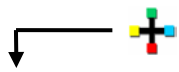
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THE CHRISTIAN HOPE

The question that I have put down for this talk, ‘Where do we end?’ is a question that many people feel you ought not to ask. They say that we live now in an anti-metaphysical era, when you don’t ask ultimate questions, when you solve problems one by one as they arise, and don’t pretend to be able to answer the ultimate questions. I have heard it said, I don’t know on what authority, that while the Gadarene swine were rushing down the steep place into the sea, one of them was heard saying to the other, ‘The main thing is to keep together and to keep moving!’ It seems to me, in spite of all that is said along the lines I have indicated, that if you are embarking on a journey, it is reasonable to ask where you are going. At least the man in the ticket office will always ask that question, if you don’t tell him first. And moreover, it is hard for human beings to live without hope, to live without something to look forward to. And you cannot help sometimes at least asking the question, ‘What is there to look forward to?’

Most of the time, of course, we don’t look forward too far. There is an incident in the Journal of Scott’s Expedition to the South Pole, which I have always found very moving. Those of you who have read that wonderful Journal will remember that at one point in the journey they met atmospheric conditions in which the horizon was completely blotted out. They were on an absolutely flat snow field. There was a kind of haze and when they looked forward there was

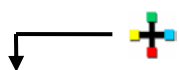
nothing to be seen. There was just a complete blank without even the line between earth' and sky being discernible. They found very quickly that whatever they did, they were going round in circles and finding themselves back on their own tracks. Finally they adopted the following device. Using the compass to point in the southerly direction, they threw snowballs ahead of



them in the line of the compass and followed the snowballs. It was the only way that they had to go straight. And that is what we do a great deal of our time. We have what we call projects, and a project is exactly 'something thrown forward'. We have a project; we throw something forward, and we follow that. There are many times in our lives when there is nothing other that we can do; there are times when the landmarks are blotted out, and you just have to go on, and do the next duty. But, of course, these men in Scott's expedition, had a compass and they had a map and they had an objective. They were not just throwing snowballs anywhere but in the direction that the compass indicated. But what if there were no base camp? What if there were nothing at the end of the journey? What if this were simply an endless game carried on until you dropped in the snow?

Is there anything to look forward to? The advice of many of the great religious traditions of mankind is that it is not wise to look forward, that hope is a will-of-the-wisp, an ignis fatuus, a mirage that draws you forward when, in the heat of the desert, you think you see water ahead of you, and you struggle on until you find nothing but more sand. Much of the religious wisdom of mankind has been along the lines of saying 'Don't hope, be contented with what you have; accept the situation as it is, and don't be deceived by hope.' And, yet we know that nothing great in the story of mankind has been achieved except by those who *did* hope, who *did* have some goal before them and who *did* think it worthwhile meeting the cost of pressing forward to that goal. Certainly we, who have the Bible in our hands, cannot escape the fact that the Bible is a book dominated by hope, by the sense that there is something to look forward to, something tremendous, something which is worth all the agony and pain and travail of world history.

But, we have to confess that in spite of the Bible, we Christians are often justifiably accused of being people who have no real commitment to achieving results here in this world. We are often justifiably accused of really only playing at the business of living in, this world, because our real interests are elsewhere, because in the last analysis



we are escapists because we think it doesn't matter what you actually do so long as your intentions are right, because what God, sees is the motives, and God is not really interested in the results, in whether you succeed or not. This is the criticism that the Marxist makes against the Christian when he gets into the Labour movement and joins with others in struggling, for better conditions for the working man. The Marxist will not trust the Christian, because he thinks that at the decisive moment the Christian will drop out; he will say, 'I cannot sully my hands; at this point I must keep my motives pure, I cannot join you.' At the critical moment he will let you down. The same point is made by Teilhard de Chardin when he puts into the mouth of a humanist scientist, a research scholar, a devastating criticism of the Christian. He says, 'When a Christian works with us, we invariably get the impression that he is doing it in a spirit of condescension. He appears to be interested, but in fact, because of his religion, he simply does not believe in the human effort as such. His heart is not really with us. Christianity nourishes deserters and false friends. That is what we cannot forgive.' It is a challenge that we Christians have to listen to.

Do we really believe, as Christians, that God, if I may venture to put it this way, deeply cares whether we succeed in what we do or not? that about this research project you are undertaking, He deeply cares whether you find the answer to your riddle or not? Or do we think

that he is only interested in our motives, whether our heart is pure, whether our intentions are good? Do we believe that it really matters whether we succeed? If we say, 'Yes, we believe that it does matter,' what then do we make of the fact that in the end we shall die and our accomplishments will perish? That all the societies and organisations and empires and cultures which we create will in the end perish, will, if not before that, at least finally be obliterated when the law of entropy has run its course and all things have finally run down to nothing? What then do we make of that fact?

It is at this point, when we come up against the fact of decay and death, that we are able to define exactly the nature of the problem that faces us, when we ask 'What is there

to look forward to?' Let me put this problem in the form of a very over-simplified picture. If we could imagine that the whole history of the world went on, taking us with it all the way, that we didn't die, that we were able to stay in right up to the end, then we could so to speak, look forward all together to sharing in the final result of what we are trying to do. We would be like a party of explorers pushing our way through the jungle, until all together we finally came to the seashore at the other end. But in fact as we know, this is not how it is. We all have to drop out of the party on the way; we are left by the roadside while the party moves on, and we are not there at the end. What then do we look forward to?

In this human situation there are two obvious solutions. One is to say that what really matters is the march. What really matters is that the party should get through, however many people have to drop out by the way. The thing that matters is that the work goes on. The workers drop out; they do not finally matter; their only significance is what they contribute to the cause. It is *that* that matters. We know that this kind of faith produces results. When you have people inspired with that kind of conviction, when they are prepared to regard themselves and everybody else as expendable, so that this thing may be carried through, you know that you have dynamism you get results. But eventually, the logic of that situation has to be faced. The logic of it is that the individual human person has no final significance, that the men and women living and dying here and now have no place in the thing that we look forward to. They are expendable. They are like the shavings on the carpenter's floor which are swept up and burned when the job is finished. Nobody remembers them because the only thing that matters is that the job is done.

We know what that has meant in the history of the totalitarian movements of our time which have been ready to liquidate human beings without scruple if they seemed to stand in the way of the job that had to be done. But when the revolutionary fervour has died down, what then is left to spur people on? This is the problem which developed Marxist societies are now having to face. Listen,

for instance, to these words from a Professor of Philosophy in the University of Warsaw, a Marxist philosopher: 'It is difficult to avoid the feeling that death is senseless, – avoidable accidental death especially. From the point of view of the progression of nature, death is entirely sensible, but from the point of view of a given individual, death is senseless and places in doubt everything that' he does. The question 'what for' cannot be silenced, and attempts to ridicule all these (problems) do not help.'

What then is the alternative? The other path that has very often been taken is exactly the converse. What matters is the human person. The only thing that really matters is that in the little span of life that is given to him, he himself becomes or achieves something significant. There are two forms in which this solution is familiar to us. One is the religious form, which in the end of

the day adds up to saying that what really matters about my life in this world is what happens when I die. What really matters is not what I do in this world, but where I go in the next world. The only thing that ultimately concerns me is my own personal destiny. That is, the religious form of the answer. We have also today, especially in Europe and America, the irreligious form of the answer in the name of what is called existentialism which basically takes the same road. What ultimately matters according to the existentialist is what I make of myself as an individual. The only meaning that history will ever have is the meaning that I put into my life by the way that I deal with these few years which I have before I disappear and am no more. Whether one takes the religious or the irreligious form of that answer, the result is the same. The story of the history of the world is not in any sense a drama with a plot and a conclusion. It is not something which has a meaning, and leads somewhere. It is literally a non-stop variety show, in which each of the actors comes on to the stage and does his bit and goes off, and what he does, has no relation to what is done after him or before him.

We seem to be impaled on the horns of a dilemma, a dilemma which faces every human being when he gets down to the root of the matter. We seem to be faced with the choice between finding significance in the history of man-

kind as a whole at the cost of losing any significance for the human person, or else finding significance for the individual human person at the cost of losing significance for the history of man as a whole. Is there any answer to that dilemma? There can only be an answer if it has an answer to the fundamental problem by which the dilemma is posed, namely to the fact of death. There can be no answer to that dilemma except that which has an answer to the fact of death. It is part of the Christian good news that in the death and resurrection of Jesus there is the answer to that dilemma. What I want to do in the rest of this talk is to try to explain, if I can, what that answer is.

Let me lead up to it by what might seem to be a digression but I think is not. We have been talking about history as a whole, but as a matter of fact, a great part of the human race has never had any sense of history, any sense that the world as a whole is going somewhere. It is perhaps the most significant fact, about the world that we live in today, that for the first time in human history, men everywhere in the world have the sense that they belong to a single history. They have the sense that before them there are two great possibilities, either the utter destruction of the human race in a nuclear holocaust, or some kind of new order for the human race in which hunger and want and fear will have been banished by the triumphs of science. For the first time men everywhere have the sense of belonging to a single history. But what does it mean to talk about world history?

Nobody writes a history, nobody goes to the trouble of collecting materials, and sorting them out and selecting them, unless he believes that something important is happening. If one believes that in the end of the day nothing really important happens in this world, then either there will be no history, (and let us remember that millions of men have lived for thousands of years with no history at all because nobody thought it was worthwhile recording anything), or else a cyclical view of history which sees human events in the pattern of nature returning over and over again like the seasons of the year to their beginning. On this view, there will be no history properly so-called. There will be the collection of records, for instance, of the sale and purchase

of land which is necessary for legal purposes; there will be the records of what great kings and rulers have done which are collected at the time of their death, when they are being honoured, but there will be no history in the sense of a continuous story.

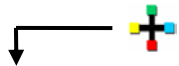
History is only written (whether it is the history of a nation or a college, or a society), when people believe that something significant is happening, and when they think they have seen what that is, when they have seen the point of the story; when they think that they see what it is that this college contributes to education, or what this nation contributes to mankind, or what this society contributes to the advancement of learning. A history, a readable history at least, will only be written by someone who has grasped the point of the story; otherwise you can't tell the story. But how do you grasp the point of the whole history of mankind? What is the point? What is it that makes it important? Only if you have some answer to that question can you begin to write a world history. And that is why as a matter of historical fact, there have not been any world histories in that sense of the word, except those which have sprung out of this book, the Bible. This is a statement which you can check afterwards if you want, but it is historically accurate.

This book is itself, so to speak, the first world history. You may think it is a very odd world history. I could argue about that with you afterwards, but it has the shape of a world history. It begins with the creation of the whole world, with the first men, and it goes through to the end where there is a picture of all the nations of the earth gathered together into a single community. It is in principle, in its form and shape, a world history, and it is out of this book that the conception of world history, has been born. The other great cultures of mankind, those which have not been shaped in one way or another by this book, have seen the only pattern by which you can interpret the world in the pattern of nature – the recurring cycle of birth and growth and decay and death, – and therefore, for them, human history has been imprisoned within nature. The unique thing about this book is that exactly the opposite is what characterises it. In this book, nature is taken up

inside of history. It would take a little time to expound that sentence fully, but very briefly, this book, this essay in world history if you like to call it so, has its basis in the conviction that the wonderful God who delivered his people out of slavery and led them into the promised land, and has led us all through up till now, that this wonderful God is in fact the God who made all things, and who therefore is doing something, in all things, and will accomplish something in all things. So in the stories of creation, and in the pictures of the end of the world which this Bible includes, you have nature conformed to history instead of history conformed to nature. You have the natural history of the world taken up into history. That is why – and again this would be a very long discussion – that is why ultimately it is out of this book that the whole conception of evolution has developed. The conception of evolution could not develop until the classical pagan static view of the world, which had imposed itself upon the European, people for so many centuries, was broken, and the Biblical picture of the world broke through again. The point that I am making is that this dynamic view of the world, a view of the world' that sees it from start to finish as a tremendous movement forward towards a real goal, a view therefore in which the achievements of man really mean something, this is a view of the world which we owe to the Bible. It is not to be found anywhere else except where this Bible has shaped the fundamental thinking of men.

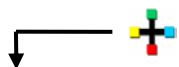
What then, and – I now come back to my main line, – what then is the ground and nature of the Biblical understanding of history? How does it help us to solve this dilemma of which I spoke? As I said a moment ago, the centre of the Hebrew faith was simply this, that the living and mighty Lord, the Lord who had made Himself known to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and

Moses and the prophets, that this living Lord had out of His love and faithfulness delivered them out of slavery, made them into a people, and brought them into a covenant relationship with Himself by which they were bound to live a corporate life of purity, personal righteousness and social justice. 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt,' therefore, everything else follows from that.



The purpose of the whole enterprise is not that, there should be a special privilege for this people, but that the righteousness and holiness of God should rule the whole earth and extend to all nations. It is not that there should be any special privileges for this people; in fact they are over and over again told that they will suffer more than any other people because of this. And, in fact when you read the whole Old Testament right through, you will see that except for a very few bright patches it is by and large a story of failure, of defeat, of darkness, of apostasy, of division, of disobedience, of disorder, of exile, of slavery and of the very near extinction of the whole people – an incredible story of unremitting disaster. And yet, in the midst of it all, is this stubbornly held and continually renewed prophetic faith that God's righteous rule, the righteous rule of this God who has delivered us and made Himself known to us, will be established throughout the whole earth; that even, and perhaps especially, through the agony and suffering of his servant Israel, the name of this righteous Lord will be vindicated. A true King will come, a true Shepherd who will really care for the sheep, a true Ruler who will really establish justice and righteousness in the earth. He will come, and God's reign will cover the world as the waters cover the sea.

In that hope the Jews endured century after century what seemed to be unremitting defeat and disaster. And finally, the promised king came, and we know what happened. He was rejected, condemned, destroyed. Are we not inclined to say, 'Surely now at last this story comes to its end, surely now this dream of a righteous kingdom must be finally extinguished?' But in fact it was not so; the death of Jesus was not an end, but a beginning of the world-wide announcement of the coming kingdom. The Jews had dreamed of a world-wide kingdom, but they thought that the nations would come on their own to Jerusalem to acknowledge the true king. It was only after the death and resurrection of Jesus that His disciples were sent out to all the nations to announce to all peoples that the long-promised kingdom had dawned and that He would come again to be the righteous, ruler of all the



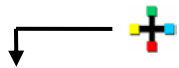
nations. 'The Gospel of the kingdom must be preached to all the nations, and then shall the end come.'

And so they went forth, and a great multitude of all orations was brought into a new fellowship of those who looked eagerly forward to the coming in glory of a righteous Kingdom, to the summing up of all things in Christ, to a Holy City; not a return to the Garden of Eden, you notice, but the advance to a city, the Holy City into which all of the nations will bring their glory, their culture, their civilisation. Civilisation means the life of a city and all the nations will bring their glory into that city. There will be new heavens and a new earth. All things will be summed up in Christ, and therefore this fellowship all around the world prays 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'

How then does this faith enable us to meet the problem of action in this world? What have we a right to look forward to? It is not simply a belief in the individual blessedness of believers escaping from this world. We have often made it look as if that is what we Christians believe, but that is not the message of the Bible. It is not that we can look forward to an individual blessedness

by escaping from the responsibilities of this world. On the contrary, as the New Testament in all its parts testifies, it is a corporate hope that we look forward to, it is the completing of God's whole creative purpose for the world. But on the other hand, also, it is not simply a belief in a future for the world, a future for the human race which you and I who are living now will not see. It is a belief which finds its pattern and its security in the dying and rising of Jesus.

Jesus came among men to preach the kingdom of God and he was rejected, defeated, destroyed. He committed all that he was and all that he did and all that he announced, and all that He believed into the hands of the Father in an act of total submission, going down into the darkness of defeat and death and to the grave. He prayed, 'Father into thy hands I commend my spirit,' and the Father accepted that offering, honoured that faith, raised up the Lord Jesus, to give us the assurance, the sign that faith is not vain, to give us the glimpse of the new creation which

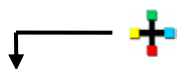


he has prepared for us. What therefore is now possible for us through him is precisely to follow the same path of total commitment to the doing of the Father's will and the manifesting of the Father's righteous rule here in this world which He has made and which He loves and which He is bringing to its consummation, albeit, a consummation which cannot be achieved except with a cleansing by fire.

This means, therefore, that it matters what we do, that it matters whether that research we now embark upon really gets through to its conclusion, that it matters whether this person whom we seek to heal is really healed, that it matters whether the things that we seek to create are truly and firmly and justly established. But at the same time, it means that we also recognise and accept the fact that everything we do, and everything we are, go to their consummation only by the way of the cross, only by the way of death and surrender. All that we have and are must be finally committed, offered, sacrificed to Him.

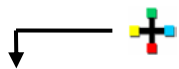
But you see there must be something to sacrifice, otherwise all this language means nothing. We commit everything that we do with all our hearts to God knowing that he cares about it and that it will, through his own grace and power, find its place in that new creation of which the resurrection of Christ is the foretaste and the earnest. To put the whole thing again in another way, it means that we do not imagine that there is a direct route from my efforts to the kingdom of God, because we know that my efforts are too much corrupted by sin and egotism and blindness for that to be possible. There is no straight road from where you and I commit ourselves to the tasks of research and service and healing, to the kingdom of God. No, everything that we do has to go another way. It has to go down with Jesus through the humiliation of death. It has to be offered up into the hands of the Father, to make of it what He wants.

Again to put it in another very simple way, which to me is very meaningful, in a single sentence of Albert Schweitzer's, 'Every act of a Christian should be an acted prayer for the coming of the kingdom.' That is the true Christian understanding of action. It is an acted prayer



for the coming of the kingdom. Everything that we have, everything that we do with all our hearts, is offered to him in the faith, the same faith with which Jesus went down into the grave, the faith that God is able to make out of this offering the new heaven and the new earth. That means that in relation to all his work, in answer to the question. 'What have we the right to expect, to look forward to?' the Christian's answer will be in the words of St. Paul: 'I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him against that day.' The Christian looks forward to that day, to the great consummation of all the ages in which the purpose of God through all creation and through all history will be finally

summed up in a glory that we cannot imagine, but of which we have a glimpse, the foretaste, the earnest, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.



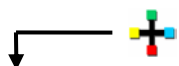
5

Life in the Spirit

We have been speaking about Jesus as a person who lived at a certain time and place in history. In the Christian creed we say every Sunday that He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and by repeating the name of the Roman Government official, we identify the fact that this was something which happened at a certain point in history, which is farther away from us every year that we live. Yesterday I was speaking about the faith which is made possible through him, both about the whole drama of human history and also about our own personal lives and their meaning. Tonight I want to speak about how Jesus, who on the one hand, is a historical figure farther and farther away from us in the past with every year that passes, is at the same time a present reality to us now, as we go through our journey.

We know very well how, when a great person dies, who has been honoured and loved, we try very hard to preserve the memory. If you go to Wardha, you will find the room where Gandhiji lived; 'you will find his spectacles there on the table, his sandals at the door; you will find everything done to try to recapture just exactly what it was like when he was here. Yet, everybody knows that that is something which sinks farther and farther into the past. Indeed, when people have asked me what is the biggest change I notice coming back to India after six years' absence, the first thing I always say is that the biggest change that I notice is the fact that the whole memory of Gandhiji has gone so much farther back into oblivion. And we know, coming closer home, how even in a College like this, there is a sense of distress (I have heard people say so) that the figure of Dr. Ida Scudder recedes farther and farther into the past, and one has the sense that something is slipping away which it is hard to recover.

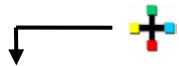
One of the striking things about the New Testament is that you do not find anywhere any trace of that feeling about



Jesus. You do not find anywhere the feeling of a figure who is farther and farther back in the past. You do not find people looking back and trying to treasure the relics of Jesus. The business of collecting relics only began centuries afterwards. Amongst those who were His actual friends, you don't find a single trace of any attempt, as it were, to hold on, as we do to the memory of a dead person whom we loved. On the contrary, right from the beginning – at least from the day of Pentecost onwards – there is a tremendous sense of Jesus as a present reality, and indeed, as one who is also to come, one who is both present and future, and not merely past, one who is the great reality with which we have to deal. There is no trace of the feeling that he is a memory from the past, which we must try to preserve.

This is brought out by the fact that you have phrases in the New Testament which, when you look at them, are very remarkable – a phrase like 'in Christ' or 'the body of Christ', phrases which are not used about any other person who has ever lived in history. Christians spoke of themselves as being 'in Christ' in other words, in someone who is now alive, and as being 'the body of Christ.' There is no trace, you see, of the thought that Jesus is simply someone whom we remember from the past. This sense of the great new reality which is Jesus present with us now, dates, according to our record, from the day of Pentecost. The disciples had come to be convinced, slowly convinced. some of them reluctantly convinced (like Thomas), that Jesus was really alive; they were meeting regularly for prayer and fellowship, asking for, and waiting for

guidance, for power – that power which Jesus had promised to them to enable them to continue what He had begun. Surely, we must imagine that they spent a good deal of their time meditating on His words, recalling His deeds, pondering all that His presence had meant to them, and above all, what the cross meant. It must still have been an absolutely shattering experience in their minds. They had all, in spite of shattering experience promises, let Him down at the last minute and He had died absolutely alone and forsaken. They would remember also the wonderful way in which He had come back to them to gather them together, to restore



them, to forgive them, and to strengthen them. And to these expectant and waiting disciples a day came when in a quite new way, the Spirit of God came upon them. They were released; they were filled with power, and they were so happy that some people said they were drunk. And immediately, from being a little group of the friends of Jesus who treasured His memory, they were out in the streets, boldly, confidently proclaiming the name of Jesus, and actually attacking the leaders of the nation and telling them: ‘This Jesus whom you crucified, God has raised up, and made him Lord.’ And when they were challenged to say what all this meant, what it was all about, Peter replied by saying that it was the fulfilment of an Old Testament promise that God would pour out His spirit upon all flesh.

Let us then pause at this moment to look at this Old Testament teaching about the spirit. The word which is translated ‘spirit’ in our English Bible and very badly translated ‘aavi’ in our Tamil Bible, is the Hebrew word ‘ruach’ which originally meant ‘the wind’, ‘the breath,’ the mighty, mysterious wind out of the desert, the wind, of which one has to say, where does it come from? where does it go to? and yet when it is here, it is powerful, it shakes things, and we cannot escape it. This word, ‘ruach’ the Hebrews used for ‘the wind of God,’ the wind which is God’s breath, the mighty, mysterious power of God that in a way that we cannot understand fills certain men like Samson, and Bezalel (Exodus 35: 31) and Saul, and enables them to do great deeds much above what the normal human being expects to be able to do. What they said is that ‘the ruach of God,’ ‘the wind of God,’ ‘the breath of God’ had come into these people and filled them with power. In the Old Testament when they speak about the spirit, the ruach, it is almost always about individuals such as I have mentioned. But there was in the Book of the prophet Joel, the mysterious promise that a day would come when God would ‘pour out his spirit upon all men,’ Peter says: ‘Now that day has dawned.’ And from that day forward in the whole of the rest of the New Testament, the great controlling reality which is referred to on every page is this Spirit of God, the Spirit



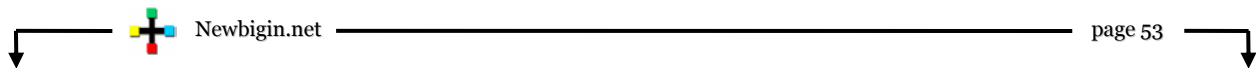
of Jesus, the Holy Spirit. This is the great controlling reality; they are living in the wind of the Spirit.

This is the thing that makes the New Testament distinctive, the thing that separates it from the Old Testament. The Spirit is not given just to a few out standing individuals but is shared with the community. Different gifts are given to each, not so that one person. may tower above everybody else, like Samson, but so that everyone in the fellowship may have the distinctive gifts that only the Spirit can give, and have the opportunity to use them all to serve the brotherhood. I don’t think I need to prove this – you can prove it yourself by reading a few pages of the Acts or the Epistles. This great reality of the Spirit is what dominates the New Testament.

I

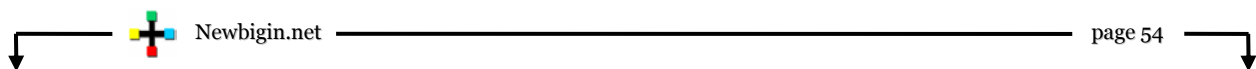
Now I want, with you, to look a little more closely at what the New Testament tells us about life in the Spirit. The first thing is that it is a life of freedom. This is one of the constantly repeated words of St. Paul. Over and over again, the Spirit means freedom, liberty, release from bondage. In Romans 8 which I shall be quoting over and over again tonight, because it is the great chapter on the Spirit in the New Testament, he says 'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has set me free from the law of sin and of death.' And again, in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, 'Where the Spirit of God is, there is freedom.' Again, in his tremendous battle with the Galatians, who, he is afraid, are slipping again into bondage, he says, 'For freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast, therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage.'

When St. Paul speaks in this way about the freedom which the Spirit gives, he is primarily speaking of the deliverance which the Spirit brings from bondage to the law. Now, when you read all the complicated arguments of Paul in Romans and Galatians, it may all seem something very remote, something that applies to a lot of Jews, but does not apply to us. But in fact if, we will look a little below the surface, it is dealing with something which we all know a great deal about ourselves. We all know



something about the business of trying to be good. Of course, we may not put it in such a Sunday School way as that. We may have more sophisticated ways of putting it. The problem is of a standard up to which we try to come, the pressure upon us of an ideal of conduct that has come into our minds through what we have read, or through what we have seen in somebody else's life, the pressure upon us of the sense of obligation that was perhaps instilled into us in our childhood by our parents. 'You ought to do this, you ought not to do that, to do this is right, to do that is wrong.' You know that this is serious, and yet, on the other hand, you know that whatever you do, unless you are killing yourself, you don't live up to it. We know that everyone of us ought to be pure and humble, and patient and loving and honest, and we know that we are not. What do we do in that situation? We will do all kinds of things, but one of them is that we do make a deliberate effort, all of us, to act up to the part. We know what we are supposed to be, roughly speaking, we know what is expected of us, and we know that even though, as a matter of fact that is not what we are actually like, at least we can act up to that part, we can conform to what is expected of us. In fact, we can become exactly what Jesus said the good men of his time were – 'play actors.' We often think it was a terribly severe word that Jesus used to describe the best people of his time, the most up-to-date, intelligent, socially conscious, modern churchmen of his time. He called them hypocrites, 'play actors,' people who were playing a part.

Let us look more closely at this business of play-acting. There are certain elements in this whole picture of what we ought to be, which it seems reasonably possible that we can accomplish, we can achieve, we can get level with. There are certain things where we can say at the end of a week, 'Well, I kept on the right side of the line all through this week. I didn't do this, I didn't do that, I didn't do the other; I didn't tell a lie, I didn't kill anybody. I didn't commit 'adultery and quite a lot of other less serious matters I didn't do and in that sense I am o.k., I am on the right side of the line.' But when we do that we are



compensating thereby for the fact that in a lot of other matters we *were* on the wrong side of the line.

It is very bewildering if you travel around the world, as I have done, to discover what a lot of different laws there are among Christians. You go to one place where a Christian who smokes

is regarded as a sinner; you go to another place where a very highly pious, evangelical group of missionaries will serve you nothing to drink except beer and everybody is smoking cigars, including the ladies! It is very very difficult unless you happen to stay in one place. My point is that we take certain things and we say, 'now in these things if you keep on the right side of the line, you are *in* and if you are on the other side of the line, you are *out*.' But we know when we do that, that all kinds of other things get left out. A man who commits adultery is 'out'; a man who slanders his neighbour secretly and gossips about him behind his back is all right, he gets away with it. He is *in*. Over and over again, as Jesus said to the good churchmen of his time, 'You tithe mint and anise and cummin. You are very very careful about all the exact details of the law, but you forget mercy and justice.' And this again and again is what good people, religious people, godly people have done. What happens, you see, is that the one thing, the really important thing, gets lost, and that is the free spontaneous outgoing love of the next person, of the neighbour.

This, I think, is why Jesus told that marvellous story about the Good Samaritan when somebody wanted to know what you have to do to fulfil the Law. He gave a picture of the man who had fallen among thieves, lying in the ditch. Two very godly churchmen went by, each of them keeping very carefully to the path, and they did nothing; and by not doing anything they had not broken the Law, or at least they did not think they had. And then the Samaritan comes along. This fellow, who is completely godless who has no kind of a religion at all, who is just an outsider, he comes along and he sees the person and he does the human thing; he goes and helps. It is this simple elementary business of responding in love to the need of the other man, that is the thing that gets lost in



our legalistic religion. And that is the one thing that matters; that is the fulfilment of the Law, says Jesus.

Let me put the same thing in another way, in terms of our own experience. What happens when I know that I have been caught while I was doing something wrong, when I said a word I should never have said, in heat perhaps? The moment I have said it I know it is wrong. I want to kick myself, I am fed up with myself; I know that I ought not to have done that. What do I do? Well, what I am tempted to do is to redouble the effort to do right. 'I will be more careful. I will keep a tighter control on my tongue. I will think very carefully before I speak.' I will, in other words play the part more conscientiously. I will be a more diligent actor, I will make sure that I don't forget my lines again. But the final result of that, you see, is just exactly what Jesus had to deal with in the pharisees. It is a facade; it is not the real person Jesus was not impressed by the facade. He said, 'I did not come for the righteous, I did not come for that impressive godly churchmen that you present to me; when you talk to me. I am not interested in that. I came for that person who is behind the facade, that sinner, that miserable, frightened, lustful, anxious, troubled person, who is working so hard to keep the facade up; that is the person I came for. I came not for the righteous, but for the sinner.' You see he was not impressed by that facade, and he is not impressed by ours. He is only interested in the real person who is behind – a very unpleasant person, perhaps, but that is the one in whom he is interested.

When I described my own reactions a moment ago, when I said that what I do is to be on my guard, so to speak, you notice that what I had forgotten to do is to ask the simple question: Where did that word come from? How did it happen that I spoke something which was not in my lines, which was out of the part? There is only one answer. It came from me. At the moment it was not play-acting; it was me. And that is the thing that of course, I am ashamed of. That is the thing I want to hide; but it is exactly that thing that Jesus wants. That is what He has come for. He is not interested in the facade, He is interested in the person, the person, the real

living person as he is, sins and all. And, that is why Jesus was such a revolutionary, because he just was not interested in the facade, in the masks, in the play.

There is a wonderful story which has meant a tremendous lot to me from the moment that I began to be a Christian; it is the story in Luke 7 about the woman out of the streets, who broke into a very respectable dinner party and poured her tears and her ointment over the feet of Jesus. You remember that the very respectable churchman who had given the dinner party was extremely offended, and although he didn't say anything outwardly, it was quite obvious what he was thinking that if Jesus had had any sense about who this was, he would not have allowed it. And then Jesus very gently does a little account. 'Simon, when I came to your house what did you do for me? Nothing except just the essential courtesies, nothing more. What has this woman done to me? She has poured everything out, all that she had. Why did she do it? There is not any rule that you must do this. You kept all the rules. Why did she do it? She did it because she loved, because her heart was broken with gratitude and she just wanted to pour out her heart. But you are not like that, are you? You keep all the rules. You are all right, but you don't know what that kind of love means.'

You see there has to be a breakdown in the play-acting business before the other thing happens, and yet the other thing is just exactly what God wants. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind and with all thy strength.' What kind of love is that? You cannot have it by keeping rules. It is something that flows out when your heart is broken and you are given to Him. I remember that when I was not yet a Christian, when I was a first year undergraduate and I was very much perplexed by this question, What difference, if any, does it make to ordinary conduct to become 'a Christian?', I watched my Christian friends and my non-Christian friends, and I asked what difference, if any, does it make? I had always the idea in my mind that being a Christian (if it was to be any good at all) would have to mean that you had, as it were, a better brand of petrol in the tank, so that when you put your foot on the accele-

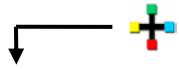
rator the thing went forward with less spluttering and more speed than it would otherwise. I thought being a Christian must mean that you have an additional sort of pep, perhaps an additional power for doing the things that a good person ought to want to do.

For me the break-through came when I discovered that this is not so at all; but that in fact being a Christian means that you turn the car round exactly the other way and go in the opposite direction. You give up the whole attempt to be a good person; you really do give it up. You no longer have any expectation of succeeding in that game. On the contrary, you simply accept this extraordinary fact that Jesus really wants you and not anything else, you, as you are; that is what he came for, and that is what he died for. He simply wants you, as you are, and nothing else, and therefore all this play-acting business drops away and becomes stupid. All that you have to do is to be thankful. In a sense, it is all included in that – to pour out yourself like that woman did at his feet. That is essentially the life of freedom, the life in which you are free to be yourself, and that is the fulfilment of the law; that is what the law was meant to achieve, but cannot achieve. That is what God means human life to be; and that is what St. Paul means when he talks about 'the freedom of the Spirit.'

II

In the same chapter (Romans 8), he goes on to speak about sonship. This is the second characteristic of life in the Spirit that I want to speak about. 'For all who are led by the Spirit of

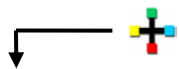
God are sons of God. You did not receive the spirit of slavery, to fall back again into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship, whereby we cry "Abba, Father." It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit, that we are children of God'. There is another famous passage in Galatians 4. 'The heir, as long as he is a child, is no better, than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate..... We were children, we were, slaves to the elemental, spirits of the universe.' We were, under all kinds of bondage and control. 'But when the



time had fully, come; God sent his son, born of a woman born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as Sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father". This word, 'Abba', as you know, is the Aramaic word for Father. It is one of the two or three places in the New Testament, where, instead of putting the words of Jesus into Greek, they could not do anything else except just transliterate those Aramaic words that they had heard from his lips. And so in the middle of the Greek text, there comes this Aramaic word, because this was the word that, above all was characteristic of Jesus: 'Abba'. It was Jesus' whole character that was in that word. When St. John says what it meant to see Jesus, he says 'We beheld, his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father'. That was the supreme character of Jesus, that he was a son, that, in every situation, wherever he was, he was a son in his Father's house. He had only to look up and say, 'Father', 'Father, what do I do?', 'Father, help me', 'Father, into Thy, hands I commend my spirit', 'Abba'. And, says St. Paul, that same spirit which, was in Jesus has been given to us. And, therefore, we have the freedom, the confidence of a son in his father's house, but also the obedience of a son in his father's house.

There is a spirit of slavery. We know it very well, and a great deal of human religion, and a good deal of what passes for Christian religion, is animated by a spirit of slavery. We know how much of the human race has lived for centuries in abject terror before the powerful and inscrutable forces of nature, lived, in other words, as those who are slaves in a house where they simply feared the householder, but did not understand what his ideas were, and therefore what he wanted. There is also a spirit of mastery, the self-confident spirit of the man who thinks that man himself can master all things for his own ends, and sometimes these two exist together.

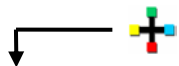
I have never forgotten. a conversation that I had in Chicago when I had the privilege of spending an hour by chance with one of the scientists who worked on, and finally produced, the first atomic bomb. It was a very vivid ex-



perience to me to listen to him talking. He told me how, in the early days of the work, the whole group of them were filled with a sense of exaltation and excitement at this tremendous thing that they were doing for the first time in history. They were taming atomic power for the use of man, and when the moment came at last after all these years of dangerous and exacting work that they did produce in the laboratory there at Chicago University the first controlled atomic reaction, he spoke of the sense of exaltation that they had, thinking of the enormous possibilities that this opened out for the human race, and how almost at once it was followed in almost all of them by a sense of terror. 'What is it that we have achieved and what is it going to do to the human race?' I cannot tell all that story now. But that oscillation between a sense of exultant mastery and a sense of real terror is characteristic of many of the best scientists of our time. Yesterday I was reading an article by a very eminent scientist, an atomic physicist, essentially saying the same thing. This man is not a Christian. He has no sustaining hope, and therefore he was really writing in terror about what ultimately is going to happen to the human race as a result of the powers that atomic

physicists have now released. Many of the best men of our time are really torn between the sense of mastery and the sense of fear.

But what is given to us in the Holy Spirit is neither of these two things. It is not the spirit of the master; it is not the spirit of the slave. It is the spirit of the son. This has enormous significance, because it means in the first place the spirit which is free' in God's world, free to develop, free to experiment, free to explore, free to probe, free to research, and it is out of this freedom that has come, as a matter of historical fact, the whole vast movement that we call 'modern science'. But on the other hand, there is not an absolute mastery. It is a freedom which can only be exercised in responsibility to the Father, and the Father has made known his character in Jesus Christ. In other words, to put it in another way, the world is his world, and because we are given the position of sonship, it is our world, but not our world absolutely. It is our world, subject to him, and it is of his love that he has

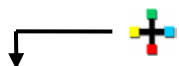


made us His sons, so that in every situation, in every, experience, we have freedom of sons. We are not slaves in terror before the mysterious powers of the universe; we have been delivered from the pagan fear of nature without which deliverance, there can be no science. We have been given the freedom to explore and experiment and research through every part of His creation. But it is freedom as sons, and not as masters, sons of the Father who is Lord of all.

III

Thirdly, says St. Paul, because we are sons, we are heirs, 'If children then heirs, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may be glorified with Him'. Because it is the spirit of sonship, it is also the spirit of hope, the spirit that leads us to look forward eagerly to our inheritance. And here I must read one of the very great paragraphs of the New Testament in which this balance between having and hoping is most wonderfully set forth. 'I consider,' says St. Paul, 'that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that shall be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; or the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly, as we wait for adoption as sons the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope which is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience' (Romans 8: 18-25 RSV).

That is a tremendously rich passage which one could spend an hour discussing, but the essential point is this. We are sons. He has given the Spirit of His Son, and therefore because we are sons, we are heirs and because we are heirs, we look forward with eager longing to



the completion of our inheritance: But this completion concerns the whole creation. It is the whole creation which is groaning in bondage, and we are part of the creation. And, we who have the first fruit of the Spirit share also in that groaning, in that suffering, in that travail of the whole creation, the whole physical world. But it is part of what God is doing to prepare this tremendous inheritance, the liberty of the children of God. We have the spirit of sonship, but what we have makes us long for more; there is a balance here between having and hoping which the Christian must learn how to maintain. Some Christians put all the emphasis on having, 'I am saved,

everything is o.k.; I am having a wonderful time; I have no problems.’ That is not the full truth about the Christian life. On the other side, there are people who put all the emphasis on hoping. ‘I am struggling; I am striving; I am trying, and yet it is all still in the future.’

The distinctive thing about the gift of the Spirit is that it puts us in the situation where we both have *and* hope. In order to express this idea, the New Testament has this very remarkable word ‘arabon’ which is translated in our English Bibles ‘earnest’ and in our Tamil Bibles ‘acharam.’ This word has recently been illuminated, because of the discovery of a tremendous number of commercial manuscripts of the second and first centuries. This word ‘arabon’ was an ordinary commercial word, to describe a down payment in cash. If you owe a man Rs. 10,000, you give him Rs. 500/ – in cash as a down payment, an assurance that you acknowledge the whole debt and that you are going to pay it. It is not just a promissory note: Some people have interpreted Christianity as though all that we had in our hands was really a pronote, a promise that at the end we would have something. And some people have interpreted Christianity as though we had the whole Rs. 10,000 in our hands already.

The New Testament uses this very remarkable word, ‘arabon’, which expresses exactly the balance between the two. We have something which is real solid cash: it is not just a promise; it is not just an idea or a hope; it is the real genuine thing. It is communion with God through

Jesus Christ in the Spirit now. It is the real thing, but it is not the whole; it is the ‘arabon’, it is the down payment that makes us sure that the full thing is going to come to us in due course. And therefore, as St. Paul says, we wait for it with patience. If we are not sure, we wait without patience; we wait impatiently. But if we are sure, if we know, we wait for it with patience, and that is the real mark of the Christian. On the one hand, he rejoices in what he has, all that God has given to him; but on the other hand he is looking forward all the time with a hope, which is a patient hope, because it is a sure hope. Therefore (St. Paul says) all this groaning, travailing, suffering and persecution which we have to go through ourselves now as Christians, and which the whole creation is going through, this whole travail and agony which is involved in fulfilling God’s whole purpose for the creation, we accept joyfully, because we know that it is all worthwhile in the end. There is something assured for which we can afford to wait patiently.

IV

Fourthly, because the Spirit is the Spirit of hope, the Spirit is also the Spirit of witness. The ‘arabon’ is guarantee of that thing which we do not yet see, the perfected kingdom of God; and the presence of the Spirit is therefore the point at which that becomes credible. If you look carefully in the New Testament, you will find that almost all the times when the word ‘witness’ is used, it is the Spirit who is the witness. The disciples are only witnesses in a secondary sense. Jesus says ‘When the Counsellor comes, He will bear witness of me and you also will be witnesses.’ It is the Spirit who will convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgement. ‘When the Spirit comes upon you, you will be my witnesses.’ It is the Spirit who is the witness, because the Spirit is the ‘arabon’, is the advance payment of the real thing.

Here I use an illustration with great fear and trembling, because I am almost surely wrong. As a very ignorant person, I imagine that the fluorescent screen in an X-ray apparatus makes it possible to see the bones, or whatever

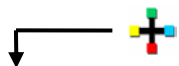
it is you are wanting to look at, on the X-ray screen. It seems to me that the Church is intended to be a sort of fluorescent screen in which the presence of the Spirit makes it possible to see what is

otherwise invisible, namely the hidden rule of God and the promise of the perfection of that rule, The Church as a whole, because the Spirit is given to it, is called to be that kind of fluorescent screen in which the invisible reign of God becomes credible.

Witness is a matter both of words and of deeds; it is not just words, it is not just deeds. You will remember that in what you may call our Lord's manifesto, the passage that He read at the beginning of His ministry, according to St. Luke's Gospel, these were the words, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' The words and the deeds you see are all part of one thing. They are all the signs of the presence of the Spirit. The word illuminates the deed which would otherwise have no explanation. And the deed authenticates the word which would otherwise be incredible. But neither in itself is the witness, it is the living Holy Spirit, who can take as He will our words or our deeds, and use them or not use them as He wills for His own purpose of convicting the world. The presence of the Spirit therefore makes it possible for witness to happen, makes it possible to believe the reality of the kingdom.

V

Fifthly, according to the New Testament, the Spirit is the ground of fellowship. We are very familiar with the phrase, 'The fellowship of the Holy Spirit'. The Greek word which we translate, 'fellowship' in that phrase, is again a commercial word. It means the common ownership of several people in a single thing. If you have a plot of land and six brothers have joint shares in it, you would say in a Greek commercial document, that they had 'koinonia' in this land. It is a commercial word meaning a common interest in, a common share in a



common participation in, a property. And, the Bible teaches us that we have 'koinonia' in the Holy Spirit. We are given a common share in the one Spirit, and therefore a deep experience of fellowship based on a common debt to Jesus Christ, is the mark of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It has been so from the beginning and it is always so, that the presence of the Spirit creates this deep sense of responsibility for one another, of caring for one another, because we are together acknowledging our infinite debt to Christ.

Within that fellowship, the Spirit who in the Old Testament gave strange and remarkable gifts' to men like Samson and Bezalel, now in the New Dispensation gives the ordinary gifts that are needed for the fellowship to live and work and grow. You remember how in several places in Romans, in Ephesians, and in First Corinthians, Paul uses the metaphor of the body – the one body and the one Spirit. By the one Spirit, a great many different gifts are given to different members, so that they can function as members of the one body and use quite ordinary gifts – gifts of administration, gifts of insight, gifts of prophecy, gifts of healing, gifts of tongues, – whatever they may be, to build up the body, to help all the membership together to grow in grace and love.

Paul has a very amusing passage in First Corinthians 12, which describes exactly the way we constantly behave. The foot looks at the nose and says, 'I must say that you don't look like a foot; I think you obviously don't belong to our party; we'd better go our separate ways.' The ear looks at the mouth and says, 'This is not any kind of an ear that I ever saw; I think it would be better if we agree to differ.' This, of course, is exactly the way we behave constantly as Christians. We want to have something which is not a body with many members, but a collection of identical feet or identical ears. The result we know, all too well, in the history of the Church. The presence of the Spirit will mean a variety of gifts. It will mean that we rejoice in the gifts that have been given to other people, which we have not received; that we can rejoice as much that another person has the gift that I do not have, as in the gift that God has given me.

It seems to me that this is one of the things that we most deeply need to learn from the New Testament – this willingness to rejoice in the gifts of others, and to recognise diversity and variety within the one body, not trying to squeeze everyone into the same mould, not trying to insist that everybody must express their faith in exactly the same way or follow exactly the same pattern of piety, but acknowledging the presence of the one Spirit; acknowledging in other words, that common confession of Jesus Christ as Lord, which is the mark of the Spirit. We must be prepared to accept a tremendous amount of variety just as the New Testament itself is full of such tremendous variety.

VI

And finally, therefore, the supreme gift of the Spirit is the gift of love, love which seeks no gift for itself, but is the outflow of the love of Christ for others, and therefore rejoices in the gifts of others. That is the supreme gift, and it is given as we are broken at the cross of Christ, delivered from every attempt at self-justification, at self-sanctification and set free simply to be the grateful channels of his love for others. You have often seen the countryside at a time when the rain has failed, how carefully and exactly the small supplies of water have to be measured along the different channels, so that each field may get its due share. But then, when there has been abundant rain, and the tanks are full, there is water flowing out freely, everywhere, to water the ground in every part. That is the difference between a life lived under the Law and a life lived in the Spirit. Life under the Law is a life of bondage, a life in which we are carefully measuring the limited resources that we have, in order to give each his due. Life in the Spirit means that the tanks are full and the sluice-gates are open and the unutterable love of Christ, as we know it again and again in our own lives, when we come to Him for pardon, flows through our lives for others. That is the fulfilment of God's law. That is what human life is meant to be. And that is what is made possible by the gift of his Spirit.

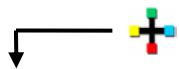
6

God in Experience

What do people mean when they talk about experience of God? There have been many times and places where that question didn't need to be asked at all, where it was taken for granted that everyone understood what is meant. You may go today into a temple and see a very simple man or woman worshipping, who seems to have no doubt whatever about the reality and importance of worship and what it means. When I was teaching a sixth form class in Conjeevaram for a number of years, a little over 25 years ago, I used to discuss all kinds of subjects with these boys, they were very proud of the fact that there was one boy in the class who claimed to be an atheist. He was thought to be the first atheist who had been seen in Conjeevaram. He was regarded as rather an important specimen. I imagine that he would be a considerably commoner phenomenon today, but I am simply saying that to remind you that probably over the greater part of human history it has been taken for granted that everybody believes in God, that experience of God in one way or another is part of human experience, and that religion is part of the established order of society. The religion varied according to what part of the world you were born into. If you happened to be born in Tibet or Ceylon, then you were a Buddhist; if you happened to be born in Saudi Arabia. then you were a Muslim; or if you happened to be born on the Island of Bali, then infallibly you were a Hindu. Equally, if you happened to be born at the right time in England or Germany you were a Christian.

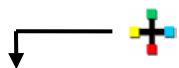
There were, in other words, and to some extent there still are, societies which the sociologists call 'sacral' societies. That is to say societies which are completely identified with a

certain conception of the sacred order, in which religion is intimately involved in, and indeed controls every



aspect of the life of society. If you are in a Muslim society of that kind, then the ultimate standard of law is the Koran, if in a Hindu society of that kind, the ultimate standard is the Codes of Manu. We are all aware of the fact that that kind of sacral society, which has been normal over the greater part of human history, has been disappearing since the 18th century if not earlier. Up till the 18th century one could say that in Europe there was that kind of a sacral society in which it was understood that society was ultimately based upon the divine revelation and the law of Moses, and in which it was assumed that everyone, practically speaking, was a Christian. Whether you were a bad man or a good man, whether you were a religious man or an irreligious man, nobody doubted that you acknowledged the existence of God. If you went to a Law Court to give evidence, you had to lay your hand on the Bible and swear in the name of God. It was simply taken for granted that in one way or another, you acknowledged the existence of God. Though you might never go to church in your life, you would be very offended if you were called an atheist.

Now we know that, for the past two and a half centuries – at least in the western world – there has been an increasingly rapid process of what is called secularisation. The sacral form of society has been breaking up. There are several aspects from which one can view that process. In the first place, it means that more and more areas of human life are surveyed and planned without any conscious reference to religion at all. You will remember the famous story of how the great astronomer Laplace presented the Emperor Napoleon with a book describing his astronomical studies; Napoleon took a quick look at it and said. ‘I don’t find anything in this book about God,’ and Laplace replied. ‘Sir I did not require that hypothesis.’ The ordinary science and increasingly the social sciences, ethics, law and politics in the western world, assumes that you do not require the hypothesis of God in order to develop a completely satisfactory and self-contained account of the world. And the realm of theory is matched by the fact, that in practice, increasingly life is organised on the basis of scientific study and research but without any explicit

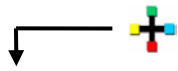


reference to religion. Secondly, one aspect of this, which is often forgotten is the rise within the societies of Western Europe and North America of Christian religious movements, which we generally call revivalist or pietist movements, which insist upon individual conversion and which regard this kind of ‘society’ religion as completely unreal, which are indifferent to these established forms of religion, which break radically with the long tradition of Christendom, and insist that religion is a matter of personal, individual decision between each man and God. Thirdly, there is the removal of the Church from a controlling position in society, in education, in public propaganda of all kinds, so that the Church has become just one of the many societies which compete for the allegiance of people.

Thus there has developed what we are now very familiar with, namely the secular type of society, in which the majority of people, profess no kind of belief in God at all. It is a minority who claim to have any kind of belief in God, and no religious view directly controls any aspect of public life. Problems are decided, not by reference to the Bible or the Koran or the Laws of Manu, but by organised research teams who take up each problem as it arises, examine it, and propose solutions which are designed to apply the latest scientific techniques to the problem in hand. You have the conception of the welfare state, in which, at its best, the object is to ensure that every person, simply as a person, whatever his religious beliefs or unbeliefs, is enabled to share as far as

possible in the benefits of modern knowledge and science. One can take the late Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru as an example of this secular spirit at its best. His speeches and writings convey at its best, I would say, this secular approach to human effort.

This process of secularisation which began in Europe perhaps in the 18th century has now become a worldwide process, indeed the process by which the world is being united into a single society, where in every corner of the world people are being drawn out of their villages into cities which are basically similar, into whichever part of the world you go. Whether you go to Tokyo or Jakarta or Sydney or Calcutta or Johannesburg or London or Chicago,



you have basically the same kind of society working on the same propositions, knit together by the same network of commerce and communications and ideas, fundamentally a single human secularised society which is organised without any reference to any alleged religious beliefs or revelations and for whom belief in God is a purely personal matter, which has no public significance.

Now let me make two comments on this process of secularisation. In the first place, let us recognise the fact that it is on the one hand a process of liberation, that it has meant, and does mean, that countless people are liberated out of the bondage of all kinds of ancient religious customs and prohibitions and taboos, and enabled to develop a life of freedom which was impossible for them before. I am not forgetting the other side of the picture. I am not forgetting that this process of secularisation can lead to a total emptiness, a total loss of meaning in which men become lost, and finally hand themselves over to some new kind of ideology, to enslave them again. I am not forgetting that. But it does remain true that this process of secularisation has meant liberation for many people from the bonds of a sacral society. A secular society at its best is concerned to see that every human person, – simply as a human person – is given the dignity and respect that is due to him, and that the resources of the community are used to do what he needs as far as is possible.

Secondly, it is not an accident that this tremendous movement of secularisation followed the re-discovery of the Bible in Europe. As you know, the Reformation and the inventing of the printing press meant that for the first time the Bible became, in Europe, the book of the ordinary man. For millions of ordinary people it was the only book, the only book that they read constantly. And there can be no question whatever, I think, that the roots of secularisation lie in the Bible. In the great prophetic tradition of the Bible, there is a constant attack upon religion, upon the forms of religion, upon the forms of what I have called a sacral society, in the interests of justice, freedom and equality for the ordinary man.

Let me out of the hundreds of passages that I could read, remind you only of one or two. Listen to this from



the Book of Isaiah when he is talking to the religious people of his time: ‘What use to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?’ says the Lord. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of he-goats. When you come to appear before me who requires of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moons and sabbaths and the calling of assemblies – I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hates. They have become a burden to me, and I am weary of bearing them. When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves

clean, cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow' (Isaiah 1: 11-17). You see here a radical attack upon religion in the name of ordinary responsibility for your fellowman.

Again in the 58th chapter of the Book of Isaiah, on the subject of fasting, 'Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a rush and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house, when you see the naked to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?' (Isaiah 58: 5-7 R.S.V.). Again, you see a radical attack upon the paraphernalia of religion in the name of simple responsibility for your fellowman.

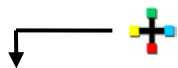
And then, in the New Testament, we find the sentence which might almost be called the charter of secularisation, the radical word of our Lord regarding the sabbath which was, almost the corner-stone of religion as far as the Jews of His time were concerned. He said 'The sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath.' One cannot imagine a more radically secularising saying than that.



The roots of this process of secularisation lie in this Book, and it is not a surprise that this whole movement gathered momentum in proportion as this Book became the book of the ordinary man in Western Europe.

Let me speak about this process under two headings first of all it means that there is, so to speak, an appeal to God beyond religion, and secondly that it is concerned with man and the justice due to man. Now let me spend a little time on both aspects of this. In the first place, it is an appeal to God beyond religion. From the point of view of the prophets and of the whole Biblical tradition, God is always, so to speak, beyond our religion. He is the living God. He can never be domesticated. He can never become something of which you can say 'we have got it where we want it.' If I may put it almost blasphemously – he does not come when we whistle. He is not at our disposal. He is always ahead of us and the very things which in one generation are the forms by which he makes himself known to us, can become in the next generation the means by which he hides himself from us. The places where our fathers met him can be the places where he hides from us. Again and again in the Old Testament you find that process repeated. You find moreover that the godly men of the Old Testament, the writers of the Psalms for instance, are constantly complaining that they cannot find God, that God has been removed from them, that he is hiding his face from them. They plead with God. It is not in any way a kind of 'taken for granted' affair, that you do this or that and there is God. It is not something that you can turn on and turn off when you want.

The same conviction is repeated in the language of all the great masters of the spiritual life. Over and over again in the great classical writings of Christian devotion, you will find these warnings, that if you take seriously the life of prayer you must expect to go through times when everything seems dark, when God seems to withdraw his presence from you and where you are summoned to go forward in faith without seeing anything. The great, wonderful Never-to-be-forgotten moments of religious experience, the great moments when God was *there* and you knew he was there, and he answered your prayer, and he

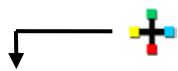


wrought miracles for you, these great moments – we remember them, we go back to them, we re-enact them in the rites of the Church, – but there is always also the danger that we turn these

things into forms which stand between us and the reality of the living God. God is always more than, greater than, more challenging than, anything that we have, as it were, within our own experience and under our own control. That is why you have the kind of language that I read to you from the book of Isaiah, and that is why in our own time that modern martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a strange sentence which has haunted the thinking of Christians ever since: – ‘God is calling us in our generation to live as if God did not exist.’ I believe that when Bonhoeffer said that, he was in line with the great prophets. He was referring to the forms of religion, (especially perhaps the forms that belong to the days when we had a Christian sacral society, the days when Christianity was the established religion) and saying that we are being called to go beyond that, to go out into the ordinary secular world, not with a religious label on us, but simply to play our part as grateful sinners redeemed by Christ, in meeting the needs of men, not protected, by any religious forms, not insisting, that the label ‘Christian’ be over us and over all that we do, but simply, as it were, anonymously, going out into the ordinary world of men’s needs, and there seeking to honour and serve all men. I think, as I have said, that when he said that, Bonhoeffer was in the line of the great prophets.

I think that Bishop Robinson has misread Bonhoeffer because he has put all the stress on the second half of the sentence. It is a very paradoxical sentence. Bonhoeffer says God is calling us to live as if God did not exist. Now I think Robinson has put all the stress on the second half of the sentence, ‘as if God did not exist,’ but I think that Bonhoeffer was absolutely serious about the first part of the sentence, that it is God, the living God, who is calling us to live like that. Therefore in all Bonhoeffer’s other writings there is a tremendous stress on the matter of personal discipleship to Jesus Christ.

No one who has read his book, *The Cost of Discipleship* can forget the tremendous emphasis he laid upon the

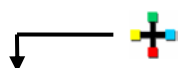


inner life of obedience, upon the life of prayer, of personal discipleship. If I quote two definitions of the Christian life from Bonhoeffer I think you will see what I mean. In one place he defines the Christian life as allowing Christ to conform us to himself, the incarnate, crucified, and risen One, and in another place he defines the Christian life as living in the faith that our life is outside of ourselves and in Jesus Christ. I think that what Bonhoeffer was doing was to call us beyond the traditional, religious forms in which we can become enclosed, and which can become an escape from meeting with the living God, in order that we might be called to a more costly personal discipleship with him. Now that can never be easy; it can indeed be desolating to go through the feeling that God has left you and that you can no longer find Him. Yet it has been the experience at one time or another of most of those who have most sincerely tried to serve God, of God’s choicest saints.

When that happens to you, I think that there are two things that you must remember. One is that God is teaching you, that he wants you to take a step forward, that he wants you to walk by faith, that he wants you to depend less upon the feelings of his presence, upon the emotions, upon the certainties that perhaps you had at an earlier time, and to walk simply by faith, trusting him when you cannot see anything. That is part of our training in discipleship. And secondly, in such a time, there is only one thing to be done, and that is to devote yourself more simply, more humbly, more faithfully to following Jesus. It means going on simply in the path of discipleship, finding the next thing that he wants you to do in the ordinary secular world with your neighbours. And as you do it, I think, you find that he is with you again, and that he gives you enough assurance to go onward.

Very fundamental to the whole Biblical picture of the Christian life is the image of the pilgrim people marching through the desert. You remember that in that march sometimes the people were allowed to camp in one place for several months, sometimes they only camped for

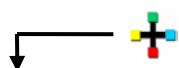
one night, sometimes for a few days, but the point is they could never settle down permanently. The day always came when



the pillar of cloud moved on, and they had to follow. That is the life of faith. You cannot settle down in one place. You cannot have God where you want him, (excuse me putting it so crudely!). God is always ahead, always beyond, always calling you forward, always giving you as much as you need to carry on with, but withdrawing it when you don't need it, and when it is time for you to learn again to walk by faith. Therefore the Christian life is an adventure, in which you are constantly being challenged to go forward beyond anything that you had previously understood.

The second aspect of secularisation which I spoke of, is that it places the emphasis on man simply as man, on man irrespective of his religious allegiance. I remind you of what I said yesterday, about what it means to be reconciled to God through the cross: it means in the last analysis simply that we are able to be human, that we are able to be a human being, as God intends a human being to be, that is to say, a being who echoes, who responds to God's own unending gift of love. A human being in God's intention is a person who gives himself to his neighbour as God gives himself to us, a person who is responsible for his neighbour as God accepts responsibility for us. That is the picture that is given to us, (and again I repeat last night's message) in the story of the anonymous man in the ditch about whom we know nothing, except that he was in need, and the Samaritan, who is not a religious man, or a churchman at all, but just a person who accepts responsibility for the other man. There, says Jesus, the law of God is being fulfilled.

That is what it means to be a human being, to accept responsibility for your brother-man, whoever he is. There is a sentence in one of Oswald Chambers' devotional books which I cannot quote exactly, but it runs something like this. He refers to somebody being 'so completely holy as to be absolutely unnoticeable.' That sentence always struck me. The real mark of holiness from the Biblical point of view would be to be quite unnoticeable. A real servant is anonymous; he does not draw attention to himself; all that happens is that the job gets done He is unnoticed. Isn't that one of the marks of true holiness in the Christian sense, that we do not draw attention to ourselves, but simply



see that the job gets done? I once heard a story which I am sure was not true, that somebody had seen a pile of wooden crates of milk powder on the dockside in Bombay, which were labelled 'Methodist milk for Methodist babies.' I am sure this was not true, but it does at least make the point that I am making that the business of Christians is not to draw attention to themselves! The job must be done in humble service wherever they are in the world, in the secular world, taking responsibility for other people, taking responsibility for their neighbour.

Now, of course, if I say *that* I know immediately the question that will be in the minds of many of you, because I have heard this question asked, quite rightly asked, several times since I came here. 'What then is the meaning of putting the word "Christian" into the title of this hospital? Why should it not simply be "The Vellore Hospital"?' Now that question can be asked on various levels. On the lowest possible level it can be asked by somebody who has got a grudge because of something which has happened to him, and wants to know how a hospital that treated him like this can be called 'Christian.' I am not going to answer it on that level. But it can be asked on a serious level, as an objective question. I heard the Bishop of Middleton say in a meeting, not many days ago, when he happened to be listening to a discussion about Christian hospitals, 'I would no sooner think of starting a Christian hospital than a Christian atomic power

station.’ A very good friend of mine, Principal, C. H. Hwang, was the Chinese Principal of a very fine theological seminary in Taiwan. I have repeatedly heard him say something like this: – ‘When the first missionaries came to Taiwan, 100 years ago, there were no modern medical services whatever in the island. They brought medical services, they founded two mission hospitals, and they were genuinely witnesses of the power of God through these hospitals. But now the State has accepted the responsibility for healing. There are now 47 State hospitals in Taiwan. It is therefore absolutely stupid for the Christian hospitals to go, on running as Christian hospitals. Their job is done. They have brought the blessing of modern healing to Taiwan; they should be satisfied that their job is done, that others have taken up

the job. They should close down these hospitals and go on and do something else of a pioneering kind that nobody else is doing.’ There are many very able Christians who take that view. I myself was recently asked to attend an international meeting of Christian doctors. I had to give an introductory paper, and in my paper I took this line. I questioned the whole propriety of having what we call Christian hospitals. But in a week’s meeting this very able group of Christian doctors came to the opposite conclusion. They came to the conclusion that there was a place for continuing to run Christian hospitals, and basically for two reasons.

Firstly, because a Christian hospital is, or can be, a place where Christians corporately carry on the healing work of Jesus in his name and in the power of his Spirit. You cannot, I think, dismiss that as an improper idea. Let me say to you very frankly, as an outsider coming to visit you, that it seems to me that people come to Vellore, to the Christian Medical hospital, for treatment from all over India, not just because of the high technical standards which are internationally known, but for another reason, which you know very well. Whatever the faults of this institution – and I am sure that it has many – there is here a standard of personal care and devotion and concern for each person which becomes known and valued. And you all share in the keeping up of these standards, all of you, whether you be Christians or Muslims or Hindus or people of no particular faith. This is all your corporate responsibility together, today but you know, and I know, that it has something to do with the faith of the people who originally founded this institution.

Secondly, the Tübingen doctors said that there are problems, mysteries, perplexities, about the whole business of healing, or living and dying, to which secular medicine in itself has no answers and upon which the Christian gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus does throw light. The human person is, as we all know, much more than a series of gadgets which require to be serviced from time to time. There are mysteries which are illuminated by the Christian faith, by the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore there should be places and

opportunities in which those who share that faith can work together, to explore the bearing of that faith upon the whole matter of healing. They should be able to explore the implications of the faith, that healing in the name of Christ means something more than just restoring a disordered organism to balance and order again. It means enabling it to be taken up into and to become part of the victorious invasion of Christ into the world of evil and sin and death, to become part of that which is the ultimate answer to the problem of death.

Now, as I said, there are two possible views about this subject, and Christians are on different sides in this debate. But it does seem to me that there is a place for this kind of distinctively Christian enterprise that these doctors spoke about. It seems to me, moreover, that you people here in Vellore can do more than any other group anywhere in the world – and I say

that not lightly but advisedly, – can do more than any other group anywhere in the world to help that discussion forward, to explore the possibilities that are suggested in the findings of these doctors, and to show us whether it is or is not true that there are specifically Christian insights regarding the whole issue of healing that can be brought to bear upon the practical life of a hospital like this.

But meanwhile I would say one or two things of a very practical kind. The first is that all of you here share a common purpose for this hospital, that it be a place where the human person is cared for as a person, whoever he is, whether he be rich or poor, whether he be Muslim, Hindu, Christian, whatever he be, – cared for with the honour and respect which is due to one made in the image of God; and where research and study are carried forward with the fullest honesty and integrity and seriousness in the belief that it matters that ignorance be overcome and knowledge extended. Secondly, that within the whole body of the staff there is a group of Christians who have the duty of continuously doing two things: (a) trying to understand and interpret their faith as it bears on the life of the hospital; and (b) inviting all others on the staff to share with them in this task of interpretation. And thirdly, there is the wider body of the staff who may be of any faith, or of no religious



faith, who have freely decided to work here, and who share in the overall purpose of the hospital. And I would say, if I may be bold enough, a very simple word to both of these groups. To the Christians I would say, for God's sake, let us have no arrogance, no trace of the feeling that if you are a Christian this means that you are better than other people, or that you are in some sense God's favourites; let us set ourselves to see that none of that kind of arrogance exists in us, that we remember that to be a Christian means simply that God has chosen us for a particular job, that God has chosen this particular group to be the witnesses to Jesus Christ in this place. Your non-Christian colleague may be a much better man than you are. He may be much more pleasing to God than you are. And, if so, you will humbly learn from him and thank God that he has put him beside you. And you will also remember that you, unworthy as you are, are a Christian, because God called you to be in that place, and to represent Jesus Christ in that place, to bear witness to Jesus Christ in that place.

To the non-Christian, let me humbly say something like this: Don't look at us Christians, please. We are not worth looking at. But do look at Jesus. Look at Him and don't ask us to accept the dogma that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are good. Don't ask us to believe the dogma that all religions are really the same because they are not. It is only possible to insist that they are all the same by not looking at any of them: and that is what is usually done. We have to study and find out what in fact they actually say, and that means coming face to face with Jesus Christ as He is given to us in the New Testament. And help us to understand your faith, for only when we have done that are we in a position to say truly that Jesus is unique. I believe that we Christians are ready to repent of our arrogance which we have indeed been guilty of. But we are not prepared to live in the night where all cats are grey and where it is a matter of official dogma that everything is the same as everything else. Do not ask us to accent that. We are living in a secular society. Even in this College which has the name 'Christian' over the door we are living in a secular society, that is to say, in a society where religion is not determined in advance, not part of the

establishment, a society in which our religious faith must be profoundly personal – a personal, a deeply experienced communion with God. The necessary corollary of a secular society is a deepened personal religion.

To speak of a deepened personal religion must not mean to speak of an escape into another world which enables us to leave this world behind. That is false religion. But, secondly, it does not mean becoming so involved in this world that we are simply part of this world, with nothing to give to it. The centre of the personal religion of the Christian as of everything else for the Christian, is the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the cross is the place where both the separation of God from the world and the identification of God with the world are at their absolute maximum. On the one hand, the separation of God from the world – because in the rejection and betrayal and death of Jesus Christ we see supremely the antagonism of the world to God, the estrangement of the world from God, the rebellion of the world against God. And yet in his humble acceptance of that, right up to the very end, we see God's utter identification of Himself with this rebellious and estranged world. It is here and here alone that the true heart of personal religion must lie. This alone is the place where we know how to be related to the world. The centre of all our personal religion as Christians is in the sacrament of Holy Communion where, week by week, we are invited to be identified again with Jesus, in his dying and rising, where he says to us 'Take, eat, this is my body: this is my blood shed for you; this is me, take it, eat it, be part of it, share it with me, be partakers with me. I want you to be with me in this; wholly identified with me.' That is the invitation that is given to us each time we come to the Lord's Supper and we are enabled in that to renew our communion with Christ in whom God, who is not of this world, has come to the world, to be its Saviour.

It is relatively easy to run away from the world and to try to find a refuge in another world. It is relatively easy to be so immersed in the world that we are simply part of it with nothing to give to it. Christ invites us to be so completely identified with him to be so one with him, who gave himself to the world and yet is not of the world, that

we may be sharers with him in that reconciling ministry: with the Christ who is not of the world, because he is utterly pure, wholly true, and loving, but Christ who is utterly *given* to the world in complete identification with the world to be its Saviour. When we live in that communion with Christ, which certainly means agony, perplexity, suffering, wrestling, and darkness, we discover in a wonderful way that God, our Father, is overruling everything in such a way that we are not lost, that we are not left without any sign-posts on the way, that we have little answers to prayer and even big answers to prayer, assurances as we go along that He has things in His hand, and on the other hand, that the Holy Spirit is going before us, preparing the way for us to go. Thus we go forward in Christ, identified with Christ, knowing that the Father overrules all things, and knowing that the Spirit prepares the way for us.

Everything that I am trying to say is summed up in words that Jesus used in the prayer on the night of his passion, the prayer for his disciples. 'I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth, thy word is truth. And as thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself that they also may be consecrated in truth.'

7

CONVERSION

I have chosen as the theme for the last of these talks, 'conversion,' and everybody knows that 'conversion' is a prickly subject. It is a word which arouses fear and suspicion. And it is so because it is the point at which discussion about a religious matter moves over to the point of decision. Obviously, one can continue an academic discussion about religious questions for a very long time. Some people would be willing, I think, to spend all eternity in that occupation. And there is need for academic, objective, impartial discussion of religious matters. We need to be willing to look objectively and impartially at what the different religions teach, and to try to understand it. But there comes a point at which you cannot remain on the level of debate, there comes a point at which a decision has to be made, a commitment has to be made. Otherwise the discussion becomes futile and a waste of time. If that point, when it comes, is evaded, then truth is lost, and the whole point of the enquiry is lost.

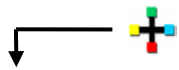
I was interested in reading recently a remark by a Marxist, who was one of those in Prague, in Czechoslovakia, engaged in regular discussions with Christians. Prague and Paris are about the only two places in the world that I know where really serious discussions between Marxists and Christians are going on. One of the Marxist participants in these discussions remarked, 'The only kind of Christian who interests me is the one who is trying to convert me'. You can see his point. If Christianity is just a set of ideas which have had a venerable past, and which it would be interesting for me to study as a part of history or as a part of anthropology, or as part of the history of religion, then I really don't have time for that study. But if the Christian thinks that he has got hold of something which it is vital for me to understand, if he thinks that he has got hold of

the answer to some of the questions that I cannot answer, if he really thinks that he has got in his faith something that is a matter of life and death for me, then I am interested, and I am willing to listen. I think it is not an accident that that remark came from a Marxist and not from anybody else, because in many ways Marxism is the most living missionary religion of our time; at any rate, whatever you think about it, Marxism is a living faith, which when people believe, they believe it passionately and costingly, and therefore they know what they are talking about; they know what it means to be converted and to become a Marxist. The plain fact is that too much religious discussion is not concerned with a living faith at all; is not concerned with anything that anybody would be willing to die for, but rather with the more or less fossilised remains of ancient beliefs.

I think we have frankly to admit that a great deal of religious discussion is exactly of that kind. It often reminds me of the people whom you see up on the top of a pylon carrying a power line, coolly adjusting the wires and insulators. You know perfectly well that they are up there because the current has been turned off. If for a moment they thought the current had been turned on, they would be down on the ground immediately. A good deal of religious discussion is really carried out coolly and comfortably because the current has been turned off, because there is nothing with any real power in it. Therefore, I think it is significant that it is the Marxist who says 'the only kind of Christian that I am interested in talking to is a Christian who wants to convert me.'

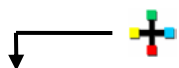
But in any case, under any circumstances, conversion is bound to be a prickly issue, because if you talk about conversion, you are really making very concrete the claim that what you are talking about is true, and is true in a decisive sense which requires you to give up something which is not true. But there are two factors which make this question of conversion even more

difficult than it would otherwise be. The first is that the problem of conversion has constantly arisen in the history of the world, and still does arise, at the point where you have the clash of two religious cultures. I was talking last night about sacral



societies, societies in which religion is an integral part of the whole social, political, legal, cultural structure. When you have the clash of societies in that stage of evolution, and when conquering society is imposing itself upon another society, it constantly has happened in the past that the conquering society takes it for granted that as part of this process it will also impose its religious beliefs upon the people which it has invaded. We all know how many examples of that there are in history. Probably all the religions of the world have been guilty at one time or another, when they had the power and the opportunity, of doing exactly that, of using the power of a whole culture, not perhaps military power, but the power of culture, of law, of economic pressure and so forth, to impose their religious beliefs upon a people who were for the time being weaker than they. When this is the case, it follows naturally that for the weaker people, or for the people which is being invaded to resist conversion is part of loyalty to its own people. It becomes a matter of patriotic duty. It is in that sense that Mahatma Gandhi viewed the whole subject of conversion. He viewed it as part of the imposition of an alien culture upon India, and though, as we all know, Mahatma Gandhi had the most intense personal respect for, and devotion to, Jesus, and was a constant reader of the New Testament, he resisted the whole concept of conversion as something which was basically anti-national. This kind of situation is less and less frequent, and will become less and less frequent as we move in general towards a secular type of society, but it can still happen in our own days, as for instance, in the very recent past it was happening in Ceylon, where it seemed that a really national effort to impose Buddhism as the faith of the nation was being made.

That is the first complication. The second complication arises from the use of unfair means to bring about conversion. We have all read about or heard about examples or situations in which some person or some religious organisation took advantage of the weakness of the other party to put over his religious beliefs. Weakness may be of various kinds, economic, cultural, or psychological, but we have all at least heard of cases where this kind of thing happens, and we know



that sometimes unfair arguments and unfair tricks are used to try to persuade a person to accept the truth of another religion and to be converted. Now, both of these, I think, we must recognise as distortions which must be condemned, and with which we can have no sympathy.

I think that it is part of the duty of Christians to work all the time' for a genuinely secular society, in which the question of religious truth can be faced squarely and openly as a question of religious truth, dissociated from coercion in any shape or form, dissociated from the pressure of one kind of society upon another. This is the kind of secular society for which we ought all to be working, a society in which questions of religious truth can be frankly and openly faced.

But that means also that the Christian must resist the imposition of the dogma that all religions are the same, and that therefore conversion is either meaningless or wrong. There have been efforts to impose that kind of dogma, and, if you examine it, you will see that, of course, under the cloak of neutrality, it is really a particular form of religious belief. If you examine the doctrine that all religions are really the same, whether you find it for instance in the writings of Vivekananda or in those of Dr. Radhakrishnan, you will find that it rests upon a particular view of religion, a view of religion which Christians believe to be wrong. And those who want a

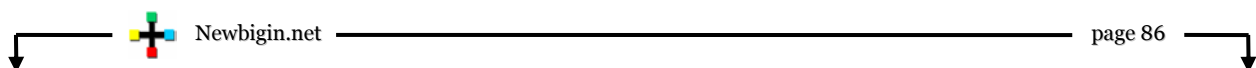
genuinely secular society must therefore resist also this attempt to impose this particular religious dogma which would destroy the genuine secularity of society. The Christian, in other words, must be on his guard, alert all the time to safeguard the freedom of religion, not only his own religion, but even more, other people's. The test of the sincerity of the Christian at this point will be in safeguarding the freedom of others (who are not Christians) to propagate their faith, to practise their faith, to seek convince others of the truth of their faith, and indeed not only of the adherents of other religions, but also of those who believe in no religion.

I want now to turn to what the Bible says on the subject of conversion. The actual words 'convert' and 'conversion' are very rarely used in our English translations, but the idea is present under several different forms. First



of all, in the Old Testament, in the Hebrew word, 'shub' the basic idea of conversion is 'to return.' You will remember how constantly the prophets were appealing to the people to return to the Lord, to return to the covenant, to be converted and return. We remember that the Hebrews, in spite of the fact that they had been so wonderfully delivered, guided and provided for, were constantly backsliding, constantly straying away from the lines that Moses and the prophets had laid down for them, were constantly going after those false gods which are no gods. Again and again the call of the prophets was addressed to them, 'Return to the Lord; turn round and come back again. Don't go on down the track that you are going. It does not lead anywhere. Turn round and come back again!' That is the essential meaning of conversion in the Old Testament. Moreover the Old Testament prophets sadly recognised that, although the whole people were redeemed and consecrated to be the people of God, it was only a minority that would be converted. As Isaiah says, 'a remnant will return' or you can translate it equally, 'a remnant will be converted.' Here the call to conversion is addressed to God's people, not to pagans, not to those outside. To those who are within the covenant, the call is addressed 'to return to the Lord,' 'to return to the way of life'. Yet it is only a minority that will heed that call. We remember that very moving prayer of Elijah when he was praying that the fire might come down upon his offering on Mount Carmel; he says, 'Hear, oh Lord, that this people may know that Thou hast turned their hearts back.' Conversion is the work of God. It is He who turns the heart back again.

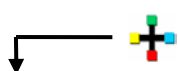
This Old Testament call to return is continued in the preaching of John the Baptist. Here, of course, we have a word in Greek which is not exactly the same as the Hebrew word, but of which the fundamental meaning is the same. John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and the literal meaning of the Greek word which is translated 'repentance,' is 'changing your mind.' It is again the idea that the mind is going in a certain direction,



and it is turned around and made to face in another direction. The godly Jews of that time, who were sure that they were the children of Abraham and children of the covenant, had to be told that they were on the wrong track, that they needed a radical turning round, and that they needed to repent. That was the essential message of John's preaching.

This was carried forward in the preaching of Jesus. According to St. Mark, the first word of Jesus' preaching was as follows: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel.' When you read that sentence and you hear 'believe in the gospel' you immediately think of what we mean by 'the gospel' which then did not exist. Let us please remember that what that really means is 'believe the good news I am telling you,' so that the whole sentence really means something like this: 'You are all expecting the kingdom of God; you

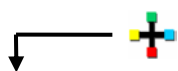
are all waiting for this righteous King who is to come and rule the world, but you are all facing in the wrong direction. You cannot see it. You will have to turn round, the whole lot of you, and then only you will see that that kingdom has begun to come, that it has dawned, that the King is actually coming into the hall, so to speak, but you are all facing round the wrong way. You will have to turn round, and then only can you believe the good news that I tell you.' This, in a very rough paraphrase, is what that first sermon of Jesus means: 'You have to face the opposite way. You have been waiting and hoping and praying for a long time, but what you hope for is not coming from that direction. You have to turn right round. You have to be converted. You have to face a quite different way.' We know how very hard it was for His hearers to accept that, as it would have been for us. It is not a matter just of an internal mental attitude. It is a total turning round of the mind which leads to a different kind of action to a different way of living, to a different type of engagement with the world. The kind of difference is indicated in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus sketches, so to speak, the meaning of this kingdom that is coming and the direction therefore in which they will have to look and act, if they are not just going to be passed by.



But this preaching of Jesus is not just a broadcast invitation, to which those interested may apply. There is an R.S.V.P. on this card. There is a specific call to certain people. Jesus didn't just issue a general invitation and the number of acceptances happened to add up to twelve. He *chose* twelve people, and we see in the verses immediately following the way it began. Passing along the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother, casting a net in the sea, for they were fishermen. Jesus said, 'Follow me and I will make you to become fishers of men,' and immediately they left their nets and followed Him. You can almost see Jesus, so to speak, converting them literally. They are busy with their boats, and Jesus, as it were, turns them round and says, 'Now you come after me.' It is His choice. As He said later to those disciples, 'You did not choose me, I chose you.' His decision was to call a specific number of men, twelve men representing the twelve tribes of Israel, but His purpose in calling them was that they should call others. I will make you fishers of men.' They were to go out and sound the same call to conversion.

We see three points here which are very vital for true understanding of conversion. First of all, that the call is addressed to all; secondly, that those whom God actually converts are few; and thirdly, that those whom He converts are converted not for their own sake but for the sake of all. If we hold those three points in mind through all our thinking about conversion, we may save some of the mistakes that have often been made on his subject.

If we go on from the Gospel of St. Mark, into the Acts of the Apostles, we see that after the crucifixion and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, essentially the same thing is revealed. There is a call to a radical turning round at the end of Peter's sermon to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, when he tells them that they have been guilty of the terrible sin of crucifying God's Messiah. We read 'when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" and Peter said to them, "Repent. Turn round, change your mind. Repent and be baptised, all of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit".'



In the same way, when we go on to read of the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles, who were right outside of the Jewish community, we have basically the same idea. When Paul meets the people of Lystra and they want to do *puja* to him, because they think he is a god, he gets very

worried, and tells them to stop all this nonsense, and then he says, 'We are also men of like nature with you, and bring you good news that you should turn from these vain things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth.' Similarly, when he writes to the Church in Thessalonica, he says, 'You are people who turned from idols to serve the living God.' It is the same idea of a radical turning round, leaving a certain direction and going in a different direction.

As soon as this call to conversion began to go out all over the world, the question of course arose as to what is to be the result of conversion. What is to be expected of people who are converted? What will be the marks of people who are converted, and very specially the tremendously urgent question came up, what about these Gentiles? Are they to become like Jews, are they to become like the people of Israel, in order that they may share in God's covenant? There was a tremendous debate on that subject, in which St. Paul fought a tremendous action against those who took that view. Finally, the matter was settled by a unanimous decision which was described as follows: 'It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things – that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these things you will do well.' In other words, the final decision was that the whole Law of Moses, the whole religion of the old Israel was not to be imposed upon the new converts, neither circumcision nor the Sabbath nor any other of the Jewish festivals, nor the apparatus of Jewish religion was to be imposed upon these Gentiles. They were to be simply 'gentiles in Christ.'

Now that phrase would have seemed to be an absolute contradiction in terms to a pious Jew of a previous era; the Gentiles were those who were outside the field of religion,



outside of God's covenant. It seemed incredible that you could be converted except by coming right inside the covenant, becoming a Jew, and accepting the whole religious apparatus of Judaism. But when it came to the final show-down, the young Church decided against that; and they did so for the very simple reason that the same gift of the Holy Spirit which they had received, the same freedom, the same release, the same sonship, was given also to these pagan Gentiles. Therefore they concluded that God was quite free to deal with these people, too, without going round by the way of Judaism; it was not necessary to impose upon these converts all the religion of Judaism. To be converted doesn't mean that.

What then did it mean to be converted? (in the New Testament, I mean). I think that if you ask that question you find that there were essentially three things that were involved in being converted. I will call them: a personal commitment, a pattern of conduct, and a recognisable fellowship. Let me take each of these three. The first is a personal commitment, a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, a personal commitment without reserve to Him, to the Son of God, 'who loved me and gave himself for me,' as St. Paul said. This is the heart of the matter, this final surrendering of the self to the person of Jesus Christ; this is the heart of what conversion means. It means saying, 'Lord, I put my whole life into your hands for now and for ever. Whatever happens, whatever comes, do with me what you will. I am yours.' Now, of course, when a person says that, he doesn't yet know all that it will involve; he cannot know. But that decision is fundamental, the personal commitment to Jesus as Lord.

Secondly, there is what I have called 'a pattern of conduct,' and I call it that because it is that and not a law. Conversion, according to the New Testament, does not mean that you are brought under another set of laws. It means that you are delivered in order to be at the service of your neighbour. But one does have to say more than that. The New Testament does not just leave it there. It doesn't impose a whole new complicated legislation, but it does give patterns, pointers, suggestions of what it means to be converted. As I said before, you have that in the

Sermon on the Mount. You cannot turn the Sermon on the Mount into a legal code that can be applied like an Act of Parliament. It isn't that. It is a pattern, an outline, a series of hints of what it means to be converted. The same is true of the moral advice that St. Paul gives at the end of his letters. These are not codes of law, but they are sketches of what it means to be wholly committed to Christ. And with them, there are also warnings; there are certain kinds of conduct which are incompatible with commitment to Jesus; certain things which finally exclude a man from God's fellowship. But again, it is not a legal code which you can carry out a hundred per cent and say at the end of the day, 'I have done it all.'

What is given to us in the New Testament isn't a legal code, but is, so to speak, an outline. But the freedom which is sketched for us is not an aimless freedom. It isn't just freedom to do anything; it is a very disciplined freedom. There is a wonderful passage in First Corinthians, Chapter 9, where I think St. Paul illustrates this in a wonderfully clear way. He says, 'Though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews, I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law, I became as one under the law – though not myself under the law – that I might win those under the law; to those outside the law, I became as one outside the law – not being without law towards God, but under the law of Christ – that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some.'

That might look like just completely unlimited freedom, but it isn't. Listen how he goes on: 'Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly. I do not box as one beating the air, but I pommel my body and subdue it lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.' The freedom of which St. Paul is speaking here is the disciplined freedom of an athlete who knows where he is going, who is free in

regard to how he gets there, but who knows where' he is going and therefore bends every nerve and gives every ounce of strength that he has in getting there.

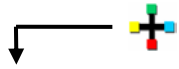
A commitment, a personal commitment to Jesus, a pattern of conduct, and then thirdly a visible companionship. It is quite obvious that those whom Jesus called and turned to himself formed a visible fellowship – his companions who went around with him. And it is equally true that after the Day of Pentecost, the disciples' were, in the same way, a visible companionship, although more and more scattered. There is a verse which describes what this visible companionship meant for those who accepted the message (Acts 2: 41): 'Those who received his word were baptised and there were added that day about three thousand souls, and they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers'. The essentials of what is involved in this visible companionship are found in those verses. It is a visible fellowship in which these five elements all helped to ensure that it was centred in Jesus, and not somewhere else.

First of all, they were baptised. They followed the example of Jesus who humbly went down into the river Jordan and accepted baptism, baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and who spoke of His own death as a baptism which we must share. In accepting baptism they were, as it were, accepting for themselves the death and resurrection of Jesus. They were being baptised into His death and into His resurrection.

Secondly, they abode in the Apostles' teaching; they listened to what the Apostles had to say about who Jesus was, what he had said, what he had done. That remains also one of the

essential marks of the visible companionship. The testimony of the Apostles, as we have it in the New Testament, which the Church has treasured through all the centuries, is the way by which our thinking is kept centred in Jesus.

Thirdly, 'in the Apostles' fellowship' was not just any kind of group. It was a group gathered round the Apostles. It was that group to whom Jesus had said, 'By this men will know that you are my disciples, that you love one another.'

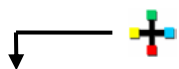


Fourthly, 'the breaking of bread,' the re-enacting of the scene in the Upper Room when Jesus had said, 'Take, eat, this is my body. Drink this. This is my blood of the New Testament.' Meeting week after week to accept that invitation, they were made again partakers in the dying and rising of Jesus, sharers in his offering of himself to the Father.

And finally 'the prayers', the life of prayer, corporate and private, in which the whole body shares, and of which the model is the prayer that we know as 'Our Father.....'

These five marks, baptism, abiding in the Apostles' teaching and in their fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers, form the very loose structure within which a continuing fellowship could go on after Jesus was no longer physically in their midst, and could remain a fellowship genuinely centred in the life, the teaching, the dying and the rising of Jesus. Now this very simple structure has down the history of the Church been constantly added to, complicated, and distorted, so that very often it has seemed that the body that went by the name of the Church of Jesus Christ was an enormous complicated machine, weighted down with the burdens of the centuries. But in truth, in its essence, it is marked by these five simple elements of outward form, and within these there is freedom for the Spirit to operate.

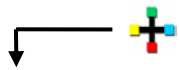
Let me again sum up these three points which, as I think, marked the content of conversion in the New Testament: a personal commitment to Jesus, a pattern of conduct, and a visible fellowship. This is still the essential meaning of conversion. This is what it means to be converted: it means to accept these. The call to conversion is first of all, as it was in the Old Testament, to those who already bear the name of Christ, who are already Christians. Let us not forget that, that the call to conversion is first of all to those who bear the name of Christ, but who have not made that personal commitment, or who have fallen away from it or grown slack and cold in it. Therefore, to you my Christian friends here in this College, I put this to you in the context of your life and work here; conversion means for you being turned round towards Jesus, so that in every aspect of the life of this College and



Hospital, you are yourselves part of God's healing and up-building work. During this week that we have been here, you have talked freely about some of the problems and difficulties that you face, and we are grateful to have been able to share some of these with you; perhaps now at the end of the week it is fair to request that each of you should ask, 'Am I part of the problem, or am I a part of God's answer to the problem?' To be converted means to be so turned round that you are part of God's answer to the problems that human sin and weakness create for every living fellowship.

Secondly, God's invitation to be converted, to be turned round, goes also to all who do not bear the name of Christ. To you also, my patient hearers of Hindu or Muslim or other faiths, who have attended these meetings so faithfully, you are already looking to Jesus, or you would not have come to these meetings. To be converted means for you, I think, to let Jesus have the last word in regard to your life, to let him have the full surrender of your life, to let him have the key that unlocks the inner chamber of your house. That in its simplest way is what conversion means,

and everything else follows. And if he does come in, (and it is you, not I or anyone else, who can settle that question) if he comes in, he will show you the way by which he means you to walk, and give you the light that you need to walk in it.



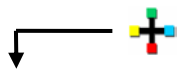
8

AND THUS TO THE RACE

‘Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God’ (Heb. 12: 1 – 2 R.S.V.).

The congregation to whom this letter was written, as far as we know, was a congregation that had great achievements to its credit in the past; it had suffered; it had accomplished; it had been a great witness to Christ. But there was a danger of its slacking off, of its beginning to coast along on the momentum of the past. It was getting to the point of a driver who says, ‘I have put on enough speed now; all that is necessary is to go into neutral and freewheel.’ And that kind of a driver, as we know, doesn’t win any races. The man who wins a race is the man who goes on beyond the point that anyone else thought was possible, who goes on beyond the point where everybody else takes it for granted that you have done enough, that you have done what you can.

And, we are in a race, the biggest race of all times. It is a kind of relay race, and this passage that we read reminds us of some of those who have run before us Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel and the prophets; and we could add many more right down to Sadhu Sundar Singh, V. S. Azariah and Ida Scudder. How they carried the torch in their day, right to the end, never letting up, never slacking off, giving everything they had! And now, says the writer, you are in the track. They are all watching, cheering, urging you on; you are in the track and it is you that have to run now. You



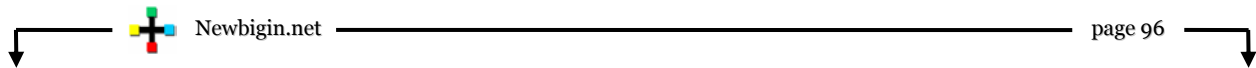
are carrying the torch now and everything depends on your putting everything you have into the race. And so, he says, ‘lay aside...’ Let me read it in the New English Bible instead of in the one we have just read. ‘With all these witnesses round us like a cloud, we must throw off every encumbrance, every sin to which we cling, and run with resolution the race for which we are entered.’

First of all he says, ‘throw off every encumbrance,’ get rid of surplus baggage. You cannot run a race carrying a suit-case or wearing a *veshii*. You have to strip to the essentials, and what those are you will find out. You have to throw away everything that is not essential for the race, and that means fixing your eyes on Jesus which is what he tells you to do, fixing your eyes right down the track to the One who is waiting at the end. You will find that there is quite a lot that you can drop, quite a lot of indulgences, easy – going ways of doing things, things that make it more difficult to give everything you have to running this race that is set before you.

And then, he says also, ‘every sin to which we cling.’ The other version says ‘the sin which clings to us.’ Well, I think it is probably ‘six of one and half a dozen of the other.’ In any case, what he says is that you have got to strip them off. You have got to separate yourself from whatever they may be. You know what they are, I don’t. Whatever they may be, resentments, bitternesses, envies, malice, covetousness, lust and the worst of them all, the sin for which the ancient name was ‘accidie’ and the modern name is ‘couldn’t care less,’ the sin of just not bothering, of being bored. Whatever it is, if you are going to run this race, you have to throw it off. Don’t spend time making arrangements for the funeral; don’t leave it in the parcel office to be

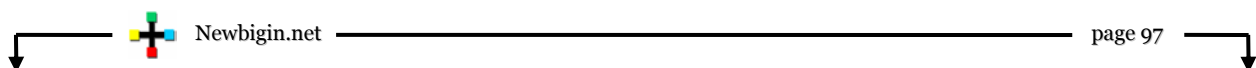
picked up on the next lap; throw it off. Be done with it. And then, ‘run with resolution the race for which you are entered’; run as somebody who intends to win.

The New Testament often speaks of our Christian life in these terms, in the language of athletics. This isn’t just a matter of keeping certain rules. As we know, there are rules and you have to keep them. It is no use running all over the field. You have to run down the track. If you



run all over the place, you end up nowhere. The mark of a Christian will be that, as St. Paul says, he runs to win. He runs, putting everything that he has into it. He runs like somebody who has made up his mind he is going to win. You know how our Lord spoke of the kingdom of God being like a man who had found treasure hidden in a field and he went and sold everything he had to get that one treasure. That sort of spirit is the spirit that he looks for in the children of the Kingdom, the spirit which is prepared to put everything else aside for the sake of this one thing, this supreme prize, this one thing that is worth having. And that is our position in this race. We have just one lap to run, and we have to run to win.

St. Paul goes on: ‘Your eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom faith depends from start to finish,’ Jesus, ‘Who for the sake of the joy that lay ahead of him endured the cross, making light of its disgrace, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.’ Your eye is to be fixed on Jesus, the pioneer of faith. Jesus, who leads the march of humanity, beating down the enemies of man – sin and death and the devil, – to make a path for us to follow, Jesus, the true man in whom alone we know what manhood is, Jesus, the pioneer of faith and also the perfecter, the finisher of faith, the one who crowns the life of adventure in all the ages. It is the supreme treasure to be conformed to Jesus, to belong wholly to him, to share his life, and as Paul says, his sufferings, so that we may share his victory, to be with him in the fight, the fight against sin, against despair, against death, against everything that negates the joy of life, to be with him in that fight and in that victory. There is no situation to which that aim does not apply. There is no situation where you cannot look to Jesus and press forward to share with him in that fight and in that victory; to carry with joy in him and for him, some tiny fraction of the world’s load of sorrow and sin and despair and disease and unbelief; to accept with joy in him and for him the wounds that unbelief and sin inflict on human kind; and to be in him and for him and through him the sign and the instrument and the promise of God’s wonderful victory over all the enemies of God.



It has been a joy to us whom you invited here to be with you this week, and on behalf of the team of missionaries would like to thank you all. You have, many of you, opened up your hearts and minds to us. You have shared with us your problems, your difficulties, your joys and your sorrows, your victories and your defeats; what God has done among you and is doing among you and the places where the power of the enemy is still present. We thank you for this privilege of sharing with you for this week in your race. This whole great institution is a work of faith in its first conception, in its birth, in its life. It is a fruit of faith, it is part of this great venture of faith which is described to us in the chapter that we read. And faith is a battle, a race, a struggle into which you have to put everything you have; you cannot go in for this race on any other terms; you cannot, as Jesus said, start in and then look back; you cannot coast along on the momentum of your previous achievements. Anyone who has ever entered for a big race knows that from the beginning to the end it is a matter of going beyond what anybody thought you could, going beyond what you believed you could, putting everything into it. That is what this great Scripture invites us to do. We, who are now in the track are running our lap in this great relay race. We share with the great heroes of the faith of all the days gone by and of our time. Therefore as you

face in this coming week, – this coming year – all the ordinary issues that you have talked about with us during this past week, this is the word that I would leave with you as God’s word to you. ‘With all these witnesses of faith around us like a cloud, we must throw off every encumbrance, every sin to which we cling, and run with resolution the race for which we are entered, our eyes fixed on Jesus on whom faith depends from beginning to end.’ And to him who sits at the right hand of God, the author and finisher of our faith, be glory and praise for ever and ever, Amen.

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