

## CHAPTER VI

### IMMORTALITY AND THE RELIGIOUS VIEW OF THE WORLD

**I**N the present chapter I wish to complete the discussion of the problem of immortality by considering its place and meaning in the religious view of the world. The slightest examination shows that the idea of immortality stands in a vital relation to religion, and in its character the idea corresponds to the degree of development of the religious consciousness. A rude religion has low ideas of a future life, and the higher the religion the higher the ideas. The progressive moralisation of the conception of God and the religious relation has gradually purified and elevated the conception of the world to come. Though eschatology is one of the most conservative aspects of religion, it cannot remain unmodified by the process of spiritual development. The old may persist for a time in a changed religious environment, but it cannot do so permanently.

The notion of a future life grew up under the

ægis of religion, and became an essential element of religious faith. And because it was a recognised religious belief it became an object of philosophical and ethical reflexion. It was owing to the fact that religion had put forward the doctrine of man's future destiny; that the belief acquired a currency and a status which made it an inevitable problem for reflective thought. Philosophy did not of itself evolve the problem, but found it to hand. In consequence, we observe that every important philosophical system has had something to say on the question, whether by way of confirming, rejecting, or criticising the belief. In the two preceding chapters we have noted the general results of philosophical and ethical thinking on the subject. Not from the speculative but from the ethical standpoint the most positive and convincing argument was developed. Immortality, we concluded, was a legitimate postulate put forward by the moral consciousness, which claimed that the world should be a moral cosmos. In other words, the postulate was necessary in order to give consistency and harmony to the facts of experience regarded from an ethical point of view. The argument has undoubted weight, but in one aspect there is a lack of finality about it. Is it not possible, it may be said, that, in the end, the facts of experience cannot be made perfectly coherent and consistent? The universe may not

be a moral cosmos. And though we postulate a principle to harmonise the facts, what guarantee have we that the principle is in actual operation? After all, to show that a thing ought to be is not to prove that it *actually* is. Obviously something is needed to carry us from the bare postulate to the realisation of the principle for which the postulate stands. To pass from the one to the other implies an act of faith in the moral reasonableness of the universe in which men live and act. And though the grounds for affirming this are cogent, it may still be denied. Moral scepticism is an ugly thing, but it is possible.

If the universe is to be vindicated as a sphere in which ethical principles are realised, the vindication must proceed on the assumption that the ultimate ground of things is ethical in its character. A non-moral Ground of the universe implies that there can be no assurance good is persistent and dominant, and will be the final goal of ill. It means there is no pledge that there is justice at the heart of things. On the other hand, if the character of the ultimate Source of things is ethical, then ethical principles must govern the process of development within the world. In short, an ethical and spiritual Ground of the world is the assurance and security for the presence and victorious activity of ethical and spiritual elements within the realm of human

experience. That is to say, an ethical and spiritual God, from Whom the world proceeds and upon Whom all experience depends, is the sufficient reason that the moral demands man makes on the universe will find an adequate response in the universe. Faith, then, in the moral character of the universe in which men live and act becomes, when we think out its implications, faith in the moral character of God. God is the Ground both of the natural and spiritual order, and He is our final assurance that the natural and spiritual realms fall within a teleological whole of which the supreme end is the Good. Apart from this there is no guarantee that the natural is subordinated to the moral order and subserves its development. Now faith in an ethical God is just the central fact of developed religion. When, therefore, immortality is claimed on ethical grounds, the demand must lead up to and find support through a religious faith in God, the Supreme Reality and the Power that works for righteousness. A God who is the source and consummation of all value cannot consistently be regarded as indifferent to the ethical values realised in human experience, or willing that they should vanish away and 'leave not a rack behind.' Hence an American writer — Mr. Fiske — has spoken of immortality as "a supreme act of faith in the reasonableness of God's work." You can

only expect immortality on the score of rational justice, if, to borrow an expression from Carlyle, 'the great Soul of the world is just.'

Enough has perhaps been said to show in a general way the vital or organic relation in which belief in immortality stands to the religious consciousness. I wish, however, to bring out the scope and significance of this fact by a somewhat fuller and closer examination of the meaning of the religious relation. That relation, at every stage of its manifestation, involves the two factors of subject and object; and the religious consciousness expresses an act of belief or faith on the part of the subject in the object. In other words, religion signifies an act of faith on the part of the human spirit in a Being or beings which are divine. This faith is born of the sense of need and of the feeling of incompleteness and limitation which man vividly experiences. Could he find a full security and a perfect satisfaction within himself he would not be religious. The stress of life and its imperious needs impel man to seek help and security in a Power above himself. So religion as it is realised in human experience means fellowship and communion with the Divine: it is not absorption into the Divine, for in the religious relation neither of the constituent factors can be sacrificed to the other. It is, for example, psychologically false to say that

religion means the annihilation of the self and the extinction of the will, so that God alone may live and rule within us. In the religious consciousness the personality of man is expanded and uplifted as well as purified by fellowship with the Deity, but it is not merged in the Deity as pantheistic systems suggest. There is an immanence of the Divine in the human which, though it eludes definition, is not identification.

These, then, are the fundamental principles or constituent elements of the religious relationship, and they are present of necessity in every form and at every stage of religion. With the growth of culture the relation undergoes development and acquires a higher meaning: as man advances in self-consciousness, so does his conception of the Divine and of the bond that connects him with it make progress. Man's idea of God and of himself evolve *pari passu*, and a better society means better gods. The main tendency of religious development is from the natural to the spiritual, and progress in religion takes the form of making the religious relation more personal and inward, and so more truly universal. Or what is the same thing from a slightly different point of view, progress in religion manifests itself in the gradual liberation of the religious consciousness from material, local, and accidental associations, and in the establishment of its essential sphere in

the soul or inner life of man, where differences of race and place no longer count. The highest religion is the most universal religion, a religion in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, and the only test of piety is the worship of God in spirit and in truth. With the development of religion the beliefs and doctrines in which it expresses itself are refined and elevated. A truly spiritual faith discards the naturalistic beliefs which marked an earlier stage of its evolution. The process of change does not always proceed at the same pace, and some materials are more impervious than others to the solvent of new ideas. For example, the ritual or the eschatology of a religion may persist in an older form, though the other elements of the system have advanced beyond them. In this connexion Dr. Charles remarks: "The eschatology of a nation is always the last part of their religion to experience the transforming power of new ideas and new facts."<sup>1</sup> But no element can remain permanently uninfluenced by the process of development, and sooner or later must adjust itself to the changed environment. Hence the old and crude ideas about the nature of the soul and the spirit-world have to be recast in terms of an enlarged religious outlook. The primitive notions of survival after death have to undergo modification and expansion.

<sup>1</sup> *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life*, p. 310.

Especially does the ethical conception of God react on the idea of immortality and infuse into it an ethical meaning. In Israel, for example, the influence of a pure monotheism guided religious faith slowly but surely to the moral conception of a future life. A religion which does not advance to the ethical idea of God has no urgent motive to purify and elevate its eschatology. On this point the contrast of Hebrew and Greek religion is suggestive.

From another side one can observe the influence of advancing religion in modifying the primitive ideas of the life after death. In all religions there is a reference, implicit or explicit, to a transcendent world. To put it more simply, every religion, however humble, means a belief in something *beyond* the immediate environment. Even in primitive religions this reference to the Beyond, though crude and rudimentary, is nevertheless present. In the rudest religion of nature the object of veneration is never a merely common object in man's external surroundings. If a material thing is selected for reverence, it is because there is something more in it than appears on the surface: it is the abode of a spirit, invisible yet possessing power. The tree or rock before which the savage performs his religious rites is an object of awe; for it is something better and more mysterious than a common tree or rock,

and therefore is worshipped. Thus while early religion finds its objects within the natural world, it looks beyond the outward appearance of the thing to an unseen source of power within it. From this elementary belief in something Beyond, the notion of divine transcendence developed. This idea of transcendence takes a more and more definite form with the progress of the religious consciousness. The divine powers gradually shake themselves free of their material abodes. The gods of national religion are higher than the spirits of the tribe: they are no longer envisaged in material things, and they are so far elevated above the world that they rule over departments of nature and human life. So in the evolution of Greek religion the spirits of the trees and springs were succeeded by the greater gods who dwelt apart on cloud-capped Olympus, from whence they presided over the destinies of mortals. This lingering connexion with the earth, which still characterised the Olympic religion, is dissolved when faith rises to a more truly spiritual conception of the Divine. In early Hebrew religion Jahveh, the covenant-God, had his abode on Sinai, and was the God of the land where his people dwelt. But in the monotheistic faith of the Hebrew prophets Jahveh was no longer a local Deity: He was exalted above the world and was the God of all nations. In a fully developed

personal persistence after death, but the falling away of the illusion of individuality with consequent absorption in the universal life, is the logical conclusion which the premises of a pantheistic system yield. If man is only the appearance of the Absolute, there is no real basis for the survival of personality after death. It is a true generalisation, that when faith in a personal God becomes weak, faith in a personal immortality becomes halting and uncertain. Any theory which, like pantheism, diminishes the value of human personality, must, *ipso facto*, weaken the reasons for believing in a personal life after death. An illustration of this can be found in certain types of mysticism, where the communion of the soul with God tends to pass into the idea of an absorption into God. In such cases there is no boundary between the human and divine; the unique and distinctive element in personality dwindles away; and in the mystic consciousness the soul loses itself in the infinite fulness of God. Mysticism of this type does not lay stress on the persistence of the finite and personal consciousness; it rather emphasises the melting away of every finite element which hinders the soul from merging itself in the Infinite Life. Hence the tendency of some mystics to convert immortality into a present experience instead of a future consummation. One recalls in this connexion

the well-known utterance of Schleiermacher in the *Reden*: "In the midst of finitude to be one with the Infinite, and in every moment to be eternal, is the immortality of religion." The conclusion is that mysticism, in the degree that it approaches pantheism, undermines the value of man's distinctive personality and diminishes the assurance of its final persistence.

On the other hand, a pluralistic theory—a theory which resolves the universe into a multiplicity of finite centres, and so is diametrically opposed to pantheism—does not in itself prove a safeguard to immortality. A mere plurality of finite centres in interaction contains no definite assurance that they will work out the harmonious consummation of individual selves. As Professor Ward pertinently asks, What guarantee can we have on the basis of mere pluralism, that the different ideals of the different centres may not prove incompatible? <sup>1</sup> For mere plurality as such does not contain the ground of its own unity. This difficulty can only be overcome, if we modify this pluralism by the recognition that the multiplicity of finite centres forms a teleological whole of which the ultimate ground and final end is God. The coherence and unity of the many are assured when the teleological organisation of the units is established by their reference to God as living ground

<sup>1</sup> *Realms of Ends*, p. 421.

as well as controlling principle and end. An ethical God is the security for the harmonious working out of their destinies on the part of finite individuals. Neither in pantheism nor in pluralism, but in a genuine Theism, is the best support to the hope of human immortality. And this becomes more clear when we consider what the religious consciousness is really seeking after in its doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The end is certainly not mere persistence of being, for that in itself has no religious value. In a spiritual religion the eternal destiny of man is linked with the thought of his redemption or salvation. The redemptive process cannot work itself out in the mundane realm, where human weakness and sin will always act as a hindrance. Accordingly, in contrast to the terrestrial life, redemptive religion postulates a supramundane form of being, in which the redemptive process comes to its full and unimpeded realisation. Therefore the religious consciousness cherishes the conviction, that the temporal development of personality issues in a transcendent form of being in which salvation is accomplished. But this doctrine can only find a solid basis in a theistic view of the universe, since from this standpoint both the temporal and the transcendent orders are seen to fall within the scope of the divine redemptive plan. The mundane and the supramundane realms are organically

related in the divine teleological order which is another name for Providence.

The problem of man's destiny, as the religious mind conceives it, has a double aspect, the individual and personal on the one hand, and the collective and universal on the other. In the historic development of religion sometimes the former side has predominated and sometimes the latter. In certain instances it has been the destiny of the race which has governed the religious outlook, and slender importance has attached to the fate of the individual. This tendency belongs to the earlier rather than to the latest stage of religious evolution. Sometimes as the outcome of deep-felt needs a religion at a point in its evolution begins to lay a fresh stress and value on the individual and his fate. An illustration of this is the rise of the Mystery Religions in Greece. But a complete view should neglect neither side; for one is involved in the other, and the ideal is a just synthesis of both. It will be of some interest and value, I think, to examine briefly the way in which the eschatological problem has developed in a concrete religion. For this purpose the most important religions are the Hebrew and the Christian.

The development of the idea of a future life among the Hebrews reveals certain peculiar and interesting features. Up to a period comparatively

late in the history of the Hebrew race its eschatology remained meagre and crude. The ideas underlying that eschatology were the ideas of primitive and nature religion rather than those we associate with an ethical religion; and they continued long in an untransformed state. No uplifting hope of a blessed future for himself inspired the early Israelite. Sheol, the place of departed spirits, was a dim and cheerless realm, like the Greek Hades, where the ghosts of the departed dragged out a miserable and forlorn existence. Even up to the time of the eighth-century prophets this rude eschatology survived, and it came to stand in a somewhat marked contrast to the ethical teaching about Jahveh which entered into the substance of the prophetic message. The inconsistency, if surprising, is explicable. The religion of Israel, in common with Semitic religion, was dominated by the idea that it was not the individual but the people or nation which was the unit in the religious relation. The covenant was between Jahveh and the nation, not between Jahveh and the individual; and the individual could only enjoy the blessings of the covenant in virtue of his membership in the chosen race. The promises which were to be the reward of religious loyalty were promises to the nation, and no mention was made of the individual Hebrew. Accordingly the future to which the

Israelite looked forward was the glorified future of his people under the favour of the Covenant God. The meagre place left to the individual in this religious scheme helps to explain the backwardness of Hebrew eschatology and the long absence of any clear hope of personal immortality in Hebrew religion. With the growth of ethical monotheism, however, it became more and more difficult for these crude ideas about the fate of the dead—ideas which were really a heritage of older religion—to survive alongside the new faith in God. The catastrophe of the Exile, with the suffering and discouragement it entailed, undermined the old hope of a glorified future for the whole nation. It became necessary to differentiate the true Israel from the faithless among the people, and to distinguish piety of heart from a purely formal religion. Only a righteous people could inherit the blessing of a righteous God. The changing fortunes of his race taught the pious Hebrew that the rule of Jahveh was wider than Israel: alien nations were the instruments of his purpose, and Jahveh was the God of the whole earth. Religion with its expansion towards universalism gained a new inwardness of content: Jahveh desired mercy rather than sacrifice, and his law must be written on the heart. Hence a deeper value came to be set on the individual, and this new valuation became the foundation on

which Hebrew faith rose to a spiritual conception of a future life. Though the message of the eighth-century prophets was one essentially for the nation, and their hope was a national hope, late in the following century the germs of a new individualism begin to appear. Jeremiah speaks of a retribution for the individual: "Every one shall die for his own iniquity" (xxxii. 30). This new reference to the individual is repeated in Ezekiel: "Every soul is God's" (xviii. 4). This fresh sense for personal religion and personal responsibility along with the deepened feeling of the value of the single soul led the Hebrew mind on to a faith in a future life for man. The writer of the Book of Job is obviously feeling after the idea: "And after my skin hath thus been destroyed, yet from my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another" (xix. 26-27). There are anticipations of immortality in two late Psalms, the 49th and the 73rd. "God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol; for he will receive me": "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me into glory." One can see how the feeling of communion with God gave the Hebrew a confidence in some better thing after death. Taught by inner experience and by the hard crises of history, the religious thinkers of Israel advanced to a definite faith in a

life after death. "Step by step through the slow processes of the religious life, through the oft-times halting logic of spiritual experience, the religious thinkers of Israel were led to the moral conception of the future life, and to the certainty of their own share therein."<sup>1</sup>

By the beginning of the third century B.C. the doctrine of the resurrection had been developed, and it was linked with the thought of the immortality of the righteous in the Messianic Kingdom. In a late fragment which has been incorporated in the Book of Isaiah, we have the conception of a resurrection to new life of the members of the holy people (xxvi. 19). This resurrection was the sequel to a righteous life on earth. In the Book of Daniel the illustrious saints and teachers are to have part in a blessed resurrection, while notorious apostates have a resurrection to 'shame and everlasting contempt' (xii. 2-3). But it is in the Apocalypses of the last two centuries before our era that the belief in a 'blessed future life' appears in a developed and well-defined form. By this time the idea of an eternal Messianic Kingdom on earth had been abandoned, and the resurrection and the final judgment come at the close of the Messianic Kingdom. Yet the notion of immortality is not

<sup>1</sup> Charles, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-154. I take this opportunity of expressing my indebtedness to the volume.

put forward as a purely individual hope. No doubt the expectation of a glorified future for the whole nation had faded away. But still it is a common good which the righteous Hebrew trusts to share with the righteous people; and his membership in the holy people, as well as his own faithfulness, gave him ground for the assurance of a happy life after death. It is important to remember that this living and widely diffused expectation had its chief source and support in the Apocalyptic Literature of the last two centuries B.C.; and to realise this is necessary, if we are to understand the position of the belief in early Christianity. And it is only in times comparatively recent that the significance of this Literature for the study of primitive Christianity has been appreciated.

The story of the progress of Hebrew religion towards a doctrine of immortality is extremely suggestive. It illustrates the truth that a belief in immortality must find a place in a religion which is truly spiritual: when the religion of Israel became ethical, personal, and inward, the new value set on the individual led necessarily to faith in his eternal destiny. That Jahveh should leave the souls of the faithful in Sheol was inconceivable.

The atmosphere in which primitive Christianity developed was an atmosphere permeated by

Apocalyptic ideas. Notions of a resurrection and of a future life were familiar, and a belief in immortality was entertained by many, though not by all the Jews. In his references to immortality Jesus was touching on a topic which, owing to the teaching of Apocalyptic, was, so to speak, in the air.

Jesus' own teaching on the life hereafter is marked by deep insight as well as by reserve. On some of the problems connected with the future life he was silent or said little. But on the fact that human existence was not annihilated by death he spoke with perfect confidence, and with unerring discernment he brought the hope of a blessed immortality into living relation with the character of God. So far as the sources of his teaching on the subject are to be found outside himself, they are to be traced to passages in the Old Testament and to Apocalyptic Literature. But in a greater degree they rest on his own unique consciousness of God and his profound experience of spiritual communion with Him. In the light of this experience he taught the value of the individual and the infinite possibilities of human life. The gain of the whole world will not compensate for the loss of the soul. This conception of the value of personality stands in the closest relation to the conception of God in the gospel of Christ. God is the Father of men:

He loves and cares for His earthly children, and will not give them a stone for bread. He knows all their needs. That this intimate fellowship should be destroyed by death is not conceivable: for God, as Jesus declared, 'is not the God of the dead but of the living,' and 'all live unto Him.' The life of God in man cannot be extinguished by the dissolution of the material organism. The communion of the human soul with God is the fulfilment of the divine purpose, and a fact of supreme value: the conservation of this value is a just expectation which is based on the character of God. As has been remarked, Jesus raises our idea of humanity, so that its immortality naturally follows.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to remember that the destiny of man, as Christ conceived it, is never a purely individual matter: on the contrary, his doctrine implies a true union of the individual and social aspects of the problem. In his actual teaching he does not so much speak of immortality in the strict sense as of the destiny of man, and this was bound up with the nature and issues of the Divine Kingdom. Man finds his self-fulfilment, not in isolation, not even in seeking a private salvation, but in living as a member of the Kingdom of God, and his future destiny is linked with the development and consummation of that Kingdom.

<sup>1</sup> Adams Brown, *The Christian Hope*, p. 191.

Salvation is personal, yet more than personal: it has as its correlative membership in the Kingdom and spiritual self-realisation through it. Now the Kingdom of Heaven is both present and future: here and now it lives and grows in the world, but its goal and completion lie beyond the world. For what is realised under earthly conditions would not be the highest good, and the individual as a member of the redeemed society reaches the final end of eternal blessedness in the Kingdom of Heaven as transcendent. The Christian hope is thus both personal and social: it has its beginning and growth on earth and calls for earnest endeavour here, but its consummation is not here but in the eternal world. Some have thought that the Christian ideal encourages men to neglect social good and civic progress as things of little moment. "The earthly city seemed poor and contemptible to men whose eyes beheld the City of God coming in the clouds of heaven. Thus the centre of gravity, so to say, was shifted from the present to a future life, and however much the other world may have gained, there can be little doubt that this one lost heavily by the change."<sup>1</sup> If the Christian hope has sometimes acted in this way, it was because it had grown narrow and had lost touch with the mind of Christ. The Christian's vocation is to labour for the Kingdom here

<sup>1</sup> J. G. Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, p. 194.

and now by the promotion of individual and social good, for there is no harvest in the future without toil in the present. The truth is, the Kingdom of Heaven in no way weakens mundane social values. But it sets them in a new perspective, and places the full realisation of the Good in a higher world.

In the teaching of Paul and the Johannine writings the hope of immortality is intimately associated with the Christian experience, an experience mediated by the person and work of Christ. This vital experience gave the disciples of Jesus a new hope for themselves and mankind. In the spiritual experience of the Christian there is revealed the 'power of an endless life,' a life which lifts the soul above the dominion of decay and death. So St. Paul records his profound conviction that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us," who are 'the first-fruits of the spirit,' and wait 'for the redemption of the body' (Rom. viii. 18-23). To the apostle the experience of the new life was a pledge that the Christian had in him a power which could not be impaired by bodily decay and was stronger than death. "Though our outward man perish, the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. iv. 16). In the Johannine writings there is the same emphasis on the Christian experience as

an inner life which rises superior to the doom of mortality. In 'the love of the brethren' men have passed from death unto life, and believers are conscious that they are already in possession of a life which is eternal. "The world passeth away and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (I John ii. 17). This eternal life is the supreme good, and it comes from union with the Source of life. "This is the record, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (I John v. 11). The full fruition of this unquenchable life will be achieved in the transcendent Kingdom of God.

The Epistles of Paul and the Gospel and Epistles of John take common ground in finding a witness of immortality in spiritual experience. But Paul also connects the Christian hope with the resurrection of Christ. "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (I Cor. xv. 14).<sup>1</sup> And no doubt this may be a confirmation to the faith of those who already believe in immortality. It will be an assurance to them, that there is at work in the universe a Power stronger than the processes of decay and death. On the other hand, an argument from a single event in the past has its limit-

<sup>1</sup> Paul, it may be noted, does not entertain the idea of an immortality of the soul as such: the soul must be clothed with some kind of body.

ations, and it may not bring conviction to those who have not entered into the Christian view of life. The difficulties in the narratives will appeal to those who approach the question in a detached and critical frame of mind, though these difficulties do not carry the same force and meaning to those who regard the problem in the light of Christian experience. To some minds there will always be an objection to making a single historical fact a sufficient basis for a universal inference, and they will point out that the person of Christ, in the doctrine of the Church, is differentiated from that of ordinary humanity. In which case it would not follow that what was true of Christ is necessarily true of all men. For these reasons one cannot expect that much will be gained by taking the resurrection of Christ as an isolated fact, and making it the basis of an argument for human immortality. The valuation a man puts upon the evidence materially depends on whether he approaches it from the Christian view of the world or not. The sceptic turns from the evidence unconvinced: the Christian finds it confirm his faith that death is the gateway to life.

This brief survey of the idea of immortality in the Christian religion will, I think, strengthen our conviction, that faith in a life hereafter has its final ground in faith in the character of God. The Christian hope rests on this, and not on any proof

that men are intrinsically immortal. Faith in the divine character was the core of Christ's own teaching on the subject. It is also involved in the argument from Christian experience which finds a place in the Pauline and Johannine message. For the new life, as it is revealed in those who have fellowship with God through Christ, is a life of transcendent value in the soul. This life is an inner treasure which faith holds that God will conserve: it is therefore an inner spring of hope and confidence.

The place which immortality fills in developed spiritual religion may now be restated in a more definite form. It stands for an essential element in the working out of the meaning and purpose of redemptive religion, since redemption cannot come to its full realisation within the present world-order. The earthly life is only a stage in a redemptive process which reaches beyond it. The ultimate *raison d'être* for a development to a transcendent order is the truth that God Himself, in one aspect of His nature, transcends the present form of existence in space and time. Hence if man's goal and destiny is with God, it cannot lie within the present order of things. On the other hand, the assurance that man is capable of an eternal destiny must depend on the valuation which is set upon him and his spiritual experience. Now the whole drift of Christian teaching is, that we

cannot value man truly if we isolate him from God. Christianity emphasises the fact, that man is linked to God by an inner bond which can be expressed by the figure of Father and child. This fact is the deepest thing in life. The same truth is also implied in the doctrine that man is made in the image of God. In the end, this conception of the relation of man to God presupposes the complementary aspect of the Divine Nature: God is transcendent, but He is also immanent in the world and human life. The immanence of God as redemptive Spirit in the souls of men gives its surpassing value to spiritual experience and to spiritual communion. As the apostle said, we have this 'treasure in earthen vessels,' but the nature and value of the treasure are a reason for believing that it is not destroyed with the dissolution of the earthly tabernacle. Death is a crisis to the Christian as it is to other men, but it is a crisis which marks the point of transition to a higher form of being. In the fact of communion with God a principle is implied which carries man beyond the mundane stage of development. The power to overcome the world and to subdue the lusts of the flesh, in which the divine life in the soul is manifested, gives to human personality a transcendent significance, in virtue of which it has access to a supramundane realm. This is the truly religious or Christian view of personality,

and it carries with it the assurance that the spiritual life, on earth incomplete at the best, will come to completeness hereafter. If we reject the religious view of personality, if we ignore the tie which binds man to God, I do not think we can have any confidence that he has a destiny above and beyond the world in which he lives and acts for a little. Are you not, it may be said, forgetting the ethical argument? The truth is, the ethical conception of life cannot stand by itself: we must either try to reduce it to the natural or carry it up into the spiritual. The former attempt cannot possibly succeed. The alternative is the frank recognition that the ethical view of man and his vocation, when its implications are thought out, leads up to the religious view. To reject the religious conception of personality is, in the long-run, to fall back on the belief, that human life is only a transient episode in the vast cosmic process, 'a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.'

To what extent, it may be asked, does religion involve a doctrine of the manner in which the lower form of existence passes into the higher? Now plainly it is the *fact* which is of spiritual value, and not the way in which it is accomplished. Christianity has no clear-cut doctrine on the subject, and only touches the problem in connexion with the transition of the Kingdom on

earth to the Kingdom in Heaven. To some it has seemed the passage from the one to the other must be catastrophic, and they think there is an analogy in the crisis of death in the history of the individual.<sup>1</sup> To dogmatise on the matter is not wise, but one cannot see that the catastrophic view is the only possible one. It is a survival of the Apocalyptic outlook on the world, and may be revised and modified in the light of fresh experience and knowledge. The transition from the mundane to the supramundane is, *ex hypothesi*, constantly taking place in the history of individuals. For this reason, if for no other, a catastrophic close to human history is not indispensable, even though it is in harmony with an ancient tradition. On the one hand, the transfiguration of the material basis of life is in keeping with Christian ideas, and finds a partial, if somewhat misleading, expression in the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. In popular thought this has come to mean the resurrection of the fleshly organism, a conception full of difficulties which was explicitly rejected by St. Paul. On the other, the notion of a transfigured organism can be brought into intimate relation with the speculative idea of the soul as the central and constitutive principle which forms for itself a higher kind of body to be its organ in the life

<sup>1</sup> So Kaftan, *Dogmatik*, pp. 637-638.

hereafter. From this standpoint the transcendent kingdom of transfigured persons would constantly be in process of being realised. In Pauline phrase 'the natural body' after death would be constantly passing into 'the spiritual body.' In any case the sudden and catastrophic close of human history, accompanied by a dramatic transfiguration of the material world, does not seem to be a hypothesis called for in any religious interest. A continuous and gradual transition from the lower to the higher order is possible. The full realisation of the heavenly kingdom would come when the redemptive process was complete, and mankind had entered into the full enjoyment of that transfigured life in which the material is transformed into the perfect instrument of the spiritual. In this higher stage of being death is transcended and goodness reigns supreme.

There are other issues connected with the traditional eschatology which have led to much discussion. The question has been put whether the end of the incurably bad is extinction or purification and ultimate restoration. On such points it is not essential that we should dogmatise, and especially so when it is hard to reach a decision either on grounds of authority or rational evidence. The opinion formed by the individual on such questions, if he forms any opinion, is often due to personal feeling. But religious

eschatology is a sphere where dogmatism about details is rash and can serve no good purpose, and the man of spiritual insight will combine faith with reserve. On one point, indeed, it is possible to speak with a reasonable degree of confidence, and this because it is intimately related to the ethical character of God and to His redemptive purpose in the world. There cannot be an abiding dualism at the heart of things: the end of development cannot be a Kingdom of darkness which remains to the last in eternal contrast and antagonism to the Kingdom of light. For if spiritual development ended in such a contradiction, it would mean that it closed in failure and defeat. The inevitable conclusion would be that the Divine plan had been frustrated, and the Divine saving purpose had failed to reach its complete fulfilment. It is perhaps possible to harmonise a belief of this kind with the conception of a finite Deity who is hampered by difficulties which interfere with the realisation of his purpose: the belief cannot be reconciled with the Christian idea of God as the living Ground of the universe and the Supreme Spirit 'from whom and through whom and to whom are all things,'— a God of infinite goodness and love who works as a redeeming spirit in history and human lives. This divine redeeming purpose must be achieved, and evil cannot finally resist the transforming

power of divine goodness. To doubt or deny this undermines the foundations of a spiritual faith, which implies a full trust and assurance that the Divine Will can accomplish its end. This faith reasserts itself even in the darkest days, for this confidence in the conquering power of the good is the life-blood of spiritual religion :

“O yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill,  
To pangs of nature, sins of will,  
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood.”

The Kingdom of God is a transcendent kingdom of personal spirits, and it is, as we have seen, the consummation of personal and collective development. If this be true, human history must be a progress, not a deterioration : on a wide survey it must reveal a growing good. It seems to us that a dispassionate view of human experience does, on the whole, confirm this judgment. No doubt if it could be shown that evil dominates and controls human life, faith in future perfection would lack justification. Now we do not minimise the wide presence and activity of sin and evil : they are very real, and the way in which they thwart and impede human progress is most apparent. The antagonism of good and evil often reaches a tragic intensity, and ostensible culture may veil powers of darkness which leap forth in a time of crisis to work destruction. Yet

even at its strongest, sin wins no enduring victory, and the threatening strength of the forces of evil only quickens into more intense activity the forces of goodness; and there is a conquering power in the good which even transforms evil into a means to its own development.

The presence of sin in the world makes progress a hard and bitter conflict, and the good can only grow in the individual and society as the fruit of struggle and earnest endeavour. Life for man is a long series of tests. Hence human progress is not an inflexible movement in a predetermined line, but a spiritual task, and so human experience is a discipline and an education. The fruit of failure, error, and suffering is to teach those who are capable of learning to turn from the evil and to hold fast to the good. Evolution has been a long and often painful process in which man has slowly advanced to freedom and self-consciousness. As the outcome of this age-long struggle, history discloses an increasing good, and man in coming to know himself better has come to know God better. When we are asked the meaning of this development, we seem to find the answer in man—man who emerges from the heart of the great world-process; who advances slowly from natural to ethical and to spiritual life; who learns to follow distant ends, and finally form ideals which transcend the world itself. Man is a being 'of

large discourse' whose outlook is not bounded by the earthly horizon; and the religious conception of his transcendent destiny is in harmony with human aspirations and ideals. From the religious standpoint man's earthly development is only a stage in a vaster movement. The good, dimly discerned in the natural order, only reaches its fulfilment in the spiritual and transcendent order. This developmental process is spiritual, and it is well to repeat that it is not mechanically determined. Humanity is not swept resistlessly on to a transcendent goal. As the Christian religion teaches, the ideal of perfection and full salvation in a higher world is a destiny after which man must strive, and he is not crowned unless he strive. In apprehending his transcendent end by faith and in his free endeavour to reach it, he fulfils his divine vocation and realises the religious meaning of life. In this sense the eternal life is the issue of faithful endeavour.

. . . "The energy of life may be  
Kept on after the grave, but not begun;  
And he who flagged not in the earthly strife,  
From strength to strength advancing—only he,  
His soul well knit and all his battles won,  
Mounts, and that hardly, to eternal life."

But if spiritual development were a merely human movement, there would be no guarantee that the goal would be reached. Spiritual

development is a manifestation of human freedom, but there is more in it than this. Behind the activity of man is the deeper activity of God. We call to mind the paradox of true religion, the paradox which is contained in the memorable words of Paul: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh within you to will and to do of His good pleasure." Man works, but God works in and through man without superseding his freedom and initiative. It is the highest privilege of mortals to be fellow-workers with God, and it is the deep pervading activity of God in the lives of men which is the final assurance that the divine purpose will be fulfilled. The thought lies at the centre of Christianity, that the God revealed in Christ is present to the souls of men, purifying, uplifting, redeeming them. And it is the presence of this redemptive life in the world that is the pledge of that full salvation which is eternal life. Speculative reflexion may do something to justify this conception, but for the Christian it is primarily a conviction won from religious experience. The idea of a God who imparts Himself to His finite creatures, and in love redeems them, has been born of historic Christianity. Faith in the God revealed in Christ has made faith in the divine redeeming work in man intimate and real. For it has taught mankind to realise that the

highest idea of the Divine is not power but love:

“So through the thunder comes a human voice,  
Saying, ‘O heart I made, a heart beats here.’”

If the Christian doctrine that God is Love conveys a true thought, it conveys with it a strong assurance in the eternal destiny of souls. For a God who is Love must respond to the spiritual needs of His human children: at the last He cannot cast the souls which proceed from Him as ‘rubbish to the void.’

Faith in a spiritual God who transcends the world, and yet is the invisible spring of all pure thoughts and upward endeavour, carries with it faith in the value of the soul and confidence in its transcendent goal. A godless world is a world which has in it no sure hope for humanity. If there be no eternal Father of Spirits there is nothing to save us from the melancholy confession of the old Roman poet:

*“Nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux,  
Nox est perpetua una dormienda.”*

Even the strongest argument for immortality—the ethical argument—becomes lame and feeble, if there be not in the universe a supreme personal Power which makes for righteousness. In days when faith in God runs low, there has followed lack of faith in man’s divine vocation and utter

disregard of human rights. The gospel of materialism and the worship of power have brought misery on the innocent as well as the guilty, and they will be judged by their fruits. Yet amid this world-travail and anguish the spiritual forces are being revived and quickened, and by and by they will emerge triumphant. Reverence and love will return to us again with faith in God and the eternal vocation of man.

The shadow of mystery will always fall on the life after death, and of many things we must be content to remain ignorant. It is in keeping with our moral and spiritual limitations, that we only 'see through a glass darkly' when we turn our gaze to the Beyond. But so long as man has a living faith in the God Who is revealed in Christ, he will not fear that at the last he must go down into darkness and silence. This world is not all: "in our Father's house there are many mansions."