

## VII

### REVELATION

WE have dealt with two of the reasons given by the Humanist writers for the rejection of faith in God. We come now to the third—the presence of Evil in the world. This is the oldest and by far the greatest of their difficulties. It is, indeed, the characteristic difficulty of Theism. In the polytheistic religions it hardly seems to exist. The gods are in the main nature divinities, and the destroying as well as preserving powers of nature are mirrored in the pantheons, and simply accepted and dreaded. It has been truly said there is no devil in the heathen cosmologies, because there is no need for him, his functions being so efficiently discharged by one or other of the gods. But the moment men rose or returned to the faith in one sole Sovereign, Just and Pure God, the problem became acute. Why was there so much evil in a world created and governed by Him? Greek scepticism put the problem in the form of a dilemma. Since there is so much evil in the world, God cannot be both good and almighty. If He is almighty He cannot be good. If He is good He cannot be almighty. Indian thought took the pantheistic road. It conserved some kind of moral order by its doctrine of an inexorably just and universal law of retribution, or Karma, which pursued the offender through all worlds, punishing

moral with physical evil. But the Supreme Being was impersonal and beyond both Good and Evil. How profoundly the problem influenced the Hebrew mind we shall presently see.

That its apparent insolubility from the standpoint of monotheism has caused many in our day to lose all faith in the God of their fathers I have no doubt whatever. We have to remember that a very large proportion of the manhood and womanhood of our modern world has passed through one of the greatest upheavals of Evil that the world has ever known. The men experienced it in the trenches and in the base camps, the women, many of them, endured long-drawn-out days of suspense and horror, and later on suffered in lives impoverished by the loss of lover, husband or children, through the slaughter of the flower of a whole generation of men.

Twenty years ago many of us older people had the opportunity of living and working in the great base camps in that generation of men which has been truly called "a lonely generation." They had been spending their earlier years in the natural happiness of youth, all unaware of the fires that had been smouldering underfoot till suddenly they came flickering up through the grass and flowers. How well they faced the ordeal in the field we know. They went through almost all that mediæval imagination pictured as the sufferings of the damned, death by torture and rending of the body by poison or by flame; the stench of the unburied dead, the imminent shadow of their own death, final exile from all they loved, the wholesale loss of their friends. In the great base camps we older

men and women did what we could to help them and learned something of their new thoughts about themselves, their fellows and the great universe which contained such horror. Nobody who knew anything of human nature could have much doubt as to the spiritual situation, or can be at all surprised to-day as to the causes of the tides of pessimistic thought through which we have been passing.

The survivors of these men are among those who are the dominant influences to-day in the world of action and also in the world of journalism, literature and art. Once more the problem of Evil has raised its formidable head. Under its pressure many have lost faith altogether in God, in the spiritual world and in the life to come. I do not think that we can understand the mind of our age toward religion without realising the new prominence which that experience of Evil has had upon the fundamental faith in God. Nor can we understand the peculiar laxity in sexual morality manifest in much of our literature to-day if we take it as simply a wholesome protest against Victorian prudery. It is also largely an after-product of the unnatural conditions of separation under which men and women lived during the war, and the evils which resulted from this, of which every base camp bore too obvious witness. I believe, therefore, that Christian thought to-day has to grapple with new determination and thoroughness with this ancient problem of Evil. We may not be able to solve it, nor need our inability to present a complete solution disturb our faith that there is such a solution, but we may be able to advance the question a stage by showing

how fruitful the past endeavour to solve it has been. It may have been enough in past centuries for the Church to confess that the mystery was insoluble. In those days traditional faith was in possession in a way in which it is not to-day, and so men were willing to accept insoluble mysteries. To-day the deepest questions are raised and pressed home, and rival schemes of thought, both positive and sceptical, are brought forward. We must to-day, if we are to follow the apostolic injunction to give a reason for the hope that is in us, do our utmost to solve this fundamental problem.

As we have seen, modern thought has by no means disposed of the problem by simply discarding belief in God. Instead of impeaching Him we find it impeaching Nature, and saying to her, "Why hast thou made me thus?" The problem of Evil is, in fact, one which no serious thought can to-day evade. Let us allow two of the Humanist writers, however, to state it for themselves.

I shall begin with Mr Lippmann's statement: "The greatest of all perplexities in theology has been to reconcile the infinite goodness of God with His omnipotence. Nothing puts a greater strain upon the faith of the common man than the existence of utterly irrational suffering in the universe, and the problems which tormented Job still trouble every thoughtful man who beholds the monstrous iniquities of Nature. If there were no pain in the world except that which was felt by responsible beings who had knowingly transgressed some law of conduct there would, of course, be no problem of Evil. Pain would be nothing but a rational punishment. But the pain which

is suffered by those who according to all human standards are innocent, by children and by animals, for example, cannot be fitted into any rational theory of reward and punishment. It has never been. The classic attempts to solve the problem of evil invariably falsify the premises. This falsification may for a time satisfy the inquirer, but it does not settle the problem. That is why the problem is ever presenting itself again.”<sup>1</sup>

Let us now hear Mr Huxley. What would be the consequences, he asks, of our rejecting the idea of a Personal God ?

“First and foremost the thinking world would see, with a sigh of profound relief, the cutting of that Gordian knot, in which man has tied up the absolute goodness and omnipotence of God with the evil of the world. This has always been a stumbling-block to belief. When natural catastrophes occur, and when we see thousands of innocent men suffer for no cause, as in the earthquake of Messina or the Mississippi floods ; when diseases strike blindly right and left, like the influenza epidemic of 1918 with its ten million victims, or the Plague in London in 1665, or in India to-day ; when we see children born deformed, deaf, blind or crippled to a life of suffering and hardship ; or an idiot child produced by the best of married couples ; when we see the success of men who are cruel, unscrupulous, or definitely wicked, and the hard lot of others who are industrious and upright ; most of all when we are confronted by a gigantic catastrophe like the war, in which not blind outer Nature, but our own human nature is involved, and

<sup>1</sup> *Preface to Morals*, p. 203.

man's best impulses of devotion, courage, intellect, endurance, self-sacrifice, pity, are all in one way or another employed upon the task of killing other men by thousands and by tens of thousands—then is it difficult for many to believe in a personal God.”<sup>1</sup>

The issue is here fairly raised, and we who are Christian men and women who believe that we possess a Divine revelation are bound to ask, first of all, what it has to say about it.

We have hitherto been confining our examination of the riddle of the world to the obvious characters of that world itself and have reached some broad conclusions as to its fundamental nature. We have been endeavouring to discover the meaning of the world in the light of what we can learn from reasoning which takes full account not only of the world of Nature, but of the conscience of men. But we have not brought into the field of discussion what has usually been known as “revelation,” and which is embodied for Protestants supremely in the Bible and for Roman Catholics in the Church and the Bible. Even within these limits “philosophical Theism” has much to say about the problem of Evil, as not a few even of those Gifford Lecturers who have strictly observed the terms of Lord Gifford's bequest<sup>2</sup> have shown. Nevertheless I think it could easily, also, be shown that in so doing they have drawn deeply on traditional Christianity for their moral conceptions and even, though the debt may not have been fully confessed, on its fundamental principles of belief.

<sup>1</sup> *Religion Without Revelation*, pp. 14 and 15.

<sup>2</sup> Lecturers under this Trust are expected to treat their subject “without reference to or reliance upon any supposed exceptional or so-called miraculous revelations.”

Writing under no such limitations, I propose in the rest of these lectures to use the full resource of special revelation in dealing with this ancient difficulty.

But before going on to that discussion it is necessary to give one's reasons for believing that we have such a special revelation, and that the matter which it contains is every whit as trustworthy for the solution of the riddle as are those natural characters of the universe, and those judgments of conscience which have brought us, it may be hoped, to a spiritual interpretation of the world.

## I

That these characters and judgments contain a true revelation of God I believe. This extension of the term is etymologically justified. Revelation means the taking away of the "veil" which, as the prophet Isaiah said, "lies upon the face of all the peoples." And as these illuminating elements in the Nature world and these judgments of human conscience do disclose the spiritual nature of the world, they are true revelations. To deny this seems to me arbitrary. But it by no means follows that all manifestations of God are on the same plane. In my judgment they differ so profoundly that I can easily understand the jealousy with which some theologians<sup>1</sup> to-day protest against this

<sup>1</sup> The vehement denial that there is any divine revelation anywhere save in the Word of God in the Scriptures, of Barth and the dialectical school of theology, is, I think, to be understood as a protest against the depression of the Christian revelation towards the level of other faiths, current in Germany before the war, and in the later glorification

extension of the term revelation from the manifestation of God's grace in the Gospel to the wider and vaguer region of Nature and the soul of man. I think, however, that it is possible to guard against this without narrowing the grace and wisdom of God.

(1) When we study a great poem we say that the creator of it is revealed by the largeness of its conception, the vividness of the imagery, the force and grace of the diction. In Masson's *Life of Milton* the biographer tells us that "Lycidas" first appeared in a composite volume of elegaic verses in memory of a young scholar, Henry King, who had been drowned in the Irish Channel. He gives us, rather grimly, samples of the other contributions, and then lets Milton speak:

Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more,  
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,  
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,  
And with forced fingers rude  
Scatter your leaves before the mellowing year.

We are watching the flight of the young eagle. Now it is in that kind of way that we should think of God as revealing Himself in Nature. We look out upon that mighty spectacle, and it fills us with admiration and awe that may rise to worship. But it is not personally addressed to us, though we are privileged to behold it. It may be that with

of "blood and soil" as media of the divine revelation in the post-war period. But surely the Christian revelation "could not be a revelation if it were not also a corroboration. Its light would not be known as light if, apart from it, the world were in utter darkness" (Bishop Neville Talbot, *Great Issues*, pp. 3 and 4).

deeper knowledge of God, derived from other sources, we may find new depths in God in and through Nature. It is not an uncommon thing to find a man, through "conversion," finding new depths of wonder and beauty in Nature :

Heaven above is deeper blue,  
Earth around a fairer green,  
Something shines in every hue  
Christless eyes have never seen.

Nor am I denying that God may and does send even personal messages to His children through Nature. I believe that He can send such messages through anything that He has made. I am thinking rather of Nature as it appears in general to mankind, before the deeper intimacy which comes to us through "grace" is acquired, and even at this earlier stage it seems to me that we have real, though indirect revelation. Nature discloses God's greatness and wisdom and beauty in the world which He has made. This, with which much of the reasoning in the earlier parts of this volume is concerned, is usually called general revelation. It came from God. It is there whether we discern it or not. It is significant, in part it takes away the dense veil of mystery. Why should we not call it what it is—Revelation?

(2) But when we turn from Nature to the human soul, we come into another zone of revelation, first of all, in that knowledge of the Good and the Right, which is possessed in very varying degrees by every human being. There is a subtle difference here from that indirect revelation of which we have been thinking. In the former case

we watch God working. It is as if in the latter, and especially in all matters of moral direction, He turned and spoke to us, in the "imperatives" of duty. That sense of the moral imperative is no doubt mediated and influenced by the society round us, and our apprehension of it varies with our own faithfulness or unfaithfulness. But that there is a great deal more in conscience than the vote of the social group or nation or humanity, or even the depths of our own reason, we have already seen. It is the voice of God Himself that speaks, warning and commanding men and women. We have something here much more intimate and personal in the way of revelation than we can get through the order and beauty of Nature. Reality presses in upon us with its imperative demands of purity, sincerity and justice, calling for our decision and obedience. Conscience, when all has been said as to its history and its errors, is assuredly a channel of divine revelation to mankind, for, as we have seen, it takes away part of the "veil" of mystery from the universe.

Further, there is in the depths of man's heart yet another channel of divine communication. I believe that in every human soul there is something over and above what has been mentioned, a potentiality of direct awareness of the Divine. In many human beings it is little more than a dim awareness, and awakens into certainty and awe only in moments of crisis. It is found in everything that can be called a religion. It has been called a feeling of dependence, but it is more than an emotional condition, for mere emotions are subjective, and this is the awareness of a

Supernatural that awakens emotions in us of what we call religious awe.

I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thought; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;  
A motion and a spirit that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.

This awareness of the supernatural or numinous is found even in the most primitive religions. I do not think that along the line of moral obligation we can explain more than a part of the religious experience of mankind, even outside the domain of special revelation. Man does not think of the gods or his God only as those who forbid or command. They are those whom he trusts and whose presence reinforces and consoles him, especially in the hour of his greatest need. He takes refuge instinctively in them, which he would not do if they were simply imperative beings. To give a full account of this highest capacity of man, as I believe it to be, would carry us too far afield at present. I believe faith at its highest to be deeply akin to genius, that strange intuitive power of the human spirit that shoots ahead of the reasoning power and divines the end often before it is clear as to the intermediate steps. Yet it differs from genius in that it interprets the whole world, and not only a fraction of it; in that it is confined not only to a few, but is potentially

present in all; and, finally, in that its use and intensity are strictly conditioned by moral loyalty. It is only the pure in heart that see God. Inasmuch as this awareness is the channel whereby God communicates with man it must be the highest thing in him, the culminating point of his development.

Such monitions of duty and intuitions of faith are surely direct and personal revelations of God to men, and this is true not only of the zone of human history, illuminated by special revelation, but of non-Christian ages and lands as well. "In every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him." Are we to suppose that God did not speak to Socrates through his "daimon," that there is no direct divine illumination in Plato, no ray from heaven in Kwannon, the goddess of mercy, or the pitiful and loving Amida of the Mahayana Buddhism? Goodness and moral beauty are such wherever they are found, and assuredly they have a divine origin. We are under no necessity of denying that there is in such elements of goodness and beauty in pagan faith a revelation of God. But we can go a step farther.

(3) When we meet with any human being who has truly realised goodness, such a man himself becomes a medium of divine revelation. It is, indeed, to such revelations that most of us owe a very large part of our knowledge of God. Ask any man who believes in God to tell you how he came into this faith. He will no doubt be able to tell of many factors which led to that critical venture of the spirit, of struggles with himself and with the world, through which he won depth and unity of aim and clearness of thought, impulses

from Nature and so forth. But I believe in the great majority of cases of such attainment the determining influences are personal, written, spoken or silent. There is no such medium of divine revelation as a noble character whose root is faith in God. To have known and loved even one such man or woman is to have had a clue to the mystery of the universe which brought them into being. We reverence such men and women, and in that reverence, I believe, is deeply implied the conviction that Ultimate Reality is on their side. We cannot permanently reverence goodness if it is rooted in mere illusion. A good man, it is true, may very well have foolish illusions, but he is good by virtue of something behind the illusion. All real saints have received the light and have become transparent for it to pass through them. Surely if we believe that, they have become channels of revelation.

William James has said that for himself he could not say that he had any direct or immediate consciousness of God, but that he believed in the living God none the less, because he could not but accept the reality of the testimony of the saint and mystic to His existence. One of our own poets has put the same thought in the familiar lines :

Through such souls alone,  
God, stooping, shows sufficient of His light  
For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise.

Many men and women have felt that the holy and loving life of some obscure father or mother was for them the most compelling of all reasons for believing in goodness and in God. If such lives

in some degree remove the veil of mystery that hangs over the universe, or if they make it more transparent for the eternal Light to shine through it, and if God made them what they were, why should we exclude them from being part of His revelation?

But if that be so we must carry the process of thought a stage farther. There have appeared in the history of the human race from time to time men and women of richer moral and spiritual character than others, who have profoundly influenced their ages, and after heroic moral and spiritual conflicts have raised the whole level of their peoples, and, indirectly, of all mankind. These are the prophets and sages of the race. It is through such men that the great religions of mankind have come into being. They are very unevenly distributed throughout human history in time and space, but there is a remarkable constellation of them in China, India and Greece from about the seventh to the fifth centuries before Christ, and another very remarkable series, slightly overlapping this other group, from the eighth to the fifth centuries before Christ in the little land of Palestine in the Eastern Mediterranean. There is no traceable historical connection between these groups, and the latter series has characteristics that demand its separate treatment. Later on by a full millenium Mohammed arose in Arabia.

Now, in spite of all the external difference between these men they have something in common. They have all a deep conviction that life ought to be better and happier than it is, they believe that they have discovered what is wrong with it, and

discovered at the same time the true way of life. They believe this with such intensity that they throw their whole energies into the endeavour to make it prevail. They have experienced in themselves that profound tension which has been described in its modern form in the beginning of this volume, the tension between what is and what ought to be. Are we to include all these men under the rubric of "Revelation" ? Can we call them all prophets ? In a general way we can, for they all to some extent made the veil thinner and more transparent than for their age and people it would have been without them. But we can only do so on the clear understanding that by so doing we are not denaturing these two great and potent words of religion : Prophecy and Revelation.

## II

Both of these words, whatever their etymological meaning, are products of the Hebrew and Christian tradition. They are Biblical terms, and though we may quite rightly and legitimately use them to describe the founders of the great religions, and the truths about God, the world and the soul of man which they proclaimed, we Christians must be on our guard lest we be misunderstood in so doing. We do not believe that the Bible is simply one of the "Sacred Books of the East," like the rest, nor do we believe that the Hebrew prophets and the Christian apostles and, least of all, Jesus of Nazareth Himself, are simply men of profound moral and spiritual insight like Socrates and Confucius. Such men, we may well admit, were divinely in-

spired to explain with the light that they had, to their own age and people, the riddle of the world, and the kind of life demanded of men by that interpretation. But according to our interpretation of it there is much more in the Bible than that, and to omit this profoundly important element and, as it were, level the Bible down to the sacred books of other religions by that omission, is to denature it and deprive it of the main secret of its power. Like the other books it contains revelation, but its revelation is of a specific kind, which is why it is by theologians, not too happily it may be, called "special revelation." What is that new element?

We may begin by saying that such sages and prophets as those we have named, Socrates, Gautama and Confucius, have the same old world before them to interpret: the Bible writers have not only this same old world, but much more of transcendent moment to all mankind, which was not contained in that old world.

Very much of the whole later argument of these lectures depends upon clearness as to this distinction, so I shall state it more fully. I shall assume that we have left the Humanist position behind us, and that the issue is not now with Naturalism, in the first instance at least, but between the believer in simple "philosophical Theism" and the believer in special revelation.

The worlds of Socrates, Gautama and Confucius differ externally as sharply as can be imagined. Athens in the later days of the Periclean age, with its white marble temples glittering in the radiant air, the deer park at Benares slumbering in the

tropic heats of the Ganges valley, and the great verdant plains of Shantung with their populous cities, were not more sharply contrasted than were the mental environment and past of their inhabitants. But the substance of the human life that ebbed and flowed round these three great teachers was the same, and the same as is around us to-day. They had the same human passions, joys and sorrows. Love and death were there, and there too was the incessant struggle between the flesh and the spirit. The same comedy, pathos and tragedy which we know in the great spectacle of human life to-day went on within the same nature environment as that which nurtures and controls us all. They had, therefore, essentially the same material as we all have for solving the same riddle, and telling us how we are to make the best of it. They differed, no doubt, in their own personal capacity, and, as we may believe, in the degree and purity of their inspiration by the Spirit of God. But the essential substance of the problem was the same for all.

Now with the writers of the Bible it is otherwise. They all proceed on the assumption that God has intervened in their history and has given them thereby a new and deeper understanding than He has given to the rest of mankind, of Himself as not only a pure and holy, but also as a gracious God. All their thought, therefore, about God and the world and the soul, unlike that of other founders of religions, is determined by this momentous creative self-revelation of God. At this stage we do not take for granted that they were right in this faith. But we shall never understand the Bible

unless we realise that from beginning to end the entire literature depends on this foundation of Divine Grace. This distinguishes it from all the other sacred books of the East, with the single exception of the Koran, which is an offshoot from Judaism, which again is dependent on the Old Testament. The claim with which the Bible comes to us is that it brings momentous new elements into the solution of the perennial problem, and that in consequence it contains the self-revelation of God in history. Clearly if that is true it may contain the solution of the problem that has so persistently haunted human thought down the ages. We have already, I believe, in our argument come a certain way towards this position.

Hitherto we have, for the most part, been examining the foundations of the Humanist position, and, finding them insecure, have been endeavouring to get down to firmer ground. Believing that we have found that ground in a spiritual universe controlled by an imperative moral purpose, we are now in quest of some positive constructive solution; some house of thought that will be habitable by civilised and rational human beings, without compelling them to utter these lamentable outcries against the enormities of a universe to which, after all, they owe the very reason and sense of justice which enable them to impeach her. In the endeavour to transcend such incoherence and to reach such a positive solution, we are met by the fact of Evil, and in order to deal fully with it we have now to deal with what claims explicitly to be Divine Revelation. How shall we

recognise such a revelation, and test it? It must, I think, shine by its own light to begin with. It must be coherent with the highest and almightiest that we know. That is to say it must be worthy of God. It must speak, also, to the realities of our condition. That, unless all that we have been seeking to prove is wrong, is undoubtedly a sinful condition, is subject to the world and exposed to mortality and seeks deliverance from that servitude. Finally, it must make sense of the world, must have something to say that throws sufficient light on the great riddle.

Now there is only one revelation that to-day in Western civilisation we need consider, and that is the revelation contained in the Bible, which all forms of the Christian religion consider as their sacred book. They believe that it contains a special revelation of God to mankind over and above all that is indirectly and directly revealed of Him in the characters of the natural universe, in the moral and religious consciousness of mankind, and through human personalities of the higher type.

We have now in this lecture to consider the nature of this special revelation and its right to the name.

There is, unfortunately, no doubt that the real witness of the Bible has been greatly obscured for many by mistaken theories about it. Two such, above all, obscure it to-day.<sup>1</sup>

(1) The older of these, dating from about the

<sup>1</sup> I shall not deal in this book with the Roman Catholic theories of Revelation. Humanitarianism is a phenomenon confined to Protestant lands.

close of the Reformation Age and the period immediately following it, is the view that is called the verbal inspiration theory. In its complete form this is that every word in the Old and New Testaments was dictated or "inspired" by God Himself, so that the whole Book in all its parts was divine. This implied that all the histories were accurate in all matters of detail, that passages could be cited equally from all parts of Scripture for the "proving" of Christian doctrine, that all that Israel did under what was represented in the Old Testament as divine direction, was right and incumbent upon men to-day, and many other consequences that are almost equally in conflict both with the enlightened conscience of Christian men to-day and the plain facts of history. This was not, I think, the view of the Bible held by Martin Luther himself, the originator of the Protestant conception of the Bible. He distinguished between the Word of God or Gospel, and the Scriptures, and though with all the other Reformers he held the view that the Scriptures "contained, presented and conveyed the Word of God," he used considerable freedom of criticism of the canonical writings. But in the later period of the Reformation, and in the age of Protestant scholasticism which followed it, the supposed necessities of controversy led the Protestant Churches into perilous over-emphasis on the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. The verbal infallibility of the Sacred Writings was, in fact, a dogma which could not be maintained whenever men came to the study of these writings without the blinding preconceptions of dogmatic controversy. Whenever they ceased dictating to God the kind

of book they thought He ought to give men, and asked the humbler and wiser question: What kind of book had He actually given? the verbal inspiration theory began to collapse by its own cumbrousness and inefficiency to explain the facts.

The rise of the sciences of Nature, the development of critical methods of research, the recovery of the forgotten languages of the Nile and the Euphrates civilisations, and the reconstructions of ancient history which followed, made it ever harder to defend the verbal inspiration theory of the Scriptures, while the great modern development in comparative religion and archæology threw a flood of new light on the development of the religion of Revelation. It was realised that the theologians of the seventeenth century had not these matters before them when they formulated the older Protestant theory of verbal infallibility. Moreover it was seen that to claim infallibility for every writing in the canon was to make a most dangerous concession to the Roman Catholic Church, for, seeing that the New Testament canon was not completed till the fifth century A.D., the theory would imply that the Church which selected the canonical writings was itself infallible so far as this momentous action was concerned. It was further discerned that to ground the verbal infallibility of the Sacred Writings on the claim of the Sacred Writings themselves was dangerously like reasoning in a circle, unless it could be shown that the Scriptures had in every part that self-evidencing power which was rightly claimed for the Gospel, or at least unless they were so bound up with the Gospel that the Gospel could not be received and

believed without accepting the infallibility of every historical detail in the Bible. This could not be done. No one who took part in the writing of the Bible ever had any idea of the Bible as a whole, and there is no passage, in the entire range of the Sacred Writings, claiming for the whole that infallibility of which the theory speaks. So it has gradually succumbed by the sheer weight of evidence and by its own inherent weaknesses. We can now see why it came into being when it did. It was a controversial position forced upon Protestantism by the Roman claim to the inerrant authority of the Church. To it Protestantism rightly opposed the Bible, but wrongly ascribed to its letter the same kind of legal authority as the Romans desired for the Church. We can see now the merits by which the dogma lived as well as the defects which have caused its decay. These merits have been set in strong relief by the development of the rationalistic criticism of the Sacred Writings.

(2) This criticism has started from the position, in itself sound enough, that to begin with we have to explore the Biblical histories and literature by the usual methods of investigation, the methods that we apply, for example, to the great classics of other religions: the *Analects* of Confucius, the Buddhist *Tripitaka*, the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon, the *Dialogues* of Plato, and the Koran. When we do this with the Bible it falls at once into two literatures, the literature of the Hebrews, and the literature produced by the appearing of Jesus of Nazareth. Further analysis continues the dissolving of the sacred Book into many other books. The first six books of the Bible become a

compilation of earlier documents, while it has been shown that much of the Mosaic legislation dates from a period centuries later than Moses. The Gospels themselves are compilations of earlier documents, and one of them is written at least sixty or seventy years after the events recorded, and so on. The whole conception of one sacred book is thus dissolved, and it becomes instead a library. Not otherwise is it at first sight with the beliefs of the Bible. The science of Biblical theology which is devoted to a realistic study of what each of the Bible writers actually thought about God and the world and the soul, far from being a unity, discloses different periods and types of thought in the Old Testament, and also different standards of morality. Even in the New Testament, which covers a much shorter period, there are differing types of thought about Christ and His salvation,<sup>1</sup> and in the case of that writer whose epistles display his thinking most fully, the Apostle Paul, most scholars trace marked developments in his thought. In a word, the conception of the Bible as one infallibly inspired book, if the method of criticism be sound, seems to have gone for good and all.

Not otherwise was it with the personality of Jesus Christ. Rationalistic criticism proceeding on the assumption that the Gospels must be treated precisely as the early Buddhist records were treated, set to work to discern the real Jesus of history behind what it believed to be the romantic overestimate of His disciples. The result was the

<sup>1</sup> Most modern books on New Testament theology distinguish between the types of thought in the Synoptic Gospels and the Acts, in the Pauline Epistles, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Johannine writings.

reduction of His personality to that of a prophet, although the greatest of the prophets, and of His Gospel to the proclamation of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man. The entire element of the miraculous must also disappear, for we should reject it in the Buddhist record as a simple matter of course. The Gospel as a history, therefore, instead of culminating in the Resurrection and Pentecost, ends at the Cross and the Tomb in the garden. All the rest is over-belief. Now clearly this reduces divine revelation very much to a matter of human insight at its highest, and, note this, it is insight into the same old world as that which Socrates, Gautama and Confucius saw. Jesus is He who saw further into the meaning of the universe than any of these great men, and lived up to His insight more perfectly than they, and the Bible is simply the most impressive of the "Sacred Books of the East," and the greatest religious creation of man. Now, as compared with the fundamentalist view, this means that God is very much less actively interested in the salvation of mankind than used to be believed. He tends to become more and more a static Absolute Perfection, waiting for man to discover Him than a living God and Father. One must therefore press the question: Which is the morally nobler God? Here is the deep flaw in the purely rational and Humanitarian view, for surely it is axiomatic in all real theistic faith that the true God is He than whom it is impossible to conceive not only any mightier and wiser but any morally nobler Being. And the God who creates countless human spirits to press through fire and anguish and peril of human life,

and who, while Himself outside and above it, simply waits for them, does not seem to me so noble a Being as He who comes. On the Humanitarian view the Cross stands above all for the moral glory of man, on the Biblical view supremely for the glory of God. A universe, moreover, which shows us the Cross as the final reaction of the cosmos to the highest manifestation of moral beauty that mankind has reached, is surely a darker and more mysterious universe than one which contains the Resurrection.<sup>1</sup> And the more mysterious the universe, the remoter and further withdrawn from mankind becomes the God who created it and sustains it in being.

The "reduction" of the Christian revelation which we find in the Humanitarian version, then, extends far beyond the personality of Jesus of Nazareth, it extends to the whole view of the universe and of God Himself.

Now even if it be true that the older theory has many defects, no really religious mind can do other than admit that this narrowing of the whole conception of God has defects which are graver still. This, I think, largely explains the stubborn resistance which we still find among devout people both in Scotland and England to what they believe to be inevitably involved in modern theories of the Bible. In some cases also it accounts for secessions to the Roman Church, under which such men and women believe they can preserve their faith in the transcendent, living, intervening God, authoritatively revealing Himself to men.

About thirty years ago a deeply interesting book

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Talbot's *A Biblical Thoroughfare*.

was written by M. Francis de Pressensé, a very distinguished French Protestant publicist, in which at the moment he seemed on the eve of returning to the Roman Church.<sup>1</sup> His father had been a famous leader of the Protestants, and the son seemed to feel that he needed to explain his action. He said, in effect: "In my father's day it was different. Then we had a real Bible, a living oracle of God. To-day what have we? A heap of human documents! In the Old Testament we have the Jehovist and Elohist documents, the Deuteronomist and the Priest's Code. In the New, instead of the four Gospels, we have the Mark narrative, the Logia, the Lucan contributions, the spiritual romance of the Fourth Gospel, and Epistles some genuine and some spurious. Over against this heap of documents you have the firmly knit and infallible authority of the Holy Catholic Church and in this living Voice it is possible to recognise a Divine Authority." But de Pressensé, I believe, did not after all go over to Rome. The Dreyfus case arose, and he threw everything into what he believed to be the cause of justice and therefore, of the authoritative voice of God. The official Roman Church in France took the other side, and lost a convert. There is no doubt, however, that de Pressensé spoke out the feelings of many Protestants, especially in the earlier days of the critical movement. But there is no real deliverance in a flight to Rome, or to any authoritative living Church, Eastern or Western, for if we study the origin and history of any such Church on the same principle that nothing is to be admitted as true in the history of any one

<sup>1</sup> *Le Cardinal Manning.*

religion, no matter what the evidence for it may be, except what we can find some analogy for in the case of all, then all alike must be shorn down to the same purely human level, the supernatural being eliminated from them all. And when the supernatural goes, special divine authority passes also, not only from the Sacred Writings, but from the Church as well. Nor can any Church, any more than any individual, evade that austere test of its claim to revelational authority, "By their fruits ye shall know them." We stand, therefore, between two alternatives. Either, it would seem, we must accept a shrunken conception of Christianity and of Almighty God, or we must abandon the principle that the Bible is to be studied exactly as we would study any other history or literature. Are these the only alternatives? Before we accept so disastrous a conclusion it is desirable to examine this principle a little more closely.

Be it noted, first of all, that if it were strictly true it would at once exclude the possibility of there being any unique revelations. The matter is settled before we begin to examine the evidence. Further, if God should manifest Himself in a unique way in any human being we should never be able to discover it. If God should incarnate Himself in any human being the fact would be undiscoverable, for there would be no real historical analogies in any other religion.<sup>1</sup> I think that all Theists at least would admit that if God did so reveal Himself it would be far and away the most important event in history. We can hardly deny that, however

<sup>1</sup> No Western historian, of course, believes in the historicity of Hindu myths of Incarnation.

unlikely we may think it, such acts of divine grace are possible. Yet if we come to accept this principle as final criterion we should by so doing exclude from our knowledge the greatest things that history might contain. No consistent Theist, at least, can therefore possibly entertain it without scrutiny as a sound initial principle of historical research. The truth is that it is a good pragmatistical rule, a good working principle to begin with, but nothing more. If adequate facts can be brought against it we must in the interests of reality cast it aside.

We may take an illustration from the present position in biology. There are many men of science to-day attacking the problem of Life, and a large number of them believe that all living process can be explained in terms of chemistry. Others, again, deny this absolutely, but all would admit that it is a good rule to go on trying to account for living process in chemical terms, so long as it does not blind men to what is there in the facts. The hypothesis ought to be tried out and taken as far as it will go. It would become mischievous if it blinded them to reality.

It is one thing to use a theory tentatively and "heuristically," but quite fatal to turn it into a dogma and refuse to let the facts speak for themselves. Of such a nature is the principle that we have to treat the Bible to begin with like any other book. It is the argument of this lecture that beginning in this way we are led on to a deeper understanding of the Sacred Writings, which carries us beyond both the Fundamentalist and Modernist points of view, and which in the end will give us

the most adequate solution of the riddle of the world.

The first great characteristic of the Bible is its organic unity of theme. When we come to it as we would come to any other book, and examine it by the same critical methods as we would apply to other sacred books, we find, as I have said, that though it is bound in one volume, and is in two parts, Old and New, it is really seen to consist of two literatures, and that these contain a great variety of writings. Many of these are highly composite, nearly every one of them rises right out of human life, intensely experienced by the writers. They are deep-rooted in history, the history of more than a thousand years. They reflect, then, many stages of civilisation. They may be compared to the geological strata deposited by many ages of human experience, except that they are by no means dead rock containing dead fossils, but are full of vivid life and interest. We feel at first that this is only a book in the sense that they are all bound together. It is really a library of the literatures deposited by Hebrew history and by the appearing of Jesus Christ. But as we deeply familiarise ourselves with it, using every modern resource of scholarship and the utmost liberty of criticism, we become aware that there is something amiss with the new metaphor. Every good public library ought to contain books representing the most radically contradictory points of view even on the deepest matters. It ought to have room in it for religion and scepticism, the most secular and the most reverent and even the most superstitious types of mind. It ought to be

able to leave on the mind of the omnivorous and receptive reader the impression of utter confusion about most of the things that really matter, provided the reader be credulous enough to endeavour to take it all in! The same thing is, of course, in a lesser degree true of a good private library. I should augur badly of the mental culture and development of any man in whose library I saw only books representing what I knew of his own point of view. I should think he had fallen into "dogmatic slumber" and was not facing "the labour and pain of the negative" in his own thought. Now the remarkable thing about this millenium or so of literature is that there is no such fundamental divergence of view throughout its entire course. There is, of course, development from one phase to another of faiths and thoughts about God and the world and the soul, but it is the development of one coherent faith the whole way through from beginning to end. No one who really makes himself at home in that literature can be left in any kind of mental chaos as to what it is all about. There is one clear tremendous theme of the Bible—the self-revelation of God. "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son . . . by whom also he made the worlds." Ecclesiastes, with its melodious lamentations over the futility of human existence, is the only book that seems even to approach a divergence from this movement. Here the author is utterly unlike the rest of the writers of the Old and New Testaments who all believe intensely in life as well as in God. But the

book is really a dramatic presentation, in the person of Solomon, of the unsatisfactoriness of a worldly life, even when it has every gift of intellect, overflowing riches, and complete satisfaction of the senses. The "Preacher" is no sceptic or atheist, he is simply a worldly man who has found out that "the world is well enough in its way, but that it does not satisfy." But he has not wholly lost his faith in God. "This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." It remains true, then, that the Bible has one central theme, and that we can classify it and arrange it all along the development of this theme, and that, therefore, the figure of a library breaks down on this impressive fact. What is it that makes the difference between a library and a book? Surely that lies in the unity of its fundamental view of things and of its theme of the latter.

So after having rejected the idea of the Bible being one book in the superficial sense of the term, we find the idea returning upon us again under the compulsion of a deeper understanding. But what are we to say of the author of such a book? Let it be remembered that none of the many writers whose works are contained in it had the least idea that he was taking part in its composition. This is as true of the four Evangelists and of the Apostle Paul as of the most obscure and forgotten writer of the narratives of the Hexateuch. Each of them wrote, as he thought, for his own day and land. Had he realised all he was doing it would have killed all the freedom and originality that was in him. He was, little as he knew it,

writing for all peoples and all times, and taking part in creating that impressive unity we call the Bible. That unity is not of a mechanical kind. It is rather like the unity of a great piece of music, in which a theme progresses from a first hint on to its full climax, a climax which has been prepared for all the way, but yet when it does come, comes with the surprise of a new creation, the emergent being grander than any one had anticipated. How are we to account for this extraordinary unity beneath the difference, which surely implies direction and control and intelligence? You cannot have the development of a theme without a thinker and a purpose. Can you have a purpose and thought without a heart? But what are we to make of a purpose which takes up into its development the great course of history? We could not have had the prophecies, for example, without the empires of the Euphrates which determined the Exile, nor the Return without Cyrus and the Persian Empire, nor could we have had the New Testament history without the Herods and Pilate and the Roman Empire and the Roman peace. Every one of these writings rises right out of the history behind it, grows out of the human soil and is conditioned at every point by its human environment. So much modern criticism has made abundantly plain. Therefore if there be really purpose and design in the Bible, it must be the purpose of One who controls the nations as well as One who inspires individual men.

This deep underlying unity of theme is, so far as my knowledge goes, unique in the panorama of living religions,<sup>1</sup> which modern scholarship sets

<sup>1</sup> The Koran is the only exception, but the Koran is the work of one man.

before us in the text-books of the science of religion. Unity is the last thing we can look for in the jungle of the nature religions. Take the sacred books of India, which form perhaps the nearest parallel. Indian thought, in spite of the long story of the development of the Vedantist philosophy from the Vedas to Brahmanism, is a confused medley of Pantheism, Atheism and Theism, and the popular worship of many gods. China and Japan have each a blend of nature-worship, Buddhism and the Confucian ethic. As I have said already; the Koran is really an offshoot of the Bible, "the kernel of Judaism," as Kuenen said, "transplanted to Arabian lands."

In this respect the Bible is unique, and the historian has the problem of accounting for that uniqueness. Quite obviously it grows out of the history. Inevitably, therefore, we are led to the history that lies behind the literature, and to the further, as it seems to me, inescapable inference that the history must be unique. There must have been something in the history out of which the unique literature came that was not in other histories. As we have seen, the new epoch of historical criticism of the Bible began when it was seen that the true method of dealing with it was not, as it were, to dictate to God as to what kind of book He had given us, but to come to it asking what kind of book He had actually given. In the pursuance of this inquiry it has, I think, been quite clearly shown that He has not given us a verbally inspired book. That is a negative conclusion. But for Christian scholars at least a positive conclusion has also been reached. It is impossible to

account for the Bible without believing in special historical revelation.

The change in point of view has been put epigrammatically by a great scholar: "The Bible is not so much the inspired record of history, as the record of an inspired history." In other words the inspiration or revelation is in the history, and only gets into the documents mediately through the history. The documents are subject to the ordinary limitations and errors of all documents, and have to be tested by historical criticism. But the history behind the manuscripts is a history of God's special revelation through Israel and through His Son.

Now is it conceivable to a modern mind that any one nation of the many in history should be set on a different plane, as it were, from other nations, and stand on a different level of privilege and responsibility from the rest? Why should it not? It would, of course, be morally incredible, if we thought of the selection of Israel as being due to some capricious preference of God, like that of an indulgent human parent for one of his children. But if the election of Israel were a vocation to service, then such election would be quite in keeping with all God's ways with men. All nations have their vocations from Him, and are privileged that they may fulfil their vocations. When God has a new truth to give to men He trains a prophet for it, and reveals Himself to him, always through hardship as well as through assurances of His love and help, that he may communicate that knowledge to others. It is quite in keeping with God's Fatherly love to all nations, therefore, that He

should appoint one nation above others to such a prophetic vocation. But if He took such action it could only be done by establishing personal relations with such a nation in a unique fashion. There is of course no doubt that Israel believed that it was a Chosen Race, chosen by the singular grace of God to be His prophet to mankind. But was this conviction true? If we are to treat the history of Israel as the ordinary modern historian treats the story of Greece or Rome or his own land, we shall simply regard this conviction as being of the same nature as each nation cherishes about itself, *i.e.* that it is the centre of the universe and that there is none like it elsewhere. It is a working convention of modern history that there is no supernatural or superhistorical intervention in the course of history. We have, however, seen good reason to believe that this can lay no claim to be anything but a good working principle. If we are in earnest with the endeavour to discuss what really happened it must not lead us to mutilate the facts. The historical student is in something of the same position here as were men of science when they had to decide whether the Newtonian theories or the theories of Einstein gave the truer account of the physical universe. The theory of Einstein, like that of Newton, gave a possible account of the facts as already known. There had to be a crucial experiment. New facts had, therefore, to be observed. Decision depended upon certain astronomical observations which required an expedition to South America for their execution. Now men of science might have settled down in their tradition, but they did nothing of the kind. The

expedition sailed, made the crucial observations, and returned with a new theory of the physical universe established. Not otherwise ought it to be with the endeavour to discover the truth about the history behind the Bible. In this case the question is: Have we here simply the same kind of events as in the histories of Greece and Rome and India and China, or was there interwoven with the history something different and unique? Have we simply the uniform web of historical events, or is there a new pattern woven in the web? When we are endeavouring to get at the real history behind the Bible are we dealing with a part of world history, fundamentally the same as we meet with everywhere else, or is there something specific and unique, a Gulf Stream of special divine action, setting through the wide grey Atlantic? There lies the fundamental issue. How can it be determined?

The evidence is cumulative, and could only be stated in its fulness by setting forth the whole teaching of the Bible about God and the world and the soul. Some endeavour to do this in outline will be found in the latter part of this book. But there is one crucial element in the whole problem, the personality of Jesus Christ. As we think of Him so shall we think of Revelation both in the Old Testament and in the New. For there is no question but that He is the climax of the long process of Divine Revelation and human discovery which we find recorded in the Bible. He is therefore, as it were, the crucial fact, the test of that view of Special Revelation which the underlying unity of the Bible has already brought before us.

Let us again, therefore, get the issue clear. If we can explain Him as simply the greatest of the human prophets, then like all the rest of us He stands on one side of the picture, with the mystery of the universe on the other. He is simply explaining the same old world as lay around Socrates and Confucius and Gautama. The only fundamental difference between Him and them lies in this, that He has a richer tradition than they had behind Him, and that He is a greater and better man, and has a deeper insight into the unchanging and silent universe, and, in consequence of that insight, a clearer understanding of the whole duty of man.

The other view is that while this goes some way to explain Him, inasmuch as He is the greatest of all the prophets, it fails altogether to bring out the vital fact that He cannot be explained from the human side alone, that in Him we have an actual new emergence of the Divine on the plane of history—in complete conformity with the earlier intervention in Israel, but far in advance of it in fulness and intimacy.

Here we have obviously two quite different views of the Christian revelation. The former tends to reduce all revelation to human insight or faith, human discovery of new depths in the same old world. The other view means that God Himself enriches His world by a new disclosure of Himself, and that we to-day do not live in the same old unchanging world of the sages and prophets of heathendom or even of Israel. We have something new, objectively given, which enables us to interpret the old material in a new way. We have, in a word, Special Revelation.

If this be true we may have, obviously, something of first-rate importance for our solution of the riddle of the world which may carry us incomparably further into the heart of things.

We have only to remember how far beyond the bareness and despair of the naturalistic interpretation of the world we were carried by our giving their due place to moral realities, to divine how profoundly important is this new issue.

On the one hand, all are agreed that to begin with Jesus of Nazareth was a man in the full sense of the word. The only question at the moment before us is whether He was more than a man, whether in some peculiar and unparalleled way God was in Him and with Him. We are not at the moment raising the questions of the Incarnation and the Trinity which the Church debated in the first three centuries of its existence. We are concerned with the protoplasm of Christian faith and experience, not with the vertebrate structure of the creeds which the protoplasm developed in the environment of the Roman and Hellenic world and in the struggle with the "heresy" of these centuries. Such questions cannot, surely, be ruled out in a world which has shown such unexpected developments in the long story of its creation. Supposing we could have been spectators of all time and existence, how many surprises we should have had. Who that saw the primordial fire-mist eddying in gigantic coils beneath him could have anticipated its results at last in land and river and sea? Who that saw these sterile continents and dead waters, could have forecast that out of them would come the green grass and the fragile beauty

of the flowers and all the amazing variety of life? Who that saw only the realm of the biologist could have foreseen that out of it would come man? Human thought to-day is obviously passing beyond the earlier conception that all this developing world can be explained as simply so much kaleidoscopic rearrangement of old materials. It recognises that, explain it as we may, new things are continually emerging out of the world. It is endeavouring to explain this element of novelty by combining such contradictory words as emergent evolution. We cannot say that in such a creative world there is no room in human history for some new emergence of the unexpected and creative and divine. The essential thing is to let the new facts make their own impression. It is an open question, then, whether we may not have the coming of Someone here who is more than Nature and more than man and his history as we know it elsewhere.

What are we to make of Jesus Christ? I shall have occasion to speak later on more fully of the substance of our Lord's revelation, and shall confine myself here mainly to that which convinces me that we have in Him that which transcends any mere human prophet of the same old world as that of which other prophets have spoken. Before doing this, however, I would guard against being taken to imply that anyone can be simply reasoned into Christian faith, or that a true picture of the Jesus of history can be got from any second-hand report. For that the inquirer must go to the sources themselves. All that can be done here is to indicate the salient points in summary form.

These are: His moral and religious standard,

His sinlessness, His self-testimony, and finally the impression He made on His disciples.

(1) That Jesus in His years of seclusion had pondered long and deeply as to what men and women ought to be, before He spoke the Sermon on the Mount, is clear, even though that Sermon as we have it may have been gathered out of His whole ministry by the Evangelist. The teaching has plainly grown out of the whole earlier life, and of its exacting purity, sincerity and beauty there can be no question. Its standards of magnanimity, forbearance and forgiveness, of moral purity in the conventional sense of the word, of complete disinterestedness, of veracity of speech and heart, of humility and courage and of love to the uttermost are expressed with incisive force. Nothing must stand in the way of their sovereignty, and His followers are to rejoice in persecution for their sake and the sake of that Kingdom which is their embodiment.

Even more wonderful than this ideal of moral conduct is His standard of how we ought to think of God and act towards Him. The teaching of Jesus about God stands quite solitary in human history. That teaching in substance is that God is the only Being worthy of our entire confidence and devotion, and that if men realised and acted upon that, Heaven would come to earth, and that He Himself had come to bring it, if man would take it. So He calls all His followers always to limitless trust in God His power, His love and His liberty to help men. They are to be perfect even as His heavenly Father is perfect.

To-day no normally sound man can stand in the

presence of standards like these without discovering the darkness and confusion of his own nature and being convicted of sin.

(2) Yet here is the remarkable thing: they did not convict Him of sin. Imperfection as compared with the perfection of God He confessed by His baptism at the hands of John, and by His own explicit statement: "None is good but God." It is part of the early Christian faith in His full humanity that "He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." But human finitude and imperfection is one thing, sin is quite another. Never once does He pray for forgiveness. Yet He tells His disciples to pray for it. "When ye pray say: Our Father . . . forgive us our debts." With all His love for man which surely springs from His faith in their spiritual nature, as deeper than their sin, He is unsparing in His judgment of the evil in every human heart. "From within, out of the heart of man, there proceed murders, thefts, adulteries." Freud and Adler never said anything more unsparing than that. Yet with so high and pure a standard and eyes so penetrating He moves through the whole story, untroubled by any sign of self-reproach or contrition or fear in the presence of the Holy God. It may be said that the absence of any sense of sin is not so wonderful. There are many people in the world who appear to be quite untroubled. "They are not worrying about their sins." That is, of course, true. It is not the mere absence of it that is the amazing thing here. It is the combination of it with what is admittedly the highest standard in the history of mankind.

It may be said that the Gospel records are so fragmentary that we cannot be sure that much is not omitted. But that is excluded by the quite undeniable fact that all His disciples believed in His absolute sinlessness. In the case of one great disciple, St Paul, it might be said, this faith in His sinlessness is not so wonderful, for whether St Paul ever saw Him or not, he certainly never lived with Him. But that the men who lived in the closest human intimacy with Him for three years should have been persuaded of His sinlessness is surely very astonishing. What it does seem to me to demonstrate is that in intercourse with them He never confessed sin to them, or prayed to God for forgiveness, or broke down in any way. His moral victory was to them complete. To them He was "the Holy One of God." This lies at the basis of that estimate of Him as "the Son of God" of which we shall speak presently. They could never have confessed Jesus as Lord had it not been for this belief in His sinlessness.

I dwell upon this unique characteristic of Jesus Christ, not because I think that sinlessness gives at all an adequate picture of the human Jesus. It is a negative, and gives no adequate idea of the fulness of spiritual energy and faith and hope and love that was in Him. But it is necessary to dwell upon it, as it is of itself enough to warn us off from thinking of Him as merely a prophet, and still more as a Hebrew prophet. For all these Hebrew prophets had far too keen a sense of sin in the presence of the Holy One to leave any doubt upon the minds of their hearers on this matter. Isaiah's vision in the Temple is typical of the entire succession of

Hebrew prophets: "Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts! Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he touched my mouth with it and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged." But we have now to consider that element in the self-testimony of Jesus which carries us far beyond the conception even of that unprecedented thing, a sinless man.

(3) The self-testimony of Jesus.

It has been tersely said by a great theologian and scholar of last generation, Ritschl, that the Old Testament is the Lexicon of the New. In order to understand the characteristic words of the New Covenant, we have to explore their origin and history in the literature of the Old Testament, and, one may add, in the modification it found in Judaism. With that Old Testament literature Jesus was evidently profoundly familiar, as He seems also to have been with the Law and with some of the Apocalypses or Visions of the Future current among devout readers of the time. Of this it is certain, no one knew the prophets so well. He knew thoroughly what a prophet was, what were his gifts, and what, also, were his limitations. Yet nothing can be clearer than that, though He had all the gifts of a prophet, He disclaimed the name. He said that He was the Messiah, the Christ. He would not even allow that John the Baptist was only a prophet. He said of him,

“What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A prophet. Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.” He was the forerunner of Himself and the Kingdom He came to proclaim. He went farther still. He said that he that “was but little in the Kingdom of God was greater than John.” Yet the very eulogy of John from which these words are taken in which He says that among those born of women there is none greater than John shows that He admired John in a way that He admired none of His own disciples, however great His love for them may have been.

It is clear, therefore, that the “greatness” of which He speaks is greatness not of personal attainment, but of opportunity and possibility. The disciples belong to a new divine order, for they are the children of the Kingdom which He has begun, as the Messiah or Christ of God. These words, to begin with, break up the whole humanitarian interpretation of Him as simply the great prophet.

What did He mean by the term “Christ”? We are obviously thrown back on the faith of the Old Testament. By that faith, as we have seen, Israel believed that God in pure grace had taken it into peculiar and intimate relations with Himself, had promised that He would Himself make its fortunes His peculiar care, and in return had asked for its complete trust and obedience. He had in pursuance of this purpose given it a land, a law, kings, priests, a temple, sacrifice and prophets to interpret the implications of the covenant and explain His ways with them and the world as it moved around them.

But He had done more. Through these prophets He had given them a great hope, that He would send them a Deliverer and Saviour who should bring them definite and final salvation, and so "complete the history of the world." Historical criticism has shown us the different stages through which that hope passed in the Old Testament. In its earlier forms it does not transcend the limitations of a human deliverer, but later the figure of the Messiah becomes manifestly supernatural, and in the period between the Testaments and in the age of our Lord it had completely passed beyond the merely natural and human. But all the way through it has in it that meaning of definite and final salvation, and the full consummation of God's purpose not only with Israel but with the world.

Now it is quite clear that Jesus identified Himself with the long-hoped-for Messiah or Christ, and by this identification claimed to complete the history of the world in the sense that all history converged upon Him, and that by their relation to Him the future of all men and all nations would be determined. At a certain point in His ministry He said this quite plainly to His disciples.<sup>1</sup> Later on, by His entry into Jerusalem by an impressive symbol attached to one of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, He declared the same truth to the whole nation—and immediately afterwards uttered the great parable of the Last Judgment, in which He predicted that "all nations" would one day be gathered before His judgment-seat, when as "King" He would pronounce their acquittal or condemnation. He pictures both the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xvi. 13-19. Mark viii. 27-29. Luke ix. 18-20.

guilty and the innocent nations appealing to Him, moreover, as their "Lord." The evidence for all these astounding claims is overwhelming. Harnack says that he "cannot concur" in the counter opinion. "Nay," he continues, "I think that it is only by wrenching what the Evangelists tell us off its hinges that the opinion can be maintained. To say nothing of anything else, such a story as that of Christ's entry into Jerusalem would have to be expunged if the theory is to be maintained that He did not consider Himself the promised Messiah, and, also, desire to be accepted as such. Moreover the forms in which Jesus confessed what He felt about His own consciousness and His vocation become quite incomprehensible unless they are taken as the outcome of the Messianic idea. Thirdly, the positive arguments which are advanced in support of the idea are either so very weak or else so highly questionable that we may remain quite sure that Jesus called Himself the Messiah."<sup>1</sup>

What does the writer mean by the "forms in which Jesus expressed His own consciousness" ? The reference doubtless is to the many other passages in the first three Gospels in which Jesus used language of superhuman authority. I would only cite one of these familiar to us all, which only needs to be deeply considered in order definitely to settle the motive of Christ's own conception of His supreme and permanent place in the spiritual life of mankind.

"All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son but the

<sup>1</sup> *What is Christianity?* pp. 133-34.

Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him. Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”<sup>1</sup>

When we take all these three elements together, the religious and moral standards of Jesus, His own sinless consciousness and these judgments of His place and authority in the spiritual universe, and consider them, we can see the magnitude of the problem that they have on their hands who hold that they have nothing here but a human prophet. For there is no escaping from the plain fact that if this is true, then the prophet was a megalomaniac. We may palliate that disastrous conclusion by saying that the neurosis belonged to the period and land as much as to the patient, but that is, after all, only a palliation of an overweening self-estimate by one who was assuming the place of the Holiest of all to which He had no right whatever, and who has befooled the human race by leading it down the pathways of superstition and servitude to unreason. Is this credible? For my part I find it blankly incredible. It is precisely the same kind of distortion and denaturing of the reality of history that we have found elsewhere to result from the carrying through of the principles of Naturalism in the explanation of the Good and the Right and of Beauty and Truth. For though in this lecture we have been dealing, in the main,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi. 27-30.

with critics of the Gospels who share our own Theism, yet they have been using naturalistic theories of Nature and of history, none the less, in this resolute refusal to admit that we have here anything supernatural or superhistorical that may disturb the continuity of the whole. Once admit that narrow formula as determining our estimate of Jesus Christ, and in the end we inevitably come to what I believe is a manifest distortion of reality.

One fact alone could justify Jesus in speaking of Himself as He did, and that is that He spoke the very truth about Himself, and that He was indeed the Mediator, Saviour and Lord of mankind. If He was then it was His high vocation, His bounden duty to say such things, and with them to open a new door of life and freedom to all mankind. For if these things were true of Him, then He was revealing to mankind new things about God, of far greater moment and hope than any human being has ever told in the ages that came before Him, or the centuries that have passed since His time.

(4) I have left till now the last element which confirms this conclusion, the impression which Jesus made on His disciples.

It is quite obvious that after the disciples had recovered from the dismay of the Crucifixion they publicly confessed Jesus as the Christ. Indeed this was the corner stone of the Church. This confession made Him Lord and Judge as well as Leader. Emerson objected to the Churches of his day in New England that they "dwelt with noxious exaggeration on the Personality of Christ."

That there has sometimes been such one-sidedness in Christian life and worship, to the exclusion of the Father and the Spirit, I should not deny, but Emerson's protest was clearly against any breaking of the Humanitarian scheme. It is quite obvious, however, that the early Church broke it from the first. That it was intensely interested in the Personality of Jesus Christ from the very dawn of the Church is plain and is, indeed, not questioned. If the Humanitarian view of Him is right, then this was all a very grave mistake. They ought to have been thinking mainly of the Divine Father and of the new ethic of love, with due gratitude and love no doubt for the great human Teacher who had shown them such depths in the old world. But nothing can be clearer than that there is more, by a great deal, in their consciousness than that. Their conviction is not simply that they are seeing more deeply through Christ into the old world of Moses, David and Isaiah, but that something new has *happened*, which has changed the whole world. God has intervened in His Son and is intervening still by His Spirit. There is therefore a cosmic change—a "new æon"—a new environment of God breaking in. We may put the matter in an illustration. In our childhood many of us were familiar with what were called "magic-lantern entertainments," in which what were called "dissolving views" were flung upon a screen. First, there came a glorious display of some Alpine region with its world of snow and ice and mountain summit. Then, as we looked, the outline became dim and then confused, and then a new landscape of tropical forest came glimmering up through the

wintry desolation, and gradually submerged and overwhelmed the old.

Something like this, it is clear, was the common view of the first believers. They believed that a new world order had dawned with new and lovelier heavens overhead, and the old world that in that light was changing fast would one day disappear in the new splendour. New and creative powers were thrilling within them. A new æon<sup>1</sup> had broken in upon all mankind, and the supreme concern was for all to realise it and break out of the old æon of sin and death into the new world which Christ had begun by His resurrection from the dead and actualised at Pentecost. The vital element here is that God has intervened in Christ, and is intervening still by His Spirit. This explains the immeasurable importance of the Personality of Christ. To make Him only a man was to leave God remote as before. To believe that "God was in Christ" was to believe in a new and far richer environing world, luminous with the Divine Presence, and stirring with new powers and new hopes. Christians were still, of course, living on the earth, but it was now one which God, after a new fashion, had entered and reinforced. That coming of the Divine had no doubt thrown much new light on the old world environment, but there had been a new divine event as well as a new human discovery in its light.

But who then was Christ? Everything, as between the two views, depends upon that. If He

<sup>1</sup> This conception of the two æons was current in the contemporary Jewish writings, and obviously played a part in the thought and teaching of St Paul. It is concealed from readers in the Authorised Version of the New Testament by the translation of the word "æon" as "world."

is only a prophet, then the matter though great is simple enough. But if He comes from the Divine, then there has been a cosmic change, and the promise of a new heaven and a new earth. Surely here we have the secret of that intense interest in the Personality of Christ which we discover in the New Testament writings, which speedily finds even the conception of the Messiah insufficient to explain Him, and cannot be satisfied until it reaches its climax in the Johannine saying "The Word was God."

But if this be true for us to-day, then it is clear that we have in the ocean of past history a gulf-stream of revelation and redemption. It becomes impossible for us to regard the history of Israel exactly in the same way as we regard the histories of all other peoples, or the Old Testament as being explicable on the same lines as the other sacred books of the East. If, as I have already said, the Bible is an organic unity, and at the crucial point we are convinced that the Supernatural and Transcendent is obviously present, then it becomes arbitrary to deny its presence throughout. For it is quite clear that the bonds which connect the history of Israel with the Christian origins are far too intimate and vital to allow us to regard the one as purely human and the other as Divine. It is true that to Christian eyes no history is purely secular or human. God was carrying His purpose out in Greece and Rome as well as in Israel. Each of these nations had its own divine vocation. But that spiritual truism must not be made the means of blinding us to the specific vocation of Israel alone among the ancient peoples of antiquity. Theirs on

any theistic interpretation of the world was that of central importance, to discover and reveal God and lead mankind on to communion with Him.

I see no reason, therefore, to question the validity of what we have seen to be the fundamental religious conviction of Israel that God had revealed His grace to them in a unique way, and that they stood to Him in a peculiar covenant relation, and had thereby a true knowledge of Him possessed by no other contemporary people. In other words, they were right in their common belief that they possessed a unique revelation of God.

It is clear, as I have said, that Jesus Christ believed this and invariably took it for granted, and said that He came not to destroy the old Covenant but to fulfil it. By this He plainly meant that that Covenant was meant to become something greater. It was meant to reach out and grow towards a consummation that would not annul it, but, conserving everything in it that was essential, would yet be far wider and deeper. On the very eve of His death He announced that New Covenant by instituting the Sacrament of the Last Supper. Even as the first Covenant was sealed by that sacrifice at Sinai, so this New Covenant would be sealed by His own death on the Cross. Whereas the first Covenant was with one nation only, the New Covenant was in God's intention with all mankind. Whereas, moreover, when the first Covenant was made the horizon of human hope did not extend beyond the grave, under the New Covenant humanity could trust in Almighty Love and Power for the life everlasting. And whereas under the Old Covenant the Spirit of God is only mentioned

as given to isolated individuals for great deeds and achievements of the Divine Kingdom, under the New in the Divine intention the Spirit of God is meant to dwell richly and always in all men and women. So, at least, the apostles interpreted their Master's words, and carried everywhere not simply a new teaching about the old world, but a message of the embodied grace of God to all mankind.

Now if all this be true, as I believe it to be true, we have in the literature of the Old and New Testaments the result and expression of this long process of revelation in history. The Bible is the product and the record of an inspired history. The inspiration was first of all in the history, and secondly and inevitably in the records.

This view of the Bible, I believe, alone accounts for all the facts, the strange blend of the human and the Divine in it, its astonishing unity and its proved necessity to the spiritual life of men. It seems to me to do justice to all that is true and important in both the modernist and the fundamentalist views of it while avoiding the violence of either. As the Old and New Testaments stand, the revelation which they contain has plainly been a gradual revelation culminating in a final climax.

But allowing to the full for this gradual development of revelation in the Old Testament, and admitting freely also that variety in presentation of the Gospel which we find in the New Testament, and which is recognised in all modern books on New Testament theology, it remains true that in the Bible there is one clear coherent view of God and the world and the soul of man. I believe that

only this interpretation of the universe really solves the fundamental problem which has been our main theme, and in the rest of this volume it will be my main endeavour to set forth the substance of this view.

It has been my endeavour in this lecture to show that we have valid grounds for believing that, as the Reformers said, the Bible "contains, presents and conveys" the Word of God, the Word of Revelation. I believe as they did, that that Word shines by its own light. It speaks home to every human being who has been loyal to the light that he has had, who has been able to distinguish between good and evil, and right and wrong, and had a true longing for God, and it authenticates itself as coming from Him. But it verifies itself by explaining the realities of human experience. If it comes from the true light of the world, it is reasonable to expect that it will dispel something of the darkness of the world, and bring sense and meaning into it, as well as into the soul of him who receives it. I shall now seek to show that the revelation thus given does actually grapple with and seek to solve that same riddle of the world, before which the knowledge of our time stands perplexed and dismayed, and further, incomplete as our knowledge, even so enhanced, may be, that we have here by far the deepest answer of all to the riddle of the world.