

WILLIAM KINGSLAND

The Gnosis or Ancient Wisdom
in the Christian Scriptures

or

THE WISDOM IN A MYSTERY

*God's wisdom in a mystery, even the
wisdom that hath been hidden*

I COR. II. 7

*O Gnosis of Light passing all know-
ledge, I praise thee*

THE GNOSIS OF THE LIGHT
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EDITOR'S PREFACE

THIS book is the last work of the late William Kingsland and is published under the auspices of "The Kingsland Literary Trust." This Trust was inaugurated by the author shortly before his death, and is by his wish composed of the Council of the Blavatsky Association, who are thereby empowered to publish his MSS. at their discretion.

The "Gnosis" had occupied much of Kingsland's time and thought during the last two years of his life, and was not completed until shortly before his death; he had, indeed, hoped to make a few alterations to the manuscript but did not live to do so, and except for the correction of some typist's errors it is published as it left the author's hand.

In this work Kingsland shows how the fundamental teachings given to the world at the beginning of the Christian era were derived from the Gnosis or Ancient Wisdom, but in time have become so perverted that the modern interpretation of Christianity represents merely their debased survival.

It should be mentioned that the author's title for this work was *The Gnosis in the Christian Scriptures*, which the Trust altered to its present form.

The cost of the publication has been met by many friends whom William Kingsland had helped to a truer concept of the realities of life through his deep understanding of the Ancient Wisdom. The contributors have been glad to assist in the production of this work as a memorial to one whom they regard with enduring gratitude and affection.

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THE GNOSIS OR ANCIENT WISDOM IN THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

INTRODUCTION

THIS work is written mainly for a class of readers and students who find themselves altogether out of touch with "Christianity" in any of its current doctrinal or sacerdotal forms, but who, notwithstanding this, have some more or less clear apprehension that behind those forms, and in the Christian Scriptures themselves, there lies a deep spiritual truth, a real *Gnosis* (Gr. *knowledge*) of Man's origin, nature, and destiny which has simply been *materialized* by the Church in the traditional interpretation of those Scriptures based upon their literal acceptance.

Not that one does not recognize that even in its most irrational and unacceptable dogmas, so-called "Christianity" makes an appeal to a certain class of minds; and, indeed, is perhaps the only form of "religion" which could make any appeal to that particular class.

However irrational Christian dogmas may be in the light of our modern knowledge—and still more so in the light of the deeper knowledge of the *Gnosis*—they do, if genuinely believed in, serve to keep the average individual more or less on a straight path of moral rectitude, and they afford him a certain amount of comforting assurance that he is not "a lost sinner"; whilst in some cases they are undoubtedly the inspiring beliefs giving rise to noble and self-sacrificing lives. Precisely the same may be said, however, of other religions which differ radically from Christianity in their formulated beliefs. In short, the evidence of the life of an individual is no proof of the truth of his creed. It is sufficient that he believes in it; the rest is mere psychology. The *One Spirit* overshadows and works in all, but the *form* in which that working is presented through the mind or intellect is a matter of the psychological make-up of the individual, the lower personal self with its heredity, conven-

tions, and environment. Thus Krishna, speaking on the Supreme Spirit in *Bhagavad Gītā*, says:

“In whatever form a devotee desires with faith to worship, it is I alone who inspire him with constancy therein, and depending on that faith he seeks the propitiation of that God, obtaining the object of his wishes as is ordained by me alone.”¹

A general recognition of this principle would put an end to all religious intolerance.

It is no part of my task in this work to set forth the numerous reasons which can be given for the rejection of the traditional beliefs which have hitherto constituted what is generally known as “Christianity.” That rejection is becoming more and more in evidence as knowledge increases, whilst in the Church itself—using the term Church to cover all and every Christian community—we have the greatest possible differences of opinion regarding the *truth* of both “facts” and doctrines which for centuries have been regarded as the very foundations of the “Faith”: e.g. miracles, the virgin birth, original sin, the atonement, the resurrection, the ascension, the second coming, the nature of the eucharist, and the clauses of the Athanasian and other Creeds. Concerning each and all of these, leading authorities in the Church itself are to-day hopelessly at variance,² whilst very few professing lay Christians are aware to what an extent the commonly received conceptions as to the origin of Christianity, based on the supposed historical veracity of the Gospel narratives, are in question to-day by those scholars who have made the closest study of the actual historical evidences.

But although I am not dealing directly with these controversies, one cannot ignore them altogether, and some references must necessarily be made to them. Moreover, the correspondence of the Bible allegories with those of the earlier Mystery Cults, such for example as those of Orpheus and of Mithra, as also those of more ancient Egyptian and Aryan sources, implies some historical connection in origins; and although this is exceedingly obscure owing to the destruction

¹ Chapter vii.

² Those who wish to consult actual statements may read with profit *The Churches and Modern Thought*, by Vivian Phelips (see Bibliography, p. 221).

by the early Church creed-makers of every particle of evidence of this connection which they could lay their hands on, many clues still remain to which some allusion must be made.

This present work, therefore, is not written for controversial purposes, or for the purpose of upsetting the "faith" of anyone, whatsoever that "faith" may be. I am not concerned to convince or convert anyone to the views herein expressed. In matters of fact I stand open to correction where I may possibly be in error. But those who have come to some apprehension of the fact that Christianity in its traditional form is not merely open to many objections on rational grounds, but also that it is only one of a number of formulated religions which are just as efficacious as itself for the "salvation" of the individual, cannot adopt the proselytizing spirit which is such a marked feature of "Christianity." In so far as "Christianity" is exclusive, dogmatic, proselytizing, I am its, perhaps somewhat bitter, opponent. When it dares to say that the individual can be "saved" only by believing in what it teaches about a certain historical character, I say that the good Jew, or Buddhist, or Moslem, or Parsi has just as good a chance—nay, in many cases a better chance—of being "saved" than thousands of professing Christians.

What I do offer here is something much more universal than that of any exclusive religion, i.e. certain principles which have been given out by various great teachers from time to time in a *form* appropriate to the age and people to whom they were addressed. These, however, have subsequently been largely overlaid and obscured by the feeble understanding and individual interests of partisans. As I shall presently show, there is no greater example of this than in so-called "Christianity."

While, therefore, I have no desire to turn anyone aside from their present "faith": recognizing as I do that that "faith" must necessarily suffice to meet the present needs of the individual: it is possible that those who have encased themselves in a hardened shell of what they call "truth," based on supposed historical facts as given in the literal word of Scripture, may hereby get some glimpse of the inadequacy

of their hitherto cherished beliefs, and of a deeper knowledge which has always been available; aye, even to that supreme knowledge which confers god-like powers on its possessor. It is useless to offer this deeper knowledge to those who have not perceived the limitations of what they already possess. That may and does suffice for their present needs; but sooner or later they must come up against facts and experiences which will shake them out of their present contentment, and make them realize that for all their assurance of "salvation" they are still very far indeed from the ultimate goal of spiritual knowledge and freedom. It is only the man who knows how little he knows, and the *necessity* of knowing more if he would escape from the present deplorable condition of mankind, and recover his divine birthright as a "Son of God," who can, or will, reach out for that supreme knowledge, that "pearl of great price" which can be obtained only when he has "sold all that he had."¹ Of this more hereafter; but I may remark here that this and other similar parables clearly show Jesus to have been an Initiate in the Ancient Wisdom or Gnosis.

It is my endeavour now to show how that supreme knowledge which I am here referring to as the *Ancient Wisdom* or *Gnosis* is embodied in the Christian Scriptures, albeit sadly overlaid with "the precepts and doctrines of men."

I am not using the term *Gnosis* as applying merely to the tenets of certain Gnostic sects which were more or less in evidence in the early centuries of the Christian era, but I am using it in connection with a definite *super-knowledge* which can be traced back to the remotest ages and the oldest Scriptures of which we have any literary records, and which was taught by Initiates, Adepts, and Masters of the Ancient Wisdom in the inner circles of those *Mysteries* and Mystery Cults which are known to have existed in Egypt and elsewhere, even in remotest times. That is the sense in which the term was originally understood. It is the mystic knowledge which effects regeneration, rebirth into the full consciousness of one's divine nature and powers as a "Son of God."

The Gnostic Sects of the early Christian centuries who were

¹ *Matt. xiii. 46.*

so virulently attacked by some of the dogma-making Church "Fathers," derived their teachings from these Mystery Cults, but at the same time many of them claimed the Christian Scriptures—though not the afterwards recognized canonical Books only—as an authority for their teachings.

"However much the Gnostics may have been indebted to heathen thought, they still wished and meant to be Christians, and indeed set up a claim to possess a deeper knowledge of Christian truth than the Psychici of the Church. Like their opponents they also appealed to Scripture in proof of their peculiar doctrines. Nay, it would even seem that the Gnostics were the first to make for that purpose a profitable appeal to the Scriptures of the New Testament. And besides this, they also boasted to be in possession of genuine apostolical traditions, deriving their doctrines, some from Paul, others from St. Peter, and others again from Judas, Thomas, Philip, and Matthew. In addition, moreover, to the secret doctrine which they professed to have received by oral tradition, they appealed also to alleged writings of the apostles themselves or their disciples."¹

"We have no reason to think that the earliest Gnostics intended to found sects separated from the Church and called after their own names. Their disciples were to be Christians, only elevated above the rest as acquainted with deeper mysteries, and called *γνωστικοί* because possessed of a Gnosis superior to the simple faith of the multitude."²

"Gnosticism desired only to add to the confession of Faith for the *ψυχικοί* a secret doctrine for the *πνευματικοί*."³

Gradually, however, as "Christian" doctrine became hardened and more and more dogmatic, and the government of the Church fell into the hands of prelates ambitious for worldly power, and quarrelling among themselves for precedence, this higher knowledge became a heresy, and what records are left of it are mainly the misrepresentations of its bitter opponents among the Church "Fathers."

The Essenes, to which community Jesus probably belonged,⁴ were certainly Gnostics in the sense in which I am here using the term. Also the writings of Philo show clearly that he was acquainted with this Gnosis, although it does not appear that any of the communities of his time had yet begun to

¹ Smith and Wace, *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, art. "Irenaeus," vol. iii, p. 269.

² *Ibid.*, art. "Gnosticism," vol. ii, p. 679.

³ *Ibid.*, art. "Manicheans," vol. iii, p. 797.

⁴ See p. 150 *infra*.

be called Gnostics. He was contemporary with Jesus, yet never mentions him, although he teaches the doctrine of the *Logos* as the "Son of God."

"Wherever we meet with the word *Logos*, we know that we have to deal with a word of Greek extraction. When Philo adopted that word, it could have meant for him substantially neither more nor less than what it had meant before in the schools of Greek philosophy. Thus, when the ideal creation or the *Logos* had been called by Philo the only begotten or unique son (*υἱὸς μονογενῆς*), the Son of God (*υἱὸς θεοῦ*), and when that name was afterwards transferred by the author of the Fourth Gospel to Christ, what was predicated of him can only have been in substance what was contained before in these technical terms, as used at first at Athens and afterwards at Alexandria.¹ (See p. 177 *infra*.)

It would appear that among some of the sections of the early Christian Church—and it must not be supposed that even the earliest "Church" was one and undivided as a community or in doctrine—the practice common to all the genuine Gnostic cults was followed in having at least three degrees of membership or initiation. It was only in the highest degree that the deepest "mysteries" were *orally* communicated; and even so it was never the case that the Initiate, the Adept, the Master could be *made* by any communicated instruction. He is not *made*, he *becomes*. He must know of the truth of the communicated teaching from his own actual experience. What was committed to writing was never more than *exoteric*. It is just as great a mistake to harden the symbolism of the Gnostic Scriptures into a definite theogony or cosmogony as it is to construct an anthropomorphic theology from the narratives of the Old or New Testaments. The real Gnosis, therefore, is a mystical knowledge and *experience* transcending that *appearance* of things which the ordinary individual accepts as the only "reality."

It is my contention in this work not merely that this ancient Gnosis did and does exist, and was represented to some extent in the teachings of these Christian Gnostic sects, but also that their claim "To possess a deeper knowledge of Christian truth than the Psychici of the Church" is one which must be sustained. In fact, that the traditional dogmas of the Church which have come down to us through the centuries are gross

¹ Max Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, p. 403.

materializations of the real teaching as to the spiritual nature and origin of Man as contained in the Gnosis. These dogmas are the result of the literal historicizing of narratives—in some cases, however, having a semi-historical basis—which were originally intended as allegories covering deep spiritual truths.

The real fact, therefore, is not that Gnosticism was a “heresy,” a departure from the true “Christianity,” but precisely the opposite, i.e. that Christianity in its dogmatic and ecclesiastical development was a travesty of the original Gnostic teachings.¹

Dean Inge comes fairly near to this view in his work on *Christian Mysticism*, Appendix B, “The Greek Mysteries and Christian Mysticism.” Thus he says (p. 350):

“A doctrine is not necessarily un-Christian because it is ‘Greek’ or ‘Pagan.’ I know of no stranger perversity than for men who rest the whole weight of their religion upon ‘history’ to suppose that our Lord meant to raise an universal religion on a purely Jewish basis.”

How much Christianity really owes to “Pagan” sources he says is difficult to ascertain by reason of “the loss of documents, and by the extreme difficulty of tracing the pedigree of religious ideas and customs.” Nevertheless this indebtedness is gradually being brought to light, and is gradually destroying the idea of the uniqueness of Christianity.

“Dionysius uses the mystery words frequently, and gives to the orders of the Christian ministry the names which distinguish the officiating priests at the Mysteries. The aim of these writers (Clement and others) was to prove that the Church offers a mysteriosophy which includes all the good elements of the old Mysteries without their corruptions. The alliance between a Mystery-religion and speculative Mysticism within the Church was at this time as close as that between Neoplatonic philosophy and the revived pagan Mystery-cults.”²

“Christianity conquered Hellenism by borrowing from it all its best elements; and I do not see that a Christian need feel any reluctance to make this admission.”³

“For over half a millennium the approach to religion for thoughtful minds was by the *Gnostic* path. Such facts—since no religion persists by its falsehood, but by its truth—entitle the ancient Mysteries to due consideration. As an important background to early Christianity, and as the chief medium of sacramentarianism to the West they cannot be neglected; for to fail to recognize the moral and spiritual values of

¹ See p. 23 *infra*.

² W. R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 350.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

Hellenistic-Oriental paganism is to misunderstand the early Christian centuries and to do injustice to the victory of Christianity.¹

The *early* Christian centuries certainly, until the Gnosis became finally extinguished as a heresy. But the "victory" of so-called "Christianity" as recorded in the history of the dark ages of the Western world cannot possibly be attributed to its moral and spiritual values. And where is that "victory" to-day in the general state of the world? The moral and spiritual values are undoubtedly there, but the Church must get back to the Gnosis, and thus bring its fundamental teachings into line with our modern knowledge before it can re-conquer the modern world.

This ancient Gnosis, as I shall presently show, is indeed being re-stated to-day in many directions outside of the Church; and sooner or later the Church must come into line with it—or gradually become an extinct community.

This ancient Gnosis we may define as that knowledge of the nature of Man and of his place in the Universe which transcends the mere *appearance* of things as presented to the senses and the intellect, and which contacts *Reality* in a region of pure Truth. The beginning of this knowledge, therefore, is the realization that *things are not what they seem*; and no one who is a crude realist—as are all orthodox Christians, both in respect of the physical world and of their own Scriptures—can make any approach to this super-knowledge.

Of course all philosophy is an effort to apprehend *Reality*; but it is an effort of the intellect merely, and as such it is, and must always be, a fruitless effort. It is one of the fundamental teachings of the Ancient Wisdom that the intellect must be transcended before *Reality* can be contacted, for intellect can only deal with *Appearances*.

Some of our modern philosophers are beginning to apprehend this fact: notably Henri Bergson, who speaks of a higher faculty which he calls *intuition*, and which he says must replace intellect if we would contact Reality. F. H. Bradley's great work *Appearance and Reality* also throws a strong light on this fundamental principle.

¹ S. Angus, *The Mystery-Religions and Christianity*, p. vii.

William James also tells us that :

“ For my own part I have finally found myself compelled to *give up the logic*, fairly, squarely, and irrevocably. It has an imperishable use in human life, but that use is not to make us theoretically acquainted with the essential nature of reality.”¹

This inability of the intellect to transcend its own categories of time, space, and causation—which is also the main thesis of Kant’s philosophy—rules out the validity of all theological speculation and assertion, whether “ progressive ” or otherwise. “ God ” as the Absolute must ever be beyond all assertion of this or that. But this was clearly perceived ages before Kant or Christianity.

“ Who asks doth err, Who answers errs. Say nought! ”²

“ Not by speech, not by mind,
Not by sight can He be apprehended.
How can He be comprehended
Otherwise than by one saying ‘ He is ’ ? ”³

This is precisely the equivalent of the “ I AM THAT I AM ” of *Exodus* iii. 14.

“ The fountain-head of Christian mysticism is Dionysius the Areopagite. He describes the absolute truth by negatives exclusively.”⁴

It is a simple proposition that that which is ALL cannot “ create ” anything outside of itself. In *1 Corinthians* xv. 28, Paul tells us that when all things have been subjected to the “ Son ” (or Logos), “ then shall the Son himself be subjected to him that did subject all things unto him, that God may be all in all.”

What! Is not then God all in all *now*?

To this we should reply: Yes, as including both *Reality* and *Appearance*; but No when we speak, as Paul is here doing, from the point of view of *Appearance* merely.

But what is this distinction between Reality and Appearance save a mere concession to the *duality* of the intellect? The ancient Aryan philosophers, perceiving this well, considered the world of Appearances to be *Māyā*, an illusion. And in

¹ *A Pluralistic Universe*, p. 212.

² *The Light of Asia*.

³ *Katha Upanishad*, 6, 12.

⁴ Wm. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 416.

truth Paul here only repeats a fundamental principle of the Ancient Wisdom, i.e. that there is a gradual withdrawal of the manifested or *appearance* universe into the ONE from which it originally proceeded. In Eastern philosophy this outgoing and return is postulated as an eternal periodical process: the outgoing being called a "Day" of Brahma (the Logos or Demiurge), and the complete withdrawal—which lasts as long as the outgoing, an incalculable period—a "Night" of Brahma. Man, being the mirror or reflection of the *cosmic* process, has the same outgoing and return—as I shall show more explicitly, as taught in the Christian Scriptures, in subsequent chapters of this work.

We may note here that in this saying of Paul we have one more instance and evidence of his knowledge and teaching of the ancient Gnosis.

To satisfy the intellect of man in its present development, a *creative* God has to be postulated: whether called the Logos, or the Demiurgos, or by some specific name such as Jehovah or Brahma. From this necessity of the intellect arise theogonies and theologies, varieties of Trinities, anthropomorphic gods, etc. The simplest concept in terms of *human* nature is the Trinity of Father-Mother-Son. But this will not always be so. Intellect, as Man evolves, will assume other aspects, and will certainly transcend its present limitations. Do not therefore accept the limitations of its present formulations as "Gospel Truth." They have their use if it is true; but let the seeker after truth thoroughly understand their nature and limitations, and put them in their proper place.

Robert Browning in his poem *Paracelsus* puts the following words into the mouth of that great Adept.

" There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fulness; and around,
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
This perfect, clear perception—which is truth.
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
Binds it, and makes all error; and to KNOW
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without."

Now that "inmost centre" is, in the teaching of the ancient Gnosis, the real SELF; the eternal, immortal, divine SELF which is *one* with the universal SELF, commonly called *God*. Thus the root teaching of this Ancient Wisdom at all times has been *the divine nature of Man*; and what was taught in the inner schools of the *Mysteries*—a teaching which can still be obtained—was the method of achieving this supreme knowledge in a practical manner; that is to say the attainment of god-like character and powers. Every man is potentially a god, however feeble may be his powers at the present time. At root he *is* God.

Knowledge is power. The supreme knowledge confers on its possessor powers the possibility of which is not even dreamed of by the ordinary individual—or the ordinary Christian for that matter, notwithstanding the repeated assertions of that possibility in the Christian Scriptures. Yet there have been some mystics in the Christian Church even in modern times who have recognized this fundamental fact of man's nature. Thus Archdeacon Wilberforce writes in *Mystic Immanence* (p. 89):

"Meanwhile remember 'the Kingdom of Heaven is within you,' all the power you can possibly need is at your disposal, you need no helper to give it you, it is yours now."

Perhaps I may be allowed to quote here from a work of my own, *Scientific Idealism*, published in 1909 (p. xiv):

"All the Cosmic Powers of the Universe are Man's, did he but know how to utilize them. They are more than *his*, they are *Himself*."

But this supreme knowledge can never be attained by those who are content to rest in a "faith" which leaves them powerless to conquer even the commonest disabilities of this physical world, let alone those higher planes of consciousness which lie immediately above—or rather *within*—and which are infinitely more *real* than this so apparently real physical world.

This potential divinity of every man in the power of the *indwelling* Christ or *Christos* principle runs all through the teaching of Jesus and Paul—as I shall presently show. It is the teaching which the Church *ought* always to have presented, and which *was* presented in the early Christian Gnostic sects

until these were suppressed by the ignorant materializers and carnalizers of teachings they could not understand. It is the teaching which, if the Church were to present it to-day, would be the salvation both of itself and of the world. Fortunately thousands have come to an understanding of it from other sources.

The individual must have *knowledge* (*Gnosis*) as well as *faith* (*Pistis*). He must have the knowledge that *conquers* each and all of the disabilities under which he, and Humanity as a whole, at present suffer, apparently in helpless ignorance. For it is simply *ignorance* that is the cause of "humanity's great pain." But that ignorance is not a necessity to which man must submit without a remedy—a remedy *here and now*. Six hundred years B.C.—not to go any further back—the Buddha taught that:

"Ho! ye who suffer! know
Ye suffer from yourselves. None else compels.
Higher than Indra's ye may lift your lot,
And sink it lower than the worm or gnat.
Within yourselves deliverance must be sought;
Each man his prison makes."¹

These words apply to the individual; yet what is the whole vast struggle of Humanity but simply the effort to rise from ignorance to knowledge—and who shall say what is the limit of that knowledge?

It is here that the Ancient Wisdom or Gnosis proclaims its message. *There is no limit*. Moreover there have always been, and there are to-day, Initiates, Adepts, Mahātmās (*lit.* Great Souls) who have achieved that knowledge; aye, even to its most glorious heights.

Thus the individual may step out in front of the Race. He may achieve this knowledge because there are Masters of the Wisdom waiting to instruct him so soon as he has shown himself ready and fit to receive the instruction. But these Masters will not, any more than the Master whose words are partially recorded in the New Testament documents, "cast their pearls before swine." They will not, any more than he did, disclose

¹ *The Light of Asia*.

the treasures of their knowledge to the world otherwise than in allegory and symbol.

When may the individual be said to be ready? When at last, through the strife and stress and sorrows and failures of repeated incarnations, he has learnt that there is no rest, no satisfaction in "the things of this world" after which he has hitherto been striving, and after which the great majority of the Race still strive. When he has not merely purified himself of all worldly lusts and desires, but also from any pride of intellect which may claim to be a knower of the truth in this, that, or the other *form*. When with an open mind he is prepared to go deeper than mind (intellect) and the man-made doctrines of men, into a region where truth is formless and immediate. When he has accomplished this—with which I shall deal more fully later on—then, and not till then, he is ready to knock at the Portal of the Temple of Initiation into that higher knowledge to which I have referred, and which I shall endeavour to elucidate to some extent in its Christian form—or rather I should say in the form in which it is presented in *the Christian Scriptures*: for what is known traditionally and historically as "Christianity" consists of man-made dogmas based on a literal interpretation of those Scriptures, and not on their allegorical, mystical, and gnostic nature.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that religion is not a matter of *escape*, of getting safely into "heaven." It is a matter of *conquest*. "Christianity," so-called, lulls its devotees into a false sense of security, or "salvation"; whereas the whole history of humanity, and of religion itself, shows us that:

"The path by which to Deity we climb
Is arduous, rough, ineffable, sublime."¹

Yet the great attraction which the Christian "faith" has offered has been that it is so *easy*: a mere matter of belief in certain dogmas of the Church; at most one short lifetime, with possibly in some cases the sharp death of a martyr, and then an eternity of bliss. Wherein is that any different or better than the belief of the fanatical Moslem who rushes to death against the bayonets and bullets of the "infidel," believing

¹ See p. 44 *infra*.

that thereby he is assured of all the sensual joys of the Paradise described in the Koran?

It has hitherto been the contention of Christian doctrinaires that the historical Jesus Christ by his coming and work "abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light"¹ in a hitherto dark and ignorant world. Nothing could be further from the truth as concerns the world at large. It was not even true of that little Jewish world to which the supposed Gospel was first preached. The Essenes, the ultra strict Jewish sect, believed firmly in immortality, and in a future state of rewards and punishments. Death was regarded as a great gain for the righteous, but they did not believe in the resurrection of the body.

As for the world at large, and taking one example only: nothing was deeper ingrained in the religion of the Egyptians than the belief in immortality.

"Indefinite time, without beginning and without end, hath been given to me; I inherit eternity, and everlastingness hath been bestowed upon me."²

Yet when we have apprehended what is really meant by the *Christ (Christos)* as distinguished from any personal historical "man called Jesus," the verse from *Timothy* which I have just quoted is seen to be profoundly true, as I shall hereafter show.

Now the Christian has unfortunately always been taught that he will leave all the disabilities and sin and sorrow of this present world behind him when he dies, and that his "faith" will ensure him an eternity of bliss "for ever and ever"; that he will have finished with this world for good and all, and will have naught more to do with its strife and conflict. This is a soul-killing doctrine: as indeed we see in such a multitude of professing Christians. They "have a name that they live, but are (spiritually) dead."

But that Gnosis with which I am now dealing has always taught that the individual cannot thus sever himself from the great stream of human evolution. He belongs to the Race from beginning to end of the great Cycle. The progress of

¹ 2 *Tim.* i. 10.

² *Book of the Dead*, chapter lxii.

the Race is accomplished only by the progress of the individuals composing it, and this is accomplished by repeated incarnations. It is true that after physical death the individual who has any spiritual nature left in him may enjoy a supreme bliss for a season, in freedom from physical conditions and limitations. The "sleep" of death is simply the equivalent between incarnations of the sleep of the body between one day and another. But again and again the individual must come back, be reincarnated; not merely to play his part in the progress of the Race; not merely to gain further knowledge himself, but also to reap what he has sown in his past incarnations, to work out his *Karma*.

" He cometh reaper of the things he sowed,
Sesamun, corn, so much cast in past birth;
And so much weed and poison stuff, which mar
Him and the aching earth."¹

This is an age-long teaching. It was also taught, as I shall presently show, in the early Christian Church.

What a vast difference it would make to this world of ours if each individual realized that he must play his part therein and contribute to the progress or retardation of the Race from beginning to end of the Cycle; that he *cannot* take any short cut to eternal bliss; that he *must* work out, not merely his own salvation, but also that of the Race. The Christian Scriptures *when esoterically interpreted* tell us how this must be done; and thereby they come into line with that which had always been taught in the inner Shrines of the Temples of Initiation.

Why in the inner Shrines? Why not openly and publicly? Do we need to ask that question when the great teacher whose words we are supposed to have in the Canonical Gospels "taught only in parables," and is reported to have said to his Disciples: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given"²? This fact is in itself a proof that the teachings in the Gospels are derived from and belong to that ancient Gnosis of which I am speaking. Nevertheless these "Mysteries" are not recorded as having been

¹ *The Light of Asia*, Book the Eighth.

² *Matt. xiii. 11.*

given to the disciples in any of the Canonical Gospels. We have to go to the "apocryphal"¹ writings, such as the *Pistis Sophia*, to obtain them. Indeed Jesus is reported to have said to his Disciples:

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. . . . These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs (or parables): the hour cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but shall tell you plainly of the Father" (*John* xvi. 12 and 25).

Note that this appears in *John*, the *Gnostic* Gospel, while its fulfilment appears more particularly in the *Pistis Sophia*, which purports to be those further teachings of the *Mysteries* given by Jesus to his Disciples eleven years after his resurrection.

There always has been and there always must be an *exoteric* doctrine for the masses, and *esoteric* teaching for those who—as Plotinus says²—"are fortunately able to perceive it."

But in fact these "mysteries" cannot be stated in any language but that of allegory and symbolism. How can that which lies altogether beyond our common consciousness of time and space and the crude realism of the common conception of this world of physical matter: how can such things be expressed otherwise than by physical *analogies* (allegories) and in a physical language which can only be symbolical, never literal? But the mischief lies in this, that the allegory is taken by the uninstructed for literal history and the symbol for reality. Is it not so even to-day with thousands of sincere Christians? Is not the Garden of Eden allegory still taken as literal history, let alone the allegories of the New Testament? If our modern physicists now find that *matter*, that apparently "solid, massy, hard, impenetrable" substance, is in reality the veriest wraith, with spaces between the atoms comparable to inter-planetary spaces, and whose essential nature can only be approximately expressed in a mathematical symbolism which it requires a highly trained mind to understand: think you that the nature of the *soul* can be demonstrated to the common people—or even to the most intellectual for that matter—as easily as the *exoteric* nature of water as a simple H_2O : the combination of two atoms of hydrogen with one of

¹ Apocryphal—hidden. See p. 73 *infra*.

² See p. 74 *infra*.

oxygen, without any enquiry as to what the "atom" really is? That was simple enough so long as the atom was thought of only as some sort of indestructible particle; and indeed it was dogmatically declared by the materialistic scientists of last century that the atom *could not* be resolved into anything else. Thus Professor Clerk-Maxwell, at the meeting of the British Association in 1873, said that:

"Though in the course of ages catastrophes have occurred and may yet occur in the heavens, though ancient systems may be dissolved and new systems evolved out of their ruins, the molecules out of which these systems are built—the foundation-stones of the material universe—remain unbroken and unworn. They continue this day as they were created—perfect in number and measure and weight."

Note the idea of "creation" entering in here. But how stands it to-day? The atom has turned out not merely to be destructible, resolvable into protons, electrons, neutrons, and even possibly into a mere wave form: but it is seen that in reality there is no such thing as physical matter *per se*; it must be accounted for in terms of something much more *cosmic*, even possibly in terms of "mind-stuff."¹

Thus it is now apprehended that there is mystery within mystery in matter itself. It can no longer be regarded as a "created" thing. Crude realism has here had to give way to a deeper knowledge, though that knowledge has as yet only penetrated a little more than skin deep.

It is hardly necessary to point out that this modern discovery that physical matter is not a thing *per se*, that it is not *sui generis*, or a "created" thing, goes a long way towards the negation of the crude orthodox theology which has always thus regarded it; and with that a good deal more in that theology also goes overboard. Little as our discoveries have penetrated into the nature of that *Root Substance* from which physical matter is derived, they go a long way towards confirming

¹ "To put the conclusion crudely—the stuff of the world is mind-stuff. . . . The mind-stuff is the aggregation of relations and relata which form the building material for the physical world." (Professor Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World*, pp. 276, 278.)

"The theory of wave mechanics reduces the last building stones of the universe to something like a spiritual throb that comes as near as possible to our concept of pure thought." (James Murphy in his biographical Introduction to Erwin Schrödinger's *Science and the Human Temperament*.)

the teachings of the Gnosis as to the nature of *Hyle*. What modern science has now discovered experimentally has always been known and taught by the Adepts and Initiates, not to mention the Alchemists.

Think you, then, that the nature of the soul is any simpler than that of matter? Think you that it is adequately explained in the crude realism of the Christian Creed; or that it is sufficient to say that the soul was "created" by God? Are the assertions of our dogmatic theologians to be accepted with any greater confidence than those of our dogmatic scientists of last century? There is not one of them who really *knows* anything about the "God" they speak of so freely as acting in this, that, or the other manner. Nor do they know what the human soul is in its essential nature. They know less of that than our physicists now know of the nature of matter. Yet the knowledge is available, has always been available for those who knock aright at the door of the Temple of Initiation. Those who think that they can rest in a mere *belief* in this, that, or the other Creed, are simply delaying their own evolution and that of the Race. Religion is not belief, it is practical knowledge of the way to regain one's birthright as a "Son of God"; which knowledge brings with it the power to conquer and command the *natural* forces of the Universe both visible and invisible, both material and immaterial.

What other than this conquest is it that is assured to us in the Christian Scriptures, in the teachings of Jesus and of Paul? Is it not there explicitly stated that we are to become "Sons of God"? What does that mean if it does not mean the acquisition of god-like powers.

"How slowly we learn that God and man are one. Do away with your limitations. Stand out free in the strong life of God. You are like children with your walls and partitions, your churches and chapels."¹

These words from "the other side" are merely an echo of what has always been taught in the ancient Gnosis, and which are also the explicit—or perhaps we should rather say *implicit*—teaching of the Christian Scriptures. Yet there are some passages which are explicit enough. For example:

¹ *Christ in You*. See Bibliography.

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (*Rom.* viii. 14).

"For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus" (*Gal.* iii. 26).

In several places in the revised version of the Testament the Greek word *tekna* is translated children where formerly it was translated *sons*. For example:

"But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children (*tekna*) of God" (*John* i. 12).

So also in *Philippians* ii. 15; and in 1 *John* iii. 1. But this does not alter the meaning. In the seventeenth verse of the eighth chapter of *Romans*—following the fourteenth which I have quoted above—Paul used the word children: evidently referring to what he has just said.

"We are children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ."

Why does not the Christian Church teach this oneness of man and God? Why do not Christians "stand out free in the strong life of God"? Why do they not claim their birth-right as "sons of God," with all the *powers* that that confers on them? The answer is simply because all this has been obscured by the man-made dogmas of a priestly hierarchy striving for *worldly* power and dominance.

This oneness of God and man (not the theological God however) is no new teaching. It was a teaching given in the Mystery Schools long, long before the Christian Scriptures put it into a new *form*. The whole motif of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* is this conquest of the lower self, and the achievement of union with the divine Self. It was called *Osirification*, or identification with the supreme God Osiris. What matters whether that Supreme ONE is called Brahma, or Osiris, or Jehovah, or by any other name? It is the *fact* that matters, not the form in which that fact is stated.

"I am the Ibis which cometh forth from Het-Ptah-ka.¹ Heaven is opened to me, and the earth is opened unto me. I have obtained the mastery over my heart. I have obtained the mastery over my members.

¹ The House of the *Ka* (astral body or double) or Ptah. Exoterically and geographically, Memphis.

I have obtained the mastery over my mind. . . . O Ra, I am thy son. O Thoth, I am thy eyes, O Osiris, I am thy Power."¹

Also as the keynote of the ancient Upanishads we have that fundamental teaching expressed in the aphorism "*That art Thou.*"

The question as to the character and personality of the central figure of the New Testament documents naturally enters largely into the subject with which we are now dealing. There are three views advocated by various writers, (a) the extreme view that there never was a historical Jesus; (b) the view that he was simply an exceptional man; and (c) the further view that he was "very God of very God." This, however, is not a mere problem of modern scholarship, it pertained to the first and second centuries, and is even evidenced in St. Paul's Epistles. Those who have made a study of the Ancient Wisdom or Gnosis are, however, for the most part quite indifferent to these controversies. They recognize in the Christian Scriptures—albeit in a very distorted and garbled manner in our English version—the same essential teaching as to Man's origin, nature, and destiny which they have learnt from other sources. In these Scriptures it is dressed up in a certain allegorical form to suit the nation and people to whom it was addressed. What is rejected is not these Scriptures but the interpretation which has been put upon them by the literalists, and the man-made dogmas, based on the literal interpretation, which have prevailed for so many ages in the West, but which are now happily being widely repudiated by the more intelligent knowledge of our age. In short, we have to-day a totally different outlook on the universe than that which was possessed by these early dogmatists; and it is not possible for us to think either of its "Creator," or of Man, or of historical "facts" in the same terms. Hence on the one hand the widespread indifference to or total rejection of "Christianity"; and on the other hand the effort of "Modernism" to bring it within the lines of modern thought. Our modern knowledge of cosmology, of anthropology, and of the real facts of history, forbids us to think that the world was "created" in the manner so long current in Christian

¹ *Book of the Dead*, Budge's edition, pp. 690, 691.

doctrine; nor is it governed by such a deity as is therein conceived.

Ages before "Christianity" made its appearance, man had discovered "the way to God"; and Initiates and Seers and divine Avatāras had declared it for those who had ears to hear. This is the one great fact that our modern knowledge of ancient literature—practically unknown during the first half of last century—has brought to light. The Christian Scriptures can no longer claim to be unique; can no longer claim to be the only and sole guide for distracted humanity in its effort to discover the whence, why, and whither. Doubtless it can claim to be the sole guide for those who know of no other—and how many professing Christians do know of the literature of which I have spoken; or, knowing of it, simply reject it as "heathen"? How many professing Christians know of their own *mystical* literature? That literature touches in many of its aspects the teaching of the Ancient Wisdom. How many, even among theological students, are acquainted with or can recognize the profound teaching of that great Christian mystic and seer, Jacob Boehme, for example? I shall have occasion to quote from him, and to show that he—although uninstructed and uninitiated in any of the Mystery Schools—*saw*, by his own natural faculty, those same deep truths which are taught in those Schools.

Anyone who has taken the trouble to wade through even a small portion of the enormous mass of polemical writings or of Biblical exegesis which belong to modern scholarship, must very quickly come to the conclusion that there is no hope of arriving at the real truth in that direction. The most profound scholarship and the keenest critical faculty have been brought to bear upon the documents in our possession, with the result that hardly any two critics are in complete agreement, whilst many are diametrically opposed in their view. The general impression left upon us by these works is simply that nothing is known for certain, not even the existence of a historical man Jesus. It is all conjecture, conjecture, and again conjecture. The real question is not what these Apostles and Disciples and Church Fathers believed to be "history" or "truth"; the real question is as to what we, with our modern

knowledge, can believe. Scholarship takes us nowhere—or rather into a morass from which we are glad to escape to the firmer ground of present facts.

Its most positive results are destructive rather than constructive. It has destroyed once and for all the possibility of the old belief—and of a good deal of modern belief also—that the Bible is the veritable and infallible “Word of God”; at least it has destroyed that for those who have any knowledge of Biblical criticism. Unfortunately most Christians are either too indolent or too much afraid of having their “faith” upset to enquire into the rational grounds of their beliefs; and what Bishop, or Priest, or Pastor, or Parson will instruct his flock here—if indeed he has any knowledge of the matter himself?

Yet Tennyson struck the right note when he wrote:

“ He fought his doubts and gather’d strength,
He would not make his judgments blind,
He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them: thus he came at length

“ To find a stronger faith his own;
And Power was with him in the night,
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone.”

As an example of the uncertainty of scholarship read the work by C. Clemen, *Primitive Christianity and its Non-Jewish Sources*.

Every page is crammed with references to this, that, or the other scholar who either supports or contradicts some particular theory, or who either is or is not in agreement with Mr. Clemen’s own theory. There is a formidable index of references to 348 of these modern authors. Yet when all is said and done Mr. Clemen himself acknowledges that his own conclusions are mostly hypothetical.

“ If, then, we leave such external matters definitely on one side, the New Testament *ideas* that are *perhaps* derived from non-Jewish sources—for we may emphasize once more the hypothetical nature of most of our results—lie mainly on the fringe of Christianity, and do not touch its vital essence.”¹

¹ Pages 371-2. The italics are the author’s.

Well, what is that "vital essence"? Surely not, as Mr. Clemen would have us believe, in the main those dogmas which are associated with the traditional interpretation of the Scriptures. He apparently fails to see that although the innumerable parallels in other Scriptures and teachings to the "history" and sayings contained in the Gospels and Epistles may not have any direct derivative connection, they undoubtedly point, in many cases, to a common tradition, in others to similarities of belief and teaching. In short, the "vital essence"—I will not say of Christianity in its traditional form, but—of the Christian Scriptures, was known and taught by Sages and Initiates ages before the Initiate Jesus or Jehoshua came on the scene, and endeavoured to present the old old Wisdom Teachings in a form appropriate to his time and his hearers.

It is the history of all such efforts that sooner or later—nay, even within a few generations—the teachings become perverted and overlaid with the conceptions of lesser minds, unable to grasp their "vital essence"—as Paul himself very quickly discovered. Was it not the conception of an almost immediate "Second Coming" that enthused the early disciples, and can that in any sense be called the "vital essence" of the teachings of Jesus and of Paul? Nay, did they teach it at all? Has it not been incorporated into their supposed sayings by subsequent writers of the Gospels and Epistles: writers who did not even hesitate to attach Paul's name to Epistles which he never wrote?

One of the latest efforts of scholarship to discover what is history and what is invention or myth in the Gospel narratives is the work of Dr. Martin Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*, translated by Dr. Bertram Lee Woolf under the title *From Tradition to Gospel*. But although the employment in this work of the method of literary criticism which has become known as *Formgeschichte* serves in many instances to clear the ground of traditional accretions, it does not in reality carry us any nearer to historical certainty on the most vital matters; save perhaps we might say as to the actual existence of a historical man Jesus. It is full of such conjectural phrases as "if so," "if we suppose," "if in some such way the probability is established," "we may assume," "it seems to

me highly probable," and so on. In summing up results in the chapter on the Passion Story, the author says (p. 216):

"Thus historical and critical considerations may enable us to produce events in the Passion Story, which might always claim some probability, both in the positive and in the negative sense. But such judgments can only be pronounced after the meaning of the Marcan presentation has been made clear, and this without regard to the question of historicity. Only then do the Form-constructing forces come to light, which effected the formulation of pieces of tradition. Thereby, in spite of superficial unity in the character of the Passion story, widely varied interests come into question. But nowhere else must we be more aware of subjectivism than in examining the Passion story."

Outside of the Gospel narrative there is practically no contemporary evidence of the existence of the historical Jesus, much less any details of his life or mission. Subsequent references by Josephus, Tacitus, and others, have every evidence of being later interpolations in the works of those writers.¹

In his work on *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*, Dr. Eisler writes as follows (p. 49):

"There remains at the end but the single hypothesis, confirmed by patristic evidence, that Josephus was not spared the indignities which Christian copyists did not hesitate to inflict upon the Christian fathers—nay, even upon the very Gospels themselves. They falsified what he had written, suppressing things which he wished to say, and making him say things which he would never have dreamt of saying, they being altogether foreign to his own mode of thinking."

On the general question of the existence of documentary evidence he says:²

"There once existed a rich fund of historical tradition about the Messiah Jesus both among the Jews and the non-Christian Greeks and Romans.

"This precious material was deliberately destroyed or falsified, by a system of rigid censorship officially authorized ever since the time of Constantine I, and reinstated in the reigns of Theodosius II and Valentinian III" (A.D. 477).

Why were these documents destroyed or falsified, as for example in the interpolations in Josephus and in Tacitus? Simply in the interests of those rigid and crude creeds and

¹ Cf. Dr. W. B. Smith's *Ecce Deus* for evidence of this.

² *Ibid.*, author's Preface.

dogmas which have been the "orthodoxy" of the Church ever since those times, but which are now so largely in question, and in fact were largely in question by certain communities even in those early days. One of the most important of these protestators was the community known as the Paulicians, who arose in the seventh century. They rejected altogether the traditional beliefs of the Greek and Latin Churches, but had a special reverence for the teachings of St. Paul. They were in fact more or less Gnostics, and as such they recognized the Gnostic element in St. Paul's teaching. They rejected the Old Testament Scriptures as having no connection with the later Christian Scriptures. Their central teaching appears to have been the inherent divine nature of the soul, its loss of the knowledge of this nature through its bodily thralldom in this world, or the kingdom of the Demiurge, and its possible redemption through the mystic Christ principle. They appear also to have taught reincarnation. In spite of severe persecution by the "orthodox" Christians they held their own for about three centuries, from about 668 to 976, and they played an important part in the history of that period, almost every historian of the Romans of the East giving some attention to them. Their teaching was in fact what we might perhaps designate as the earliest form of Protestantism.

"They were a steady protest in favour of the right of the laity to the possession and use of the Holy Scriptures. They were, in this respect, under the Byzantine despotism, what the Donatists, Lollards, Waldenses, and Puritans have been in other times and places."¹

How is it that round the supposed history and personality of this mysterious character, Jesus of Nazareth, of whom we have practically no record whatsoever outside of the Gospel narratives, such a mass of contentious matter should have arisen, should have given rise to such varied and opposite opinions and doctrines, and—what is perhaps even more remarkable—to the vilest exhibition of human passions of hatred and cruelty that the world has ever seen? Is there some occult law in the spiritual world analogous to that in the physical world, namely, that action and reaction are equal

¹ Smith and Wace, *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, vol. iv, p. 220.

and opposite? Do we need to invent gods and demons of a *personal* nature to account for the good and evil which is so prominent in this world of ours? Is there anything which is to us "evil" for any other reason than that we have not control of some *natural* force? It can hardly be denied that there are beings in the invisible world who can use *natural* forces to work evil for mankind just as there are embodied souls who are incarnate devils in character; but these have no power to harm the MASTER, the man who has realized his divine nature and powers; and indeed such a one will deliberately *use* such intelligent or semi-intelligent beings for purposes of "good." Is not even the Devil of the Christian Scriptures supposed to be *used* by the God of the same Scriptures on certain occasions? I would only hint here, therefore, that there may be a natural law that the introduction or liberation, so to speak, of a certain amount of spiritual force in the world in any one direction, brings about automatically a corresponding liberation or opposition in the contrary direction. Do we not in fact find this law operating in our own individual nature? Does not any increase in our effort to spiritualize our nature call up from the depths of the subconscious a corresponding opposition, bringing to the surface slumbering and unsuspected atavisms of our lower animal nature and attachments? This is a well-known law in Occultism, and surely applies to the Race as well as to the individual. Thus in this view we might possibly regard the work centred in Jesus of Nazareth—and possibly not in him only at that time—as some outpouring of spiritual energy upon the world, and judge of the greatness of that by its opposite effect.

If we study carefully the history of the early Christian Church as exhibited in the reckless and acrimonious controversies which raged both before and after the various Councils had finally hardened the Creeds into their traditional orthodox form, we can only come to the conclusion that it was the human and not the divine element which finally gained the ascendancy. The documents of the Bible itself, very far from being the inspired word of "God," are exceedingly human documents; and—as Dr. Eïslar says in the quotation I have just given from his work—even the Gospels themselves were falsified in

order to bring them into line with "Orthodoxy." They are full of errors, contradictions, unbelievable statements, and are replete with "the precepts and doctrines of men"; not to mention errors of translation and re-translation.

In particular, as regards the central figure of the Gospels—the supposed history of a man called Jesus Christ in those Gospels—they do not exhibit that history in any biographical sense, but simply a mass of legend and tradition passed from mouth to mouth during the first century and the first half of the second, and inevitably gathering, not truth but fable and miraculous elements on the way: just as was done for example with the "history" of Apollonius of Tyana, who was credited with so many miracles altogether on a par with those of Jesus, and was considered by many to have been a god. Dr. Dibelius in his work *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* says:

"In the earliest period there was no connected narrative of the life, or at least of the work of Jesus, i.e. a narrative comparable to a literary biography or the legendary life of a saint. The stories contained in the synoptic Gospels, whose essential categories I have attempted to describe, were at first handed down in isolation as independent stories. Folk tradition as contained in the Gospels could pass on Paradigms, Tales, and Legends, but not a comprehensive description of Jesus' work."¹

The so-called *Acts of the Apostles* suffers in the same manner, and is now very generally discredited by scholars. Thus, for example, M. Loisy,² in his *Les Acts des Apôtres* (p. 105), says:

"The editor of the *Acts* is a forger, and not unconscious of what was reprehensible in his work from the point of view of sincerity."

C. Clayton Dove, in his work *Paul of Tarsus* (p. 19), says:

"Acts contradicts Paul's Epistles with regard to events of great moment. This contradiction is of such a character that if Paul and the author of *Acts* were intimately acquainted either the one or the other must have been telling falsehoods."³

¹ Second edition translated by Dr. Bertram Lee Woolf under the title *From Tradition to Gospel*, p. 178.

² "One of the most significant figures in the religious history of our times." (Professor Jacks in *The Hibbert Journal*, April 1934.)

³ Readers may be referred to this work for the contradictions in Paul's teachings as they stand in the Authorized Version, and if taken literally. The antitheses in the writings attributed to him are also freely acknowledged in the recent work by James S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ*.

Now Luke is supposed to have been the author of *Acts*, and Harnack, in his work *Luke the Physician* (p. 112), says:

“St. Luke is an author whose writings read smoothly; but one has only to look somewhat more closely to discover that there is scarcely another writer in the New Testament who is so careless an historian as he. Like a true Greek, he has paid careful attention to style and to all the formalities of literature; but in regard to his subject matter, in chapter after chapter he affords gross instances of carelessness, and often of complete confusion in the narrative. This is true both of the Gospel and the Acts.”

It is likely, however, that many of the contradictions here referred to, as well as those in the Epistles themselves, are due to subsequent editing to make them appear to conform to the *orthodoxy* which already, in the second and third centuries, was hardening the original spiritual doctrine into a carnalized and intolerant dogmatism.

The Apocryphal *Acts of the Apostles* mentioned above makes instructive reading as to the methods of making “history” prevalent in those times. In an article on this work in Smith and Wace’s *Dictionary* we read as follows:

“The real history of the lives and deaths of most of the Apostles being shrouded in obscurity, a pious imagination was very early busily employed in filling up the large lacunæ left in the historical reminiscences of the Church. Not a few of such narratives owe their origin simply to an endeavour to satisfy the pious curiosity or taste for the marvellous in members of the primitive Church; while others subserved the local interests of particular towns or districts which claimed to have derived their Christianity from the missionary activity of one of the Apostles, or their line of bishops from one immediately ordained by him. It likewise not infrequently happened that party spirit, theological or ecclesiastical, would take advantage of a pious credulity to further its own ends by manipulating the older, or inventing others entirely new, after a carefully preconceived form and pattern. And so almost every fresh editor of such narratives, using the freedom which all antiquity was wont to allow itself in dealing with literary monuments, would recast the materials which lay before him, excluding whatever might not suit his theological point of view.”¹

That the later Church Fathers adopted the same methods can hardly be disputed. Gibbon, in his *Decline and Fall*, says

¹ Vol. 1, p. 18. In another place (vol. 1, p. 137) they speak of “the great prevalence of forged letters and treatises in the first centuries after Christ.” The Gospels and Epistles have very evidently not escaped this practice.

that "Eusebius himself indirectly confesses that he has related whatever might redound to the glory, and that he has suppressed all that could tend to the disgrace, of religion" (vol. i, chap. xvi). In a footnote he adds: "Such is the *fair* deduction from two remarkable passages in Eusebius, L. viii. C.2, and de Martyr, Palestin. C.12." Smith and Wace, however, in their *Dictionary*, art. "Eusebius," contend against this interpretation. It would appear, however, that we can hardly exonerate Eusebius from gross exaggeration in many matters, more particularly when he expatiates on the numbers and sufferings of the martyrs. But possibly his greatest dishonesty is to be found in his deliberate falsification of dates, more especially Egyptian, to make the history of nations in general fit in with the supposed Biblical chronology. Thus Bunsen in his voluminous work *Egypt's Place in Universal History*, vol. i, p. 206, says:

"He had undertaken a comprehensive scheme of adjustment between the Scripture dates and those of all the other ancient nations. He is, therefore, the originator of that systematic theory of synchronisms which has so often subsequently maimed and mutilated history in its Procrustean bed. There can be no doubt, as we have already remarked in treating of Manetho, that Eusebius entered upon this undertaking in a very unscrupulous and arbitrary spirit."

The reference which he here gives to his previous remarks is as follows (vol. i, p. 83):

"Syncellus has done Eusebius no injustice in stigmatizing him not only as superficial, but as having intentionally falsified the Lists (of Manetho) in order to force them into harmony with his own synchronistic system. . . . We are bound, therefore, to regard his labours with the greatest mistrust, and to pronounce it a most uncritical course to quote him, as is the custom of many, as a competent authority in spite of this delinquency, whenever it suits their purpose."

To what extent the Gospel narratives as we have them in the Canonical Scriptures were made in this ancient manner of making "history" has yet to be discovered: perhaps never will be discovered by scholarship; yet it is already clearly seen that there is much to be rejected in the light of our modern knowledge.

It appears to the present writer that the strongest evidence for the actual existence of a great teacher—whether called

Jesus, or Jehoshua, or by any other name—lies in the *Sayings* (*Logia*), and not at all in those portions of the Gospels which purport to give incidents in his life. Most critics are agreed that the origin of the Gospels—at all events the Synoptics—lies in the first instance in some such collection of *Sayings* which they call “Q” (German *Quelle*—Source). Dr. Dibelius in his work already referred to says of this “Q” source:

“We know nothing certain about the extent of the source ‘Q,’ for we can only deduce ‘Q’ in the places where the two parallels, Matthew and Luke, give the text in a somewhat similar fashion. We are not able to say how much of material special to each writer comes from ‘Q’ (p. 234). . . . The present position of research into the source ‘Q’ warrants our speaking rather of a stratum than of a document. We already recognize the effort of the Churches to gather together words of Jesus in the manner of ‘Q,’ but we do not know whether the result of these efforts was one or more books or indeed any books at all” (p. 235).

In an article in *The Hibbert Journal* for January 1936, on the apocryphal Gospel of Marcion, M. Paul-Louis Couchoud contends that this Gospel was the original from which Luke drew his narrative; and moreover that:

“It is impossible to find in the source ‘Q’ that homogeneity which would justify a belief in its existence, and the originality to which it lays claim ought to be divided in unequal proportions between Marcion and Matthew.”

But as regards the Birth Stories, and the Crucifixion and Resurrection, these are palpably derived from earlier allegories. The early Christians endeavoured to destroy all traces of this derivation which appeared on the Egyptian and other monuments and in every Gnostic document they could lay their hands upon. That in itself is sufficient evidence of the pre-Christian origin of these allegories—which in fact conceal a knowledge of some of the deepest Cosmic facts, an approach to which is now being made by modern science.

Our present English Bible is not merely a translation and re-translation, but at some time, probably during the second century, the Canonical books were selected, and were edited, re-edited and over-written to conform to an already hardening theology, which subsequently became embodied in the traditional Creeds.

"The Gospel of Mark is no exception to the rule that church-writings of this type inevitably undergo recasting and supplementation until the advancing process of canonization at last fixes their text with unalterable rigidity."¹

And the Creeds themselves: what of them? Read the history of the controversies of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries—not to go any further—controversies which raged round not merely questions of doctrine, but also as to the precedence in authority in the Church of this, that, or the other Patriarchate—more particularly as between Rome and Constantinople—and see if you can form any other opinion than that so-called "Christianity" in its doctrinal and sacerdotal form is a flat contradiction of all that is contained in the reputed Sayings of Jesus, whose mission, more clearly than anything else stated in the Gospels, was to abolish the priestly hierarchy and the formal worship of Temple or Sanctuary "built with hands"—as witness the discourse with the woman of Samaria (*John* iv. 7-15).

Gibbon, in his *Decline and Fall*, gives the following quotation from a work by Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, died A.D. 368:²

"It is a thing equally deplorable and dangerous, that there are as many creeds as opinions among men, as many doctrines as inclinations, and as many sources of blasphemy as there are faults among us; because we make creeds arbitrarily, and explain them as arbitrarily. The *Homoousion*³ is rejected, and received, and explained away by successive synods. The partial or total resemblance of the Father and of the Son, is a subject of dispute for these unhappy times. Every year, nay, every moon, we make new creeds to describe invisible mysteries. We repent of what we have done, we defend those who repent, we anathematize those whom we defended. We condemn either the doctrine of others in ourselves, or our own in that of others; and reciprocally tearing one another to pieces, we have been the cause of each other's ruin."

These were the men who determined what for so many centuries has been known as "Christianity."

Well then, what shall we say of this traditional "Christianity" which is being both widely advocated and widely repudiated

¹ B. W. Bacon, D.D., *The Making of the New Testament*, p. 170.

² Vol. i, chapter xxi.

³ The doctrine of the common essence or substance of the Father and the Son.

to-day? We can only say one thing. It arose, and it is in vogue to-day, because it makes an appeal to a *certain class of mind*. Human nature is not so very different to-day from what it was twenty centuries ago. On all sides we contact credulity, superstition, acknowledgment of authority—more particularly sacerdotal authority—in place of reason. Of course the great mass of the community have neither the time nor the capacity to think out these complex questions for themselves. They accept without question—in any attention they may give to religion at all—the teachings of the religious community to which they may happen to have been brought up. Can we blame them? Barely ten per cent of our population make any profession of any kind of religion. Look also at the variety of Creeds and Sects—all supposed to take their authority from the same Scriptures. How shall the rational man choose? Yet, strange to say, what we see to-day is not merely the more or less unintelligent members of the community conforming without thought—or perhaps with what they do *think* is sufficient reason—to an inherited religion or a traditional authority, but we also see the most intelligent men, who profess to examine all sides of the question, joining this, that, or the other community, and in some cases renouncing previous convictions with which they have been associated from their birth upwards. A recent case was that of a Wesleyan minister who has gone over to the Roman Catholic Church. What might be called the modern classical example is that of Cardinal Newman. After a visit to Rome, in 1832, he wrote condemning the Roman Catholic Church in no measured terms; yet in 1845 he entered that Church. And did not Paul, after persecuting the Christians, ultimately become an ultra-Christian? We shall account for this, however, later on.

In all such cases there is something deeper than *intellect* which governs the choice. Indeed, we might say that the *function* of the intellect is to find “reasons” for these deeper motives, which lie hidden even from the individual himself. He *thinks* that he has ample reason for his choice. But if Truth is one and indisputable, how can valid “reasons” be found for such diverse and opposite doctrines?

But—I can hear my critics say—do not the same considera-

tions apply to what you may put forward in this volume? Let me say at once, then, that most certainly they do. That is why I have said at the commencement of this *Introduction* that I am writing only for a certain class of students—or, if you like, for a certain class of minds. What I have here to say *will* appeal to these as truth, while for others it may be the deadliest error, even as Gnosticism was for those early Church Fathers who endeavoured to destroy all the Gnostic traces of the origin of their "Christianity."

But yet there is a difference: *must* be a difference between those who are seeking to choose between the conflicting opinions and creeds of so-called Christianity and those who have found a much deeper and more universal basis for their faith, and are thereby independent of all these sectarian and doctrinal controversies.

All truth is relative. It is the *how* of our perceptions. It is the perception of the relation and proportion of things; but there is a narrow and a wider perception of this relativity, this *appearance*. The Sun *appears* to move over the heavens from east to west, and primitive man considers this to be the *reality*. A deeper knowledge discloses other relations between the Sun and the Earth, and we pass from the crude realism of the primitive man to our modern astronomical knowledge. Yet there is certainly a still wider or deeper apprehension to be obtained of the relations and proportions of our Solar System—not to go any further into space-time—and this knowledge would certainly make our present conceptions appear as crudely realistic as those of primitive man compared with our modern knowledge.

Absolute truth, or fundamental Reality, would be the perception of a thing in *all* its relations and proportions; which perception, paradoxically, would take it out of all relation and proportion. In other words it would become the Absolute. But that perception, as already explained, is beyond the reach of the human mind or intellect.

And so in relation to questions of religion, which cannot be separated from those of cosmology and anthropology. We have to-day a much wider and deeper perception of the relation and proportion of things than that of the crude flat-earth

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creed-makers and dogmatists who, as late as the 16th century, burnt Bruno at the stake for opinions which are now commonplace in our modern thought.

So also is it with our literary knowledge. We are in a vastly different position to-day with a knowledge of other ancient Scriptures than the Bible; in which Scriptures indeed we can trace precisely the same fundamental teachings concerning Man and his relation to Deity as we find in the Christian Scriptures when *esoterically interpreted*. It is therefore the *universality* of these teachings which gives us the assurance of their truth; which makes us independent of all the strifes of sects, creeds, and dogmas, and which enables us to value the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, not as unique documents, but simply as taking their place with the other great Scriptures as a certain *form* of the ancient Gnosis; a form moulded by and appropriate to the people and times in which they came into existence.

Thus the students who have the wider knowledge of these other Scriptures—and, we might add, the ancient philosophies also—are in quite a different position to appreciate *Truth* than is the man with only one Scripture and one religion. Such a man, it is true, may have consolation and peace and happiness in his religion; and it is just because he has these that he holds his religious beliefs to be true, however much opposed they may be to other beliefs. And of course they are true for him; but that is no proof of their *essential* truth. This “faith,” or belief in certain formulated creeds, does not belong specially to any one religion, it is common to all. But some of us do not want consolation, we want Truth. Do we not see, indeed, that in the Christian religion as presented to us in our Churches and Chapels that very *consolation* which is offered is a bar to any further progress in real knowledge; that knowledge which we are told in the Christian Scriptures will finally conquer death itself? As the Christian only believes in one physical death, he interprets that conquest as meaning his safe entry into heaven, and an escape from “the second death” at the Judgment Day. Yet here again it was taught, long before it was re-presented in the Christian Scriptures, that the Master of the Hidden Knowledge achieves an actual

conquest over the necessity for reincarnation, or physical birth and death.

Here is this teaching as given by the Buddha, and put into the beautiful language of Sir Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*.

" Then he arose—radiant, rejoicing, strong—
Beneath the Tree, and lifting high his voice
Spake this, in hearing of all Times and Worlds:—

" Many a House of Life
Hath held me—seeking ever him who wrought
These prisons of the senses, sorrow-fraught;
Sore was my ceaseless strife!

" But now,
Thou Builder of this Tabernacle—Thou!
I know Thee! Never shalt Thou build again
These walls of pain,
Nor raise the roof-tree of deceits, nor lay
Fresh rafters on the clay;
Broken Thy house is, and the ridge-pole split!
Delusion fashioned it!
Safe pass I thence—deliverance to obtain."

Perhaps we might say that it is only those who have reached the high status of a Buddha or a Christ who have really *attained*. Paul himself disclaims attainment "unto the resurrection from the dead."

" Not that I have already obtained (that resurrection), or am already made perfect; but I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which I also was apprehended by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on towards the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus " (*Phil.* iii. 12-18).

The reference to "the resurrection from the dead" in the previous verse eleven, shows clearly that Paul meant by that something quite different from the physical resurrection at the "last trump" which he is represented as teaching in *1 Corinthians* xv. 51. For if anyone could be said to be certain of such a resurrection at the "last day" in the orthodox sense, it was surely the Apostle Paul. We say that Paul's teaching of the resurrection was that of a resurrection from the spiritual

deadness of our present natures; and that the final conquest for those who have attained "unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," is the conquest of the necessity for further incarnations and consequent deaths. That was the attainment of Gautama Buddha, and of many Buddhas before him. We say that the Christian Scriptures when *esoterically* interpreted teach the same doctrine of attainment. But the teaching is not merely veiled, it has been deliberately over-written and perverted in the documents as we have them, and the evidences of the derivation of those documents from earlier and Gnostic sources have been destroyed.

Irenaeus tells us that:

"The Ophites, like other Gnostics, rejected the Old Testament altogether as a work of a subordinate divinity, and containing nothing of the revelations of their *Sophia*, or Divine Wisdom; whilst they held that the New, although originally of higher authority, had been so corrupted by the interpolations of the Apostles as to have lost all value as a revelation of Divine Truth. They drew the chief supports of their tenets out of the various 'Testaments' and similar books then current, and ascribed to the Patriarchs and the most ancient Prophets, for example, the book of Enoch."¹

The great fault that the student of world religions and world history has to find with "Christianity" in its traditional and dogmatic form is its insularity. Essentially Jewish, not merely in its geographical and historical setting, but also in its adoption of the Jewish Scriptures—and that in their literal interpretation—and the anthropomorphic concepts of the Jewish god Jehovah: it takes no account of the vast population of the world in other countries, and the uncounted millenniums of human history prior to a supposed date about 4000 B.C. and a supposed promise of the Jewish deity to Abraham—which has certainly never been fulfilled, and never can be fulfilled. What is missionary work to-day but an exhibition of this same insularity, and what of the exclusive claims of the Roman Catholic Church? All who are not "Christians" are "heathen" who must needs be saved by accepting—not the real Gospel of Christ, which is and can be universal, but—those dogmas of the Church

¹ Quoted from King's *Gnostics and their Remains*, second edition, p. 96.

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into which ignorant men corrupted that Gospel, and never were and never can be universal.

Jew and Gentile, Christian and Heathen—what are these distinctions in relation to that ONE LIFE which lives and moves in ALL: mineral, vegetable, animal, human, and beyond in unthinkable grades of existence from Man to Celestial Hierarchies and Dyhān Chohāns, and from them to the absolute ONE?

The real Gospel of the Christ is and can become universal because it is the ancient *Gnosis*; and *that*, as St. Augustine tells us, “existed among the ancients, and never did not exist.”¹

Let the Christian Church get back to that, and it may conquer the world; for all our advance in Knowledge will be found to be in conformity with it. But what hope is there that the ecclesiastical edifice will yield itself to such a reconstruction?

To sum up: the more one becomes acquainted with the available documents of the first four centuries of the Christian Era and the researches of scholars therein, the more one realizes that the historical facts as to the personality round which the traditional dogmas centre have yet to be discovered, as well as the earliest beginnings of that hierarchical cult which subsequently became known as the Christian Church. Yet there is one feature that stands out with the utmost clearness, at least for those who know that the deeper initiation knowledge has always existed, and indeed is evidenced in the writings of some of the Church Fathers themselves, not to mention the explicit statements of both Jesus and Paul. That feature is the gradual hardening and materialization of teachings which originally belonged to the Mystery Cults.

The dogmas and creeds with which the term “Christianity” became finally associated in its ecclesiastical hierarchical form were the result of an intense struggle between an original mystical and *esoteric* Christology, known to and taught by men who were more or less familiar with the Ancient Wisdom, and another set of men who were crude realists, literalists, and historicizers of the mystical allegories—commencing with the first chapter of *Genesis*. If the Garden of Eden story could be taken by these as literal history, can we be

¹ See p. 163 *infra*.

surprised at the dogmas which they subsequently based thereon? This literalizing of *Genesis* is a sample of all the rest. And if the Church "Fathers" could so materialize the *spiritual* resurrection of the Race taught by Jesus and Paul as to make the resurrection that of the *physical* body at the "last day," can we be surprised at the ignorance and superstition which so quickly became associated with the hierarchical establishment and its mass of slavish adherents? Nay, if we have seen this prevailing through so many centuries, and in existence even to-day, we can hardly be surprised at what happened in a community two thousand years ago in the entire absence of our modern knowledge of cosmology and anthropology.

Even as early as St. Paul's time these strifes and divisions are in evidence in his Epistles; and he himself found himself compelled to teach mainly an *exoteric* doctrine. Like Jesus he has "many things to say" which the communities to whom he addressed himself "were not able to bear." How much of the real *esoteric* doctrine he did disclose "among the full-grown"—i.e. those who were prepared to receive it—we do not know; but knowing ourselves what that esoteric doctrine was—and always has been—we have no difficulty in recognizing his knowledge of it in many of the statements in his Epistles.

Later on, when the episcopate became established, the conflict raged in a still more fierce manner between those Church Fathers, such as Origen and Clement of Alexandria, who understood the esoteric teachings and the allegorical nature of the Bible narratives, and those "Fathers" who, as I have said, were crude realists, literalizers, and historicizers, and who were quite incapable of understanding the dynamic and flexible teachings of the Gnosis, their whole endeavour being to establish a rigid and dogmatic theology, and a priestly hierarchy holding sway over both the bodies and souls of men. How well they succeeded in doing this, and in suppressing not merely the Gnosis but all other learning besides, is written in letters of blood and fire and persecution in the subsequent dark ages of the Western nations.

CHAPTER I

RELIGION AND RELIGIONS

BEFORE dealing more specifically with the Christian Scriptures and the religion based thereon, it will be useful to survey to some extent the field of Religion in general; and it is fundamental to our subject to draw a very broad distinction between Religion and religions.

Religions are the *product* of Religion, but they are not Religion itself.

Religion itself is neither a belief, nor ritual, nor worship. These are the expression of the religious *instinct* in man, but they are not Religion itself; and when Religion itself has been found, they are transcended.

What then is Religion in its essential nature, and apart from any of the special forms or religions which are an endeavour to give it expression?

Religion is a *life*: the inherent life of the Spirit; but beliefs, ritual and worship pertain to the intellect. They express ideas *about* the things of the Spirit. They necessarily have a spiritual background, and they may even be said in a certain sense to minister to the life of the Spirit, just as clothes may be said to minister to the life of the body. They are in fact the clothes in which the intellect dresses up the *instinct* in man that he possesses a spiritual nature.

Beliefs are many, varied, and often in deadly conflict. Ritual is a form of ceremonial magic. Worship is mostly rooted in superstition and fear; in the idea that the deity requires to be propitiated and praised like an earthly king.

No one religion can claim to be unique, or to be the one and only guide for the individual in his effort to place himself *en rapport* with the spiritual world, or with any Being or Beings therein. We know of course that the claim to uniqueness is commonly made by the devotees of most religions, who look askance at, or consider to be "infidels," those who do not accept their own particular tenets. This has been particularly in evidence in two religions, Mahomedanism and Christianity,

and it is at the root of all the religious hatreds, disputes, persecutions, and bloodshed with which the world has been so terribly afflicted, and which is still very widely in evidence. Happily there is to-day in a large section of the community a much wider tolerance; and there is also a very large body of intelligent people who refuse to attach themselves to any one sectarian religion, yet who are by no means irreligious, and might perhaps be called rather seekers after Truth than religious people. I speak of these now as being principally among our Western peoples. They are students of religion rather than being "religious" in the common acceptation of the term, and they can and do regard each and every religion from an outside point of view. They are mostly those who have rejected Christianity in its ecclesiastical or creedal form, but yet are by no means anti-Christian so far as the life and example of the central figure of the New Testament is concerned. It might perhaps be said of them that they accept Christ but reject Christianity in its traditional or dogmatic form. I shall have more to say of this, however, later on.

I think that it is coming to be more and more clearly recognized by impartial and unsectarian students of religions, that what is commonly called *religion* is more or less what we might call an *accident* of Religion in its real essential nature. These various religions of the world, so disputable in themselves, and so much at war with each other, are merely the outer expressions of a deep spiritual *instinct* in man, and they are necessarily based on and limited by the knowledge and experience of the individual or the community in which they arise or persist. Primitive times and primitive people give rise to primitive conceptions of man's relation to the world in which he lives; but more particularly to the unseen world with which he instinctively feels that he has some deeply rooted connection.

But there is a two-fold mischief here. In the first place these primitive conceptions are apt to survive and be carried on beyond their legitimate age, and into communities which have largely arrived at a wider and deeper knowledge; in which case these earlier concepts come into conflict with the more enlightened ones. In the second place, this survival is fostered

by a hierarchy of religious officials whose very existence depends upon the survival of the old concepts, and who therefore discourage enquiry and research, and even foster ignorance and superstition in order to retain their authority and power.

This is seen very plainly to-day in the struggle of the old Christian theology with what is termed *Modernism*; and the trouble is that so many people here in the West, who have only had religion presented to them in a form which is for them utterly irrational, abandon religion altogether—as has been done in Russia on a wholesale scale—and thus starve the spiritual side of their nature. Where religion is only presented as something which an enlightened intellect must regard as superstition, the result can only be agnosticism, scepticism, or materialism. So far as the intellect is concerned, the remedy lies largely in a comparative study of religions; and this ought to lead—though it does not necessarily do so—to a deeper apprehension of what Religion itself is in its essential nature. It does not necessarily do so because the essence of Religion belongs to a region which transcends intellect; and a merely intellectual study of religions will never yield that which must be grasped by a faculty higher than intellect, and which—following Bergson—we may call by the not altogether satisfactory term intuition.

Intellect is more apt to belittle and materialize Religion than to expound it; as indeed is plainly to be seen in those formulated religious systems which have derived from some of the greatest religious teachers of the world, and which, in their creedal form, are so much in question to-day. Intellect can only invent creeds and dogmas within its own limitations; and these presently become overpassed, outworn, and obsolete: let alone the bitterness and dissensions to which they give rise among themselves.

The dogmas of the Christian Church have little in common with the teachings of Jesus. They were formulated by men who had the most primitive ideas of the nature of the Cosmos: ideas which are utterly childish in the light of our modern knowledge of cosmology and anthropology. Yet they still survive, for the reasons I have just given.

I might quote many writers who have recognized this

necessary distinction between Religion and religions. In *The Journal of Transactions of the Society for Promoting the Study of Religions*,¹ No. ix, June 1934, p. iii, we have the following:

“Religion is a mysterious power in human life which, in the course of historical civilizations, has thrown to the surface a thousand diverse religions. In a word: Religion produces religions.”

H. Fielding, in his suggestive book *The Hearts of Men*, writes as follows:

“What you call religion I call only a reasoning about religion. The dogmas and creeds are not religion. They are summaries of the reasons that men give to explain those facts of life which are religion, just as philosophies are summaries of the theories men make to explain other facts of life. Both creeds and philosophies come from the reason. They are speculations, not facts. They are pessimistic terms of the brain. Religion is a different matter. It is a series of facts.”

Instead of saying that “religion is a series of facts,” I would rather say that it is the recognition of one supreme fact: the fact of the *inherent spiritual nature of man*.

We say that because man is a thinking animal he possesses *Mind*. But man is not merely a thinking animal: he is even more fundamentally and essentially a religious animal. The religious instinct lies much deeper in his nature than his mental acquirements; and therefore we say that because he is a religious animal he possesses *Spirit*: for Religion is concerned with the things of the Spirit—using that term for the ultimate *Principle* which must necessarily be the root and cause of all that exists in man or in the Cosmos, whatever name you may give to that *Ultimate*, or however you may conceive of it.

“Some few, whose lamps shone brighter, have been led
From cause to cause to nature’s secret head,
And found that one first Principle must be.”

And here I would note that nothing can exist in man, or in any individual thing, be it an atom or a god, that is not in the first instance *cosmic* in its nature. If man has a physical body, it is because there is Cosmic Matter. If he has mind, it is because there is a Cosmic Mind. And if he has spirit—

¹ Address, 17 Bedford Square, London, W.C.1.

or rather, I would say, if he *is* Spirit in his essential nature—it is because there is a Cosmic Spirit. And it is this fact—on which I will presently enlarge—that lies at the root of his religious *instinct*, and that gives rise to religion in all its varied forms. Religion, therefore, I define as: *The instinctive recognition by man that he possesses a spiritual nature, and the effort which he makes to realize that nature.*

All history shows that man is essentially and instinctively a religious animal. What has not man done and suffered, what will he not do and suffer, for what he calls his religion? This is not a matter of one age or of one form of religion; it is evidenced in all ages and all religions. Asceticism and martyrdom have never been confined to any one religion.

It is not necessary that the individual should be conscious of his supra-conscious spiritual nature in order that it may exercise his influence. Modern psychology shows us the enormous influence of the sub-conscious, of which influence the individual is just as unconscious as he is in the vast majority of cases of the influence of the supra-conscious, or what we are here calling the higher Self, the spiritual Ego. Unconsciously feeling that influence, he makes his religion according to his intellectual capacity, and maintains that he has sound *reasons* for his formulated beliefs; for it is precisely the function of the intellect to supply those “reasons.”

We may distinguish three grades or phases of religion as a recognition of a super-mundane or spiritual order in the universe.¹ The first of these grades is that of primitive Man, who defies natural forces: more particularly those which he considers must be propitiated in order that he may not suffer injury from them. This phase we might distinguish broadly as the religion of *fear*.

The second grade introduces human conceptions of a *moral* nature, and endows its deities—or in monotheistic forms, its deity—with moral qualities which are a reflection of those which a more or less advanced civilization recognizes as necessary for the well-being of the community: such as justice, equity,

¹ The classification which I am here giving is substantially the same as that given by Einstein in his work *The World as I See It* (p. 28 ff.), to which I am indebted.

truth, honesty, non-injury; but also along with these the conception of the anger of the deity against transgressors, and arbitrary punishments for evil-doers. The deity is in fact still a purely anthropomorphic one, though conceived as embodying high human qualities, not excluding that of love. This phase we might distinguish broadly as the religion of *morality*.

The third grade rises above all anthropomorphic concepts, and recognizes a supreme, impersonal UNITARY PRINCIPLE, or ONE LIFE, as being not merely the *Source* of all that exists both in the seen and the unseen, but as being *all inclusive*; as being both the manifested and the unmanifested; as being, in fact, the Universe in its *totality*, and therefore not capable of being distinguished as this, that, or the other, either in existence or in quality; for to distinguish it thus would be to exclude the opposite, and would therefore nullify the primary postulate that IT IS ALL. This phase we might designate as *cosmic* religion. It is the religion of the philosopher, the mystic, and the initiate; and perhaps also of the scientist who has found himself compelled to abandon materialism. In it the individual recognizes his own oneness with the Cosmos. All that he is or can be exists as cosmic principles, and, *qua* individual, he is merely a particular and limited example of those principles. He asserts, therefore, that in his inmost deepest nature he is *one* with that UNITARY PRINCIPLE which is the Universe, and his religious effort is to realize that to the fullest extent in consciousness.

This is the religion of the Ancient Wisdom, of the Gnosis. In its application to the individual it finds its highest expression in the aphorism "That art thou" of the *Upanishads*; and later—and in what I am more particularly trying to elucidate in this work—in the "I and the Father are one" of Jesus, and the "Christ in you" of St. Paul.

What can be more *cosmic* than Paul's magnificent address to the men of Athens? (*Acts* xvii. 24-8.)

"The God that made the world and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is he served by men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and he

made of one every nation of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he is not far from each one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain even of your own poets have said. For we are also his offspring."

Cosmic Religion, the Ancient Wisdom or Gnosis, requires no "temples made with hands," for it teaches that "the kingdom of God is within you." It is dependent neither on tradition, nor book, nor priest. It is purely a matter between the individual and his own soul in the oneness of that soul with the ONE LIFE—commonly called "God"—in which "we live, and move, and have our being." Cosmic Religion is the effort of the individual to realize that oneness in ever increasing measure; whereas religions of ritual and ceremony and petitions addressed to an *external* God must ever keep the individual from that realization, until happily he has discovered their ineffectiveness.

These three phases or *grades* of religion naturally shade off, as it were, into one another. We may find elements of the one mixed with those of the next higher. This is specially the case with the first two grades, which we might describe as *communal* religions, they require a priestly caste, whilst as regards the third and highest grade, it is purely an individual matter: that is to say as between the individual and his own soul; and having no priestly hierarchy to dictate to it, or to come into conflict with *orthodoxy* in all its varied and disputable forms, it is free from the admixtures referred to, though it may have, and indeed has, many different methods of actual practice in the endeavour of the individual to attain to a full realization of the supreme unity.

There is no such thing, and there never can be any such thing, as a universal religion so long as humanity is what it is, at vastly different mental levels. The three grades of religion just enumerated correspond broadly to the grades of human intelligence. Christianity in its ecclesiastical form can never become a world-religion, for it is only one species of the numerous religions belonging to the second grade; and it is largely mixed also with elements of the first grade. But

