

The DISTINCTIVE
IDEAS *of* JESUS

CHARLES CARROLL ALBERTSON



Division

BS

Section

543

. A423

LIBRARY
DEC 15 1
THEOLOGICAL S

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

✓
Charles Carroll Albertson

*Minister of the Lafayette Avenue
Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn, N.Y.*



Philadelphia
The Westminster Press
1914

Copyright, 1914,
By F. M. Braselmann

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Preview	9
CHAPTER	
I. The Seeking God.....	23
II. Man's Vast Value.....	37
III. A New and Living Way to God.....	51
IV. New Life from God.....	67
V. An Efficient Motive.....	93
VI. The Unbroken Continuity of Life.....	109
VII. The Distinctive Personality of Jesus.....	125
Bibliography	147

PREVIEW

HEATHENISM gave us a seeking religion; Judaism a hoping religion, but Christianity is the realization of what heathenism sought and Judaism hoped for.—LUTHARDT.

A mere Plato, theorizing about life, a Seneca, full of moral apothegms, Jesus never was, nor could be. He has wrought a revolution in the moral and intellectual life of mankind. O patient Jesus, touching us with Thy strong, strange, quiet, loving strokes, calming our hearts, nerving and girding us for duty, no time or distance separates from Thee. We see Thee, hear Thee, feel Thee still!—CHARLES MCTYEIRE BISHOP.

But, irrespective of the miracle-working of Jesus, His power is altogether an unparalleled fact in history. A new era dates from His birth. His coming, as Doctor Sears has well said, was a new influx of power. Jesus seems to concentrate in His own person the great constructive forces of religion. . . . It was His wonderful work to create in the Roman Empire a new faith, a new hope and a new joy. The belief in immortality became through Him in Judea what it had never been in Athens or Rome, a living, working faith, which transformed the earth and transfigured death. . . .

The unexampled power of Jesus was creative, likewise, of a new humanity. It poured its fresh, renewing streams through all the channels of social life. Modern society as well as modern history dates from the advent of Christ. . . . It was the peculiar power of the despised Nazarine to call forth, by a mighty voice, a new civilization from the grave of the old. It may be said that philosophy rolled away the stone, but to restore life was the miracle wrought by Christianity.—NEWMAN SMITH, *Old Faiths in New Light*, 2d ed., pp. 210, 211, 215.

PREVIEW

CHRISTIANITY has in it much that is common to other faiths. The discovery of the common ground upon which we, as Christians, may meet Jews, Confucians, Buddhists and Mohammedans is a very essential part of the ministry of the modern missionary. Jesus did not repudiate the teachings of those who had preceded Him, save as He believed them to misrepresent the Father and to burden needlessly the sons of men. Nor did He ever intimate the worthlessness of the doctrines of those who should come after Him. He fulfilled the truths of Judaism; that is to say, He filled them full, made up what was lacking in them. So, Christianity is Judaism plus. It is Confucianism plus—plus very much. It is Buddhism plus. Whatever in these systems is grotesque or puerile, Christianity is minus that. And Christianity is plus by so much as it makes plain what they make vague,

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

makes sure what they leave in doubt, renders vital what they impose as merely mechanical or imitative, or what they leave powerless and dead.

Christianity is not unique in holding a doctrine of sin. That man needs to be rescued from error in thought and practice is one of the postulates of every great faith. Christianity is not peculiar in that it teaches a doctrine of salvation. Every other religion has its corresponding word. Christianity is not alone in its teaching of a future existence. That idea is also present in some form in other religions. There is a Christian code of morality, but Christianity differs from other faiths more in its dynamics than in its ethics. That missionary was both truthful and wise who said to a Confucian, "You need the power of Christ to enable you to obey Confucius."

Count Okuma, one of Japan's keenest statesmen, declared in an address at the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Christian missions in Japan:

PREVIEW

“The sages of Japan and China have taught many excellent truths in regard to morality, but they have too much neglected the spiritual; and no nation which neglects the spiritual can permanently prosper. Modern civilization has its rise in the teachings of the Sage of Judea, in Whom alone is found the dynamic of moral progress.”

But there are other ideas which are the distinctive fruit of the Christian Gospel. They exist, if at all in other systems, indefinitely. If other faiths contain them, they are in solution. In Christianity they are defined, precipitated. They are the radical elements of our faith—radical in the sense that they are at the root of the system. They are characteristically Christian; that is, Christianity has the qualities it has because of these doctrines. Without these it could not be what it is.

In at least six great points Christianity is distinctive. In an age when indifference sometimes calls itself liberality—and when invalid thinking is often mistaken for tolerance,

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

it is easy to fall into an attitude that views Christianity as merely one of "the world's great altar stairs that slope through darkness up to God"; an attitude from which Jesus appears simply one among humanity's saviours, a sort of superior Socrates, and not greatly to be preferred to Zoroaster.

The study of comparative religions is vastly enlightening. A fair knowledge of all the religious systems which have obtained among the nations enables the student to set aside for a season everything common to Christianity and other faiths. After he has done this, there will be a Christian residuum, a group of ideas belonging peculiarly to that religion which is based upon the person, words and works of Jesus. It is not claimed that there are no traces of these in other systems, but that, in Christianity, they are not merely contained but developed. They are among the essentials, and not the incidentals. They are not merely ornamental, but fundamental.

First among these ideas is that of God seek-^v

PREVIEW

ing the lost. The second has to do with the value of that which is lost. The third presents a method by which the lost may be restored. The fourth offers a new quality of spiritual life to the returned prodigal. The fifth furnishes the lost, who has been restored and reborn, with a motive by which he may prove himself worthy the utmost effort of God to save him. The sixth surveys the life of man, lost in sin, restored, reborn and re-furnished with moral power, fitted for immortal fellowship with God. These, then, are the distinctive doctrines of Christianity—God's Solicitous Fatherhood, Humanity's Eternal Value, Jesus Christ's Mediatorial Ministry, the New Birth of Manhood, Love as the Law of the New Man, and the Unbroken Continuity of Life.

That these ideas are set forth in the New Testament as in no other sacred book needs no argument, and proof cannot fairly be demanded. That each of them in itself is of incalculable value to the race, it is needless to affirm. But that all of them are the ideas

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

of Jesus, that He plainly stated and often repeated them in various terms, is a fact of which we need to be reminded.

These studies, popular rather than academic though they are, may serve to point out that, whatever may have been added to the original content of the Gospel by elaboration at the hands of those who sought to interpret Jesus' message and meaning to the world, the ideas just named have not been superimposed upon Jesus' teachings. They are a part of them, if indeed they do not form the very substance of them. The apostles hold them—Paul, John, Peter, James, the unknown author of the Epistle to the Hebrews—but they do not pretend to have originated them. They build upon these ideas, and confess that Another had already laid the foundation. And He had. If the Epistles had never been written, or if they had been lost amidst the ruins of that Eastern world to which they were first given, we would still be able to derive these distinctive ideas from the four Gospels. They are the bequest of

PREVIEW

Jesus to the world, and what they have meant to the world is incalculable.

Phillips Brooks in his Bohlen lectures on "The Influence of Jesus," and Doctor Richard S. Storrs in his Ely lectures on "The Divine Origin of Christianity Indicated by Its Historical Effects," make plain in what degree humanity is indebted to Jesus for its loftiest inspirations. In Glover's "Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire," the author reminds us that it was a new thing when religion, in the name of truth, and for the love of God, abolished the connection of the human mind with a trivial past; when Jesus cut away at once every vestige of the primitive and every savage survival—all natural growths perhaps, and helpful, too, to primitive man and to the savage, but confusing to men on a higher plane—set religion free from all taboos and rituals, and became the Vindicator and Exponent of eternal realities. It is such a Man as this, he says, who liberates mankind.

To what extent these ideals of Jesus have

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

molded or modified the thought of humanity, entered into the very unconscious cerebration of the modern man, may be imagined if not measured when we reflect how largely our lives have been enriched by such ideas as liberty, philanthropy, democracy and immortality.

It is no great step from the apprehension of the seeking God to the impulse which leads one who has been found—and who, in Jesus, finds himself—to seek his still wandering fellow man. It inevitably follows, when the man is supplied with an efficient motive. In the recognition of the supreme worth of man, the indefeasible dignity of the soul, lies the most fertile source of social uplift. That the basis of morality is buttressed by faith in the superiority of the individual to death is hardly to be doubted.

The author does not undertake to discuss the influence of the distinctive ideas of Jesus. He merely suggests that our interest in these ideas is much more than theological. Many a movement called modern has its roots in an-

PREVIEW

cient soil, and it were well for us not to lose sight of the Sower who scattered with lavish hand in Judea the seeds of an age-long and world-wide harvest—a harvest the world is only just beginning to reap.

I

THE SEEKING GOD

PROPHETS, and even men of genius, can by their message bring us near to God, but they cannot permanently keep us there, or cure that rebound and reverision in which our souls gravitate to earth and cleave to the dust. Nothing can, until we are quickened by that unique, living and eternal Word wherein God comes near to us in very presence and act, and not in message alone. He comes near and makes us His own. Others can impress us with God; in Christ God creates us anew. Others by their very purity may make us doubt whether we have any right to approach a holy God; but in Christ such misgivings are submerged in the discovery that He has taken the matter out of our hands into His own, and Himself has come to us and made us His forever. . . . God did not send, but came.—P. T. FORSYTH, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, pp. 57, 58.

I

THE SEEKING GOD

FROM Genesis to Revelation the Bible is full of God. It is preëminently God's book. Yet there is in it from first to last no attempt to prove that there is a God. The writers of the various documents which constitute the Bible never argue the question. They boldly assume that God is, and that He is a Person. The volume commences with the simple words, "In the beginning God." The author acts upon the supposition that what all religions admit needs no proof. Subsequent writers proceed to portray the character of God as exhibited in His dealings with nations and men. They represent Him as one, not many; as spiritual, not material; as just and wise and righteous. All of this concerns us as nothing else can. We are eager to know the nature of that Force which works in all things and is, as we believe, at

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

the heart of the universe. Force is, in itself, a cold and comfortless word. The Hebrew prophets say this Force is personal, holy, wise, benevolent—which is the best the Hebrew prophets can do for us. But that is much. To understand how much it is, we have only to remember that pagan conceptions of God never approached the idea of benevolent kindness, much less of holiness. So the Hebrew mind has made an incalculable contribution to human knowledge.

But the supreme revelation was yet to come. In the fullness of time, in the fullness of preparation, expectancy and need, Jesus came to make up what was lacking in our view of God. He had much to say about God—more than about any other subject. He called God a Father: “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father.”

There are fathers and fathers. Jesus pictures God as a compassionate Father. Such is the teaching of the parable of the Prodigal. Not the son, but the father, is the central figure of that matchless picture. Then there

THE SEEKING GOD

is the parable of the Lost Sheep. Not the sheep, but the shepherd, is the chief character of that touching drama. Put these two parables into one, and we have God represented not only as going out to meet the lost one, but going into the mountains of the far country and seeking him with anxious heart and aching arms. This is Jesus' idea of God. The last, the least, the lost, are ever Jesus' favorite words. "The last shall be first." "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren." "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

And Jesus gives us to understand that not only does the Father seek the lost, but that, in Himself, God, veiled in flesh, is seeking man. Thus, He is somewhat more than a representative, a messenger, of God—He is God, revealing in every step of His life, in every miracle of healing and in every parable of truth, the Father's mind and heart. So, Jesus' coming was a part of God's seeking.

In order to save the lost, the heart of the

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

Eternal must be wonderfully kind. And to make saints out of such unpromising material as human clay with all its faults and flaws, its incapacities and corruptions, challenges the powers of the Omnipotent. This is the purpose of the Gospel—to transform the sons of men, with all their defilement, into kings of an immovable kingdom and priests of an unending priesthood.

The pearl-diver gropes in darkness and dangers unimaginable to bring the precious jewel up from ocean depths. The genius of a Washington converts a host of undisciplined troops into an effective army. A young artist, before whose eyes a heavenly vision shone, constructs a cathedral window of rare beauty out of the discarded fragments left by other workmen. Invisible forces of the atmosphere take up the moisture from slimy ponds and sluggish streams and salty seas, and send it down again in pure and purifying dew and rain. Yet all of these are but imperfect symbols of what God undertakes to do when He saves the lost, and constructs

THE SEEKING GOD

out of rescued material the august and invincible Kingdom of Heaven. Gods many there have been in earth's theologies and mythologies, but where, outside of the Holy Scriptures, shall we find such a God as this? No Persian, Hindu, Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek, Roman or Norse deity has been thought of as a saviour of lost men. By no effort of reason can any one of them be identified with the father of the prodigal, looking forth from his lonely dwelling place for the first sign of a travel-worn and penitent son.

A field of cactus is one of the most forbidding sights on our arid southwestern plains. Fruitless and thorny, it cumpers the parched ground. One day, a man said, "If I could but infuse the cactus with the active and fertile principle of a fruit-bearing plant, I could make the desert a garden." He tried to do it. He tried, presumably, unnumbered times, and failed. At last he tried and did not fail. To-day, at Santa Rosa, Luther Burbank will show you a variety of cactus without thorns, but not without fruit. It is one of the mir-

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

acles of the modern world of scientific experimentation. What that man has done for the cactus is a symbol of what Jesus is doing for the human race. He came to live in our desert. The sharp stones bruised His feet, and the hot sun smote Him; wild beasts of the hills howled about Him, and wilder beasts of men hunted Him to his death; but He did not give up His life until he had engrafted upon humanity the life of God.

The prophet who had prevision of a time when the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and when the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose, may not have had a clear conception of the means by which that transformation shall be effected, but we are not without evidence that he thought of a divine Man as the creator of new conditions. "The parched ground shall become a pool." "The parched ground" is literally "the mirage." So Isaiah dreamed of a day when the ideal shall be realized, when that which all the holy have hoped for shall become a fact. Henceforth let us not call Jesus the divine

THE SEEKING GOD

Dreamer—He is more than that, more than an interpreter of dreams—He is the worker-out of dreams, at once the fulfillment and fulfiller of them.

Yet the fulfillment of man's fairest dream was the fruit of no mere languid aspiration. The architect dreams of a bridge across a chasm, but the laborers are yet to come. Jesus is man's vicarious Bridge-builder.

The parable of the Lost Coin indicates God's desire for the restoration of man. So also does that of the Lost Sheep. But that of the Lost Son completes the picture of God and adds to our knowledge of man the idea of his possible coöperation with God in his own salvation. A coin is valuable, but insensate. It cannot know whether it is in the possession of its rightful owner. A sheep can know its own lostness, but is helpless. It is a silly creature, easily panic-stricken, and totally devoid of the homing instinct, common to dogs and doves, and possessed even by bees. It can coöperate with its rescuer only as its pathetic voice may lead him to the pit into which

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

it has fallen, or to the rock on which it lies bleeding. But a wandering human soul can say, "I will arise and go to my Father." He can hear the Father's voice, and answer, "I am here, and I am coming." It is not too much to say that God listens for that answering cry. He hearkens, that is, He bends forward to hear man's answer to His "Come."

The life of Jesus from Bethlehem to Olivet is God's invitation to man to think of Him as a Father. Everything He is and says and does beckons us Godward. Nothing forbids. When our reluctant souls yield to the gentle yet urgent entreaty of the Christ, it dawns upon us in how many ways and by how many means He has been appealing to us to come to God. His voice may long have fallen upon deaf ears, but when we hear it we recall its accents unheeded in the past—in our past. Had we listened, we had heard that Voice in the soft winds, in the loud storms, in the quiet of the evening, in the silences of the night. By our need of fellowship, by our unquenched desire for satisfying truth, by our sense of

THE SEEKING GOD

the vanity of life's best and of the bitterness of life's worst, by our yearning for rest in the sheltering shadow of the Eternal, He calls us, and the degree of our response to Jesus' call is the measure of our approach to God.

II

MAN'S VAST VALUE

ORTHODOXIES will replace orthodoxies, but evangelicalism, as a loyalty of the spiritual life to Jesus Christ, will abide. Modern men will succeed modern men, but He, the Christ, will continue to evoke the faith and adoring love of countless generations. Physical life will end, but the life of the spirit will abide with its Lord, who is Spirit. Social orders will replace social orders, but brotherhood will expand increasingly until the Great Day when Jesus shall be supreme, and the successive approaches of the spiritual life toward Him as its Type and Saviour shall have culminated in a social order in which sin shall be crushed, Christlike souls shall constitute the Democracy of New Spirit, and God shall be all in all.—SHAILER MATHEWS, *The Gospel and the Modern Man*, p. 327.

II

MAN'S VAST VALUE

THERE has come into the world a new sense of the worth of man since Jesus of Nazareth lived and wrought and taught. It is most remarkable that He who knew man most deeply, thought most highly of him. That is a fine definition of a friend—one who knows all about us and still believes in us. Jesus is man's best Friend.

Three thousand years ago, pyramids could be built without enormous cost, even though to raise one granite pile required the labor of a hundred thousand men for thirty years. What were a hundred thousand human lives in the eyes of a Pharaoh, a Rameses, a Ptolemy? What were they in the view of a Cæsar? It detracts somewhat from the glory of the colossal monuments of the ancient world to recall that they were possible only because human life was incredibly cheap.

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

The great wars of the past were possible because there was no Carlyle to rise up and cry: "Why this waste of life? Is not every soldier son of some mother? Why should motherhood rear sons for slaughter?" Was Carlyle a voice, or the echo of a voice? Where did he get his estimate of the value of a man's life? Let this story answer that question. Two men were walking together along a pleasant road in Scotland. They came to a hill overlooking a peaceful valley. In the distance was a village with a solitary church spire rising above its thatched roofs. One of the men pointed to the church, and said, "Were it not for that, you and I could not be here." He meant that civilization is under obligation to Christianity for all it counts most dear. The speaker was Carlyle. His voice was an echo out of Galilee.

You may see along the Tiber engraved markers in the walls of palaces, indicating the high-water mark of the river at flood time. When an old Roman dramatist said, "I am a man and nothing human is alien to

MAN'S VAST VALUE

me," the high-water mark of paganism was reached. It required a lofty exercise of spirit to reach that height. For, remember, so great a mind, so ample a soul, to use his own phrase, as Plato, had declared: "A mechanic has no leisure to be under a physician's treatment; let him try some active remedy and keep about his business. If he recovers he can keep on with his work; if he dies he is rid of his troubles. If he cannot attend to his work it is useless for him to live." And it was Aristotle who declared: "We cannot dispense with farmers and mechanics, but these have nothing to do with public affairs, and are not worthy of the name citizen. They are incapable of greatness of soul because they work for wages, and therefore must be of a mercenary spirit. The difference between them and slaves is an external difference only. They ought to be slaves, and would be if the state were rich enough to buy them, or strong enough to enslave them. Therefore our free youth ought not to learn any trade, for that would degrade

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

them from citizens to mechanics." Cicero expresses the same opinion: "What more foolish than to respect the mass of the people as anything, when you despise them individually as laborers and barbarians!"

Into a world accustomed to such sentiments as these, Jesus came with a totally different conception of the worth of man, teaching that every man is great just because he is a man. When that idea took root in human thought, it had within it the promise of all coming freedom.

If any man asks, "When and where did Jesus teach any such doctrine?" we point to the whole tendency of His teachings, to His conduct in social relations, as well as to His words. See His absolute disregard of tribal, national and social distinctions. The Jew in Jerusalem and the Samaritan under the shadow of Ebal; the Greek from Decapolis and the Syrophœnician woman, were equally in His sight potential subjects of the Kingdom of God. The hated publican He did not despise. The blind beggar, the naked de-

MAN'S VAST VALUE

moniac with foam on his cut lips, the unclean leper, the forgotten social pariah—all these He treated with tender regard for their humanity. He had eyes wherewith to pierce the thin disguise of flesh and see beneath however repulsive exterior the image of God.

Consider His estimate of the worth of man—any man—all men—as judged by His appeal to their intellect. The noblest teachers the world has known appealed to select classes, considering only the brilliant, the clever, the enlightened, as worthy or capable of receiving their truth. Moses had no message for the heathen—and all non-Hebrew nations were heathen to him. Plato had no message for the barbarian—and all non-Hellenic races were barbarians. Buddhism has its esoteric revelation—its truth for the initiate alone. But to whom did Jesus appeal? To all men. He knew no aliens. The only man barred out of His Kingdom is the man who erects his own barriers.

Not long after Jesus disappears from sight we see Saul of Tarsus, narrowest of the nar-

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

row, elect of the elect, break away from all tradition, all custom, all precedent, and preach this Gospel to Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female. Roman centurion, Philippian woman and Greek slave girl are all welcome to hear the new evangel. Doubt if we may the miracle of the noonday radiance that smote Saul blind, we cannot doubt that something had transformed him from the bigoted devotee of a provincial faith into the zealous apostle of the most catholic and democratic doctrine of man the world had yet known. The appeal of Saul—now Paul—like that of his Master, was to the intellect of man as man.

If Jesus' recognition of the intellect of man implies, as it does, man's vast value, even more does His appeal to man's deeper moral nature. It was true once that not many rich, not many mighty, not many noble, were called, but from the first all who were called were called to moral wealth and worth, soul power, and nobility of spirit. In the name of a religion which professes lofty

MAN'S VAST VALUE

sentiments, India has been cursed with a caste system which is the chief obstacle to social progress and reform. According to Hinduism, one born a hewer of wood or a drawer of water can never in this world be anything better. Born of the thief caste, he can never in this world rise above it. But when Christianity confronts caste there is a battle to the death. Either caste goes down, or Christianity is defeated in the encounter. The religion of Jesus everywhere proclaims that there is no degree of mastery in the practice of virtue, no depth of knowledge of the will of God, no height of holiness, no expertness in the interpretation of spiritual mysteries, that any man of any birth or social stratum may not aspire to and attain. The serf may be a saint. The mechanic may be a priest unto men and a prince unto God. The humble shall hear and be glad. We all, beholding, are changed.

“The humblest life that lives may be divine;
Christ changed the common water into wine.
Starlike comes Love from out the magic East—
And Life, the hermit, finds his fast a feast.”

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

Under the tuition of such a faith, a faith that affirms the value of man as a child of God, a faith that appeals to the intellect and moral nature of all men—regardless of arbitrary distinctions—a faith that offers glory, honor and immortality to all who will to do the will of Jesus, men soon outgrew the imperfect opinions of the philosophers as to the value of man. So Basil declares, “Man is a great being.” Ambrose exclaims, “Thou, O man, art the great work of God.” Chrysostom says: “Do not imagine that an injury to a slave will be pardoned as of no consequence. Human law recognizes a difference between the two classes, but God’s law knows none.” And again, the golden-mouthed speaks: “You say your father is a consul. No matter—show me your life; by this I will judge of your nobility. I call the slave noble if I see nobility in his life. I call base and ignoble, him who, though in the midst of dignities, has a servile spirit.”

Basil, Ambrose and Chrysostom were among the early preachers of the new system.

MAN'S VAST VALUE

Did emperors see in such an idea the future overthrow of Cæsarism, imperialism, institutionalism? It was there! There the Florentine Republic, the Dutch Republic, the English Commonwealth and the American Constitution are contained. There were the germs of a movement which has been slow to mature, but which has made a new political map of the world. The uplift of the masses is the outgrowth of that idea. From it has been derived the present passion for the cure of social and industrial ills. Jesus' doctrine of man's vast value is behind the philanthropy which writes over against the natural law of the survival of the fittest the new law, "We must make the unfit fit to survive!" If the natural law of the survival of the fittest means the survival of the fittest to survive, and not the survival of the fittest to live, then how immeasurably superior is Christ's doctrine, which seeks to make the morally unfit fit to live, fit to fill life with hitherto unimagined fullness, fit to invest the word "life"—which may mean mere animated existence

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

—with meaning that exhausts the power of language to define! Henry Herbert Knibbs gives us such an idea of life endowed with the quality of eternity:

Heaven is viewless. That is good for us.
Hell is apparent in the daily stress,
And nightly strife with dragons. That's good, too.
He that once sees the pit avoids the pit,
And on the path of safety nears the throne.
The soul but turns upon itself that spends
All effort in avoiding sin, nor nears
The portals of the Home. Aye, He asks more—
A ceaseless toiling toward the waiting Face,
To win the blessed best there is in Life.

III

A NEW AND LIVING WAY TO GOD

THE conscience-stirring, faith-evoking Jesus of Nazareth, who, amidst the flux of words in which men have tried to explain His person, has, through the centuries, satisfied man's hunger for a knowable, reconciled God, given the perfect revelation of the spiritual life that is eternal, and proclaimed the certainty of the life to come, is an unchanging element of a Christianity that ever seeks to adapt the Gospel to a changing order.

If the modern man cannot understand or accept an inherited Christology, he can at least in the depths of his own spiritual life serve the real Person whose redemptive energy doctrine seeks to estimate and enforce. And in serving Him he will know the power as well as the struggle of the emancipated, victorious, spiritual life.—SHAILER MATHEWS, *The Gospel and the Modern Man*, p. 298.

III

A NEW AND LIVING WAY TO GOD

AT the very basis of all the great religions lies the hypothesis—possibly it would better be called hypostasis—that man needs to be restored; that, made to be at home with God, he has somehow lost himself; that, away from God, man is out of normal adjustment. It goes far to establish the doctrine of sin that it is a part of every religious system that has taken any deep hold upon the human intellect.

The literature of the world affords ample illustration of the experience of conscious moral lostness. Poetry, the history of the heart, is full of it. Pagan moralists confess it. The old, old cry has echo in modern hearts,

“I was born in ignorance,
I have lived in uncertainty,
I die in trepidation—O Cause of Causes, pity me!”

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

Chief among the problems of social science is that of correcting, arresting, or curing the deep-seated tendencies in man to evil. By all the complicated codes of law, civil and criminal; by all the machinery of government designed to protect our persons and guard our properties from harm; by all our institutions for retributive and remedial treatment of wrongdoers, we confess a common alienation from the ideal and estrangement from goodness, a world need, which can be satisfied only by a world return to God.

The end of all religion is to bridge the chasm between man and God; to bring man back to God—or up to God; to diminish the distance between what humanity now is and humanity as God sees it in His finished thought. The very word religion means just this, to reunite, to rebind in perfect harmony the finite and the infinite.

When Jonathan Edwards said, “I will make the salvation of my soul the great business of my life,” he spoke wisely, and, considered as to its ultimate implication, un-

A NEW AND LIVING WAY

selfishly. No foolish man, no selfish man, ever made true religion the serious business of his life. Browning represents Johannes Agricola as saying:

“There’s heaven above, and night by night
I look right through its gorgeous roof,
Nor suns and moons, tho’ e’er so bright
Avail to stop me; splendor-proof,
I keep the broods of stars aloof,
For I intend to get to God.”

This, after all, is the quest of the ages—not for gold, but for God. Philip’s words to Jesus were representative, and not alone personal, “Show us the Father.” But we expect no vision of the Eternal. All Philip wanted was—and all we want is—to know how to get to God. Jesus knew what all the sons of men were seeking, and He said, “I am the way.” If He had said, “I know the way,” it had been a startling thing. If He had said, “I will show you the way,” He had promised an incalculably precious gift to men. But when He said, “I am the way,” He left the company of mere students and

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

teachers, and stepped into a radiance that gives deathless glory to His name. There have been other pathfinders, but here is One who claims to be the Path. Is it strange the anonymous author of the Epistle to the Hebrews calls Him the "new and living way" to God?

The old way was formal, ceremonial. Moses said, "Sacrifice is the way to God." So altars were sprinkled with the blood of the lambs and calves. This was symbol, but as with us, the symbol was too often mistaken for that it was intended to symbolize, and worship degenerated into a hollow, spiritless form. Prophets and psalmists called the people back to truth, saying, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." "Rend your heart, and not your garments." Yet all the words of preachers and prophets fell on deaf ears, until Jesus came to demonstrate the meaning of a living sacrifice; to translate into human experience the divine will with reference to man's life and man's approach to God. There is now no need for beasts to bleed upon

A NEW AND LIVING WAY

the altar. Let the cooing doves and the lowing kine be driven from the temple courts. Let fires die out, which once consumed the flesh of pious offerings. The sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ fulfills all types, and the way of His Cross and ours is the new and living way to God.

The late Dr. John Fiske gave us a book entitled "Through Nature to God." Thomas Moore wrote:

There's nothing bright, above, below,
From flowers that bloom to stars that glow,
But in its impress we can see
Some feature of the Deity.

The pantheist points us to God in nature. The devout naturalist looks through nature up to nature's God. He who sincerely seeks God in forest or field is not without his reward. The astronomer who cried, "O God, I think thy thoughts after thee!" had caught a glimpse of nature's God. To him the star-paved spaces of the sky were paths by which his mind was led to God.

To every reverent student of natural

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

forces, the laws of nature are the thoughts of God. When we discover some great principle, such as gravitation or evolution, we perceive God's habits in the creation and government of the universe. But, though nature is not a dead realm; though there is life in all its parts, and though that life is one, whether blowing underfoot in clover, or beating overhead in stars, the way to God through nature is not an easy way. The pilgrim is all too likely to grow weary of the quest, and to fix his faith upon some work of God. Fire-worshippers, sun-worshippers, idol-worshippers of every sort, have stopped short of the Ultimate Cause of causes. Left to himself, the common man never finds his way through nature to God. He mistakes nature for God, prays to the wind, and peoples the air with spirits, of his own imagining. Nature needs an interpreter.

How dull and unattractive to the most of us is any nature study until some skillful teacher opens our understanding! One of his students pays this tribute to Professor

A NEW AND LIVING WAY

Agassiz: "His teaching was a revelation; nothing of natural history could ever be the same to us after he had spoken to us of it." Many a student of philosophy has said the same of Mark Hopkins or of James McCosh. The way into the meaning of truth is best opened by a living teacher. The word—biological, astronomical, philosophical—must be made flesh and dwell among us. The Word of God must be made flesh. It must be embodied in a human life. Jesus Christ is that Embodiment. The other word for embodiment is Incarnation.

As supplemental, in a sense, to Dr. Fiske's "Through Nature to God," Dr. George A. Gordon gives us his study, "Through Man to God." It is a helpful and noble book, and points to the same necessity in the realm of religion that exists in the realm of science and art—the truth must be embodied that we may all see and know it. It must have been the consideration of this necessity on our part, as well as of infinite goodness on God's part, which led Professor Romanes to write

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

in his fragmentary "Thoughts on Religion," "The Incarnation is not only not unreasonable, but antecedently probable."

The fatherliness of God is a sufficient explanation of the whole Christian scheme of redemption. A father must manifest himself to his own children. It is one of the most startling thoughts in all the Holy Scriptures that God lacks something of completion until humanity knows Him as He is. Is the Absolute not absolute, therefore? The Absolute cannot be the Absolute until he is All in All to all His children.

Dr. Robert E. Speer, in a masterly address on "The Unsatisfied Longing of Christ," affirms that the divine Saviour cannot be all it is possible for Him to be to any soul until He is all it is possible for Him to be to all souls. The sea is not the "all-absolving sea" until it washes all shores, and fills every bay and inlet to the utmost of its capacity. The air is not the all-ensphering air until it penetrates every nook and corner of the earth.

A NEW AND LIVING WAY

From the dawn of moral consciousness in man, God has besieged the human soul in efforts to fill it with His own power and presence. Barriers of ignorance have obstructed His entrance into our lives, barriers of base passion, and false pride, and vain thoughts, and selfish desires. God cannot force us to recognize and receive Him without robbing us of our free will and power of choice. But the siege is never lifted. God never grows weary in His attempt to occupy a Kingdom which of right is His. The Incarnation is His utmost effort to gain access to our inner lives. Omnipotence can go no further. The infinite has no greater resource of argument or power.

It is as if a father were seeking to reveal himself to his children by gifts of his own making. Is he an artist? He paints a picture, or carves a statue. That sunset sky is our Father's canvas, that human form is his sculpture. But not yet do the children see their father in his works. So he writes them, writes tenderly, simply, beautifully. He re-

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

veals his mind in letters. This Bible is our Father's letter to us. But not yet do the children see their father in his words. At last, having prepared them for his coming, he appears among them, walks with them, converses with them, helps them in unnumbered ways, and seeks by patience and benevolence to win their love. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. Can any father do more than that? Is there any way to God so plain, so simple, so worthy of all acceptance, as the Living Way—the way of the Life? More directly than through symbolism, more satisfyingly than through nature, more surely than through processes of reasoning, more personally than through a book, we see God in Jesus Christ. And how we see Him is suggested by a poet who found and followed the New and Living Way:

“In Christ I feel the heart of God
Throbbing from heaven through earth.
Life stirs again within the clod,
Renewed in beauteous birth.
The soul springs up, a flower of prayer,
Breathing His breath out on the air.

A NEW AND LIVING WAY

“In Christ I touch the hand of God,
From His pure heights reached down,
By blessed ways before untrod,
To lift us to our crown;
Victory that only perfect is
Through loving sacrifice, like His.

“Holding His hand, my steadied feet
May walk the air, the seas;
On life and death His smile falls sweet,
Lights up all mysteries;
Stranger nor exile can I be
In new worlds where He leadeth me.”

IV

NEW LIFE FROM GOD

THERE is, as Dr. Newton Clarke says, good reason why regeneration should be the favorite name for describing, from the divine side, the beginning of the divine life in man; but if any man, conscious of the reality of the change, finds some other figure truer to the facts of his own experience, let him not hesitate to use it; the warrant for his freedom is the New Testament itself. Even our familiar and comprehensive "conversion" is not the only legitimate name; perhaps it is not in every case the best possible name for the experience it describes. Conversion is the turning round of the soul from evil to good, from sin to God. But the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews preferred to speak rather of our being "enlightened"; so that instead of speaking of a man's conversion we might speak with equal accuracy, and in some cases perhaps with more perfect fitness, of his "illumination," the diffusion of divine light through the sin-darkened soul.—GEORGE JACKSON, *The Fact of Conversion*, pp. 104, 105.

There are experiences of another kind by which the faith of a Christian man is verified. Of these one of the most decisive and most wonderful is the consciousness that through Christ he has passed into the eternal and divine order. He belongs to two worlds. He is just as certain that he is environed by things unseen and eternal as that he is environed by things seen and temporal. In the power of the life given to him in the new birth he has entered into the Kingdom of God. He is conscious that that diviner region is now the native land of his soul. It is there that he finds perfect rest and perfect freedom. It is a relief to escape to its eternal

peace and glory from the agitations and vicissitudes, the sorrows and successes, of this transitory world. It is not always that he is vividly conscious of belonging to that eternal order; this supreme blessedness is reserved for the great hours of life; but he knows that it lies about him always, and that at any moment the great apocalypse may come. And even when it is hidden, its "powers" continue to act upon him, as the light and heat of the sun pass through the clouds by which the burning splendor is softened and concealed.—R. W. DALE, *The Living Christ and the Four Gospels*, pp. 15, 16.

IV

NEW LIFE FROM GOD

THERE was a wise and noble man who came by night to seek an interview with Jesus. He had thought long and deeply on religious things. He knew the utter emptiness of a merely mechanical piety. Nothing less than a faith of freedom and power could satisfy him. So he came to One whom he recognized as a religious authority; came by night probably because he sought an uninterrupted interview; proved his courage by coming at all to One at whom the scribes and lawyers looked askance. Jesus honored his courage and his sincerity, and gave him the best answer possible.

In that night interview with Nicodemus Jesus declared more plainly than at any other time His doctrine of the new birth, "Ye must be born again." It sounded strange to the wise man. It was a dark saying, and a hard

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

saying. Instantly the scientist and the philosopher asserted themselves in a great, pressing, persistent "How?" Jesus answered the question with a parable from nature, a parable about the wind. More mystified than ever perhaps, the truth-seeker went away. But it is not written that he went away sorrowful or indignant. He went away wondering. Subsequently we have a flash-light picture of this same Nicodemus. In an hour of crisis he speaks a good word for Jesus. The night interview was not in vain. We have no means of knowing to what experience in his own life Nicodemus had been led by the strange words about a second birth, but if we look into Christian history we shall find innumerable pages made radiant by lives into which had come some such transformation as that which may properly be supposed to follow a second birth.

Buddhism offers the seeker after the supreme gift of life a second birth, and a third, and a thousandth, but all beyond the grave. By a series of rebirths, reincarnations, the

NEW LIFE FROM GOD

soul at last may come to satisfying peace. Deliverance from ill may be achieved uncounted æons hence. The doctrine of Jesus is that of a present deliverance. He says not only, "Ye must be born again," but, "Ye may be born again." Here and now in the midst of time, surrounded by clamorous evils, and feeling within our own natures the oft uprising of unspiritual forces, we may, if this doctrine of Jesus be dependable, experience a change of motive, an acquisition of power, a new and superior viewpoint, not by our own labored efforts at self-help, but by the communication of a new and superior quality of inward life.

The word "conversion," with all its wealth of meaning, does not adequately describe the experience of new life from God. It is difficult for us to get away from the etymological content of a word, and "conversion" is a word which does not necessarily carry with it all the significance which attaches to such a word as "regeneration." Conversion denotes a change from one state or condition to

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

another, a change of mind, of viewpoint, of convictions or emotions. This is included in the Christian conception of a spiritual life. But the term which describes the genesis of this new life is that which Jesus used not once, nor twice, but often. After Him, the apostles used it. They cannot make it more striking by varying the terms by which they refer to it. Nor is there need to make it plainer. Birth is the beginning of natural life. Rebirth is the beginning of spiritual life.

Conversion is the soul's return to God. It has been well called, in instances in which the change of attitude was sudden, the soul's leap to God. In cases in which the change is more gradual, it is the soul's approach to God. Regeneration is not only a new impulse from God, but the genesis of a new heredity, divine in origin and in essential nature. It is the spiritual process of the remaking of a life which sin had unmade.

A youth of twenty sat alone in a little hired room in a city boarding house. He had

NEW LIFE FROM GOD

just left behind him a battle field on which sense and spirit had warred for the mastery. Sense had been victorious. Conscience was at work. The angel of penitence had come to minister to him with the sweet baptism of tears. The remembrance of other battle fields was in his mind. He reasoned with himself thus: "My associates have misled me. Their combined influence is stronger than my power to resist. I must cut loose from them. I will." And he did. "I have some books which have tripped me up. The reading of them has awakened the animal within me and paralyzed my moral muscle. I will destroy them." And he did. "I have certain habits of thoughts and choice which have been hurtful to me. By oft yielding to the inclination of habit, I have worn grooves in my mental mechanism along which it daily becomes easier for imagination and desire to run. I must establish new mental habits. It will require constant and painful effort, but new habits can be acquired. But more than all these, I have propensities to evil, probably in-

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

bred. I need not only new friends, and new books, and new habits, but a new heredity. God is my Father. Surely childship involves similitude of character. I will seek to re-establish my vital relation to God." What he sought was nothing else and nothing less than a new birth. How he sought it cannot easily be told. Whether he obtained it, he alone is competent to say. But one who knows him intimately is prepared to affirm that presently he became conscious of such a new and pervasive sense of inward reënforcement that when he sought in the Scriptures the proper terminology with which to express his experience, he found it only in a saying of Paul, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation."

One who is born into this world not only enters a realm hitherto unknown to him, but leaves behind a realm totally different from that which he enters. So, it would seem, the experience of the new birth involves, prior to, or coincident with, the new creation, a destruction, a dismissal, an abandonment of

NEW LIFE FROM GOD

such "former things" as are in their nature incompatible with the new life upon which one has entered.

If we could divest ourselves of some of our preconceived notions, derived consciously or unconsciously from sermons, or books, or conversations; if we could dismiss from our minds some of the once valuable but now well-worn phrases associated with religious experience, and approach the whole problem of this experience called regeneration, and view it through eyes divested of the scales of prejudice through which often we see but dimly, because of the very familiarity of that upon which we look, we might see that, after all, however mystical the experience may be, however supernormal it may seem to be, spiritual regeneration has its parallels in the realms of intellect and sensibility. Not uncommon, when we review the mental biographies of many people, is the radical, even revolutionary, effect of a picture, a book, or even of a single sentence, upon all the subsequent history of an individual. Mental life

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

is reorganized about a new center. The esthetic nature is rehabilitated, or moral life is penetrated with the imperative force of new ideals. An English youth hears by apparent chance, the phrase, "The greatest good of the greatest number," and in after years confesses that all his studies in civil and political economy had their beginning in that single sentence. It gripped him as with hoops of steel. It brought into play upon and within his life, forces of the existence of which he had hitherto been unconscious. Benjamin Franklin ascribed his benevolent impulses to the influence of a book he read in youth—Cotton Mather's "Essays to Do Good." A young English physician, utterly unspiritual, happens into an auditorium in which an American evangelist is conducting a service. Nothing the evangelist says, nothing the great choir sings, impresses him, but the manner in which the evangelist conducts the service, prompt, businesslike, shrewd and sane, leads him to review the mental process by which he has hitherto evaded the religious

NEW LIFE FROM GOD

appeal. The young man has not been irreligious, but unreligious. He goes away from this service to assume henceforth a new attitude, not alone toward religion, but toward the world at large. The center of life has shifted. Presently we find him a volunteer surgeon on a hospital ship among the neglected fishermen of the North Sea, and a little later, apostle, messenger, and "angel" to the Labrador coast.

Time would fail us were we to attempt even to catalogue, without at all describing or defining, just such experiences, the records of which are within the common knowledge of us all. Personalities so disparate as Martin Luther and Friar Lawrence, Thomas Carlyle and John Henry Newman, Professor Franz Delitzsch and Mr. W. T. Stead, John Wesley and James Smetham, Horace Bushnell and Charles Kingsley, Cardinal Manning and Charles H. Spurgeon, Dr. R. W. Dale and General Booth, Lady Henry Somerset and Adeline, Countess Schimmelman, Dwight L. Moody and Frank T. Bullen, witness, with

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

that remarkable agreement in general, combined with difference in detail, which is the best evidence of competent testimony, that the experience of a new creation is not peculiar to any period of time or to any type of mentality. Professor Romanes, friend and disciple of Darwin, having lost and regained his faith in the integrity of the facts of Christian consciousness declares, in his "Thoughts on Religion," "This experience [speaking of conversion] has been repeated and testified to by countless millions of civilized men and women in all nations and all degrees of culture." Professor George Jackson, of Didsbury College,¹ alluding to many ancient and modern instances of spiritual rebirth, says:

Facts are not fairy armies which vanish into thin air at the waving of a magician's wand; but in this case the facts are so numerous and so well authenticated that to attempt to ignore them is simply to put the foolscap on our own heads. And if, instead of ignoring, we will patiently investigate these sudden conversions, but two points in regard to them will, I think, become

¹ In the Cole Lectures at Vanderbilt University, 1908, on "The Reality of Conversion as a Fact of Consciousness."

NEW LIFE FROM GOD

clear to us. First, while no definite significance attaches to the manner of conversion but only to the results of it, and while sudden conversions are often followed by disappointing reactions, on the other hand, the lives of multitudes, lifted at once and permanently to a higher level, remain to attest the reality of the experience; and, secondly, it seems unquestionable, however we may explain it, that there are some whose one chance of better things lies in some sudden, soul-shattering experience, which overturns the life from its foundations.

In recent years there has been a striking movement among scholars, with a passion for original investigation and research, to reduce the facts of Christian consciousness to a science, or at least to study them with scientific thoroughness and impartiality. Professor Henry Drummond was among the first to point out that it must be one aim of a scientific theology to study the phenomena attending and following conversion, in order to restore to Christianity its most convincing credential. Professor Starbuck in "The Psychology of Religion," Professor Coe in "The Spiritual Life; Studies in the Science of Religion," and in "The Religion of a Mature Mind," Professor James in "Varieties of

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

Réligious Experience," and Professor Jackson in the Cole Lectures alluded to above, which have been published under the title "The Fact of Conversion," have done much to redeem the data of spiritual life from seeming unreality. There can be no satisfactory argument against the genuineness of the results of conversion in the face of such facts as have been collected with extraordinary care and presented with luminous clearness by Professor Leuba in the "American Journal of Psychology" (vol. 7, page 373), by Harold Begbie in "Twice-Born Men" and "Souls in Action," and by Philip I. Roberts in "The Dry-Dock of a Thousand Wrecks."

A distinguished authority on comparative religions affirms that the consciousness of personal fellowship with God through faith in Christ is one of the distinctive features of Christianity, and that there is no trace of anything like it in any oriental religion. This consciousness of fellowship has sometimes been called God-consciousness. The moment of its beginning is the birth moment of the

NEW LIFE FROM GOD

new man, the spiritual man. What shall we call the event which marks that beginning? It has been pointed out that Jesus called it rebirth and that Paul called it a new creation. Peter speaks of it as a "resurrection from the dead." Dr. Dale accepted "renewal" as the right word to use in describing the initial act or process—for it would seem that the type of experience varies widely between a sudden accession of unaccustomed life and impulse, and a gradual dawning of light and unfolding of power. The Shorter Catechism suggests another term: "Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel."

A recent biography of Florence Nightingale by Sir Edward Cook, reviewed at length in the "British Weekly" of November 13, 1913, furnishes us most interesting facts in the spiritual life of that remarkable woman:

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

Her calling was emphatically the work of God's Spirit. It would seem to most that her early circumstances were supremely fortunate. Her parents were very wealthy. . . . They were accustomed to travel on the Continent. They were in the very best society, and met the leading men of the day. Florence was an ardent student and scholar, winning in her personality, distinguished and elegant if not actually beautiful. She seems to have been adored by her own circle and admired by all who saw her. . . . Her father was a Unitarian, and though she herself for a time conformed outwardly to the Church of England, her opinions did not square with any of the ancient creeds. . . . She became more and more restless, more and more weary. The Spirit of God had called her. In an autobiographical fragment, written in 1867, she mentions as one of the crises of her inner life, that God called her to his service on February 7, 1837, and Sir Edward tells us that there are later notes still fixing that day as the dawn of her true life. She was then seventeen.

These then are but other terms to describe the workings in men and women of diverse types, of a power which is able "to dissolve a life which has all the appearance and probability of permanence, and to reorganize it by a new principle." Professor James, who approaches the problems of philosophy and inner experience in an attitude of refreshing

NEW LIFE FROM GOD

candor and who describes them in terms at once accurate and untechnical, thus defines conversion: "To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a life hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities." Another modern thinker, less well known than Professor James, but no less hospitable to the truth, speaks of religion as "the inflow of the divine into human life, and the consequent uplift of human life to the divine." This writer has, unconsciously perhaps, applied to religion generally words which best describe the beginning of religious life in the human soul. A divine hand "throws open the gates of new life" to us, and something happens in the human spirit, which has its symbol in chemistry, when a hitherto chaotic mass begins to crystallize, and in biology when a living cell

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

begins to increase by division and redivision. Motion is the resultant of power. Life proceeds only from life. A dead soul springs into life at the touch of that Power whence all spiritual life proceeds.

Michelangelo's fresco representing the creation of man pictures the moment when the divine spark is first lighted in human life at the touch of the Almighty Hand. Surely it requires nothing less than a touch of the Creative Hand to restore the soul. Regeneration is the restoration of the human spirit by the act of Him who first breathed into man "the breath of life." Rebirth is the work of God's inbreathing. "The wind bloweth where it listeth: . . . so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Sick of sin and weary with failures, we long to make a new start, and talk of turning over a new leaf. The new start and the fresh white leaf are offered us at the moment of our re-creation. The lines of Susan Coolidge thus become doubly dear to him who stands at the portal of a better life:

NEW LIFE FROM GOD

Every day is a fresh beginning,
Every morn is the world made new.

Of all the distinctive ideas of Jesus, perhaps the doctrine of new life from God is the one most difficult for the average man to accept. "How can a man be born when he is old?" As a matter of fact, each added year of life after one passes the age of sixteen, renders it so much more improbable that he will be born again. This much is certain. All the statistics of conversion prove it. There is a time in life when the soul is so impressionable and the will is so flexible that, granted the desire to be born again, the process is not attended with violent emotions. A vast majority of all who are consciously led by the Spirit enter that consciousness in youth. There is a comfortably large number of cases of conversion in mature years, and even in old age, but the normal age synchronizes with the first well-developed impulses of young manhood and womanhood. Look, for a moment, at the words in which a representative company of the twice-born, college

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

students, eager young thinkers, describe their experiences of rebirth:²

"The opening of my spiritual eyes was a great event; there was no great change otherwise. I had always done as well as I knew."

"The chief change was in my inmost purpose. I was no longer self-centered."

"The change was marked and radical. I had feared God, now I loved him. I did not rest in ceremonies, except as a means of growth."

"Then God had been far off in the sky, too holy and good to let me get close to him. Now he was a tender, loving Father, and very near."

"When rising from my knees, I exclaimed, 'Old things have passed away and all things have become new,' it was like entering another world—a new state of existence."

"I felt an unfolding of truth and a revelation of God's ways. I underwent a moral and intellectual quickening."

These are representative experiences. In few cases, apparently, among thoughtful, decent-living young people is the great change accompanied by an emotive upheaval. But the expression "change of heart" does not begin to exhaust the meaning of the experi-

² Edwin Diller Starbuck, "The Psychology of Religion," pp. 119, 120, 131.

NEW LIFE FROM GOD

ence, much less does the phrase "change of mind." It is nothing less than a change of nature: "The person emerges from a smaller, limited world of existence, into a larger world of being; the individual learns to transfer himself from a center of self-activity into an organ of revelation of universal being." Regeneration is, therefore, the emergence of a new self. Individuality is not impaired, personality is not dissociated, but by association with the eternal Self, by alliance with Infinite Personality, a spiritual self of which before we had been but dimly conscious if at all, asserts its sovereignty, and life henceforth can never be the same.

From the days of Saul of Tarsus until now the doctrine of new life from God has not been without exemplification in any age. Certain periods seem to be peculiarly rich in illustrations, as, for instance, the age of the Wesleyan revival, and that of the great awakening under the preaching of Mr. Moody. But that the power of the divine Spirit is not exhausted is evident from the current history

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

of the Salvation Army, and conversions as radical and revolutionary as any in Whitefield's time are common in every rescue mission. If the truth were known it would be clear that the same mighty Spirit whose acts are written in the New Testament is abroad in the world to-day convincing men of sin, awakening some who never went into the far country and spent their substance riotously, to their deep need of spiritual life, and through the quiet workings of conscience prompting multitudes to seek to be made partakers of the divine nature. The experiences of the young Japanese, the story of whose illumination is strikingly told in a little book called "The Life Beautiful"; of Selim, son of Hassan Bey, whose quest of the living God is related by Henry Otis Dwight in "A Muslim Sir Galahad"; and of Miss Emily Gregory, once associate professor of botany at Bryn Mawr, later on the staff of the Botanical Department of the University of Pennsylvania, and founder of the Department of Botany in Barnard College in New

NEW LIFE FROM GOD

York, the awakening of whose religious nature is told in "A Scientist's Confession of Faith," a little book full of rare human interest—these are as wonderful and as convincing as anything in all the annals of the Church. God still seeks man. Jesus is still the Door, and as something of the massiveness and splendor of a house may be judged by the greatness of the entrance, so the spaciousness and beauty of that new life in God to which we are called may only be imagined by the ampleness and glory of His life through Whom we enter into the life of God.

V

AN EFFICIENT MOTIVE

IT is this entry of the divine into man's sphere, with its inversion of the primitive order of things, that first gives the elements of the Christian life their full depth and force. Only thus can we do equal justice to its love and gentleness on one hand, and to its seriousness and truth on the other. Christian love means very much more than is conveyed in the woefully shallow presentment of it lately indulged in even in popular romances. For it is no soft connivance at human weakness and error, no embellishing of the events of the world, no Yea and Amen to every pronouncement. It is characterized rather by an infinite seriousness, demanding as it does, a new world and a new life which only the divine Power can bestow. The task that devolves on man is not merely man's concern, a private matter of his own happiness, but it has a far-reaching effect on the ordering of the Whole, and is thus fraught with grave responsibility.—RUDOLPH EUCKEN, *Christianity and the New Idealism*. Translated by Lucy Judge Gibson, pp. 80, 81.

V

AN EFFICIENT MOTIVE

IF man, untouched by religion, be lost; if he be spiritually defective; if he be far from goodness and from God, or rather, being so, he needs two things above all else, an ideal and an uplift.

Many people fail to do right because they do not know the right. It is not the function of conscience to discern the right. Moral judgment must do that; then conscience bids us do what moral judgment pronounces right. So conscience has impelled and approved many a wrong act; moral judgment may be uninstructed or misguided. Conscience needs not to be educated, but needs only an indwelling spirit of righteousness to keep it awake, active, sensitive. But moral judgment must be educated. We must learn to recognize the true and the good when we see them. We must be furnished with a correct ideal.

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

After long discipline the Hebrew people acquired a noble ethic. They were incomparably above their neighbors in both the theory and practice of virtue. Disraeli was entirely justified in reminding a gentleman who had taunted him with being a Jew that it was no reproach to belong to a race that was building marble temples and singing matchless songs when the savage races of northern Europe were drinking the blood of their enemies slain in battle.

Read the thirty-third chapter of Isaiah and judge the moral standing of the Hebrew people: "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high." Lofty ideal is that, yet not loftier than the picture of God's gentleman presented by a psalmist two centuries earlier than Isaiah: "He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the

AN EFFICIENT MOTIVE

truth in his heart . . . he that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not . . . shall never be moved.”

But if there is lacking in the ethics of the Old Testament anything of humility and tenderness, anything of the altruistic outlook, the broad view of human brotherhood, and social service, we have it in the highest degree and fullest measure in the life and teachings of Jesus. There is nothing lacking in the system of morals contained in the Christian Scriptures. The new ideal is the old, perfected, spiritualized, lifted to a purer air and a nobler view. It is the testimony of its keenest critics that Christianity offers us a flawless code. Mr. Herbert Spencer in the preface to his “Data of Ethics,” objects that it is too perfect—that it mocks and baffles us by its very perfection.

It must be granted, however, that Christianity is not alone in its advocacy of excellent ethics. There is Confucianism—not a religion, it may be, but a moral system which has taken the place of religion in innumer-

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

able lives. Let it be conceded that the ethical code of Confucius is admirable. But shall we not look behind the code at its philosophy? What vital force does the Chinese sage recognize whereby to make his code effective? What motive does he seek to supply his disciples? A single instance will suffice to show by what celestial diameters he is separated from the Founder of Christianity. Confucius teaches the duty of neighborly kindness, but shrewdly suggests that the duty is really to oneself, inasmuch as we may be in need sometime. An appeal to self-love. Honor your parents and your children will honor you. How inexpressibly above this is the admonition, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right! Even the Mosaic commandment lacks this fine spirit, with its judicious reminder of temporal reward, "That thy days may be long upon the land." Read the parable of the Good Samaritan. There is pure philanthropy, disinterested benevolence, with never a suggestion that we may ourselves fall among thieves.

AN EFFICIENT MOTIVE

There is a unique and significant phrase occurring often in the Psalms, ascribing to Jehovah the quality of loving-kindness. The New Testament encourages us to the cultivation of that divine quality, unselfish goodness, and affirms the sufficiency of love as the ground of obligation. Love is the great word in the messages of Jesus, even as it was the great force in His ministry. The apostles so understood it. "We love him, because he first loved us." "The love of Christ constraineth us."

President Mark Hopkins, of Williams College, in his great book, "The Law of Love and Love as a Law," argues the supreme accent of Christianity upon love as a motive, operating in every possible phase of life, covering the whole domain of morals.

* * * * *

Next to a moral ideal, man needs a moral uplift, a constant impulse, prompting him to approach that standard. There is, in Christianity, provision for both these fundamental needs. In Jesus, behold the Man! And as

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

to the motive, the inner energy, the power not ourselves which we may make our own, whose operation in our lives brings us nearer and nearer daily to the mark of our high calling, is it not in this—the love of Christ?

This phrase has a threefold meaning: the love of Christ for us, our love for Him, and His love in us. This it is that constraineth. But is not constraint equivalent to coercion? Then I will not be coerced; I am free, and no power shall enslave me! But does it not all depend on whether the coercive power be from without or from within? If the force be external we may resist it, but if it be a moral energy within ourselves, we may gladly yield. Hunger constrains us to eat, yet we do not need to be driven to the breakfast table. Love constrains a mother to minister to her children, and she becomes a willing servant all her days. Yet is she ever so free as when she is serving those she loves? We sometimes speak of being in duty bound to do such and such things. Duty binds us,

AN EFFICIENT MOTIVE

conscience binds us, gratitude binds us, faith binds us, affection binds us,

“Captive, yet divinely free.”

It is still a debated question what is the strongest human motive. Sixty-three years ago, the trackless prairies of the West were dotted with emigrants' wagons on their way to the coast. It took five months to cover the distance from the Mississippi to California, but thousands made the journey. Gold was there. Neither Alaska snows nor desert suns have terror for the modern argonaut.

Then there is the passion for discovery, the desire to explore the unknown. Peary braves the hardships of the far white North, Landon penetrates the mountain fastnesses of remotest Thibet, and William Edward Geil crosses Africa at the equator.

But what men have not been willing to do for treasure, or knowledge, or fame, they have been willing to do for love. They have gladly eaten the bread of affliction and drunken the waters of bitterness all their

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

days; they have taken the places of others in lifelong servitude; they have devoted themselves to the object of their affection with total effacement of self.

“As the ancient seer saith—
Only love is strong as death;
Aye, and stronger far than life,
Brave as battle, stout as strife,
Dearer than the things we see,
Planted in eternity!”

And all that men have been willing to do for love, for human love, and more, men have done and are doing, constrained by the love of Jesus Christ. Father Damien among the lepers is a good instance, though not the only example by any means. He is type of a very large class. The tribute of Robert Louis Stevenson was well deserved. Would there were some Stevenson to celebrate the heroism of many another comrade of the Cross whose life has been devoted to the service of those whom the rest of the world forgets, or remembers only to pass by on the other side. Willis Hotchkiss goes to a remote district of

AN EFFICIENT MOTIVE

Central Africa because there is a tribe who were as sheep without a shepherd. Mary Reed, an Ohio girl, is among the lepers of India. The daughter of one of America's most gifted literary men is devoting herself to the care of the inmates of a cancer hospital. What is her inspiration as she breathes the fetid air and dresses the festering sores of those from whose presence we naturally shrink? The love of Christ.

In the darkest spots of earth's darkest continents and islands, a host of men and women, the sons and daughters of comfort and culture, are devoting themselves uncalculatingly to the uplift of submerged races, healing and teaching and preaching in Jesus' name. Let the world wag its head at missionary sentiment, joining in Sidney Smith's characterization of the whole missionary scheme as the dream of a dreamer who dreams he is dreaming, but until the world shows us something braver, finer, nobler, more heroic than the missionary movement of the modern Church, the world would do well to put its finger on

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

its scornful lips and pray for the grace of silence.

The power of the love of Christ as a motive in the lives of his disciples, has it any parallel in history? Let Professor William James answer: "The best fruits of religious experiences are the best things that history has to show." Every great life has a great motive. Alexander's and Cæsar's and Napoleon's was the love of conquest. The call of the blood in the veins of the warriors is to the field of murder set to martial music. The passion of Garibaldi was desire for the unification and freedom of Italy, to plant upon the ruins of old Rome a new and imperial standard. The passion of Garrison and Phillips was the love of freedom. It demands a great motive to call forth from a great nature its worthiest deeds. Behold what the love of Jesus Christ can do! It transforms a narrow zealot like Saul into the tireless apostle of a catholic faith, and makes him the most influential figure in history this side of Calvary. It endows the tongue of

AN EFFICIENT MOTIVE

Chrysostom with incomparable eloquence, and tips the pen of Augustine with resistless logic. It anoints Savonarola the prophet and saviour of Florence. It lights the torch of Luther. It penetrates and possesses the mind of Calvin. It energizes the will of Knox and warms the heart of Wesley. It nerves the martyrs of modern China when frenzied mobs cry, "Death to all Christians!" It quickens the pulses of six thousand of the choicest of our university men and women as they offer themselves for service where their Lord most needs them. The busy man, already burdened with affairs, assumes a new office in the Church—the love of Christ constraineth him. The timid woman who trembles when she hears her own voice in public, accepts the leadership of a Bible class—the love of Christ constraineth her. The young man, ambitious to get ahead, turns from the path of probable success because he cannot longer pursue it and be true to his ethical ideal—the love of Christ constraineth him. The youth full of the love of life dashes the cup

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

of pleasure from his lips, denying himself daily for the love of Christ.

If the love of Christ can do so much, shall we not carry it—or be carried by it—up to life's last conscious hour, and say when earth recedes, as the lad in Dickens' story, "It is time to go to Him who loves me"? What shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord?

This, then, is the fifth distinctive idea of Jesus. He says, "I am the way to God," and He builds His empire in the hearts of men, the eternal Lover of souls in a sense in which it is true of none other.

VI

THE UNBROKEN CONTINUITY
OF LIFE

HERE the brief in immortality must rest before the revelation of the personal life in its full power, at its highest and its best in the Son of Man. Here reasoning from nature ends, and faith abides, at the last ascent of life, where He to whom the Spirit was given without measure looked up into the heavenlies and knew the Father. We cannot live and die as though the sun had not risen, for the light of His spirit now fills our skies. Modern science will not think the whole process and intent of evolution through, until it shall come to the Christ, and behold all that the Jesus of history has become and now is in the light of the world. There is no full and final answer to our questionings of life and death and the whole to come except in the presence of the perfect manifestation of life in the Man of men, as we behold His glory, even the glory of the Father which was from the beginning—the glory that invests all lives which are lived in the same mind that was in Him.—NEWMAN SMYTH, *Modern Belief in Immortality*, pp. 93, 94.

VI

THE UNBROKEN CONTINUITY OF LIFE

DISGUISE the term as we may, comfort ourselves as we do with symbols and parables from nature's book, death seems in many instances an unrelieved calamity. To die in infancy or youth, as many do, before life has well begun; to die in middle age and leave one's work undone; to say good-by to a world of beauty and bounty, strikes us as nothing else and nothing less than remediless disaster. Nothing within the range of possible human experience, not even sin, is so difficult to reconcile with the doctrine of a moral universe as such a death. Sin is the defeat of a soul, but out of defeat, out of successive defeats, may come ultimate victory. Moral redemption is possible. The hope of recovery saves us from despair at sight of the destruction wrought by evil.

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

“Noble souls, through dust and heat
Rise from disaster and defeat the stronger;
And, conscious still of the divine
Within them, lie on earth supine no longer.”

So, over against the word sin we write the greater word salvation. This is the bright light behind the black cloud. But what of that other black cloud we call death? What light can dispel the shadow it casts across our paths? Is there any thought or truth—which is the reality back of thought—consideration of which renders death other than it seems? There is. Christianity gives us a word for this reality. Over against the word death, Christianity writes the word immortality.

But here we stand on common ground with certain of the other great religions of the world. Here, indeed, we find ourselves in company with some of the leaders of philosophic thought who may not be regarded as religion founders.

It cannot be affirmed that the doctrine of human immortality is one of the distinctive ideas of Jesus. But it can be affirmed, and

UNBROKEN CONTINUITY OF LIFE

is maintained, that in Christianity the truth is taught with a unique degree of clearness and cogency; and that the Founder of Christianity and those immediate followers of His who derived their ideas personally from Him, who were the earliest leaders of the Christian movement, assert the reality of immortality with a confidence which lacks nothing of certainty. On this subject Jesus spoke plainly where others have spoken vaguely, and, after him, his apostles leave not doubtful what others have left doubtful, the affirmation of the survival of personal consciousness after death. So, Jesus differs from other teachers not so much in the idea of a future life as in His mental attitude toward it. He said much of it, but He taught more about it by what He did not say.

As circumstantial evidence may be, and often is in every respect as substantial and convincing as direct evidence, so the argument from silence may be as valid as any verbal proof, or process of logic. It is like the "argument by withdrawal." For exam-

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

ple, if you have a theory that a certain stone in an archway is an essential part of the structure, and if one who has a theory that it is not a necessary part removes it, and if at once the structure falls or is manifestly in danger of falling, or obviously imperfect, you need not call witnesses to confirm your theory. It is confirmed "by withdrawal." In law, certain documents are to be construed in such and such a way in the absence of any provision to the contrary. That is to say, certain factors are read into the paper because they are, by assumption, already there.

In the common affairs of daily life and communication, we interpret silence of a certain kind as equivalent to speech. You have a telegram one morning from a friend, saying, "I will arrive at eleven o'clock." In the absence of other information you conclude he means "at eleven o'clock to-day"—not to-night, not to-morrow. You reason thus, "Of course he means this eleven o'clock; if it were not so he would have told me."

You left home for business at eight o'clock

UNBROKEN CONTINUITY OF LIFE

in the morning. You met your wife at twelve, had luncheon with her and parted at one. How do you know the house was not robbed an hour after you left this morning? How do you know the children were well when your wife left home? Yet you never even inquired whether burglars had carried away the silver or whether the children had come down with the measles. You answer, "I know that all was well for had it not been so she would have told me." What an eloquent interpreter of silence you are!

Your boy went to college in September. He had enough money to pay his tuition, buy his books and pay his board for three months. He seemed entirely willing to go, trusting you to send him a remittance for his second term, asking for no bond to guarantee his continuance at college. He knew you expected to help him all through his course; if it were not so you would have told him.

Your children had their breakfast this morning. They did not manifest any great anxiety about where the dinner was to come

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

from. They expect you to provide food for them. You know where the provisions are, and where more may be secured from day to day. If it were not so you would have told them. Perhaps this may be called the argument from silence.

Now Jesus used this argument in teaching His disciples to believe in God. He never reasoned it out with them, but He talked to them about God as if God were, and as if He were a Father. If it were not so He would have told them. They believed in a future life. He never took time to reason that out with them. But He talked to them as if the future life were as certain as the present; as if the earth were but one of many dwelling places God has prepared for His children. He spoke of His plans for the future as if all time were His. He talked of centuries and ages as we speak of minutes and days. He acted as if death were no more than passing into another room. At last they came to take the same view of death. The black specter in their path became a mere shadow. The river

UNBROKEN CONTINUITY OF LIFE

dwindled into a mere brooklet to be crossed with a single step. He let them hold that view of death. We believe it was the true one. If it were not so He would have told them.

The affirmation of immortality was not a novelty. Socrates and Plato had affirmed it. But they had to argue it, and right well they did so. The attitude of Jesus was that of calm confidence in the unbroken continuity of life. In this He is unique. He had no need to reason out a truth. He possessed truth as an attribute, not as an act.

Our confidence in immortality cannot possibly be founded as that of Jesus was. He saw the whole circle of life, whereas we see but a little segment, a broken arc. Like Plato, and like Paul, we must reason out our faith. But our confidence may be kindled by His confidence. He was One who never doubted; One, who knowing what a great tyrant death is, calmly looked on death as if it were but an incident in life, an incident like sorrow, to be faced courageously, but not feared; an incident like pain, to be borne

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

patiently; like doubt, to be dispelled; like sickness, to be cured; like darkness, to be passed through.

If you have ever been at sea in a storm you know how all eyes watch the captain. If he is calm, so are the passengers. If he looks troubled, they are troubled. Look at Jesus when the shadows of death were gathering around Him. His friends were few, His enemies were many and strong. His ministry had been brief. Yet with the Cross in sight, He speaks as serenely as any king on his way to coronation. He speaks of His Kingdom, of his conquest, of conquests yet to be. If He could so speak on the eve of His death, surely we may fare on, all unperturbed by thoughts of the narrow bed under the green, "hoping, and assuredly believing" as Shakspeare wrote in his last will and testament, "to be made partaker of life everlasting."

When did Jesus ever do or say anything that may be interpreted as teaching that death is the end of life? The little daughter of Jairus was dead to all her friends, but she

UNBROKEN CONTINUITY OF LIFE

was not dead to Him. She was asleep, and He had but to awaken her. The son of the widow of Nain was dead to his mother, but in Jesus' view he had simply passed into another room, and had but to be recalled. There is Another Room. Lazarus had entered that room and returned at Jesus' call—still Lazarus. So there is nothing in the Other Room to destroy or impair personality. The line of life is undeflected. If it were not so He would have told us.

I stood on the banks of the Potomac one morning in March. The river was cold, and the air was warm, and the mist rose from the river and concealed the tops of the tallest buildings. I looked at the Washington Monument. It seemed to end about two hundred feet above the ground. If I had not seen it before in its completion, I might have judged two hundred feet to be the height of the shaft, but I knew it was higher than that. Indeed I had ascended it and it took but a moment of time for imagination to reconstruct the invisible part of the monolith. It was an un-

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

broken shaft, even though the larger part of it was invisible. Such was Jesus' view of life. The mists of death never obscured its unbroken continuity.

If His view of life be the correct one, then death is but a mist, a cloud, and they who pass out of our sight pass through the cloud as our soldiers did who led the Union line far up the slopes of Lookout Mountain. They planted their banner above the clouds. To them the clouds were no barriers. To us who follow Jesus, death is no barrier. He planted His victorious banner above the clouds, on an immortal height, to which He calls us as He bids us follow Him.

Perhaps the force of this argument for immortality will appeal to us all the more powerfully when we remember that Jesus was an absolutely candid teacher of the truth. He assumed to lead His people into all essential truth. So He was under every obligation to disabuse the minds of His disciples of errors into which they had been led by others. This is exactly what He did. He was constantly

UNBROKEN CONTINUITY OF LIFE

correcting their conceptions of things religious. They believed in the future life. He never rebuked them for it. He never warned them that they were cherishing a false hope. He had been cruel beyond belief to call them to martyrdom in the belief that the moment of their death was to be the moment of their victory, if He had not Himself shared their undying hope. They may have had their moments of doubt and wavering. He never had. They hoped. He knew. He was conscious of supreme superiority to every limitation of time. To Him time was one eternal present, and life one uninterrupted line.

Death is the result of organic change. The spirit is not organic. What, then, can death do? It can release the spirit. That is all.

“Never the spirit was born;
The spirit will cease to be never;
Never was time it was not;
End and beginning are dreams;
Birthless and hopeless and changeless
Remaineth the spirit forever;
Death hath not touched it at all,
Dead though the house of it seems.”

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

You may take a berth on a southbound train in the midst of a snowstorm. The last sounds you hear will be the furious wind and the dashing sleet. In the morning you will awaken in a land of soft breezes and blue skies. In another day you will see the orange trees in bloom and hear the mocking birds make melody in the silvery dawn.

It is a parable of life and death. There is an old prayer beginning, "O Thou who callest Thy people to pass through death that they may see Thy face." Jesus confirms the longing and vindicates the hope which others have laboriously striven to prove probable. And unless we are greatly deceived He did "pass through death," He did emerge unhurt, and lives until this day in the Heaven of heavens, and in that Kingdom He has set up in pure and humble hearts.

VII

**THE DISTINCTIVE PERSONALITY
OF JESUS**

THAT by which the divinity of Jesus is seen to be not a mere logical addendum to Christianity but an integral part of Christianity itself is simply these meanings of the fact of Christ which we have been discussing. What the Christian man finds he receives from Jesus is not simply teaching about God, but is a life and power that are of God himself. He finds in the fact of Christ all he looks to find in God. As he reads the definition of eternal life as to "know thee (that is God) . . . and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent," he is quite unable religiously to maintain the distinction between the two. He finds God not beyond Christ, but in Him. In the very human life and person of Jesus we find not only a human life and person that direct us to a higher source of power; we find already there the presence and power of what declares itself to be not less than God Himself. When Jesus deals with us and works within us, He does what only God can do. All Christian experience is nothing if it is not this. And if this be so, then, again, we can only in one way say what Jesus is. As Herrmann aptly puts it, "when we confess His deity, we simply give Him His right name." What other name can we give to One who is for us and in us what assuredly only God can be?—P. CARNEGIE SIMPSON, *The Fact of Christ*, pp. 130, 131.

VII

THE DISTINCTIVE PERSONALITY OF JESUS

IT is on record that certain officers were sent to arrest Jesus and bring Him before a committee to be examined as to the purpose of His teachings and their possible effect upon the people. The officers saw Jesus and heard Him, but returned without their Prisoner. "Why have ye not brought him?" they were asked. Their reply was, "Never man spake like this man." This, in effect, is the unconscious testimony of all who came close to Jesus—close enough to hear Him in parable or invitation or warning or promise.

We have studied the great ideas of Jesus which have no adequate parallel in any other of the religions of the world that offer themselves in opposition to Christianity or in competition with it. Now, considering His mes-

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

sage as a whole, these qualities distinguish it from the teachings of other sages and philosophers: its transparent simplicity; its self-assertive authority; its absolute certainty, that is, the absence from it of any "ventured assertion," and its wholesome sanity.

The best literature suffers, necessarily, from translation into foreign tongues, however flexible or copious those tongues may be. But turned into whatsoever mold of language they may be, the teachings of Jesus are so plain that any man of ordinary understanding, however untutored his mind may be, need not err therein. The recorded words of Jesus are few, but they are like a gushing fountain in the heart of the hills, in whose pure and unexhausted depths countless rivers have their source. Moreover, Jesus assumed an authority which differentiated Him from all the mere prophets who had preceded Him and all the mere apostles who succeeded Him. They quoted the opinions of the ancients, and stood upon precedents. Jesus prefaced his

PERSONALITY OF JESUS

great sayings with, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, . . . but I say unto you." He created precedents. Then the positiveness of His affirmations is refreshing. His preface often was, "Verily, verily," a Hebraism of superlative assurance. Nothing that Jesus said has become obsolete in the light of subsequent knowledge. Professor Romanes thus puts it in "Thoughts on Religion":

One of the strongest pieces of objective evidence in favor of Christianity is not sufficiently enforced by apologists. Indeed I am not aware that I have ever seen it mentioned. It is the absence from the biography of Christ of any doctrines which the subsequent growth of human knowledge—whether in natural science, ethics, political economy, or elsewhere—has had to discount. This negative argument is really almost as strong as is the positive one from what Christ did teach. For when we consider what a large number of sayings are recorded of—or at least attributed to—Him, it becomes most remarkable that in literal truth there is no reason why any of His words should ever pass away in the sense of becoming obsolete. . . . Contrast Jesus Christ in this respect with other thinkers of like antiquity. Even Plato, who, though some four hundred years before Christ in point of time, was greatly in advance of Him in respect of philosophic thought, is nowhere in this respect as compared with Christ. Read the Dialogues, and see how enormous is the contrast with the Gospels in respect of

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

errors of all kinds, reaching even to absurdity in respect of reason, and to sayings shocking to the moral sense. Yet this is confessedly the highest level of human reason on the lines of spirituality when unaided by alleged revelation.

While the personality of Jesus is not necessarily included in a discussion of His teachings, nevertheless we may very appropriately follow a survey of His doctrines with a study of His character. On the eve of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem the whole city was stirred and one question sprang from every mind to every tongue, "Who is this?" This has been the inquiry of the ages. There is no more pressing problem of to-day. No one can read the New Testament without confronting it. Indeed, no one can review the history of what we call Christian civilization without feeling called upon to come to some kind of opinion about Him.

Much less can one acquaint himself with Christian biography without meeting the query, "Who is this?" Can one read the life of Gladstone, even as written by so pronounced an agnostic as Viscount Morley,

PERSONALITY OF JESUS

without being conscious of another Personality to whom the great commoner was so related that we cannot estimate the life of the statesman without reference to that Other whose disciple he professed to be? In the portico of Trinity Church, Boston, they have set up a statue of Phillips Brooks, by St. Gaudens. Just back of the heroic figure of the great preacher stands another figure, in whose face we recognize the features of the Christ of art. It is impossible to account for Phillips Brooks, for the sanity and sanctity of his life and the pervasiveness and permanence of his influence, without reference to that Other. "Who is this?"

Not only does the question confront us, "Who is this?" but it is speedily followed by a peremptory challenge, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" We may read the biographies of great men with the keenest interest but without feeling called upon to do anything. The biographies of Bismarck and Cavour do not demand any act of the will on the part of the reader. The

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

strange thing about the Gospels, the inexplicable thing—unless we admit the supernatural character of the central Person of the books—is that they demand a verdict. The personality of Jesus presents a moral imperative, “What will ye do with Me?” So, the fact of Christ lies not alone in the realm of history, but of morals.

Reason rejects the notion that four men, not of the learned class, dwellers in a Roman dependency, remote from the literary influences which dominated the age, held it within either their purpose or their power to invent such a character as Jesus. Had the evangelists been dramatists, creators of romance, and had they been capable mentally and morally of imagining such a personality as Jesus, they would not have offered Him to the world as the Messiah. He was altogether unlike the Man the Jews expected; totally dissimilar to the deliverer the Gentile world had set its hopes upon. Isaiah’s Wonderful-Counsellor and Virgil’s heaven-born world ruler are not unlike.

PERSONALITY OF JESUS

Jesus was born of a Jewish mother. His human lineage and His environment, the intellectual, social and religious atmosphere of His childhood and youth, all conspired to make Him a typical Jew of the Augustan age. But something defeated that conspiracy. There is nothing in Bethlehem, Nazareth or Jerusalem to account for the fact that He was not a typical Jew of his age, or of any other age. Tolerant, catholic, cosmopolitan, universal, He towers above his contemporaries as would a giant *sequoia*, springing out of the arid soil of a sagebrush plain.

Considered as to the magnitude of His plans, which included the conquest of the world; as to the method by which He proposed to conquer all nations, not by the arm of power, but by spiritual agencies; considered as to the union in Him of moral faculties generally regarded as absolutely antagonistic, such as justice and benevolence, power and tenderness, kingly dignity and meek humility, stainless purity and abounding sympathy for the slaves of sin, eagerness for the coming

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

of the Kingdom of God and passionate patience to await the widening thoughts of men—considered as to these, the character of Jesus is as unique as are His ideas. “Ideas alone,” says Griffith Thomas, “never save and inspire lives; they must have a personality behind them to give them reality, vitality and dynamic. A disciple is more than a scholar, an inspiration is more than instruction. Christ’s words are of permanent value because of His person; they endure because He endures.”

Considered as to the claims He made for Himself, Jesus stands alone, majestic and incomparable. He claimed to be the Messiah, but in this He was not alone. There have been many false Messiahs. What is more, He claimed to be the Redeemer of all sinners, the Master of all good servants, the Judge of all mankind. He suffered Himself to be called by many various titles, Rabbi, Master, Lord, but the name He most frequently applied to Himself was Son of Man. As the son of Mary He belonged and still belongs to the

PERSONALITY OF JESUS

Jews. But as the Son of Man He belonged, and belongs forever, to humanity.

“O man’s best man, O love’s best love,
O perfect life in perfect labor writ,
O all men’s Comrade, Servant, King or Priest.”

It was given to no other great religious teacher to foresee the extent of the influence of his own faith. Buddha never dreamed of being the object of the adoration of millions. Mohammed never hoped to extend his conquests beyond the desert peoples. But Jesus was serenely confident during His life, and even in the presence of death, that He was founder of a Kingdom which should include all other kingdoms. “The deliberateness of destiny” was in His steps. The assurance of eternity was in His promises. Superiority to time and space, to natural and artificial barriers, to national and international boundaries, to principalities and powers, to things present and things to come, was in His soul who said, “I . . . will draw all men unto me”; “All power is given unto me in heaven

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

and in earth. . . . I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." The amazing progress of the Gospel in modern times is thus revealed as no surprise to Him. He predicted it from the beginning.

In a sense in which it is not true of any other religion it is true of Christianity that its Founder is still a vital and vitalizing personality among men. Jesus lives not alone in history and in the institutions which have flourished where the influence of Christianity prevails, but in the consciousness of multitudes to whom His name is not merely that of a hero and a martyr but the name of a familiar friend. If it is true, as Froude says, that no man in modern times is what he would have been if Luther had not lived, it is true in a larger measure that nothing in modern civilization has been untouched by the spirit of Jesus. Laws and customs have been modified, the accepted code of ethics has been shaped, benevolence and philanthropy have been inspired, the passion for popular edu-

PERSONALITY OF JESUS

cation and popular government has been nourished, standards of personal and family life have been raised, by the presence in the world of a power whose source is in no other than in Him Who said, "My words shall not pass away." "Where the word of a king is, there is power." But there is among men a kind of power which cannot be spoken of in general terms, a power such as that the laureate had in mind in his immortal tribute to Arthur Hallam:

And Power was with him in the night,
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone."

It is a restraining power when human nature needs restraint, when imperious and clamorous passions would carry us away from sanity and holiness; a constraining power when human nature needs to be roused from its moral lethargy. This power Paul knew who said, "The love of Christ constraineth us." Did he mean our love for Christ, or Christ's love for us? Great as is

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

the place these thoughts held in Paul's mind, he had quite another thought in view—the love of Christ in us.

The benefactors of the race in former periods of time—

“Bards, prophets, martyrs, sages,
The noble of all ages,
Whose deeds fill history's pages,
And Time's great volume make,”——

these we venerate. Hardly can it be said of any one of us, even the most sentimental, that he loves Socrates or St. Francis. But it is said, with every evidence of sincerity, by multitudes of people, of every degree of intelligence, and of every type of temperament, that they love Jesus. They sang His love in their secret meetings in the Catacombs. The words, “*Jesu amor meus,*” which inspired the hymn below, go back to the age of the martyrs of Nero's Rome:

“In this dreary dungeon, I,
Bound in chains a prisoner, lie,
But my Love is ever nigh—
‘Jesus is my Love.’

PERSONALITY OF JESUS

“Friends and kindred all have fled,
Some are false and others dead,
But this One of whom I said,
‘Jesus is my Love.’

“Better with Him in the gloom
Of this dreary dungeon tomb,
Than without in palace room—
‘Jesus is my Love.’

“Scant my clothing, coarse my food,
Vexed am I with treatment rude,
Yet, though lacking earthly good,
‘Jesus is my Love.’

et er here in bonds to lie,
Better on the block to die,
Than my faith I should deny—
‘Jesus is my Love.’”

What is the secret of this persistent idea that Jesus is still alive, to receive our declarations of love and, in return, to manifest His love to us? It is in an experience of fellowship, the ground of which is in the realm of consciousness, a realm which lies far beyond the reach of scientific or historical criticism.

Jesus promised to be with His disciples in all ages. The Christian Church affirms that

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

this promise has been verified. Is the claim of Christianity in this respect verifiable? Not by logic. (It is John Morley who says, "Mere logic as a finder of truth is only a thin sour wine, and not an acid.") Not by mere ratiocination. But it may be verified in a truly scientific way, by personal experiment. Many of the sayings of Jesus are axiomatic. They are self-evidencing to the heart, as light is self-evidencing to the eye, or as sound to the ear. Many other sayings of Jesus are demonstrable. Some of His sayings are neither axiomatic nor provable, but rather of the nature of revelation. They are mysteries which only the great hereafter may explain. But certain sayings of Jesus, few in number yet memorable and unique, are purely experiential. They are such as: "My peace I give unto you." "Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest." "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

PERSONALITY OF JESUS

If the volume of testimony alluded to in a preceding chapter concerning the experience of new birth be weighty and impressive, equally so is the testimony of the ages to the truth that Jesus lives in the consciousness of those who call him Lord. The late Hugh Price Hughes, in an address on "The Unanswerable Argument for Christianity," once referred to three distinguished Englishmen of his day, Michael Faraday, Robert Brown- ing and John Bright, as convincing witnesses to the truth of the presence of Christ in human consciousness. But his argument was the more cogent, because he concluded with these words: "Let me also, in all humility, bear my personal testimony. The experience of which I speak is my own experience. For thirty years I have lived in the light of that great revelation of God's love, which was given to me when I was a schoolboy in Wales." Very like John Bunyan's declaration: "I have ventured my own soul upon this truth, and were all your souls mine own, as my own soul is, I would venture them there."

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

The marvel of all this is not so much that large numbers of people in every age for nineteen centuries should cherish such thoughts, express such sentiments, indulge such emotions, tenaciously cling to such convictions; the wonder is that He who is the object of this affection should have foreseen it, predicted it, built all his plans upon its certain fulfillment. The Kingdom Jesus spoke of as His Kingdom lay, and still lies, primarily within the hearts of men. It is an empire of love. There have been other religions with millions of adherents. But the distinctive fact in His religion is "the continuous and ubiquitous activity of His person. Under all its forms, in all its periods, and through all its divisions, the one principle alike of reality and unity has been and is devotion to Him. He is the Spirit that inhabits all the churches, the Law that rules the conscience and binds into awed and obedient reverence the saintly men who live within all the communions that bear His name."

What is the conclusion of the whole mat-

PERSONALITY OF JESUS

ter? Who is this? What think ye of Him? What then shall we do with Him? "If it is not superhuman authority that speaks to us here, it is surely superhuman arrogance. . . . One man of a particular race and age cannot be the standard for all men, the judge of all men, of all ages and races, the goal of human moral development, unless he is something more than one man among many." If He be that Something More, what else can He be than what the Church unites to call Him, "the Word of God Incarnate"? And if He be that, then all the mystery is clear, the mystery of His perpetual power and of the world's increasing interest in Him. God has spoken. "Infinite silence breaks into the spray of human speech upon these earthly shores." If He be that, we know both how human is the heart of God, and how divine may be the life of man. Nay, rather being that, the riddle of the universe is solved and now we know that in the labyrinth of life there dwells no monster to devour, but, at the beginning and end of every process of human development,

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

individual and social, is One whose purpose is to make us perfect in Him.

The words with which these studies close are written as we enter the Advent season. The stars that shower their silver on the earth to-night bear us in memory back to Bethlehem. The bells across the snow, the trees that blossom in our homes with joy for little children's eyes, the gracious greetings sent from friend to friend, are all symbolic of the gifts he brought, and of that gift supreme, Himself. We know that He was helpless Babe, and reverent Child; that He was Youth obedient to the yoke of discipline and toil; that He was perfect Man and that there dwelt in Him "the fulness of the Godhead bodily"; that He who came from God returned to God, our Elder Brother still, and that He ever lives on high. Not for us now are opened heavens and angels' song, but is it nothing that we have His peace, His love of peace, His faith in things unseen, His interest in all mankind, His sympathy for those who suffer and His pity for the weak?

PERSONALITY OF JESUS

Alice Meynell's tribute to Jesus in her poem called "Christ in the Universe" is such as is deserved by none other than the Lord of all worlds.

With the ambiguous earth
His dealings have been told us; these abide;
The signal to a maid, the human birth,
The lesson, and the Young Man crucified.

But not a star of all
The unimaginable stars has heard
How He administered this terrestrial ball;
Our race have kept their Lord's entrusted word.

Of those earth-visiting feet
None knows the secret, cherished, perilous—
The terrible, shamefast, frightened, whispered, sweet
Heart-shattering secret of His way with us.

No planet knows that this
Our planet, carrying land and wave,
Love and life multiplied, and pain and bliss,
Bears as chief treasure one forsaken grave.

Nor in our little day
May His devices with the heavens be guessed,
His pilgrimage to thread the Milky Way,
Or His bestowals there be manifest.

But in the eternities
Doubtless we shall compare together, hear
A million alien gospels, in what guise
He walked the Pleiades, the Lyre, the Bear.

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

O, be prepared, my soul!
To read the inconceivable, to scan
The million forms of God those stars unroll
When in our turn we show to them—a Man.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALEXANDER, WILLIAM, Primary Convictions.
BARROWS, JOHN H., Christianity the World Religion.
BEGBIE, HAROLD, Twice-Born Men.
BEGBIE, HAROLD, Souls in Action.
BROOKS, PHILLIPS, The Influence of Jesus.
BUSHNELL, HORACE, The Character of Christ.
COE, GEORGE A., The Spiritual Life.
COE, GEORGE A., The Religion of a Mature Mind.
DALE, R. W., The Living Christ and the Four Gospels.
DALE, R. W., Fellowship with Christ.
DRUMMOND, HENRY, The Ideal Life.
EDERSHEIM, ALFRED, The Life and Times of Jesus the
Messiah.
FAIRBAIRN, A. M., The Place of Christ in Modern
Theology.
FALCONER, R. A., The Truth of the Apostolic Gospel.
FORSYTH, P. T., The Person and Place of Jesus Christ.
GORDON, G. A., The Christ of To-Day.
HILLIS, N. D., The Influence of Christ in Modern Life.
HORTON, R. F., My Belief.
HUGHES, HUGH PRICE, Essential Christianity.
HUGHES, HUGH PRICE, Social Christianity.
JACKSON, GEORGE, The Fact of Conversion.
JAMES, WILLIAM, Varieties of Religious Experience.
KING, H. C., The Ethics of Jesus.
MATHEWS, SHAILER, The Gospel and the Modern Man.
NICOLL, W. ROBERTSON, The Church's One Foundation.
PIERSON, A. T., Many Infallible Proofs.

THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF JESUS

- RHEES, RUSH, The Life of Jesus of Nazareth.
ROBERTS, PHILIP I., The Dry-Dock of a Thousand Wrecks.
ROMANES, G. J., Thoughts on Religion.
ROSS, G. A. J., The Universality of Jesus.
SIMPSON, P. CARNEGIE, The Fact of Christ.
SIMPSON, P. CARNEGIE, The Facts of Life.
SMITH, DAVID, The Days of His Flesh.
SMITH, DAVID, The Historic Jesus.
SPEER, ROBERT, The Man Christ Jesus.
SPEER, ROBERT, The Character of Christ.
STALKER, JAMES, The Christology of Jesus.
STARBUCK, G. D., The Psychology of Religion.
THOMAS, W. H. G., Christianity Is Christ.
VAN DYKE, HENRY, The Gospel for a World of Sin.
VAN DYKE, HENRY, The Gospel for an Age of Doubt.

Date Due

F 13 '42



Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 01018 3046