

*Problems of
The New Christianity*

E. M. LAWRENCE GOULD

LIBRARY OF THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PRINCETON. N. J.

PRESENTED BY


Rev. Lewis Sasse

BX 8721 .G7 1922

Gould, Edwin Miner Lawrence,
1886-

Problems of the new

PROBLEMS OF
THE NEW CHRISTIANITY



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2014

*Problems of
The New Christianity*

BY ✓

E. M. LAWRENCE GOULD

EDITOR OF "THE NEW-CHURCH MESSENGER"
AUTHOR OF "SON OF GOD AND SON OF MAN"

WITH INTRODUCTION

BY

JOHN GODDARD

THE NEW-CHURCH PRESS

NEW YORK

COPYRIGHTED, 1922, BY
THE NEW-CHURCH BOARD OF PUBLICATION

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES

To a Group

MISUNDERSTOOD AND NOT INFREQUENTLY MALIGNED
FOR WHOM I HAVE A DEEP AFFECTION
AND IN WHOSE FUTURE I HAVE AN
UNSHAKABLE CONFIDENCE—

The Younger Generation of Today

FOREWORD

THE following pages embody in outline an answer to the great fundamental questions of religion and the future life. They were prepared and delivered in the usual course of pulpit ministration, but were also designed to meet a broader need than is usually felt in our churches. Through association with Mr. Gould I have known of his great desire to answer the questions of thinking people, especially of young men as yet unsettled in their religious convictions — to appeal not only to “the man in the street,” or to men as we find them, but to all honest minds, well disposed toward, unconvinced by, or skeptical of the former Christian teachings — to supply a rational basis for their faith, such as the New-Church revelation offers.

This is a task great enough for any man. The present freedom of the human mind,

FOREWORD

absolved so largely from the past bondage of fear and superstition, together with the growing conviction that religion is character, good living, good will, opens a wide door of opportunity to one who loves and who is fitted for this broader work. Mr. Gould seems especially adapted for it, not only by inclination and training, by clearness of thought and diction, but also by the fact that, during the war and since the armistice, he has been closely associated with young men in the service. The dangers and sufferings of the soldiers and sailors who took an active part in the war tend to bring to the fore these great questions of life and death, and I have much sympathy with Mr. Gould's strong desire to meet such questions with that form of truth which not only satisfies the intellect, but appeals also to those deepest affections whose germinal forms have been implanted in the earliest stages of life by the angels of infancy who "always behold the face of my Father."

It will be the duty of the New-Church

FOREWORD

teachers of the next generations, while not neglecting the needs of the individual, to apply the thought of the perfect love of God as revealed in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ to the practical conditions of the world — to supplement the words of the prayer, “Thy will be done, as in heaven, so upon the earth,” by pointing and leading the way to its fulfilment — to carry this missionary message to all the world. And to this work we hope and believe that the author of the present volume may be a successful and an honored contributor.

JOHN GODDARD

NEWTONVILLE, MASS.
March 16, 1922



- I WHO OR WHAT IS GOD?
II CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN?
III DO MEN DIE?
IV WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE?



I

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD?

In the beginning God created the heavens
and the earth. (Gen. i, 1.)

And Jesus came and spake unto them,
saying, All power is given unto me in
heaven and on earth. (Matt. xxviii, 18)

THIS is, as we are so frequently re-
minded, an age of rapid and perva-
sive change. The material conditions, and
with them the economic, social, intellectual,
even the moral structure of human life as
it has long been known are in a state of most
bewildering flux. Nothing seems altogether
fixed or stable. In the world of ideas, hardly
a principle that has for generations been re-
garded as established but has had to meet
with criticism, if it has not actually been
denied.

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

Humanly speaking, that which lies behind this "great unrest" is the world spread of the spirit of democracy. From the beginning of history until almost within our recollection, the main factor in most people's lives was one kind or another of authority. It was the habit of the average man in the average situation to do as he was told. Nor did this seem at all strange to him, since his associates and his forbears, in their turn, had quite unquestioningly done likewise. It was not just a matter of action, either; it was just as true of thought. For generation after generation men were told by those who happened to be in authority not only what they should do, but what they should believe. They believed — as they acted — blindly.

If the established authorities of church and state had been willing to keep within the bounds of reason, this state of affairs might have kept on indefinitely, and we

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

might today be living in a continuation of the Dark Ages. But — fortunately, as it turned out — they were not. First in the church, the intellectual honesty of men like Martin Luther and his fellow reformers was forced into reluctant rebellion, and political rebellion followed after. Slowly, but gathering strength like wildfire, the spirit of individualism swept over western Europe till it caught even in the remote American colonies. And here first in modern times there was set up a nation consciously committed to the principle that authority rests not upon Divine right but upon the consent of the governed. So contagious was the American example that it has changed the whole social and political face of the world; so that today men everywhere demand the right to govern themselves and to think for themselves. The days of authority and obedience are forever ended.

This tremendous change has made or will

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

ultimately make it necessary for human life to be recast from top to bottom. Nothing can remain quite as it was, for everything must be re-established upon the new foundation of democracy. This does not mean that all that was worth while in the old ways of living will be lost. Indeed, all that was really good will finally be kept, or be returned to. But the good old things will be retained for a new reason. In a good many ways we shall still follow tradition, but no longer simply because it is tradition; it will be because it seems to men's impartial, reasonable judgment to be worth the following. And this will be as true in religious matters as in any others. Our religious conceptions must, like all the rest, be re-examined, re-tested, re-valued and in many instances re-stated so as to meet the needs of a new age. I earnestly believe that, whatever else may be abandoned, the world will and must retain Christianity, but

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

it will not be the Christianity of the autocratic ages. That which must come — and is, indeed, already coming — is a new Christianity, deeper, fuller, richer, truer and more reasonable than the faith of any previous generation.

Such a Christianity, I say, is even now in process of development. It is not limited by the bounds of organization, but is found in men of all denominations and of none. It is affecting all denominations; for where is the church which will today accept, without reinterpretation, the creeds and dogmas even of a generation ago? Yet the establishment of the new Christianity is no easy task, as every forward looking minister or church worker knows. A rational examination of the fundamentals of religion raises problems which cannot be solved without the most earnest effort and the utmost open-mindedness. It is my effort in what follows to do what I can toward carrying on this

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

work, and my awareness of my personal inadequacy finds its compensation in the fact that the ideas which I shall try to express are not my own, but came from one who has been called "the greatest mind since Aristotle," the great Swedish scientist, philosopher and theologian, Emanuel Swedenborg. In the light of his teaching — or, as I believe, of God's own teaching through him — I shall approach the problems which are to be considered in this little book.

What is the first and greatest problem which the new Christianity must face, and to which it must somehow find an answer suited to the present age? Since the chief aim of all religion is to set up a right relation between men and God, the problem is inevitably that of God Himself. Until the churches have at least substantially agreed as to the nature of God, who is at once the subject and the avowed source of their

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

message, there can never be a real growth of religion or a general acceptance of it by the world. God, the Creator of the universe, whose laws are its laws and by whose life it lives — is He in any sense a person, so that we can say, "Who is He?" or was creation but the work of an unknown, impersonal First Cause or Creative Energy? Who — or what — is God?

There is, of course, the prior question whether there is any God at all, but that is one on which we need not spend much time. On those who can be satisfied to explain the universe by saying that it "happened" or "evolved," an argument is generally wasted. If we exclude all but the evidence of sense, then certainly the fact of God cannot be proved. But if the evidence of reason is considered, then it must be evident at least that all this something did not come from nothing, for "from nothing, nothing comes." No one has ever yet seen an effect without

· WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

a cause, which was in turn the effect of some preceding cause. So a First Cause has been and is the postulate of all reasonable thinking about the phenomena of existence.

There is one other simple, rational principle which is fundamental to our thinking. If "from nothing, nothing comes," it must be likewise true that the less cannot cause or generate the greater. Where, if not from nothing, could the added greatness come from? Therefore we must assume that everything in the wide range of human experience has or has had a cause as great as if not greater than itself; and that the First Cause is as great as, if not greater than the sum of all that has been, is, or can be. And, since there is no known limit to what can be, therefore the First Cause is itself without limit, or infinite. Thus the first rational conclusion from a study of the universe is that there must be an infinite First Cause.

Since the less cannot create the greater,

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

the First Cause — or God — must be at least equal to the highest known form of existence. The highest form of material existence is the rather mysterious thing we know as force or energy. This, indeed, not only underlies but constitutes all matter, for if matter is analysed it breaks up into elemental atoms, which in turn resolve themselves into electrons. And these, scientists define as “points of force.” There is, however, a form of existence which is higher than material energy — which can modify, control and direct energy to its own purposes. This higher power is the soul or personality of man, operating through the activity of his will and intelligence. The soul is at least in part superior to any power outside itself. Nothing controls it that is not even more controlled by it. Therefore we may say that soul, or personality, is the highest known or conceivable form of being.

This being the case, and since (once more)

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

the less cannot create the greater, it must follow that the Creator of personality must himself possess it — that God must be, in some sense at least, a Person. Is it conceivable, really, that an unconscious force could create the conscious soul of man? God is a Person, and possessed of the essential attributes of personality, active will and active intelligence. Or you may say that He consists in will and intelligence united in activity. Thus His essential nature is threefold, which led the wise men of old time to speak of Him as a Trinity; yet He is not a trinity of persons but a Trinity in a Person.

The next question must be that of the moral character of God's will and intelligence. Here the answer lies in the simple fact that the moral sense exists in man, a being whom He created. If man is or can be good, then God must be infinitely good. If man's thoughts can be true, God's must be

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

infinitely so. I shall assume the agreement of most thinking people at the present time to the proposition that the essence of moral goodness is unselfish love. Therefore we may describe the will of God as Infinite Love and His Intelligence as Infinite Wisdom. These two, with their unceasing joint activity for the ultimate well-being of all created things, make up the true and infinite Trinity — Love, the Father; Wisdom, born of Love, the Son; and the activity of both together the Holy Spirit.

Now the conception of an all-powerful, infinitely wise and loving God must face one really serious objection — the fact of the existence in the universe of moral evil. I say “moral evil,” though in point of fact there is no other. Evil is not a physical but a moral quality, and cannot properly be predicated of material things. Material nature has no quality of good or evil; it is no more “cruel” (as men sometimes call it)

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

than it is kind. Its forces all exist for useful ends, and all are useful when they are not misapplied. But in the spirit of man the quality of moral evil does exist, and has expressed itself from the beginning in innumerable ways; and there are many thoughtful people to whom this fact seems to cast a doubt on the existence of the kind of God Christianity has taught us to believe in. I will say even that the problem of evil is incomparably the most difficult that religion has to face. The most satisfactory answer to it that I know is given by Swedenborg in his book on "The Divine Providence," and I can only try to give you a brief outline of its teaching.

In the first place, while evil has a very real existence, practically speaking, it exists in quite a different sense from goodness. For, like all negations, it exists only relatively to the thing which it denies. Evil is not a thing in itself; it is either the absence or

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

the perversion of goodness. In the former case, it is exactly parallel with physical cold. Experimentally and to sensation, cold exists, but it is not a thing, as heat is; it is simply absence of heat. When an object has less heat than its surroundings, or than our bodies, then we call it cold. But we do not say, because there are some objects that are relatively cold, that heat does not exist or is a failure. Neither does the fact that there are people who are relatively evil prove that goodness is a failure. It means simply that the work of goodness has not yet been finished. It cannot be finished in the nature of things so long as new people are continually coming into being; for they must first be created before the operation of God's love can make them good.

Man cannot be and could not possibly have been created good. He could, if it had been worth while, have been made a wonderful automaton which would go

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

through the motions of goodness; but in that case his acts would have been quite devoid of moral quality. Goodness by its very nature has the implication of a choice, of a free choice. A good man is good because he did not have to be good but desired to be so. So the very existence of real goodness demands the existence of at least a possibility of refusing it — a possibility, that is, of evil. God could not make men able to be good, did He not also make them able to be bad.

Man, moreover, in the exercise of freedom, has the power not only to refuse goodness but to use what is properly and in intention good for evil ends. Nothing exists in the material universe or in human nature which was not meant to serve some useful purpose. Thus the instinct of self-preservation is a necessary faculty that men may continue to live; but, turned to selfishness, it becomes the root of every evil. Thus again the

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

physical and spiritual need of man for woman and of woman for man was meant to be the basis of the greatest happiness the human race can know; yet has been made a source of horror and disease. It is no fault of God's that this is so. From Him comes never anything but goodness, which men in their selfishness pervert and desecrate. Man alone is to blame for all the moral evil in the universe.

Some may still ask, "Why could not God have made men different?" Because to have made them different would have robbed them of the one gift which is higher than goodness, since it is the basis not alone of goodness but of manhood, individuality. That is freedom, which is God's supreme gift to men and angels — freedom to be as good and wise as they desire and to grow more so to eternity, or to refuse all goodness and all wisdom. Freedom not only is God's supreme gift to men, but is the one thing

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

which, in all His infinite relationships, He guards most closely. That is the reason why God cannot intervene to stop the evils and abuses of this world. That is the reason why He did not stop the War. If men are to be men and not automata, they must be left, both individually and collectively, to make themselves the kind of world that they desire. If, in their madness, they desire to make themselves a little hell, God can do nothing more than love and pity them. In this sense Mr. H. G. Wells is right in saying that God is not omnipotent. He has set up a universe in which all the natural and moral forces work for righteousness; He stands ready at every moment to throw the whole force of His being into every struggle for the right; but He can never and will never take away the freedom He has given us.

There are few words, indeed, which have been more misunderstood than has "omnipotence." It has for centuries been taken

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

to imply the power to do what is essentially impossible. Thus the medieval schoolmen wrangled over God's ability to make a yardstick with one end. But the ability to create a contradiction is no true sign of omnipotence. Power thus applied would simply destroy itself. For God to attempt, for instance, to make a man free and not free would be to take away all meaning from the word "freedom," and all reason and sanity from the universe. God cannot act in a way contrary to "the nature of things" because the nature of things is fundamentally His own nature. His omnipotence consists in His unlimited ability to work wisely for the fulfilment of His own good purposes. It is not an independent attribute, but a quality of the Divine Love and the Divine Wisdom.

But the most important phase of our great subject is still to be dealt with. What we have so far said of God has been in ab-

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

stract terms. We have talked of His love and wisdom, of His power, and so on. At the same time we first of all described Him as a Person. Can we, so to speak, know Him personally? Is there a real and individual relation with Him into which, in some way, we can enter? If there is not, a mere theoretical understanding of Him is of little value, and theology becomes a science just about as abstract as astronomy.

God as Infinite Love and Wisdom is, by His very nature, absolutely and forever beyond our reach. Infinity, even in its lowest, mathematical sense, is something which the finite mind can talk about, can postulate, but which never can have a real and concrete meaning to it. This was what the apostle meant who said, "No man hath seen God at any time." But he said also, "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath brought him forth to view." God as He is in Himself

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

could never really have been known to us; but for that very reason He has manifested Himself to us in our Lord Jesus Christ. Here is the very centre and core of the New Christianity — the acknowledgment that in Jesus all God's infinite love and wisdom were forever made accessible to all mankind. If we desire to know what sort of person God is, we may find our answer in the life and personality of Christ. As Paul said, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself."

Now I admit that the fact that God was in Christ, or that Christ was God, cannot be proved by ordinary scientific reasoning. It is not the sort of thing that could be proved in any case. Who can prove, for example, that the symphonies of Beethoven are beautiful? One must first *feel* their beauty, and may then, if he wishes, analyse the reasons for it — may, by studying the laws of harmony and counterpoint, come to an un-

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

derstanding of the way in which the beauty was achieved. It is so with the deity of Jesus Christ. One must first feel it — as good men and women have so powerfully felt it from the time He walked on earth — and may then try to analyse or to account for it as best he can. Only, let us not lose our sense of the great fact because the explanation of it sometimes seems to be beyond our powers.

There are so many Christians at the present day whose mental attitude might be expressed as: “Christ must somehow have been divine; and yet, how could He be?” Happily for the world’s future, this is not as nearly an unanswerable question as it first appears. The answer to it, may, indeed, be found in Christ’s own words, if we will study them intelligently. We know that He called Himself “the Son of God,” and also “the Son of Man.” He spoke of God sometimes as one afar off who could “for-

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

sake" Him, and at other times as His own inner nature. ("I and the Father are one.") Nor did He mean by this to imply simply the sort of union with Divinity which any human being might achieve. He quite definitely set Himself apart from other men, calling Himself their "Lord and Master."¹

What He meant was that in this world He had a dual nature, of which one part was Divine and an inheritance from God Himself, the other human and inherited from Mary. All His life on earth was in fact one long struggle between these two natures, in which the Divine eventually won a complete victory. But in this struggle God the Creator met, as He could not have met in any other way, the life conditions of His creatures, and through it He could make known to them forever how His purpose was that human life be lived. His purpose was that

¹For a fuller treatment of this subject, see the author's pamphlet, "Son of God and Son of Man."

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

“Word” which “was in the beginning”; its embodiment in Jesus was “the Word made flesh.” Jesus was thus the character of God Almighty, stated in human terms. He was, as someone lately has so beautifully called Him, “all of God that we can ever know.”

“In Him,” as Paul said again, “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead, bodily.” All that our highest intuitions recognize at once as Godlike, all that our reason teaches us to look for in the Source of every good, we find in Jesus, and in Him alone of all who ever trod the earth. God’s love inspired Him; God’s truth spoke through His lips; God’s power operates on men through the unending, ever-growing influence of His Divine Personality. In Him, as He Himself said, we may see God, and through Him come in touch with God. For the Christianity which will endure all earthly changes, Jesus Christ and He alone must be the

WHO — OR WHAT — IS GOD ?

source of all inspiration, the recipient of every word of prayer and praise, the one final example of each would-be Christian's daily living. The new Christianity can be summed up in a single word, and that is, *Christ!*

II

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN?

And God spake all these words, saying (Ex. xx, 1.)

The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit. and they are life. (John vi, 63.)

THE concept of a literal, verbal revelation of Divine Truth to mankind has been fundamental to Christian thinking, in the Protestant Church especially, until comparatively recent times. During the whole of what we spoke of as the period of authority, the Holy Bible was regarded as directly inspired by God and as, in consequence, infallible. Any belief or dogma that could plausibly be based upon a text of Scripture was thereby regarded as not only beyond question but even beyond rational examination. Truth was, in fact, conceived as some-

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

thing higher than reason and not necessarily accessible to it, while Divine Authority was the one and proper basis of belief.

But, with the recent downfall of the idea of authority in political and social matters, there has come also a decided weakening in adherence to Divine Authority, in this sense at least. Men have, for one thing, come to see quite clearly that no "act of faith" can make a person really believe what he does not understand. The idea that it could is, indeed, patently absurd. A child, for instance, could quite easily be made to say, upon parental authority, that he believed in the binomial theorem, but unless he had studied algebra his belief would have no real significance. Just so, it is now realized, one might say that he believed in the vicarious atonement; but the practical value of his belief would depend absolutely on the degree to which that doctrine held a definite meaning in his mind. It is true that

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

in either case one might say, "So and so, who is a wiser man than I, says that this is true, so I will assume it is true until I know the contrary." That may be a useful attitude in certain instances, but it is not belief. Belief does not rest on authority, even Divine Authority, but on the individual mind's ability to understand the truth and recognize it as such.

Seeing this, men have made in the last few years an earnest effort to understand the Bible, and that very effort has had the effect of lessening belief in the Book's literal infallibility. No honest and impartial reader can deny that it is full of inaccuracies and contradictions; and its apparent moral standard, even, is not always up to present day requirements. Furthermore, we have no recent, scientifically accredited instance of God's speaking with men in such a way as the "inspiration" of the Bible was once thought to imply, and the whole con-

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

cept of the "miraculous" has been pretty well eliminated from modern thinking. How, it is said, can God, who is the source of law, be thought of as occasionally violating the very laws which He Himself has made? So, while most Christians still assert that they believe in "the inspiration of the Bible," what they have in mind is not the old idea of actual Divine Revelation, but a Divine enlightenment of the Bible writers differing in degree but not in kind from that of any earnest, spiritually minded man.

Is this to be the final verdict in the matter? Certainly it does not harmonize with what the Bible claims about itself. For while the Bible nowhere claims a literal infallibility, it does claim, in many places, to contain the literal words of the Almighty. "God spake all these words, saying. . . ." "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying" These are not isolated statements, but occur repeatedly. Are we to regard them simply

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

as the unconscious over-statement of a superstitious enthusiast, who puts the substance of his dreams or of his intuitions into the mouth of God; or have they such a reasonable basis in fact that we may still accept them literally? Can God speak with men?

In the last chapter we spoke of God as omnipotent, but saw that His omnipotence does not involve the ability to act unreasonably or in violation of His own laws. We should say, therefore, that God certainly can speak with men, *provided*, first, that there is a good and sufficient reason for His doing so, and second, that it can be done without the violation of natural or spiritual law. If we can find that these two conditions exist, or have existed, then the existence of concrete Divine Revelation ceases to be either impossible or unreasonable.

Why, then, should God desire to speak with men? As a rule, we know it seems to be

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

His policy not only to leave men in freedom but to do nothing for them that they can do for themselves. Thus the human infant, with its infinite capacity for learning, comes into the world with less inborn, instinctive knowledge than is possessed by any other living creature. Thus, again, God never has revealed to us any of the facts of natural science. He never told us that the earth was round, or that steam and electricity might be used for power. But if, on the other hand, there are facts which no human study or ingenuity ever could find out, and if, moreover, these are facts which it is vitally important that we should know, would there not be a valid reason why He should reveal these facts to us? This, I confidently believe, is just the case.

Take, as a supreme instance, the great fact of God's own existence. One of the strongest and most valid proofs of God's existence, so the philosophers tell us, is the

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

fact that the idea of God exists in the human mind. For, they assert, the mind of man is not so constituted as to be able to originate ideas entirely foreign to its own experience. In the strict sense, indeed, the mind of man cannot originate anything. It can only develop and expand such ideas as come to it from the outside. If, therefore, the idea of God exists, it must be that it has a basis in reality, and, indeed, in actual experience.

True enough; but in what kind of experience? Nothing in our ordinary lives from day to day would lead us, in and of itself, to a belief in God. He is not evident to any of our senses, and, if He is the spiritual Being we conceive Him, never can be. It has been suggested that the idea of God originated in man's wonder at great natural phenomena, such as thunder, wind, and so on, but this gives our primitive ancestors credit for tremendous powers of construc-

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

tive, abstract thinking. Is it not, really, far more reasonable to suppose that the idea of God exists in the mind of man because God Himself put it there, and put it there by definite, concrete revelation of Himself? It never can be proved, at any rate, and I for one do not believe, that there is anything in nature to lead man to imagine the existence of the supernatural.

Does it not, therefore, seem to be a probability that God always has revealed Himself to man, from the beginning? As to His methods in the times we know as prehistoric, we have little basis for assertion. It is interesting, however, to compare Swedenborg's statement that there was once an "Ancient Word" which was spread over a large part of the world with what ethnologists have since discovered as to the similarities in the mythology of races half a world apart and having no historical connection with one another.

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

“But,” you may say, “even though God had a good reason for revealing Himself to men, would not His doing so have involved a violation of the laws of ordinary human experience? It would at least have had to be a supernatural affair, and there is no scientific evidence of the existence of the supernatural.” Here one must simply ask the question, “What is scientific evidence?” Is not Sir Oliver Lodge a scientist? Of those scientific men who have attempted an open-minded study of the subject, have not at least a good proportion come to the conclusion that the existence of the supernatural *can* be proved, and that phenomena of a non-physical origin *are* produced under certain conditions? That the results of present day communications with the spirit world are for the most part very unsatisfactory has no bearing on the reality of the communications. But of that, more in what follows. Our point now is that there *are* “natural

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

laws" — if we want to call them that — under which it would be possible for God to speak with men if He chose to do so. For Him to do so would involve no change in the constitution of the universe, even as we now know it.

If we admit, then, that God had a reason for speaking with men, and that He could do so, the next question must be as to the form which His speech, or revelation of Himself, would take. How would God speak?

Assuredly in our language, since we could understand no other. And when I say "our language," I do not, of course, mean any particular tongue, but rather the body of human concepts and ideas upon which, with some incidental variations, all our languages are based. In other words, God must express Himself to man in terms of human thought. Now a main characteristic of human thought is that it almost always tends, unconsciously or consciously, to clothe itself in symbols.

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

Purely abstract thinking is impossible except to a limited degree and for a very limited time. Indeed, the gift of thinking abstractly at all has come comparatively late in human evolution. Even today there exist people¹ who cannot think of abstract qualities as such. Their language has no adjectives. When they want to say a thing is hard, they say it is "like a stone," when round, it is "like the moon," and so on. (See White, "Mechanisms of Character Formation," p. 84.) Most of our own words for abstract qualities have at least their origin in a like material symbolism. Thus we speak of "high" motives, a "warm" heart, a "clear" idea, a "keen" perception, a "cogent" (holding-together) argument, and so on. Instances might be piled up indefinitely. In most of these cases we have almost ceased to be conscious of employing a symbol, and in some we are entirely so. We do not stop

¹The Tasmanian aborigines.

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

to think, when we call a man "assiduous," that we really mean he sits right down to his work, but that is what the word means, nevertheless. Small wonder that the study of symbolism is becoming one of the central elements in the new psychology.

Where does this universal tendency to make use of symbols come from? It is a thing to which we have grown so accustomed that we seldom think of it, but it must have an origin somewhere. For Emanuel Swedenborg, whose study of the subject even modern scientists have not yet caught up with, it rests in the very nature of things. It is to him, in fact, the explanation of the ancient problem of the relation between mind and matter. Matter, he says, is but the outward symbol and expression of mind, or spirit. Each material object is the sensible analogue, or "correspondence," of a spiritual quality. Each, in its sphere, performs a function similar to that of the other. As

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

love warms the soul, heat warms the body. As an argument is based upon a solid fact, a house is founded on a rock. This is not to say that matter has no real existence, or that its facts and laws can safely be ignored; simply that matter, with its facts and laws, exists from and because of spirit, from which it took its origin. The natural universe indeed exists, but it does so because there is a spiritual universe, of which it is the outward, visible and sensible manifestation.

It is from his ancestral consciousness of this close relationship between matter and spirit that a man takes so naturally to the use of symbols. That, being ignorant of the law on which they should be based, he frequently misuses them, does not affect the fact. It is the fact of symbolism or correspondence that has made it possible for God to reveal His infinite and spiritual ideas to man. It is in terms of symbolism that the Holy Bible, which is God's one complete

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

revelation of Himself to man, is written in every part; and because of this it is possible for what is apparently a very human, fallible book to be Divine in character and infinite in meaning.

I know only too well how strangely such a statement falls upon the modern ear. The idea of a symbolic interpretation of the Scriptures is no new one — it is at least as old as Origen — and has been, in the minds of modern scholars, quite conclusively discredited. But the trouble with the old attempts at symbolic interpretation was that they had no scientific basis. Exegesis was a simple matter of intuition. If one man said that a certain symbol meant one thing and another, another, neither could prove the other wrong or himself right. What Swedenborg calls the “science of correspondences” leaves no room for guess work, since it deals with a symbolism based upon the very nature of things. Light can mean nothing

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

but truth because it is the one material embodiment of that by which the soul sees.

How could a book which had no more than a literal, surface meaning properly be or be called Divine? It would, indeed, inevitably grow out of date, as some men think the Bible has. While there are certain fundamental human interests which remain the same from age to age — love, conflict, sacrifice, and so on, for example — still the forms in which these clothe themselves change so completely as in time to rob the noblest ancient treatment of them of direct appeal. Considering the two things in themselves, who would not rather read of the World War than of the wars of Israel? It is only as we learn to see in Israel a Divinely chosen symbol of all struggling humanity that her history assumes a meaning which can never lose its power. And till the world comes to recognize her and the other figures of the Bible history as sym-

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

bols, God's Word never will again possess the power over men that it once had. With a symbolic understanding of the Bible, all its superficial imperfections and inaccuracies drop out of sight. The story of the Creation may not harmonize with known facts of geology, but is perfect as a history of the growth of the human soul. Even a seemingly barbaric statement like the Psalmist's curse on Babylon, "Happy he that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones" (Ps. cxxxvii, 9), takes on a wholly new aspect when we realize that the "little ones" in question are the beginnings of evil passion, and that the "stones" are the solid facts of God's Commandments.

It is, of course, impossible in the brief space of time at our disposal to give any real idea of how the science of correspondences opens up the inner meaning of the Word of God — how, to take just one more example, the account of the first three kings of Israel

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

describes the growth of reason in the adolescent mind, and so on. I can but urge whoever may be interested to a further study of the subject, on which there exists today quite a considerable literature in addition to the works of Swedenborg himself. I will, however, venture one assertion. If there is any passage in the Scripture which the science of correspondences cannot unravel, or if in any instance it is found necessary for the purpose of interpretation to depart from the basic law which has already been stated (that is, the law of an exact analogy between the spiritual and the natural), then all that has been said will be discredited. I say that no such case ever has been found, or ever will be. The proof of the key is that it fits the lock; and if you do not believe me, try it for yourself.

One objection which is often made to such a symbolic interpretation of the Bible as I have tried to outline is that it tends to take

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

away from men the Bible that they have already — that by “explaining away” the Scripture’s literal meaning it tends rather away from real faith in the Bible than toward it. This is simply not the case. The science of correspondences leaves the letter of the Bible as just what it is today — the Divinely guided utterance of the noblest thoughts and highest inspirations that have ever come to men. God did indeed speak to men through the immortal letter of His Word. The sayings that are put into His mouth are actually His sayings, the Commandments His eternal laws. At each stage of men’s development He told them literally and directly just as much of His truth as they were then able and ready to receive. More than this He did not, in the literal sense, attempt, because there would have been no use in doing so. In all external matters — matters of science, sociology, even of outward morals — He made use of the conceptions

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

which were already in men's minds. From their then point of view, He told them the next good thing that they should attempt; and this is why the moral standard of the Bible is so obviously higher at the end than at the beginning. But within all that was said to certain men at a certain time, He hid a message to all men in all time. Within the letter which, by itself, "killeth," He put the spirit which "giveth life."

So the apparent inaccuracies and contradictions of the Bible have, as I have said, no terrors for the spiritual student of it, for he realizes that it was not science or philosophy that God's Word was meant primarily to teach. Those parts of it which take the form of history are doubtless based upon historic fact—or at least on the view of fact held at the time when they were written—but the history is of secondary importance. What is important is that God chose these stories or these legends as a means of teach-

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

ing all mankind His nature and His purposes. It is to know these and to see their application to our lives that we should read the Bible.

You will perhaps have wondered how God ventured to conceal His message to mankind in such a way, how He could know that it would not be overlooked. But the essential divine laws of human conduct are not such as needed to be veiled in any age, for, while their forms change, they do not. So in the Bible any honest man, though with no knowledge of the fact of symbolism, can find for himself the way of righteous living, and uncounted multitudes have found it there from the beginning. As it is so beautifully put by Swedenborg: "The Word in (the literal) sense is like a man clothed, whose face and hands are bare. All that concerns man's life, and so his salvation, is bare; the rest is clothed." The man who is content with the Bible as it is will find in it a full

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

store of spiritual food; but for the man of the new age, of restless, questing, probing mind, there is in its symbolic, spiritual sense a treasure house whose stores he never can exhaust.

I have sought all along rather to show how the Holy Bible can be the actual Word of God to men than to prove that it is such. This was of intention, since the nature of the Bible, like the Deity of Jesus Christ, is not a matter of proof so much as of intuition. If one can humbly and sincerely read the Bible without *feeling* — without knowing somehow in his heart of hearts — that it is different from and greater than all other books, there is not much that can be said to him. The supreme evidence that the Bible is Divine comes not from the outside, but from within itself. It will speak its own message to the listening soul far better than the feeble words of man can paraphrase it. All that a study of this kind can hope to do is to help

CAN GOD SPEAK WITH MEN ?

brush aside some of the intellectual difficulties which impede our hearing. By its own nature, by its formative effect upon two human civilizations, by its deathless message to the heart of every one who reads it, the Divine Book of Books will of itself proclaim and prove forever that, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

III

DO MEN DIE?

Now, that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for to him all are living. (Luke xx, 37, 38.)

DO men die? There may be those to whom this seems an idle question. For there were days not long ago when death to many of us fell almost to a commonplace, when the results of war and pestilence made the "King of Terrors" only too familiar to us. Still I submit that nothing that we saw gives a real answer to the question, "Do men die?" We saw their bodies die, and, when the opportunity was offered, laid them reverently in the earth from which they

DO MEN DIE ?

came, but of what happened to the men themselves we could see nothing. For the time is past when thinking people could say of the few score pounds of animated dust that constitute a human body that they are a man. Even the scientists, who in their proper study of matter are a little apt to lose sight of the other phases of reality, are at last being forced to recognize that there is something in us which is immaterial. Two recent scientific statements are worth studying in this connection. Dr. Charles Baskerville, a well known chemist, said in an interview:

Though we know that the human brain works as the result of the action of material cells, there is something there that certainly is not material; something that cannot be explained on any purely material hypothesis. This is the mind, the spiritual part of man, no less real than the material, and, though dependent on the material for its power to express itself, far more important than the material.

DO MEN DIE ?

From quite a different point of view — that of the psychologist — M. A. G. Tansley comes to a similar conclusion. In his book, “The New Psychology in Its Relation to Life,” he says:

Thought and emotion as we know them are absolutely *sui generis* and we do not get the least nearer to an understanding of them by believing (or, for that matter, disbelieving) that they are produced by brain processes. The nature of the connection which certainly exists is absolutely beyond our ken. We are thus driven to consider the psychic sphere separately from the physical sphere, as a distinct field for psychic investigation, with data, concepts and laws of its own. We must not mix up physiological and psychical terms as is often done by popular writers. Such a phrase, constantly met with in ordinary writing and speaking, as, a thought flashes through my brain, is quite illegitimate. Thoughts belong to the mind, not to the brain, by whatever changes in brain cells they may be accompanied.

Each of these writers has, in his own way, seen that a body is not a man. A man *has*

DO MEN DIE ?

a body, but he *is* something definitely and recognizably more. He is an individual, a personality, a soul, or, in the Biblical term, a spirit. "God is a spirit," so the Master tells us, and as He made man in His own image, man must be a spirit too.

When, therefore, we approach the question, "Do men die?" what we are really asking is whether the human spirit — the real man — is able to survive the dissolution of the body which has clothed it, and by means of which it has communicated with us and with the world. If, as Dr. Baskerville puts it, the mind is "dependent on the material for its power to express itself," can it continue to exist when its material instrument is gone?

Let it be understood, however, that what I am speaking of is the whole, individual spirit, and not just the spirit substance, if there be such a thing. I mean the whole man, with his memory, personality and con-

DO MEN DIE ?

sciousness, for all these make the man. Those who believe that there is such a thing as spirit — and to this class most present day philosophers unquestionably belong — will generally admit that it, like matter, must be indestructible; but there are many who incline to think that spirit, again like matter, may take different forms at different times, and that the spiritual substance which to-day goes to make up the soul of one man may in future times exist within that of another. If this be true, the answer to our question is affirmative. Men do die. For it is memory and individuality that make up a man as such, and if these perish, then it is the end of him. What is it to me that, after I am dead, the substance of my spirit is embodied in another? If I have lost my conscious personality and the sense of my own identity, then I am done for. A complete annihilation could be no worse.

But what reason have I for believing that

DO MEN DIE ?

such will not be the case? Upon what rational basis can there be set up a hope of individual immortality?

That such a hope has held a place in human life as far back as we know about it, no one can deny. True, there have been and are exceptions, but a desire to live after death has been a typical human characteristic in all lands and times. Men have clung to the hope of immortality in the face of physical appearance with a desperate persistence which, if it be unjustified, we can surely call the most pathetic thing in all the world. There has been no way in which any new religion or philosophy could quite so certainly attract a following as by some kind of teaching of a resurrection. As a mere matter of history, it was this element in Christianity which at first attracted to it the wide range of peoples out of whom the early Christian Church was formed. Civilized Greek and Roman joined with the painted

DO MEN DIE ?

savages of Gaul and Britain in the worship of a Leader who was pictured to them as the Conqueror of death. And in its turn, the wide spread of Christianity bears its own witness to the historic truth of the Resurrection story.

It is said sometimes nowadays that the desire to live after death is but a natural outgrowth of our selfish egoism — is in fact the logical corollary of the primitive “will to live.” It may be this in part, but it is also very much more. Who that has ever really felt the call of a great work, what scientist, what artist, or what poet, but has felt the inadequacy of a single lifetime for the service to mankind he felt himself to be capable of rendering? Who that has known true friendship or a deep and enduring love has not felt that his emotion somehow *must* not have an end? If the desire for eternal life were but a selfish thing, we should expect to find those who have cherished it themselves in-

DO MEN DIE ?

human, selfish, egotistical; but the fact is just the opposite. As one of our leading American essayists, Mr. E. S. Martin, puts it:

In all times lives geared to that belief have usually been the better for it. It is the very mainspring of religion, the great warrant for resistance to materialism and the notion that to get all you can and enjoy it while you may is the end of human life.

No, the "hope of everlasting life" is bound up with all that is noblest and most precious in existence. But that in itself is no proof that the hope is justified. Is there such proof?

In the material sense, of course, there is not and there cannot be. What we have called the soul of man is by our very definition of it immaterial, and its power to exist apart from matter is the thing that we are trying to establish. But if the soul exists apart from matter, then it obviously cannot reach us through our physical senses. Did

DO MEN DIE ?

it ever, really? Even in this life we can neither see, hear, taste nor touch another's soul, and yet we are forced by reason to admit that it exists. By reason only can we know that it exists after the body dies. If we can know of immortality it must be through our minds, not through our senses. On the other hand, if immortality cannot be proved to sense, neither can sense disprove it. That matter exists no more proves that there can be nothing immaterial than a horse proves there can be no other animal.

Properly the burden of proof should be put on those who deny immortality rather than on those who affirm it. Have we sufficient evidence of the body's effect on the soul to justify our thinking that the death of one destroys the other? If, by an accident, I lose a limb, I am not therefore any less myself. Why should I think, then, that the loss of my whole body will be able to put an end to me?

DO MEN DIE ?

But, leaving temporarily aside the question of a possible Divine revelation on the subject, there are two great natural laws which of themselves give evidence to any reasonable mind that death cannot affect the soul.

One of these is the evident tendency of evolution to produce an increasingly complex universe. In the old days of purely theoretical philosophy it was supposed that unity and simplicity were the measure of perfection. Upon this basis many thought, as orientals still think, that the human spirit must at last be drawn back into the One from which it came. But the whole trend of evolution is in just the opposite direction. Everywhere the newer, higher forms are more elaborate and complex than their primitive forerunners. Every day the physical universe becomes a little more diversified — tends to the production of more highly different and specialized individuals. Can it be otherwise in the spiritual universe? Is

DO MEN DIE ?

it not, on the contrary, most probable that the very tendency of spirit is to split itself into an ever-increasing number of individual personalities, each of which shall not only exist permanently but grow ever more highly individualized?

There is another natural law which gives us evidence of the soul's immortality—namely, that *nothing normally dies till it has ceased to grow*. The fruit tree springs up from a seedling, reaches its allotted size, bears fruit, provides through seed for future fruit trees, and then dies. It could have done no more, however long it might have lived. The wild animal grows up, acquires the instincts of its species, propagates and perishes. It would be no better and no wiser if it lived for centuries. Even the human body reaches physical perfection with maturity and instantly begins its lingering process of decay. Just of itself, it would be no more efficient as an instrument if it survived for-

DO MEN DIE ?

ever; for the various accomplishments which we habitually call physical dexterity are not actually in the body, but in the mind. If it were possible for the mind, say, of a pianist to be transferred to another body, he would need but a little muscular development to be able to play as well as ever. But when we come to the mind and soul of man — to man himself — we have a thing which is unlike any of those of which we have been speaking. A man never need stop growing — never does, in fact, except by his own laziness. There are no known or imaginable limits to the powers of the human soul. Do you suppose that Shakespeare would have written no more plays if he had lived in physical vigor for another hundred years? Was Lincoln's power to impassion men for freedom limited by the assassin's bullet? Would he not have a message for today if he had lived and kept his faculties so long? To the man with a living, active mind each

DO MEN DIE ?

day opens new vistas, every hour reveals new interests, and his mental treasure only grows the richer with the passing of the years. Surely the soul of man *must* be immortal, since the very essence of it is eternal growth.

But above all considerations of nature or of natural law, our faith in immortality must rest on our belief in nature's God. If God is, immortality must be, and if He is not it cannot be — for surely no material energy could produce an immortal soul. A God who made men only to wipe them out of existence after a few short and unsatisfying years of life — who planted in the breasts of men a hope He had no thought of realizing — such would be no true God, but an unclean and cruel monster. For, say what one will of life in this world — and for many of us it can be a very splendid and inspiring thing — still when it is considered as a whole, with all its imperfections, disappointments, tragedies, frustrations, above all its utter

DO MEN DIE ?

incompleteness, it is meaningless without the hope of another life to follow it. Regarded as a training school, the world we know can be explained and understood; but in itself it is without coherence or significance. No wonder that materialistic thinkers have developed a philosophy of "resignationism," that they say, "The answer to the riddle of the universe is that there is no answer." There is indeed no answer — but a life beyond the grave.

Again we say, "If God is, immortality must be." That the soul should perish at the end of earthly life would imply a Deity as stupid as He would be cruel. We have seen that the soul is, at the time of death, but on the threshold of its growth. If God should then decree its dissolution, it would be as though I should set out an orchard and, just as the trees began to blossom, cut them down. If no wise man would think of such a folly, how can God, the all-wise, even be

DO MEN DIE ?

imagined as permitting it? No! As surely as God lives, so surely will He sometime give us opportunity to use to the full the powers of growth and service with which he has endowed us.

I have said that the soul's immortality could not possibly be proved to the material senses; but I did not mean by this that there can be no manifestation of the ultimate existence to those who are still on earth. Such events have taken place repeatedly in human history, and may even, in a certain sense, take place today. They may seem, to those who do not understand them, to employ the physical senses, but they do not really do so. We have thought of the physical body with its senses as a thing distinct from the spirit, but sensation itself, though it makes use of physical organs, is a spiritual thing. The eye does not really see; it is seen through. The ear serves only as a sort of telephone by which the spirit hears. And since sensation

DO MEN DIE ?

is a quality of the spirit, and yet must have organs through which it can operate, it follows that the spirit must itself have organs, and a body to which they belong. As Paul says, "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." Furthermore, as conscious life is inconceivable except in an objective environment, there must be a spiritual world, in which the spiritual body dwells. Yet, inasmuch as time and space are qualities of matter, and a spiritual world can have no matter in it, therefore time and space cannot exist in that world, except in the minds of its inhabitants; and therefore also, we cannot say that the spiritual world is here or there, since it is actually everywhere. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "The kingdom of heaven is within you." For as the material world embraces all of matter, and all matter is in the material world, just so the spiritual world embraces all of spirit, and our souls, being spirit, are in that world

DO MEN DIE ?

even now. All that takes place at death is that our consciousness, being deprived of the organs by which it is made aware of this world, turns to its spiritual senses and lives in the world of spirit.

This process can, however, take place temporarily in certain cases before the time of death, and it is thus that manifestations of the spirit world to people here must be explained. The immaterial has not been "materialized," as some have thought; but men who still lived in material bodies have had spiritual senses opened. Thus it was that all the supernatural apparitions took place which we read of in the Bible. Not in the land of Canaan but in the spiritual world, not with their physical but with their spiritual vision did such men as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Manoah and so many others see "the angel of the Lord." Not with their physical eyes, indeed, did the disciples see the risen Lord Himself,

DO MEN DIE ?

for as the story shows the body in which He appeared to them was not a material one. (Did He not pass through the closed doors?) And to some partial opening of the spiritual senses must be credited all that is genuine in the so-called "psychic phenomena" to which men like Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle are giving so much attention at the present day. There will be no real understanding of such phenomena till this fact is grasped.

But while the results of modern spiritism, when intelligently understood, furnish an interesting confirmation of what may be learned from other sources, they are in themselves more apt than otherwise to be misleading, if not actually dangerous. Communications from a person whose identity we cannot know, and whose veracity we have no means of verifying, cannot in their very nature be of any great value; and this is but too evident from most of the results that have been

DO MEN DIE ?

published. All that these really show is that the spirits in question have the power to read our minds, and that they tell us what we already think or want to think. (Take, for example, what the spirits told the Rev. Basil King, who is a Canadian, of the spiritual virtues of the Canadian people.) This is entirely in harmony with the Bible's teaching that communication with the spirit world is possible, but that it is dangerous except when it comes by Divine permission, and unsought.

While the accounts in the Bible are and must be the basis of all positive knowledge in regard to the future life, there is one relatively modern case of spiritual illumination which is worthy of consideration by all thoughtful people, and especially because in all its details it is absolutely unique. I refer to the case of Emanuel Swedenborg, who claimed that he possessed from God the power of transferring his consciousness from the

DO MEN DIE ?

natural to the spiritual world at will, and this for over thirty years. Nothing in literature is at all comparable with his book, "Heaven and Hell, from Things Heard and Seen." Here was a man who, if he was not absolutely deluded, was in an entirely different situation from all "mediums" before or since. He was not at the mercy of the spirits, for he dwelt in their world consciously. He could talk with them face to face and in their own environment, and so could form a critical estimate of them such as is impossible to others. Of the contrast between him and other "psychics," the late William Dean Howells said:

There is, in fact, nothing in the things reported from Raymond [Sir Oliver Lodge's son] which may not be paralleled and amplified a thousand-fold from the Memorabilia of Swedenborg. His one work, "Heaven and Hell," is a storehouse of experiences and observations which, whether we allow them to be genuine or not, are still of an extent and variety which far transcend all sub-

DO MEN DIE ?

sequent communications. The things told by Raymond are the commonplaces of Swedenborg's revelation and philosophy. Raymond's facts, if we may call his fragmentary and disconnected responses so, with the struggles of the mediums for intelligible statements, might all have been derived from the superabundant testimony of the books where every fact of a world neither unknown nor unknowable is so amply set down that curiosity is almost sated.

Again he speaks of Swedenborg as writing with "such dignity as shall make the gibberish of the ordinary 'control' of the ordinary medium seem an affront to the human intelligence."

With a full consciousness of the stark incredulity which such a claim as Swedenborg's is bound to arouse at the first hearing, I nevertheless dare to assert that an impartial study of his writings will lead almost anyone to conclude, as I have, that there is no explanation that will fit his case but that which he himself gives to it. If, as the

DO MEN DIE ?

Savior said, the dead are living — notice He said, “*are living*,” not “*will live*” at some future time — then it is only natural that God in His goodness should have given us some knowledge of the state in which they live. And in that very goodness is the test of every putative revelation. There is an old and cowardly saying that a thing is “too good to be true.” But if our God is infinite goodness, then the better and more perfect any picture of the destiny He has prepared for us, the more sure we may be of its truth. And if Emanuel Swedenborg’s picture of eternal life in a real world, where every soul is given opportunity to develop to its fullest in the very surroundings which are most appropriate to it, where God forces no man into heaven and condemns no man to hell, where “all we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist” — if, I say, such a picture strikes in the soul of each of us an echo of instinctive recognition, may we not dare to

DO MEN DIE ?

say that here at last God has Himself given the full and final answer to our question, "Do men die?"

How, indeed, can men die when God Himself, as He was manifest in the flesh, gave His undying promise, "Because I live, ye shall live also"?

IV

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE?

Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them;

But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.
(St. Matt. xx, 25-29.)

THE word "religion" comes to us from the Latin, and is presumably derived from the roots *re* (back) and *ligo* (to tie or bind). The earliest historic concept of religion, therefore, is that of a force which holds or ties men back from certain acts which they would otherwise perform. There

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

has, however, also been in the word from the beginning the implication of a particular kind of force—the force of some sort of belief in the supernatural. Thus the full primitive conception of religion is a recognition of the fact that certain things which we should otherwise desire to do may not be done because they are opposed to the will of some supernatural power. Supernatural power, however, is not a thing which primitive minds are capable of picturing abstractly or impersonally; therefore, what came to be the dominant thought in religion was that of the will of the gods.

From this standpoint it is easily seen that the ethical character of a religion will depend on the view held as to the ethical standards of the gods themselves. If they are cruel, tyrannical or domineering, then religion will partake of the same character. Their essential attribute is not necessarily moral excellence, but power, and it is their power

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

which makes men's obedience to them the part of wisdom. Furthermore, their power and authority are things of which they may well be expected to be jealous, and accordingly the best way for a man to avoid their anger and to win their favor is by emphasizing the difference between himself and them. He may do this in any one of several ways — by acts of worship, by a generally humble attitude, or, perhaps best of all, by one form or another of self-persecution. By giving up the things he likes to do, and even by inflicting physical injury upon himself or upon his family, he may be fairly sure of winning the divine favor. This is the typically pagan view of religion, which not only has existed in most of the religions of the past, but even at the present time and in Christianity itself dies very hard indeed.

The Jews were originally pagans, so that we may expect to find strong elements of paganism in their religious ideas — and this

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

although we believe that their religion itself was a veritable revelation from God. For it is impossible to put into a man's mind ideas which are entirely at variance with his previous conceptions, and it is equally impossible to give a man *any* ideas without their being modified by his previous conceptions and by his habits of thought. When, therefore, Divine Revelation first came to the Jews it had to be in a form not too much out of keeping with their earlier ideas — that is to say, it had to be a modified and slightly spiritualized paganism. Anything more than this they would have been as unable to grasp as a child would be to grasp the differential calculus.

Hence primitive Judaism rejected human sacrifice and self-torture, but retained and even encouraged animal sacrifice. And there is little to indicate that the average Jew saw any special ethical meaning even in the Ten Commandments. These, along with the

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

multifarious and wearisome observances of the ceremonial law, were to be obeyed, not primarily because they had a moral importance, but because Jehovah had commanded them and would sternly punish disobedience.

This is not to say that no higher idea of religion ever existed among the Jews. On the contrary, the Divine effort to lead men to see God's law as a moral force is evident on every page of the Old Testament if one will look for it. In the later prophets especially, the thought of God as the embodiment and source of righteousness — as one who will be satisfied with nothing less than a moral service from His people — the thought of religion as a Divine ethical system, is expressed with a force and eloquence never since surpassed. "The righteous God loveth righteousness." "Ye people, rend your hearts and not your garments." "The sacrifices of God are a broken heart: a broken and a contrite spirit, O Lord, thou wilt not

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

despise." Such sayings as these are the imperishable jewels of our spiritual heritage. But there is nothing in Jewish history to show that such a view of religion ever became popular. On the contrary, even in the Gospel times religion was still for the average Jew a measure of formal self-mortification practised for reasons of immediate self-interest.

Then, having failed to reach men through the written and spoken word, God made the Word flesh. He resorted to the force of living, personal example. He embodied His Divine nature in the human personality of Jesus Christ, so that that personality became and is forever Divine. This was the turning point in the world's religious history. Whatever wrong ideas men might have had as to the nature of God, they now need hold them no longer. *God is Jesus Christ!* And the conception of religion which, as Christ, He gave to men, was to their previous ideas as daylight is to darkness. Gone, in the teach-

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

ing of Jesus, is the thought of God as a Divine Tyrant. He is revealed instead as the infinitely loving Father of all mankind, making His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sending rain on the just and on the unjust. Gone, too, is the thought that He can ever envy men their happiness, or need to be propitiated. If He gives men laws, it is not to restrict them, but that they may have life, and have it more abundantly. Again, and most important of all, the Savior taught that happiness itself is not to be attained by seeking it for oneself, but by trying to give it to others. The one real human eminence is eminence in service. Religion henceforth was not to be a twofold relation — between a man and his God; but threefold — between God, man, and man's neighbor.

I said the old, the pagan ideas of God were gone; rather I should have said they might have gone. For our Lord in His wisdom

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

very clearly foresaw that a large part of what He taught was out of the mental reach of His contemporaries. Ages, He knew and said, would have to pass before the new heaven and new earth which He envisioned could actually come into being. Ages would have to pass before there should be in the world that intelligent recognition of Him and of His Gospel which He figuratively spoke of as His Second Coming. His predictions were entirely correct. No sooner were His followers away from conscious personal relationship with Him than the old habits of thought with which they had been brought up began to reassert themselves. Christianity lost something of its distinctive character and began to be more or less Jewish. And then, as the new religion spread to other nations, each of these proceeded to graft upon it part of its own religious inheritance. Greece brought the dialectic machinery out of which Christian philosophy and theology were built.

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

Rome made the Church an empire and a spiritual autocracy. Asia, before long, added her concept of asceticism and withdrawal from the world.

So the old pagan idea of religion as an arbitrary restraint, a tying back, became a part of the accepted Christian tradition. By the fifth century A.D., monasticism had become a recognized institution of the Church — was even thought of as its highest embodiment. Simeon, called Stylites, who was seemingly one of the most selfish men who ever lived, had won his canonization by remaining for half a century on the top of a pillar. And to this day the largest nominally Christian organization holds that self-punishment is a virtue, and that the highest form of religion is to withdraw from contact with the world and even from its most sacred and inspiring ties. Protestantism, while abjuring many errors, still refused to accept Christ's teaching about religion. It still thought of

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

it — and, in large measure, thinks of it to-day — as a restraint, a curb, a tying back of the spirit. So naturally the average man today thinks of the Church as the arch-enemy of freedom and of the joy of living.

Is it not time that the real teaching of Jesus should be stripped of its pagan and oriental accretions and be seen at last in its true light? Is it not time that there should come into the world a new Christianity — new, not in the sense of denying anything that was genuine in the old, but as a fuller, freer and more spiritual interpretation of it? The new Christianity is here! The evidences of it are on every hand. Everywhere men are turning away from the contentions of priests and theologians — turning away from arbitrary reasoning about Christ — turning back to the personality and teaching of Christ Himself. And this turning — this realization that Christianity is Christ — is actually that mysterious and

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

long-awaited Second Coming which the Savior prophesied when He was here on earth.

The "New Church" exists as a society for the promotion of the new Christianity. It does not claim to have a monopoly of it; it delights to recognize it in all churches and in all lands; all that it asks is to do what it can to serve it. And yet I think it can be fairly shown that the new and true view of Christ's religious teaching was first set forth among men by Emanuel Swedenborg. This man had, it is true, strange psychic experiences; he claimed to reveal to men from personal experience the nature of the life after death; but this was not at any time his chief concern. The real aim toward which his life and all his efforts were directed was to set before men a new and higher standard of Christian living — as he called it, a "true Christian religion." In his writings we find for almost the first time since the Savior

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

walked the earth, a conception of religion which is radically different from the pagan one. He saw religion as Christ saw it — rather, he saw Christ's vision of religion — not as a matter of mere theory and belief, not even primarily as a matter of not doing things, but as a matter of *doing things*. His most fundamental teaching was that "all religion is a matter of life, and the life of religion is to do good."

Searching the gospels for the keynote of Christian living, he found it, as the world in general is finding it today, in that momentous saying, "I am among you as he that serveth." So long as men thought of themselves as isolated human units, it was possible to think of religion as a matter between each man and his God. But if, as our Lord taught, humanity is a spiritual whole, if all men are branches of one vine, are children of one Heavenly Father, a new factor necessarily enters in. God's chief purpose in creation is not the

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

well-being of individuals as such, but that of the race. And so the only true way to serve God is to do what we can to carry out His purpose — that is to say, to serve mankind.

This, then, is the essential answer to the question, "What is the religious life?" It is the useful life — the life of service. There are few thinking men or women who would now question this statement, though when Swedenborg first made it, something like a century and a half ago, it was thought revolutionary and heretical to the last degree. And even now it needs to be defined. "Service" is coming to be more or less a catchword, which people use with but little thought of its meaning. Do not many of us instinctively think of a life of service as meaning a life in some way exceptional — that of a minister, perhaps, or of a physician, or a welfare worker, or some kind of a public servant. These, indeed, may be useful lives, each in its own way, but they involve only

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

a small part of the sum total of possible service to humanity.

In the first place, only a few of us are fitted by nature and disposition for this kind of occupations, nor would the world be better off if it were otherwise. Let us admit and emphasize that the spiritual element in man's life is the supremely important factor in his existence. If this is neglected or abused, all the rest counts for nothing. On the other hand, God, in His infinite wisdom, has put us in a world in which the major portion of our time and conscious thought must, in the nature of things, be devoted to material considerations. Unless most people gave the larger portion of their energies to the provision of food, comfort and shelter, there would not be enough of these things to go around. Nor is it difficult to see why it is well that this should be the case. The cultivation of moral and spiritual virtues, if too much *consciously* indulged in, is more apt to lead to self-con-

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

sciousness and self-conceit than to a true success. Real character is developed mainly while we are not thinking about it. And for that reason, service to the material welfare of our neighbors is as true a field of religion as any directly spiritual ministry. God has given to every man and woman a unique set of abilities and powers. There is one thing which each of us can do well—if not better than anyone else, at least much better than the average. It may be ministering directly to the souls' welfare of our neighbors; it may be helping to train their minds; it may be providing food or clothing or shelter for their bodies; or it may even be providing rest and recreation for them by amusing them. What it is, matters very little; the main thing is to find it out and do it to the best of our ability. The real vehicle of a man's religion is his Job!

There are some interesting corollaries to this idea. For instance, the so-called "labor

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

question" is now an important, vivid issue in the public mind — and certainly I have no thought of even trying to settle it. There is a feeling, however, which seems to underlie a good deal that is said and written on this subject, which, if our thought is true, will make a right solution of the problem unattainable — I mean the feeling that work is an intrinsically evil or unpleasant thing. The question of how much a man ought to have to work is certainly debatable, and many men unquestionably have to work entirely too hard. The pay the worker should receive and the conditions under which he should live and labor offer enormous opportunities for clearer, fairer thinking. But if there is anything sure, it is that every human being ought to have some work to do, and that the deliberate idler is the most irreligious, as he is the most useless species of the *genus humanum*. There are but two sources of lasting human happiness — work, and love

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

— and the man or woman who never learns to enjoy working at something he can do well misses one of the highest satisfactions that this life, or the next, affords.

But if the man who will not work is irreligious, so is the man who works, or chooses his occupation, from a mere motive of self-interest. It is not Christian to pick out an occupation simply for the money one can make by it, and there are at least some nominally "respectable" occupations which will be abandoned when the world is really Christianized. Nor is it religious to work at a useful occupation simply to get money or fame. These are poor ends at best — bubbles that break as we touch them, Dead Sea apples that turn to ashes in our mouths. There is only one ambition really worthy of a man made in God's image, and that is to leave the world a little better for his having lived in it.

The useful life, however, involves more

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

than a good start and good intentions. It is not enough that we just find a job; we must proceed to make ourselves efficient at performing it. Real efficiency is a matter of training and education, but still more of character. And it is here that we trace the connection between the new idea of religion and the old; for character building is, in the beginning, a matter of self-restraint, of giving things up. It is a different kind of self-restraint, however. The fact that a thing is pleasant does not necessarily put it under suspicion, nor is it ever God's reason for asking us to abstain from it. Evil is evil because it hampers our usefulness, and in so doing robs us of a part of our capacity to be as happy as God meant we should be. The new Christianity will give an even higher place to the Ten Commandments than did the old, because it will more clearly recognize the acts which they forbid as anti-social, and thus dangerous to the well-being, alike of

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

society, and of the individual as a member of it. If a man ceases to be a useful citizen when he lies or steals or commits adultery, does he not also make the world a less desirable place to live in, even for himself? Would not a country in which the Ten Laws were scrupulously kept by all the citizens be the sort of country in which each of us would like to find a home?

For, as our Lord taught, the Commandments are not arbitrary restrictions placed upon our happiness; they are the very laws of our own nature. He said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," and He might well have said as much of every Divine law. The indulgences which God forbids sometimes appear on the surface as leading to happiness, but in fact they rob us of the chance of it. Take, for example, the promiscuous indulgence in sex relations. It is forbidden because, and only because, it inevitably tends to destroy in him who prac-

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

tises it the capacity for the purest happiness the human heart can feel — the lasting love of one man and one woman. And so it is with all the rest of God's commands.

Self-restraint, however, is but the beginning of the religious life. This is a positive and not a negative thing. The next stage is study and instruction. It is strange how men will recognize that it takes study to become a good carpenter or a good doctor, and yet feel that somehow one can be a good Christian — which is the most important and most difficult thing of all — by instinct. The life of religion is to do good, but to do good a man must first know how. And so the theoretical side of religion has a vital, if still a subordinate, place. Sources of religious information are many and various, but they all come back to the one Divine fountain of spiritual truth, the Word of God. The man who is really and intelligently religious will read the Bible regularly, for he cannot get

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

along without it. Nor will he be satisfied with the mere reading. Knowing that other men read also, he will want to confer with them in order to get their interpretation of what he reads. He will want to get the interpretations of men trained in Bible study as an occupation, and this almost inevitably will lead him to the Church. There are, indeed, many religious men who do not go to church, but that is just a temporary condition for which people and the Church are both in part to blame. The Church will ultimately awake to its true character and mission, and religious men will ultimately realize their need of it. And in the meantime, if the Church is not the kind of thing we think it should be, we should not stand outside and criticize; we should get in and help. The government of our country will not be substantially improved so long as we persist in talking and thinking of it in the third person. It is not "they"; it is we —

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

you, I and our neighbors. And the Church is just the same.

Deeper, however, than the need the man who tries to lead a useful life will feel of instruction and of the Church — deeper than any other need, in fact — will be his need of God. One cannot serve mankind by mere force of determination, however strongly one may wish to do so. There are too many temptations in the way, and we ourselves are much too weak, too lazy and too self-indulgent. More and more the thoughtful people of the world — outside the churches just as much as in them — are beginning to see the need of real belief, not just in a God, but in a personal God. Such a book as Mr. Wells's "God the Invisible King" could not have been written by such a man unless the world had changed from what it used to be. We need not only to believe but actually to *feel* that in our efforts at well-doing God is with us. Lacking this inspiration, the very

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

stoutest of us must eventually lose heart. But it can be attained — in many ways, but most of all through prayer. This is no theory, no self-deception; it is a fact of human experience. The whole history of mankind shows nothing more clearly than that the right kind of a relation with God can give men strength to do what they would otherwise have been incapable of. And this is most true of all when God is recognized for what He is, the infinitely tender, loving, approachable, Divinely Human Being who came down to earth and lived our life as Jesus Christ our Lord.

What is the religious life? It is a life of daily service to men lived in a personal relationship with a personal God. Such a life has its difficulties, but they are healthy ones, and its rewards are above all computation. It is not narrow, but broad; not gloomy, but supremely happy. It forbids no really good thing, even in this world, while develop-

WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ?

ing, as they can be developed in no other way, the soul's capacities for eternal happiness in that life for which our brief adventure here is but a training and a preparation. May God grant us, every one, the courage and determination to set out on it!

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 01035 5834