

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

CHRISTIAN knowledge, the staple of theology, is part of the larger whole of the Christian religion. In fastening on the intellectual content of Christianity, and making it the object of reflection and speculation, theology discharges a legitimate and even necessary task; but it is a task which it only executes by making an abstraction from a realm of concrete reality in which knowledge has emerged in vital and indissoluble union with other factors and experiences of a unique spiritual economy.

When we consider Christianity as a historical phenomenon in its totality, it might seem that its nature is describable in terms of power rather than of light. It entered into history as an aggrégaté of spiritual forces which aimed at accomplishing, and which actually accomplished, extraordinary results of a spiritual kind. It has exhibited a remarkable combination of creative with assimilative and leavening power. On the creative side it gave men the sense of a satisfactory relation to the Divine Being, and of a relation to the universe in which everything that evoked misgiving and fear was bound to work out eventually for good; it moulded a higher type of human character; it prescribed a new mode of life in conjunction with a gift of spiritual energy to make that life possible; and it called into existence a Christian society which, even when weakened by its later divisions,

declensions and corruptions, has continued to be the chief nursery of moral enthusiasm and endeavour, and also by far the most imposing and far-reaching of the organisations directed to the promotion of the highest well-being of mankind. It has also given proof of its vitality by an assimilative power which, in the contributions which it has collected from the world for the support and enrichment of its life, is analogous to the drafts made by the body upon the material world in the service of human personality and of its spiritual life. It has also shown extraordinary pervasiveness—permeating every sphere of human activity, and making a considerable impression even in those spheres, such as the æsthetic, the economic, and the political, in which the world claims the right to speak the final and decisive word.

In view of the diffusiveness of the operation of Christianity, and of the variety and complexity of the phenomena in which it is traceable as an inspiring or moulding force, it is easy to make a mistake as to its essential meaning and purpose. It is especially difficult to do full justice to its significance if one happens to be peculiarly interested in some isolated aspect of human activity with which it has come into intimate touch. Christianity involves a body of ideas, and indeed cannot live and operate without them; and it is intelligible enough, though none the less erroneous, that those whose business is with ideas should suppose that its whole significance is that of a divine or quasi-divine philosophy, which has accomplished the signal achievement of being at once popular and profound. It takes to do with morality, and that very earnestly and effectively; and again it is natural that those whose interests are preponderantly ethical should regard it as essentially a moral code, which has profoundly stirred

human nature by reason of the instinctive response which we make to a sound and lofty ideal, and also by reason of the strength of the sanctions which it has brought into play. Others, again, impressed with the primary importance for man of the interests of the economic and political spheres, have thought that the deepest meaning of Christianity might be found to lie in its power to bring about some adjustments of mind and environment, which would mitigate the pressure of poverty and injustice, and at least pave the way for a better social and political order. But all such observations are one-sided and misleading in comparison with the commonplace observation that from time immemorial, and among all nations, there has been a recognition that man is confronted by a spiritual problem, that in all ages he has sought to solve it, and that Christianity has its place, which it occupies with sovereign dignity, as a type of the experiences and activities to which we give the name of religion. It is quite true that we cannot construe Christianity out of an abstract idea of religion,¹ but it is also true that we may radically misapprehend it if we fail to understand the nature of the demand that has been made throughout history by the religious heart of mankind, and if we fail to realise that Christianity is based on a recognition of the legitimacy of this demand, and has sought to meet it point by point. It is therefore a necessary preliminary to an investigation of the nature of Christianity to inquire what has been the end sought in religion, or the function which it has endeavoured to serve in the life of the individual and of the race.

¹ Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums*⁴, 1901, p. 5. Harnack comes near missing the genius of Christianity when he says it is all comprehended in the commandments of righteousness and love, but his habitual insight into its character of a salvation soon reasserts itself.

I

Modern discussions of the end sought in religion have issued in a general agreement to accept as an important discovery a view which had been taught in earlier ages, and which had been held by many ordinary people who were not aware that any other account of the matter was even plausible. This is the theory that the essential and practically universal intention of religion has been to serve a practical purpose as a means of protection and blessing to man. The activities in which man engages may be roughly divided into three groups, according as they minister primarily to intellectual, aesthetic or practical needs. One group, which aims at the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity, comprehends the manifold disciplines of science and philosophy. A second group addresses itself to the æsthetic side of our nature, and gratifies the taste for the beautiful by the varied charms of form, colour and melody. These are the Fine Arts—painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry. The third division includes those activities which minister to the satisfaction of the numerous practical wants of mankind. They primarily seek, not truth or beauty, but utility. They are illustrated in the whole range of the industries that are devoted to the support and enrichment of human life, in the technical applications of science, and in the labours of the professions which undertake the higher forms of the service of man.

When, now, we inquire as to the end of religion, it is manifest that it has most affinity with the third group. It has been classed with the theoretical, on the ground that it completes the edifice of human knowledge by making known the first

cause and the final cause of the universe, but though religion involves an element of transcendental knowledge, it can no more be shown that it originated in reasoning than that it recognises in knowledge its most precious possession.¹ It has also been connected with the æsthetic group of activities, chiefly on the ground that the religious sentiment has something in common with the feeling evoked by the contemplation of the beauties and sublimities of nature, or of the creations of artistic genius. But the two are sufficiently differentiated by the fact that the products of the Fine Arts have power to please even when the subjects are known to be fictitious, while nothing is less easy to tolerate than a religion which is known to be false. While it undoubtedly contains elements that make a strong appeal to the intellectual and æsthetic sides of human nature, the central purpose of religion connects it with those activities and provisions which serve a more narrowly practical purpose by doing work for the protection of man, and for the amelioration of his lot. Many sciences have branched off from religion, just as many have branched off from medicine; but religion as such, equally with medicine, has ever been animated and governed by the conviction that the knowledge which it possessed was held to be administered and applied as a means of blessing to mankind. This truth has at times been hid from the wise and prudent, but it was ever revealed even to babes in religion. It is the universal belief of heathenism that religion is at least profitable, and in this it is at one with universal Christendom, which has expressed its mind on the point in describing Christ as the Saviour, and His Gospel as a salvation.

¹ A good classification and discussion of the types of theory are given by F. Nitzsch, *Evangelische Dogmatik*, 1896.

It may also be observed that a religious crisis takes place whenever it is found that a religion does not accomplish the results which it was previously relied on to secure. When in a Chinese village the adoption of a new idol does not end the drought, or when in our western world an earthquake or a railway disaster is traced to forces which God does not seem to have in hand, it is a natural instinct of human nature to turn aside either to a new or to an unknowable God.

It is not asserted that it is an exhaustive account of the end of religion to say that in it man seeks protection and blessing for himself. In the parallel case of friendship, as Cicero pointed out, it cannot be affirmed that the governing motive is the consideration of the advantages to be derived from the formation of friendly ties. The motive is rather to be found in the affection felt for another, and in the sense of the duties which we owe to those whom we have come to love.¹ Similarly we may trace throughout the history of religion a sense of duty mingled with love which lays constraint upon men to render worship or whatever else is regarded as acceptable service. In the religions of the lower culture the altruistic motive is verifiable in certain classes of gifts and sacrifices to ancestral spirits; while in Christianity it is a common form of speech that religious acts are performed, apart from any self-regarding thought, for the glory of God. This complementary fact is well vouched for, and disposes of the charge that in religion man has merely thought of using God as an instrument for the safeguarding of his own interests. At the same time it is also undeniable that through religion man has never ceased to expect great blessings for

¹ *De Amicitia*, vii. viii.

himself and for his people. Can we state more precisely what he has looked for in religion, and by what means, and on what terms, he has hoped to secure its blessings?

II

At first sight it might appear impossible to frame a formula which will cover the numerous and widely varying conceptions that have been entertained as to the practical purpose which religion pursues. And yet amid all the diversity it is possible to trace a constant conviction of the religious mind. At every stage man has had an idea of well-being which comprehended his highest conceptions of the good, and he has looked on religion as the means by which he was to attain it, and to be secured in its possession. The function attributed to religion was, in brief, to procure for him, and to secure to him, the chief good of existence. The second element in the religious idea is that this good is to be realised through union and communion with a power conceived to be strong enough to accord the needed protection and help. The conception of this power—whether many or one, and of its nature and attributes—has exhibited the widest variations, but the general testimony of religious history has at least been unwavering in its postulate of a divine being that was able to control the world, and that was master of the course of events. The third constant element is that certain requirements are made, the fulfilment of which is the condition of enjoying communion with the divine being, and of thus obtaining the protection and the blessings which make up the sovereign good. In brief, there is a body of convictions which may be said to form the higher unity of religious history, and which include these three beliefs—that there is a chief

good for man which is attainable, that its attainment is possible through the help of a divine power, and that this help is granted on fulfilment of the terms that are agreeable to the divine will. Let us now proceed to consider how Christianity realises these essential elements of a religion, and also how in realising them it presupposes and operates with a scheme of ideas which contribute the essential materials of a Christian theology.¹

i. The conception of the blessings which are made available for man in the Christian religion rests upon the presupposition that the human lot is a conjunction of extraordinary dignity with extraordinary distress, and is contrasted with the idea of the chief good embodied in other religions by its spirituality and comprehensiveness.

History discloses an ascending scale of ideas as to the constituent elements of man's chief end which is reached and safeguarded by means of religion. On the lowest heathen plane man values himself as a being of the natural order—made only a little higher than the animals, and sometimes worshipping and devouring the animals as embodying or representing the highest power and wisdom. At this stage religion is chiefly directed to ensure the well-being of a tribe by winning material blessings—as favourable weather, increase of the flock, good luck in hunting, victory in battle, the preservation and recovery of health, and a numerous progeny of sons. The great religions of India mark a striking advance upon this stage, while they also exhibit the one-sidedness which is natural in the first assertion of a momentous truth. Man is known to belong to the realm of spirit, and to be akin to the principle which sustains, penetrates and environs the world of sense.

¹ The following exposition was somewhat closely reproduced in an address given at the World Missionary Conference, 1910.—*Reports*, vol. ix. p. 156 ff.

Material goods are despised as belonging to a realm of illusion, and peace is sought in a redemption which is wrought out within the individual soul. But the spiritual elevation of Brahminism and Buddhism is accompanied and marred by two grave defects. In their disparagement of the natural blessings and tasks of human life they do despite to the legitimate demands of human nature as well as to the rationality of the order of things. Above all, in so far as they lay at their foundation a pessimistic estimate of existence, and encourage the conception that the best to be looked for by the individual is to pass out of conscious existence by absorption in the Infinite, they involve the negation of the central idea of religious history—that life exists to be conserved, and to be filled out by religion with the greatest positive blessings.

The two religions which rank for Christian faith as specially revealed are founded on the same presupposition as to the dignity and spiritual distress of man, and they include the same elements of blessing, although with a difference of proportion and emphasis.

(1) In the preparatory stage of the Christian religion, represented by the religion of the Old Testament, we already find two presuppositions as to the nature and condition of man which prepare the way for the promise of a superlative salvation. The first is that man is a being of sovereign dignity, made in the image and bearing the likeness of the Highest.¹ As such he must be thought to be capable of, and destined to, the enjoyment of blessings that gather up every known and proved element of good, and which also include such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man. The second article of the preliminary doctrine was that the natural and

¹ Gen. i. 26-7.

existing condition of mankind is one of great spiritual misery and danger—that it lies under the dominion of the power of sin, which is the chiefest of the evils that darken the human lot, which is in a sense the only true evil, and which brings untold sorrows and menaces in its train.¹ A religion grappling with the problem from these premises could not but appear with the character of a great salvation; and in Christianity especially, which realises them with fresh depth and intensity,² the capital problem is conceived to be the disclosure of provisions for annulling the guilt and for breaking the power of sin. It may be added that the truths of the unique dignity and the spiritual distress of man, which underlie the whole Christian system, and to which the records of revelation bear unanimous and sustained testimony, are not bound up, save in the Pauline scheme of thought, with an account of the precise conditions under which man has reached the strange conjunction of his greatness and misery.

(2) The religious blessings are conceived alike in the Old and New Testaments in respect that they promise blessings both of the natural and of the spiritual order, and that they promise them both to the individual and to the race. There is, however, a marked difference of proportion; and the distinctive feature of Christianity is that, while comprehending the point of view of the Old Testament, it lays the main emphasis on the spiritual nature of the blessings and on their destination to individuals.

In the religion of Israel devout thinking was largely concerned with the nation, with the way of its deliverance from the power of its enemies, and with the conditions of its future security and well-being. It is true that the outlook of some sages and saints was in this

¹ Ps. li. 5; Is. liii. 6.

² Rom. i., ii., vii. 18 ff.

particular much wider. It is an exaggeration to say, as is sometimes said, that in the Old Testament only the nation with its kings and great men counted in the eyes of God. Those who composed the patriarchal narratives and the later histories knew that God takes to do even with inconsiderable persons and with minute concerns; and in many of the Psalms it is clearly the voice of personal piety, and not merely of a national consciousness, which makes its contrite and plaintive appeal to God. But it is still true that there is a certain timidity about claiming for the individual any considerable immediate gift of divine blessing. The general conception is that God deals with the nation in the mass, and that individuals indirectly become partakers of the blessing when the nation as a whole enjoys the divine favour. This view is confirmed by the observation that although the prophets taught a doctrine of God which fully justified belief in individual immortality, it was only at a late date that the inference was drawn and became a recognised article of the Jewish creed. Again, there are very unworldly elements included in the hope of national blessings. The prophetic hope gave a prominent place to blessings which were spiritual and which involved at least as much of responsibility as of privilege—a purified worship, immediate knowledge of God, the enforcement of His law, the mission of Israel to lead the nations to the worship and service of the true God. At the same time it is undeniable that the prophetic vision of the Kingdom of God was very largely of a political cast, with the programme and promise of an ideal political and social order, and of a large development of material power and prosperity.

In the Christian religion the promised blessings are

pre-eminently individual in destination and spiritual in character, while yet they take account of the other aspirations which have been mirrored in religious history. The individual soul, to begin with, is estimated as of immeasurable value, and is represented as an immediate object of the divine love and care.¹ Men are not dealt with in the mass, but the Gospel makes its way by an appeal to individuals, and through their personal acceptance of the offered boons. The spiritual blessings, while described in various aspects, are resolvable into three, which are of rich content and far-reaching result. The first and fundamental benefit is a relationship to God similar to the relation of father and son, involving on the side of God love, help and protection, on the side of man trust and obedience, and which is carried on in the form of personal communion.² In view of the universal fact of sin, the paternal relationship of God comes to expression in the form of the forgiveness of sin, the primary significance of which is that God admits the sinner to the same privileges of filial communion and blessing which he would have enjoyed had he escaped the pollution of sin, but which also involves the remission of all penalties entailed by sinful acts and habitudes.³ The second of the individual benefits—separable in thought, though not in experience, from the first—is the formation of a character which gradually attains to the height of moral perfection. Two stages are recognised in this spiritual process—an initial stage of conversion or regeneration, and a stage of growth and upbuilding described as sanctification.⁴ In Christ there came into the world the pattern of a higher and holier humanity, and the New Testament gives

¹ Matt. xvi. 26.

² Matt. vii. 7 ff.

³ Matt. vi. 14; Rom. v. 1 ff.

⁴ John iii. 3; Eph. iv. 13.

expression to the conviction, which is uttered wherever the Christian religion is met with in purity and power, that from Him also proceeds a Spirit of power which can effect a new creation, and enable man, in spite of clinging weakness and repeated backslidings, to advance surely towards the spiritual goal. The third of the boons is the gift of eternal life,¹ which is conceived as a life both of divine quality and of endless duration. Specially noticeable is the spirituality of the rendering of the idea of immortality—the blessedness of heaven being made mainly to consist in the vision of God and the fellowship of Christ, and in the attainment of that perfection of which here we have an earnest in our best hours of aspiration and endeavour.

To all this there is an important supplement. There is, to begin with, an element of natural blessings which is included in the Christian conception of the sovereign good which is realised in religion. Christ taught His disciples to trust God for food and raiment, and for providential protection amid the dangers and privations of the world.² In particular, there can be no doubt that part of the impression which the evangelists designed to make was that the healing of those that were sick in body and mind was an important part of the mission of the Saviour, and that it would be perpetuated and even extended in the labours of the later generations. There is also to be considered the pregnant Pauline saying, 'All things are yours.'³ And again, Christianity had the design to bless the race as a whole. It includes the promise, not only of individual salvation, but of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. According to a

¹ John v. 24; 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18; 1 Peter i. 3, 4.

² Matt. vi. 25 ff.

³ 1 Cor. iii. 21.

recent reading of the Gospels, indeed, it is held that the Kingdom of God which Jesus contemplated was detached from the soil of this world, and from organic connection with the historical development of the race, and was relegated to a heavenly sphere, where it would come into existence after the cataclysmic ruin of our earth. This interpretation, however, is only reached by ignoring a considerable body of the sayings and parables of Jesus which have an excellent title to be regarded as authentic; while in the apostolic writings room is certainly made for the conception of a development of the Kingdom within the world, both by the Pauline references to the Roman Empire,¹ and by the principles of the theology of the Fourth Gospel. In any case we are justified by the implications of Christian faith, and also by the providential commentary which has been added in the later history of the world, in accepting the view that the Kingdom of God promised in the Gospel was designed to interpenetrate the nations, to knit them together in the bonds of faith and love, and to serve at once as the gathering-ground and the inspiration of all that is known as truth and righteousness.

ii. The Christian religion contains a doctrine of God which perfectly meets the demand of the religious instinct of mankind. By the idea of God in the perfect religion two conditions must be fulfilled—one that He has the power, and the other that He has the will, to respond to man's cry for protection and blessing. The defect of polytheistic and dualistic systems is that there is no assurance that the being whom man worships has the power to help, as He may be too weak to cope with the forces of the world, or may be prevented by another divine being who is

¹ Rom. xiii. 4; 2 Thess. ii. 1-10.

stronger than He. Pantheistic systems, which rob God of personality, involve the desolating consequence that He has neither the personal knowledge nor the loving will which will guide for our good His infinite power. In the Christian religion the necessary elements are asserted with the note of absolute assurance. On the one hand He is greater than the world, for He is its creator and governor; mightier than sin, for it exists only by His permission; stronger than death, for it is His ordinance; and as He is infinite in wisdom as well as in power, He is able to deliver us from all threatening evil, and to bestow upon us all true and lasting good.¹ On the other hand He, while infinite God, regards us with more than the tenderness and pity seen in a human heart which is filled with holy love.

The Christian doctrine of God combines the idea of the infinite might and wisdom which are suggested by the immensity and the order of creation, and by the utmost sweep of human reason, with that of the manifestation of perfect holiness and self-sacrificing love which was given in the person and life of Jesus Christ.² Manifestly there can be no higher reach of the idea of God than that which ensures that the infinite wisdom and power are wielded by the Father who was interpreted by Christ, who feels as He felt towards men in their sins and sorrows, cherishes the same saving purpose which He pursued towards individual men and women, and seeks by the same individualising love and care to lead them, to teach them, and to perfect them. To this has to be added that the same God who was incarnate in Christ is conceived as pouring into the souls of those who believe His own divine life³—evidencing His power by

¹ Rom. viii. 35 ff.

² Rom. i. 20; John i. 18.

³ Rom. viii. 9; Gal. v. 22 ff.

making all things new, His wisdom by making even the evil to work for good to those that love Him, His holiness by the nature of the end which He pursues, His love by the greatness and the unmerited quality of His gifts.

It would thus appear that the irreducible minimum of theology which is needed to enable the Christian religion to do its work must be cast in Trinitarian form. It cannot include less than that God, infinite in might and wisdom, was uniquely revealed in Christ, and that He gives to believers to possess, in their inward experience, 'His very self and essence all divine.' But it was felt by the primitive Church that fuller and more precise definitions were needed to make the Christian salvation effective, and as we shall see it was this conviction that carried forward the development of the catholic doctrine of the Trinity.

iii. The third element of religion, we have seen; is what may be called its saving theory—the account that it gives of the conditions on which man procures the friendship and protection of God. The way is paved for the Christian theory by the two articles of its doctrine of man. His dignity, with which he is clothed as made in the image of God, shows him to be capable of salvation and communion with God. His distress which follows from the dominion of sin proves his need of salvation. And the fundamental religious problem is, On what terms can such a being be admitted to the favour of God?

The question is one to which every religion essays some sort of answer, and we may set forth the Christian answer by way of contrast to the two other theories which have made upon religious history their deep impression. The first is the theory of ceremonialism,

which has been the soul of many religions, and has exercised an influence upon all. It was the characteristic pagan theory, which moved the Old Testament prophets to indignation or scorn, and it has constantly reappeared in decadent periods of the Christian Church. Its underlying idea is that the way to please the divine being, and to have Him on our side, is to render Him honour, whether by making Him gifts, wearing a badge of some kind, or engaging in acts of external homage. The popularity of this conception is due to the fact that the universal religious consciousness recognises that God requires something at our hand, and ceremonialism points out the easiest possible way. The second theory was that which St. Paul declared to be embodied in the legal dispensation of the Old Testament, and which has been revived in the Christian Church at various times in the view that the essence of true religion is morality. It rests on the conception that God is our master, who has imposed upon us a code of moral laws, and entrusted us with various tasks, and that the way to His favour is to be found in obedience to His commandments, and in fidelity to our appointed vocation.¹ And certainly to say that God treats us and will treat us exactly as we have deserved is no unworthy conception of God and of His relation to man. It is moreover an equitable, common-sense doctrine, and seemingly effectual as appealing to enlightened self-interest, and putting a useful premium upon purity and righteousness of life. Among other objections to it are these—that in view of the deep-rooted and universal fact of sin no man can possibly attain to the sense of satisfying God, and that in the case of those who have sold themselves to sin for a long season, the outlook must

¹ Gal. iii. 10-12.

Himself. At two stages of Christian experience this has its confirmation. One is the sudden conversion, with its classic witness in St. Paul, who declared that, when he was a stiff-necked rebel and blasphemer, God arrested his course, revealed His Son in him, and thenceforward enabled him to do all things through Christ strengthening him. In the average Christian experience, when it has not supervened on a phase of infidelity or shame, divine grace is usually realised as an influence which has throughout enveloped and fertilised the inner life, and which if intermittent in its action has also been the gift of a faithful God. The chiefest certainty is that, in answer to prayer, a grace is given which brings light in perplexity, comfort in sorrow, and strength to deal with life's temptations and tasks.

But the ethical system of Christianity has a natural as well as a supernatural side. It creates motives of a kind that make a powerful appeal to the will, and which effectually dispose it to seek after perfection. These motives have had a varying degree of emphasis placed upon them at different times.

1. It has frequently been held that the motive-power of Christianity springs chiefly from its emphatic proclamation of the doctrine of future retribution. The mediæval Church wielded an extraordinary influence over its members by reason of the lurid colours in which it depicted the torments of Purgatory, and because of its conditional undertaking to abridge their duration and mitigate their severity. The apologists of the eighteenth century, who laboured to establish the superiority of Christianity to the so-called religion of nature, rested a large part of their case upon the contention that Christianity had converted into a certainty what was previously only a surmise—viz.

the survival of death by the soul, and the existence of a future dispensation of rewards and punishments. In recent times less reliance has been placed on this as a source of persuasion, and for several reasons. Apart from the note of uncertainty which has crept into the eschatological teaching of the Church, there has been a growing feeling that the appeal of enlightened self-interest is not in harmony with the genius of the Christian religion, and is rather a survival from the Old Testament conception of the relations of God and man. Further, it is doubtful if the most realising sense of heaven and hell ever went very far in the way of inspiring noble character and stimulating to noble action. The effects of the belief were negative rather than positive: like criminal legislation and the machinery of the police courts, it might so far serve to restrain wickedness, but it could not set the soul aflame with the Christian enthusiasm. St. Paul, no doubt, relied on the terror of the Lord wherewith to persuade men,¹ and besought them to flee from the wrath to come; but it was matter of experience that, though they might enter on the Christian life because of a great fear, they would advance in it because of a greater love.²

2. According to another view the predominant motive supplied by the Christian system to noble living is, not hope or fear, but gratitude. This was certainly prominent in the teaching of Jesus. In the parable of the Unmerciful Servant, it is supposed that the gratitude of a debtor will be proportional to the magnitude of the debt which has been remitted; and the argument is that as the magnitude of the sinner's debt is immeasurable, so should be his response in the form of

¹ 2 Cor. v. 11.

² 1 John iv. 18.

obedience to the forgiving mercy of God.¹ Similarly, St. Paul, after enumerating the mercies bestowed by God in His grace, builds thereon a plea for presenting our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God—our reasonable service.²

3. For our own generation the motive power of Christianity seems largely to lie in the spell that is cast by the person and character of Jesus Christ. It seems true that the vision of heaven and hell is less operative than of old in ordinary thinking, and it is probable that the sense of guilt has become less general, in any case less overwhelming, and that therefore there is a lessened appreciation of the boon of forgiveness. But what is certain is that the sense of the degradation of sin was never stronger, nor the desire to escape from its power. And at this point the moral aspiration finds succour and strengthening in the conception of Christ as Master and Leader in the life of noble endeavour. There is that within us all which finds its desire voiced in the demand of Israel in the days of old, for a King who should rule over us. The goodness of a cause is not enough; it needs a leader who will stand to its adherents and to the world as its symbol and champion, and who, by firing the imagination, engaging the affections, and arousing enthusiasm will generate the power that will carry it onward to victory. And in the fact that Christianity not only proposes a sublime moral ideal, but that the ideal is embodied in the person and life of Jesus Christ, who draws human souls to Himself by the matchless beauty of His character, and who inspires them with sentiments of adoration and love and trust—in this we find a deep and abiding source of the power which builds up

¹ Matt. xviii. 23 ff.

² Rom. xii. 1.

Christian character, and which manifests itself in a purity, a righteousness and a beneficence in accordance with the mind of Christ.¹

III

The result of this analysis is in the first place to make clear that the Christian religion embodies and implies a number of most important affirmations of a theoretical or doctrinal kind. There are versions of Christianity current in the world and in the schools which represent it as being in its essence a merely ethical or æsthetic quantity, which makes no real demand upon the intellect for understanding and assent. As a fact it is inseparably interwoven with beliefs which are of wide range and of transcendent importance, and which come into irreconcilable conflict with other ideas that, in the name of speculative wisdom, have claimed to dominate the work of the human mind. It presupposes that the natural condition of man is one of sin and misery, due to alienation from God; and it thus comes into collision with the superficial optimism which only perceives the divinity of man, and ignores the disposition of the animal and the rebel. It teaches that there is a chief good to which man is

¹ We may gather up what has been said into a definition of the kind which has often been attempted in modern theology. Christianity is a religion sharing with others the ethical, monotheistic and universal notes, and pre-eminently distinguished by the evangelical note, in which (1) there are designed to mankind the individual blessings of forgiveness, perfection and eternal life, and the racial blessing of the Kingdom of God; (2) which guarantees these blessings by a doctrine of God as Almighty, All-wise and All-good, who has been revealed in the person and work of Christ and in the Holy Ghost as the principle of the spiritual life of His Church; and (3) which conveys the promised blessings on the condition of faith in the mercy of God in Christ, and achieves moral perfection through the constraining and enabling power of divine grace, and of the motives of gratitude and love.

destined, that it includes all which has been revealed in human character of moral nobility, and all which has been known in human experience of well-being and joy, and that once attained it will be held as an abiding possession, by the help of God, in defiance of change and death. In so teaching, it clashes with the pessimistic estimate of life which has governed the thought of ancient and modern philosophical schools, and which also underlies some of the great religions of the world. It is vitally implied in it that God is a Personal Being—not an impersonal Spirit, but a self-conscious and ethical Being: and if this be true, it is not only the most momentous truth which has come within human ken, but it convicts some of the most imposing structures of human thought of having a falsehood for their foundation or their core. It further construes God in terms of Jesus Christ—asserting what, if true, must be the most momentous fact of history—that God was revealed in the fulness of His moral perfections in One who was found in fashion as a man. It also stands for a belief which, if true, must constitute the most important fact known to us about human nature, that during the bygone centuries, and even now, the very life of God has been pouring into the lives of men, and flooding receptive souls with a light and a power that are a preparation for, and an earnest of, immortality. And finally, it is obviously a truth of the most stupendous importance which is conveyed to us in the Christian religion, and which at all events cannot be detached from it without reducing the system to comparative emptiness and futility, that we are acquainted with the conditions upon which sinful man can enter into the divine alliance in which he is delivered from all evil and secured in the enduring possession of the highest blessings. There is a real dis-

inction between religion as a mode of life and theology as a scheme of thought, but it is abundantly clear that the Christian religion not only involves, but lives by taking for granted, a somewhat elaborate theology.

It is to be observed next that the ideas referred to, which make up the Christian view of God and of human life and destiny, have possessed in virtue of their religious setting a character of guaranteed knowledge. In view of what was said of the end or function of religion as seeking to accomplish a practical result, the most relevant question to raise as to the Christian religion must be, Does it do the work which it professes, and confer the blessings which it promises? It holds of religion, as of a course of medical treatment, that the really apposite inquiry is, Did it prove an effective remedy for the malady? Upon this point the best judges are those who, accepting the Christian diagnosis of the spiritual conditions of man, have made trial of the remedy. And this, at least, is not open to doubt, that the undertaking of Christianity to protect and bless by the communication of the highest blessings has been largely made good. There are, of course, promises that remain in a realm of hope—those which remain for fulfilment in a future world—but it is matter of observation that, when put to the proof, it has been found to give an assurance of reconciliation to God, and to bring into experience a spiritual health and a moral energy of a unique kind. And if this religion, so far as it could be tested, has brought healing and health, the only natural inference is that it rests upon clear facts of the universe and operates through the application of truths. No more than the patient, suffering from ills of the body and experiencing a cure could be a medical sceptic, could those who attained to union with God and newness of

life through the Gospel, doubt that the diagnosis was just, and that the ideas on which the treatment was based were in accordance with reality.

It is further important to notice that there is a much larger consensus of opinion than is commonly supposed in the great divisions of the Christian Church as to the essence of Christianity. The organised Christian society, as distinguished from individual thinking, has never lost its grasp of the truth that Christianity is a religion—not a mere system of ideas, or a system of moral instruction, or a method of refined æsthetic enjoyment—and that as the perfect religion it is the vehicle of a great deliverance and of a splendid and enduring inheritance. As to the blessings of the Christian salvation, there is a far larger measure of agreement than of disagreement in the testimony of the various sections of the Christian Church. On the all-important question for religion—the idea of God, and the attributes and works of God—there is absolute agreement; while the Trinitarian formulation of the doctrines of God, as framed by the patristic Church, is the common good of the Creeds and Confessions, and when challenged by schools of modern Protestant thought, it has commonly been in the interest, not of a Unitarianism, but of a Sabellian type of Trinitarian thought. On the question of the theory of salvation there is indeed sharp collision, especially between Roman Catholic and Protestant thought; but both are agreed that the theory must embody the idea of grace and issue in morality; and the controversy mainly turns on the question as to which of the alternative theories does most justice to the idea of grace, and most adequately safeguards the interests of the moral life.