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THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF LIFE.¹

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I.

WHAT is essential to the Christian doctrine of life can be brought to mind more readily than in any other way known to me, by a very brief contrast between some features of the Christian religion and the corresponding features of the greatest historical rival of Christianity, namely, Buddhism.

Both Christianity and Buddhism are products of long and vast processes of religious evolution. Both of them originally appealed to mature and complex civilisations. Yet both of them intended that their appeal should, in the end, be made to all mankind. Both of them deliberately transcended the limits of caste, of rank, of nation, and of race, and undertook to carry their message to all sorts and conditions of men. Both showed, as missionary religions, an immense power of assimilation. Both freely used, so far as they could do so without sacrificing essentials, the religious ideas which they found present in the various lands that their missionaries reached; and, like Paul, both of them became all things to all men, if haply they might thereby win any man to the faith that they thought to be saving.

Both were redemptive religions, which condemned both the mind and the sins of the natural man; and taught salvation

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through a transformation of the innermost being of this natural man. Each developed a great variety of sects and of forms of social life. Each made use of religious orders as a means of separating those who, while desirous of salvation, were able, in their present existence, to live only in a close contact with the world, from those who could aim directly at the highest grades of perfection.

Each of these two religions attempts, by a frank exposure of the centrally important facts of our life, to banish the illusions which bind us fast to earth, and, as they both maintain, to destruction. Each is therefore, in its own way, austere and unsparing in the speech which it addresses to the natural man. Each shuns mere popularity, and is transparently honest in its estimate of the vanities of the world. Each aims at the heart of our defects. Each says: "What makes your life a wreck and a failure, is that your very essence as a human self is, in advance of the saving process, a necessary source of woe and wrong." Each of the two religions insists upon the inmost life of the heart as the source whence proceeds all that is evil, and whence may proceed all that can become good about man. Each rejects the merely outward show of our deeds as a means for determining whether we are righteous or not. Each demands absolute personal sincerity from its followers. Each blesses the pure in heart, requires strict self-control, and makes an inner concentration of mind upon the good end an essential feature of piety. Each preaches kindness toward all mankind, including our enemies. Each condemns cruelty and malice. Each, in fact, permits no human enmities. Each is a religion that exalts those who, in the world's eyes, are weak.

And not only in these more distinctly ethical ideas do the two religions agree. Each of them has its own world of spiritual exaltation; its realm that is not only moral, but deeply religious; its home land of deliverance, where the soul that is saved finds rest in communion with a peace that the world can neither give nor take away.

In these very important respects, therefore, the distinctly religious features of the two faiths are intimately related. In the case of each of the two religions, but in the case of Buddhism rather more than in the case of Christianity, it is possible, and in fact just and requisite, to distinguish its ideas of the nature and the means and the realm of salvation from the metaphysical opinions which a more or less learned exposition of the doctrines of the faith almost inevitably uses.

Buddhism has its ideas of the moral order of the universe, of Nirvana, and of the Buddhas—the beings who attain supreme enlightenment—and who thereby save the world. These ideas invite metaphysical speculation, and furnish motives that tended towards the building up of a theology, and that, in the end, produced a theology. But each of these religious ideas, in the case of Buddhism, can be defined without defining either a metaphysical or a theological system. The original teaching of Gotama Buddha rejected all metaphysical speculation, and insisted solely upon the ethical foundations of the doctrine, and upon those distinctly religious, but non-metaphysical, views of salvation, and of the higher spiritual life, which Buddha preferred to depict in parables, rather than to render needlessly abstruse through discussions such as, in his opinion, did not tend to edification.

The common ethical and religious features of Christianity and Buddhism are thus both many and impressive. Some of the greatest life questions are faced by both religions, and, in the respects which I have now pointed out, are answered in substantially the same way. Moreover, in several of the ethical and religious ideas in which these two religions agree with each other, they do not closely agree with any other religion. So far as I can venture to judge, no other religions that have attempted to appeal to the deepest and most universal interests of mankind have been so free as both Buddhism and Christianity are from bondage to national, to racial, and to worldly antagonisms and prejudices. No others have made so central, as they both have done, the conception of a personal saviour of

mankind, whose dignity depends both upon the moral merits of his teaching, and of his life, and upon the religious significance of the spiritual level to which he led the way, thus moulding both the thoughts and the lives of his followers.

When we add to all these parallels the fact that each of these religions had an historical founder, whose life later came to be the object of many legendary reports; and that the legends, in each case, were so framed by the religious imagination of the early followers of the faith in question that they include a symbolism, whereby a portion of the true meaning of each faith is expressed in the stories about the founder—when, I say, we add this fact to all the others, we get some hint of the very genuine community of spirit which belongs to these two great world religions. That the imaginative Buddha legends show an unrestrained and often helpless disposition to adorn the religion with an edifying body of miraculous tales, while the relative self-restraint of the early Christian Church in holding in check, as much as it did, its vigorous myth-making tendencies, remains, in many respects, a permanent marvel — all this constitutes a very notable contrast between the two faiths. But this is, in part, a contrast between the two civilisations (so remote, in many ways, from each other) whose development lay at the basis of the two religions. Buddhism was more surrounded by an atmosphere of magic than the Christian Church ever was. Yet in those essentials which I have just reported, the agreements and analogies between the two faiths are both close and momentous. So far the two seem to be genuine co-workers in the same vast task of the ages—the salvation of man, through the transformation of a natural life into a life whose dwelling-place lies beyond human woe and sin.

II.

Wherein, then, lies the most essential contrast between the Christian and the Buddhistic doctrines of life? This contrast, when it once comes to light, is, to my mind, far

more impressive than are the agreements. It has often been discussed.

The most familiar way of stating this contrast is to say that Buddhism is pessimistic, while Christianity is a religion of hope. This is, in part, true; but it is not very enlightening, unless the spirit of Christian hopefulness is more fully explained, and unless the Buddhistic pessimism is quite justly appreciated. Both religions hope for salvation; and, for each of them, salvation means an overcoming of the world. Each deplores humanity as it is, and means to transform us. The contrast is, therefore, hardly to be defined as a contrast of hope with despair. For each undertakes to overcome the world, and assures us that we can be transformed. And each regards our natural state as one worthy of despair, were not the way of salvation opened.

Nearer to the whole truth seems to be that frequently repeated statement of the matter which insists upon the creative attitude which Christianity requires the will to take, as against the quietism of Buddha. Buddhism has as its goal a certain passionless contemplation, in which the distinction of one individual from another is of no import, so that the self, as *this* self, vanishes. Christianity conceives love as positively active, and dwells upon a hope of immortality.

Nevertheless, the concept of beatitude, as the Christian thought of the Middle Ages formulated that concept, sets the contemplative life nearer the goal than the active life, even when the active life is one of charity. Hence, in their more mystical moods and expressions, the two religions are, again, much more largely in agreement than our own very natural partisanship, determined by our Christian traditions, tends to make us admit.

It is also true that Buddhism aims at the extinction of the individual self; while Christianity assigns to the human individual an infinite worth. And this is indeed a vastly important difference. Yet this very importance remains unexplained and a mere formula until you see what it is about

the human individual which constitutes, for the Christian view, his importance. One may answer, in simple terms, that, according to the teachings of Jesus, the individual is infinitely important, because the Father loves him; while Buddhism, in its original Southern form, has nothing to offer that is equivalent to this love of God for the individual man. Yet the further question has to be faced: Why and for what end does the God of Christianity love the individual? And it is here, at last, that you come face to face with the deepest contrast.

For God's love towards the individual is, from the Christian point of view, a love for one whose destiny it is to be a *member of the Kingdom of Heaven*. The Kingdom of Heaven is essentially a Community. And the idea of this community, as the Founder in parables prophetically taught that idea, developed into the conception which the Christian Church formed of its own mission; and through all changes, and despite all human failures, this conception remains a sovereign treasure of the Christian world.

III.

The Individual *and* the Community: this, if I may so express a perfectly human antithesis in religious and deliberately symbolic speech—this pair of terms and of ideas is, so to speak, the *sacred pair*, to whose exposition and to whose practical application the whole Christian doctrine of life is due. This pair it is which, in the first place, enables Christianity to tell the individual why, in his natural isolation and narrowness, he is essentially defective, is inevitably a failure, is doomed, and must be transformed. This, if you choose, is the root and core of man's original sin, namely, the very form of his being as a morally detached individual. This is the bondage of his flesh; this is the soul of his corruption; this is his alienation from true life; this fact, namely, that by nature, as a social animal, he is an individual who, though fast bound by ties which no man can rend to the community wherein he

chances to be born or trained, nevertheless, *until* the true love of a community, and *until* the beloved community itself appear in his life, is a stranger in his father's house—a hater of his only chance of salvation—a worldling, and a worker of evil deeds—a miserable source of misery. *This* is why, for Christianity, the salvation of man means the destruction of his natural self—the sacrifice of what his flesh holds dearest—the utter transformation of the primal core of the social self. I say: It is the merely natural relation of the individual to the community which, for Christianity, explains all this. Here are the two levels of human existence. The individual, born on his own level, is naturally doomed to hatred for what belongs to the other level. Yet there on that higher level his only salvation awaits him.

Buddhism fully knows, and truly teaches, where the root of bitterness is to be found—not in the outward deed, but in the inmost heart of the individual self. But what, so far as I know, the original Southern Buddhism *never* clearly made a positive part of its own plan of the salvation of mankind, is a transformation of the self, *not* through the *mere* destruction of the narrow and corrupt flesh which alienates it from the true life, *but by the simple and yet intensely positive DEVOTION of the self to a new task—to its creative office as a loyal member of a beloved community.* Early Buddhism never, so far as I know, clearly defined its ideal of the beloved community in terms which make that community, viewed simply as an ideal, one conscious unity of the business, of the eager hopes, and of the patiently ingenious and endlessly constructive love, of all mankind. The ideal Christian community is one in which compassion is a mere incident in the realisation of the new life, not only of brotherly concord, but also of an interminably positive creation of new social values, all of which exist for many souls in one spirit. The ideal Christian community of all mankind is to be as intimate in its enthusiasm of service as the daily life of a Pauline church was intended by the apostle to be, and as novel in its inventions of new arts of common living as the

gifts of the spirit in the early Christian Church were believed to be novel. The ideal Christian community is to be the community of all mankind, as completely united in its inner life as one conscious self could conceivably become, and as destructive of the natural hostilities and of the narrow passions which estrange individual men, as it is skilful in winning from the infinite realm of bare possibilities concrete arts of control over nature and of joy in its own riches of grace. This free and faithful community of all mankind, wherein the individuals should indeed die to their own natural life, but should also enjoy a newness of positive life—this community never became, so far as I can learn, a conscious ideal for early Buddhism.

How far the Japanese religion of loyalty in its later forms of modified Buddhism, or in its other phases, has approached, or will hereafter approach, to an independent and original definition of the positive and constructive ideal of a conscious and universal human community which is here in question, I am quite unable to judge. The Japanese Buddhist sects well know what salvation by grace is. They well conceive and accept the doctrine of the incarnation of the divine being in a supernatural individual man; and are certainly universal in their general conceptions of some sort of human brotherhood. And they have reached these religious ideas quite apart from any dependence upon Christianity.

But what I miss in their religious conceptions, so far as I have read reports of these conceptions, is such a solution of the problem of human life in terms of loyalty, as *at once* demands the raising of the human self from the level of its natural narrowness, to the level of a complete and conscious personal membership in a beloved community, and *at the same time* defines the ideal community to whose level and in whose spirit we are to live, as the community of all mankind, and as one endlessly creative and conscious human spirit, whose life is to be lived upon its own level, and of whose dominion there is to be, in ideal and in meaning, no end.

The familiar article in the Christian creed which expresses

this perfectly concrete and practical and also religious ideal, and expresses it in terms whose ethical and whose religious value you can test by personal and social experience, whatever may be your own definition of the dogmas of the Church, and whatever your metaphysical opinions may be, and whatever form of the visible or invisible Church chances best to seem to meet this your interpretation—the familiar article of the Christian creed which expresses, I say, this ideal, just as an ideal, uses the words: “I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints.” One can understand and accept the spirit of this article of the creed, without accepting the dogmas or the obedience or the practice of any one form of the visible Christian Church. By this, Christianity has furnished mankind with its most impressive and inspiring vision of the homeland of the spirit.

IV.

Ethically speaking, the counsels which this Christian idea of the community implies, include all the familiar maxims of the Sermon on the Mount, and all the lessons of the parables; but tend to give to them such sorts of development as the ideals of the early Church, in Pauline and post-Pauline times, gradually gave to them. Always the difference between the two levels of our human existence must be borne in mind, if the interpretation of Christian love is to become as concrete as Paul made it in his epistles, and as concrete as later ages have attempted to keep it, even while developing its meaning.

You love your neighbour, first, because God loves him. Yes, but how and why does God love him? Because God loves the Kingdom of Heaven; and the Kingdom of Heaven is a perfectly live unity of individual men joined in one divine chorus—an unity of men who, *except* through their attachment to this life which exists on the level of the holy community of the Kingdom of Heaven, would be miserable breeders of woe, and would be lost souls. Let your love for

them be a love for your fellow-members in this Kingdom of Heaven.

Yes, but *this* neighbour is your enemy ; or he belongs to the wrong tribe or cast or sect. Do not consider these unhappy facts as having any bearing on your love for him. For the ethical side of the doctrine of life concerns not what you *find*, but what you are to *create*. Now God means this man to become a member of the community which constitutes the Kingdom of Heaven ; and God loves this man accordingly. View him, then, as the soldier views the comrade who serves the same flag with himself, and who dies for the same cause. In the Kingdom you, and your enemy, and yonder stranger, are one. For the Kingdom is the community of God's beloved.

As for the way in which you are to love, make that way of loving, to your own mind, more alive by recalling the meaning of your own dearest friendships. Think of the *closest* unity of human souls that you know. Then conceive of the Kingdom in terms of such love. When friends really join hands and hearts and lives, it is not the mere collection of sundered organisms and of divided feelings and will that these friends view as their life. Their life, as friends, is the unity which, while above their own level, wins them to itself and gives them meaning. This unity is the vine. They are the branches.

Now of such unity is the Kingdom of Heaven. See, then, in every man the branch of such a vine—the outflowing of such a purpose—the beloved of such a spirit, the incarnation of such a divine concern for many in one. And then your Christian love will be much more than mere pity, will be greater than any amiable sympathy with the longings of those poor creatures of flesh could, of itself, become. Your love will then become the Charity that never faileth. For its object is the beloved community, and the individual as, ideally, a member of that community.

Is such a regard for individuals too impersonal to meet the spirit of the parables ? No, it does not destroy, it fulfils, as

the early Christian Church, in ideal, fulfilled the spirit of the parables. Paul spoke thus, and thereby made Christian love more rather than less personal.

If by person you merely mean the morally detached individual man, then the community, the Kingdom of Heaven, is indeed superpersonal. If, by person, you mean a live unity of knowledge and of will, of love and of deed, then the community of the Kingdom of Heaven is a person on a higher level than is the level of any human individuals, and the Kingdom of Heaven is at once within you, and above you, a human life, and yet a life whose tabernacles are built upon a Mount of Transfiguration.

Reconsider familiar parables in the light of such an interpretation—an interpretation as old and familiar as it is persistently ignored or misunderstood. That, I insist, is a useful way of restating the Christian moral doctrine of life.

Over what does the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son rejoice? Over the mere delight that his son's presence now gives him, and over the feasting and the merriment that his own forgiving power supplies to the repentant outcast? No, the father has won again, not merely his son as a hungry creature who can repent and be fed. The father has won again the unbroken community of his family. It is the father's house that rejoices. It is this community which makes merry; and the father is, for the moment, the incarnation of the spirit of this community.

Why is there more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just persons? *Why* is the lost sheep sought in the wilderness? Because the individual soul has its infinite meaning in and through the unity of the Kingdom. The one lost sheep, found again—or the one repentant sinner—symbolises the restoration of the unity of this community, as the keystone stands for the sense of the whole arch, as the flag symbolises the country.

And *why*, in the parable of the judgment, does the Judge of all the earth identify himself with "the least of these my

brethren"—with the stranger, with the sick, with the captive? Because the Judge of all the earth is explicitly the spirit of the universal community, who speaks in the name of all who are one in the light and in the life of the Kingdom of Heaven.

V.

These things remind us how ill those interpret the teachings of the Master who see in them a merely amiable fondness for what any morally detached individual happens to love or to suffer or seem. It is the ideal oneness of the life of the Kingdom of Heaven which glorifies and renders significant every human individual who loves the Kingdom, or whom God views as such a lover. And because Paul had before him the life of the churches, while the Master left the Kingdom of Heaven for the future to reveal, Paul's account of Christian morals is an enrichment, and a further fulfilment of what the parables began to tell, and left to the coming of the Kingdom to make manifest.

In suchwise, then, are the familiar precepts to be interpreted, if the Christian doctrine of the moral life is to be what it was intended to be—not a body of maxims and of illustrations, but a living and growing expression of the life-spirit of Christianity.

For the doctrine, if thus interpreted, points you not only backwards to the reported words of the Master, but endlessly forwards into the region where humanity, as it continues through the coming ages, must, with an unwearied patience, labour and experiment, and invent and create. The true moral code of Christianity has always been, and will remain, fluent as well as decisive. Only so could it express the Master's true spirit. It therefore must not view either the parables or the sayings as a storehouse of maxims, or even as a treasury of individual examples and of personal expressions of the Master's mind; expressions such that these maxims, these examples, and these personal sayings of the Master can never be surpassed in their ethical teachings. The doctrine

of the sayings and of the parables actually cries out for reinterpretation, for the creation of a novel life. That seems to me precisely what the Founder himself intended. The early apostolic Churches fulfilled the Master's teaching by surpassing it, and were filled with the spirit of their Master just because they did so. This, to my mind, is a central lesson of the early development of Christianity.

All morality, namely, is, from this point of view, to be judged by the standards of the beloved community of the ideal Kingdom of Heaven. Concretely stated, this means that you are to test every course of action *not* by the question: What can we find in the parables or in the Sermon on the Mount which seems to us more or less directly to bear upon this special matter? The central doctrine of the Master was: "So act that the Kingdom of Heaven may come." This means: So act as to help, however you can, and whenever you can, towards making mankind one loving brotherhood, whose love is not a mere affection for morally detached individuals, but a love of the unity of its own life upon its own divine level, and a love of individuals in so far as they can be raised to communion with the spiritual community itself.

VI.

Now if we speak in purely human, and still postpone any speaking in metaphysical, terms, the community of all mankind is an ideal. Just now, just in this year or on this day, there exists no human community that is adequately conscious of its own unity, adequately creative of what it ought to create, adequately representative, on its own level, of the real and human communion of the spirit. Our best communities of to-day either take account of caste or of nation or of race—as all the political communities do—or else, when deliberately aiming at universality and at religious unity, they exclude one another; and are therefore not, in an ideal sense and degree, beloved communities. Two things, if no other, stand between even the best of them, as they are—between them, I

say, and the attainment of the goal of the truly beloved and the universal human community.

The one thing is their sectarian character—excluding, as they do, the one the other. The other thing is their official organisation, which cultivates in each of the more highly developed communities of this type, a respect for the law at precisely the expense of that which Paul experienced as the result of the legal aspect of the Judaism in which he was trained.

No, the universal and beloved community is still hidden from our imperfect human view, and will remain so, how long we know not.

Nevertheless, the principle of principles in all Christian morals remains this: “Since you cannot *find* the universal and beloved community, *create* it.” And this again, applied to the concrete art of living, means: Do whatever you can to take a step towards it, or to assist anybody—your brother, your friend, your neighbour, your country, mankind—to take steps towards the organisation of that coming community.

That, I say, is the principle of principles for Christian morals. But, for that very reason, there can be no code of Christian morals, nor any one set of personal examples, or of sayings, or of parables, or of other narratives, which will do more than to arouse us to create something new on our way towards the goal. Christian morality will not, either suddenly or gradually, conquer the world. But if Christianity, conceived in its true spirit, retains its hold upon mankind, humanity will go on creating new forms of Christian morality; whose only persistent feature will be that they intend to aid men to make their personal, their friendly, their social, their political, their religious orders and organisations such that mankind comes more and more to resemble the ideal, the beloved, the universal community. And the ethical aspect of the creed of the Christian world always will include this article: “I believe in the beloved community and in the spirit which makes it beloved, and in the communion of all

who are, in will and in deed, its members. I see no such community as yet; but none the less my rule of life is: Act so as to hasten its coming."

Now such an ethical creed is not a vague humanitarian enthusiasm. For it simply requires that we work with whatever concrete human materials we have for creating both the organisation of communities and the love for them. The work is without any human end that we can foresee. But it can be made always definite simply by resoluteness, in union with devotion. *That* is the type of work which always has been characteristically Christian, and which promises to remain so.

VII.

The Christian idea of the community and of its relation to the way of salvation requires for its complete appreciation a comparison and synthesis which shall also include the idea of atonement.

What I have to suggest at this point will set the religious value of the idea of atonement in a light which must be for many minds somewhat novel; for otherwise the idea of atonement would not have been so long and so variously rendered more mysterious by the technically theological treatment which has been freely devoted to it. Nevertheless, in its deepest spirit, this very idea of atonement has been so dear to the religious mind of Christendom, and so familiar in art, in worship, and in contemplation, that it simply ought not to appear so mysterious. The fate of the Christian idea of atonement has been, that what Christian piety felt to be the head of the corner the Christian intellect has either rejected, or else, even in trying to defend the atonement, has made a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.

Between the idea of the saving community and the idea of atonement, lie the gravest of Christian ideas—those which many optimists find too discouraging to face, or too austere to be wholesome. These are: the idea of sin, the idea of our original bondage to sin, and the idea of the consequences

involved in defining sin as an inner voluntary inclination of the mind, rather than as an outwardly manifest evil deed. These ideas about sin are in part common, as we have said, to Christianity and to Buddhism.

But, as a fact, Christianity has so developed these very ideas, has so united them with the conception of the grace and of the loyalty which save men from their natural sinfulness, that just these conceptions regarding sin, despite the fact that Matthew Arnold thought them too likely to lead to a brooding wherein "many have perished," are ideas such that their rightful definition renders Christianity what, for Paul, it became—a religion of spiritual freedom.

In studying the moral burden of the individual, and the realm of grace, we see that Christianity is a religion dependent, for its conception of original sin, upon the most characteristic features of that social cultivation whereby we are brought to a high level of self-consciousness. Early Buddhism had, so far as I am aware, no views about the nature of the social self as clear as those which Paul attained and, in his own way, expressed. But Paul's very doctrine about "the law"—that is, about the social origin of the individual self, and about that which "causes sin to abound," is a theory which lies at the root of the power and the right of Christianity to say to the self which has first attained sinful cultivation in self-will, and which has then been transformed by "grace" into a loyal self, precisely what Paul said to his converts: "All things are yours." For the doctrine of Paul is, that the escape from original sin comes through the acceptance of a service which is perfect freedom. Out of the Christian doctrine of sin grows the Christian teaching about the freedom of the faithful—a teaching which, in its turn, lies at the basis of some of the most important developments of the modern mind. The doctrine of sin need not lead, then, to brooding. It may lead to spiritual self-possession.

The doctrine of atonement enables us to extend the Pauline theory of salvation by grace, so that not merely our

originally helpless bondage to the results of our social cultivation is removed by the grace of loyalty, but the saddest of all the forms and consequences of wilful sin—namely, the deed and the result of conscious disloyalty—can be brought within the range which the grace of the will of the community can reach. The idea of atonement has a perfectly indispensable office, both in the ethical and in the religious task which the Christian doctrine of life has to accomplish.

VIII.

Let me try to make a little more obvious this interpretation of the idea of atonement. Let me use for this purpose another illustration.

If my view about the essence of the idea of atonement is correct, the first instance of an extended account of an atoning process which the Biblical narratives include would be the story of Joseph and his brethren. Let us treat this story, of course, as obviously a little romance. We study merely its value as an illustration. The brethren sin against Joseph, and against their father. Their deed has some of the characteristics, not of mere youthful folly, but of maturely wilful treason. They assail not merely their brother, but their father's love for the lost son. Their crime is carefully considered, and is deeply treacherous. But it goes still farther. The treason is directed against their whole family community. Now, in the long-run, according to the beautiful tale, Joseph not only comforts his father, and is able to be a forgiving benefactor to his brethren, but in suchwise atones for the sin of his brethren that the family unity is restored. Here, then, is felt to be a genuine atonement. Wherein does it consist?

Does it consist in this, that the brethren have earned a just penalty which, as a fact, they never adequately suffer; while Joseph, guiltless of their wilful sin, vicariously suffers a penalty which he has not deserved? Does the atonement further consist in the fact that Joseph is able and willing freely to offer, for the good of the family, both the merits and the

providential good fortune which this vicarious endurance of his has won?

No; this "penal satisfaction" theory of the atoning work of Joseph, if it were proposed as an example of a doctrine of atonement, certainly would not meet that sense of justice, and of the fitness of things, and of the true value of Joseph's life and deeds—that sense, I say, which every child who first hears the story readily feels—without in the least being able to tell what he feels. If one magnified the deed of Joseph to the infinite, and said, as many have said: "Such a work as Joseph did for his brethren, even such a work, in his own divinely supreme way and sense, Christ did for sinful man"—would *that* theory of the matter make the nature of atonement obvious? Would a vicarious "penal satisfaction" help one to understand either one or the other of these instances of atonement?

But let us turn from such now generally discredited "penal satisfaction" theories to the various forms of modern moral theories. Let us say, applying our explanations once more to the story of Joseph: "God's Providence sent Joseph into captivity, through the sin of his brethren, but still under a divine decree. Joseph was obedient and faithful and pure-minded. God rewarded his patience and fidelity by giving him power in Egypt. Then Joseph, having suffered and triumphed, set before his brethren (not without a due measure of gently stern rebuke for their past misdeeds) an example of love and forgiveness so moving, that they deeply repented, confessed their sins, and loved their brother as never before. *That* was Joseph's atonement. And that, if magnified to the infinite, gives one a view of the sense in which the work of Christ atones for man's sin." Would such an account help us to understand atonement, either in Joseph's case or in the other?

I should reply that such moral theories of atonement, applied to the story of Joseph, miss the most obvious point and beauty of the tale, and also show us in no wise what

genuine atoning work the Joseph of the story did. Would the mere repentance, or the renewed love of the treacherous brethren for Joseph, or their wish to be forgiven, or their confession of their sin, constitute a sufficient ground for the needed reconciliation, in view of their offence against their brother, their father, or their family? If this was all the atonement which Joseph's labours supplied, he failed in his supposed office. Something more is needed to satisfy even the child who enjoys the story.

But now, let us become as little children ourselves. Let us take the tale as a sensitive child takes it, when its power first enters his soul. Let us simply articulate what the child feels. Here, according to the tale, is a patriarchal family invaded by a wilful treason, wounded to the core, desolated, broken. The years go by. The individual who was most directly assailed by the treason is guiltless himself of any share in that treason. He is patient and faithful and obedient. When power comes to him, he uses that power (which only just this act of treason could have put into his hands), first, to accomplish a great work of good for the community of a great kingdom. Herewith, according to the tale, he provides for the future honour and glory of his own family for all time to come. And then, being brought once more into touch with his family, he behaves with such clemency, and justice, and family loyalty; he shows such transient but amiable brotherly severity towards the former traitors, he shows also such tender filial devotion; his weeping when the family unity is restored is so rich in pathos; his care in providing for his father and for the future is so wise; his creative skill in making again into one fair whole what treason had shattered is so wonderful—that all these things together make the situation one whereof the child says without definite words, what we now say: "Through Joseph's work all is made, in fact, better than it would have been had there been no treason at all." Now I submit that Joseph's atoning work consists simply in this triumphantly ingenious creation of good out of

ill. That the brethren confess and repent is inevitable, and is a part of the good result; but by itself that is only a poor offering on their part. It is Joseph who atones. His atonement is, of course, vicarious. But it is perfectly objective. And it is no vicarious "penal satisfaction" whatever. It is simply the triumph of the spirit of the family through the devoted loyalty of an individual.

Joseph turns into a good, for the family, for the world, for his father, for the whole community involved, what his brothers had made ill. In his deed, through his skill, as well as through his suffering, the world is made better than it would have been had the treason never been done. This, I insist, constitutes his atoning work.

As to the brethren, their treason is, of course, irrevocable. Joseph's deed does not wipe out that guilt of their own. But they can stand in the presence of their community and hear the distinctly reconciling word: "You have been the indirect cause of a good that, by the grace and the ingenuity of the community and of its faithful servant, has now been created, while, but for your treason, this good could not have been created. Your sin cannot be cancelled. Nor are you in anywise the doers of the atoning deed. But the community welcomes you to its love again, not as those whose irrevocable deed has been cancelled, but as those whom love has so overruled that you have been made a source whence a spring of good flows."

The repentant and thankful brothers can now accept this reconciliation, never as a destruction of their guilt, but as a new and an objective fact whose significance they are willing to lay at the basis of a new loyalty. The community is renewed; the spirit has triumphed; and the traitors are glad that the irrevocable deed which they condemn has been made a source of a good which never could have existed without it. They are in a new friendship with their community, since the ends that have triumphed unite the new will with the old and evil will, through a new conquest of the evil.

Let my illustration pass for what it is worth. I still insist that an atonement of this sort, if it occurs at all, is a perfectly objective fact, namely, the creation by somebody of a definite individual good on the basis of a definite previous evil. That the total result, in a given case, such as that of Joseph, is something better than would have existed, or than would have been possible, had not that evil deed first been done, to which the atoning deed is the response—all this, I say, is a perfectly proper matter for a purely objective study. Such a study has the difficulties which attend all inquiries into objective values. But these difficulties do not make the matter one of arbitrary whim.

Moreover, if the atoning deed has brought, as a fact, such good out of evil that, despite the evil deed, the world is better than it could have been if the evil deed had not been done—that this very fact has its own reconciling value—a value limited but precious. The repentant sinner, seeing what, in Adam's vision, Milton makes the first human sinner foresee, will rightly find a genuine consolation, and a true reunion with his community, in thus being aware that his iniquity has been overruled for good.

A theory of atonement, founded upon this basis, is capable of as technical treatment as any other, and deals with facts and values which human wit can investigate, so far as the facts in question are accessible to us. Such a theory of atonement could be applied to estimate the atoning work of Christ, by anyone who believed himself to be sufficiently in touch with the facts about Christ's work. It would be capable of as technical a statement as our knowledge warranted.

This then, in brief, is my proposal looking towards an interpretation of the idea of atonement.

IX.

Turning once more to view, in the light of this interpretation, the Christian doctrine of life in its unity, we may see how all the ideas now unite to give to this doctrine a touch

both with the ethical and with the religious interests of humanity.

To sum up: As individuals we are lost; that is, are incapable of attaining the true goal of life. This our loss is due to the fact that we have not love. So the Master taught. But the problem is also the problem: For what love shall I seek? What love will save me? Here, if we restrict our answer to human objects, and deliberately avoid theology, the Christian answer is: Love the community. That is, be loyal.

Yet one further asks: What community shall I love? Speaking still in human terms, we are to love a community which, in ideal, is identical with all mankind, but which can never exist on earth until man has been transfigured and unified, as Paul hoped that his churches would, at the end of the world, soon witness this transfiguration and this union.

So far as this ideal indeed takes possession of us, we can direct our human life in the spirit of this love for the community, far away as the goal may seem and be.

Yet what stands in the way of our being completely absorbed by this ideal? The answer is: Our enemy is what Paul called the flesh, and found further emphasised by "the law." This enemy is due to our nature as social beings, so far as this nature is cultivated by social conditions which, while training our self-consciousness, even thereby inflame our self-will. *This* our social nature, then, is the basis of our natural enmity both towards the law and towards the spirit.

How can this natural enmity be overcome? The answer is: By the means of those unifying social influences which Paul regarded as due to grace. Genius, and only genius—the genius which, in the extreme cases, founds new religions, and which, in the better known cases, creates great social movements of a genuinely saving value—can create the communities which arouse love, which join the faithful into one, and which transform the old man into the new. When once we have come under the spell of such creative genius, and of the communities of which some genius appears to be the spirit, only

then can we too die to the old life, and be renewed in the spirit. The early Christian community is (still speaking in human terms) one great historical instance of such a source of salvation. To be won over to the level of *such* a community is, just in so far, to be saved.

But the will of the loyal is, in the purely human and practical sense, a will that we call free. The higher the spiritual gifts in question are, the greater is the opportunity for wilful treason to the community to which we have once given faith. The consequences of every deed include the great fact that each deed is irrevocable. And the penalty of wilful treason, therefore, is, for the traitor, precisely in so far as he knows himself, and values his life in its larger connections, an essentially endless penalty—the penalty which he assigns to himself, the fact of his sin.

For such penalty is there any aid that can come to us through the atoning deed of another? There is such aid possible. In the human world we can never count upon it. But it is possible. And sometimes by the grace of the community and by the free will of a noble soul, such aid comes. As a fact, the whole life of man gets its highest—one is often disposed to say, its only real and abiding—goods, from the conquest over evil. Atoning deeds, deeds that through sacrifices, win again the lost causes of the moral world, not by undoing the irrevocable deeds, nor by making the old bitterness of defeat as if it never had been, but by creating new good out of ancient ill, and by producing a total realm of life which is better than it would have been had the evil not happened—atonement expresses the most nearly absolute loyalty which human beings can show. The atoning deed is the most creative of the expressions which the community gives, through the deed of an individual, to its will that the unity of the spirit should triumph, not only despite, but *through*, the greatest tragedies, the tragedies of deliberate sin.

Through the community, or on its behalf, the atoning deeds are done. The individual who has sinned, but who knows of

free atoning deeds that indeed have been done—deeds whereby good comes out of his evil—can be not wholly reconciled to his own past, but truly restored to the meaning of the loyal life. Upon the hope that such atoning deeds, if they have not been done because of our sins, may yet be done, all of us depend for such rewinning of our spiritual relations to our community as we have sinned away. And thus the idea of the community and the idea of atonement—both of them, still interpreted in purely human fashion, but extended in ideal through the whole realm that the human spirit can ever conquer—form in their inseparable union, and in their relation to the other Christian ideas, the Christian doctrine of life. The Christian life is one that first, as present in the individual, offers to the community practical devotion and absorbing love. This same life, also present in the individual, looks to the community for the grace that saves and for the atonement that, so far as may be, reconciles. As incorporate in the community, or as incarnate in those who act as the spirit of the community, and who create new forms of the community, and originate atoning deeds—as thus present in the community and in its creatively loyal individual members, the Christian life expresses the postulate, the prayer, the world-conquering will, whose word is: Let the spirit triumph. Let no evil deed be done so deep in its treachery but that creative love shall find the way to make the world better than it would have been had that evil deed not been done.

The Christian doctrine of life consists in observing and asserting that these ideas have their real and distinctly human basis. This doctrine also consists in the purely voluntary assertion that, in so far as these ideals are not yet verifiable in human life as it is, this life is to be lived as if they were verifiable, or were sure to become so in the fulness of time. For that fulness of time, for that coming of the Kingdom, we labour and wait.

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