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THE INTOLERANCE OF CHRISTIANITY

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IT is the claim of religion that it meets the deepest needs of mankind—needs that have their seat in the abysmal deeps of human personality. There are several great religions making such a claim. Not all of them make exclusive claims. Some frankly say, with a generous tolerance of other faiths, "Your religion is good for you; ours is good for us." Can Christians return this compliment? There are those who will readily answer in the affirmative, and decry any other attitude as savoring of narrow bigotry. But can it with truth be said that, while Christianity is the best faith for us, other faiths may serve as well or better for other portions of the human race? Or has Christianity elements that render it unique and indispensable to all mankind?

The answer to this question is vital to the whole outlook and program of the Christian Church. Christianity's claim to be a world religion, its right to be a missionary religion depend upon it. If what she has to offer cannot be duplicated in the markets of religion, and if it can be shown to be absolutely essential to human welfare, then, and then only, can Christianity make good her claim to be an exclusive and universal faith. Then, and then only have we the right to press its claims upon the adherents of other faiths. Who that knows the tragic results that often follow the deserting of one's ancestral faith in the non-Christian lands can doubt the importance of this question for their people as well as for ourselves?

Now, while maintaining the fullest respect and reverence for the religious convictions of others, we would state frankly and unequivocally our conviction that Christianity

stands alone among the faiths that seek the allegiance of mankind. It has fundamental teachings found in no other faith. It makes fundamental claims that belong to no other, and moreover, it can and does make good these claims.

This is not to say that there is no truth in other faiths; that they are not, indeed, in some aspects "broken lights" from the great body of eternal truth. Through them earth's blinded peoples "stretch lame hands of faith," groping for the altar-stairs that "slope through darkness up to God." And who shall say that some of them do not touch the hem of His garment? We cannot believe that the Father-God looks with scorn upon any religion through which seeking souls try to find Him. These faiths are an evidence that "God left not himself without a witness" in the hearts of men. And we may well approach them with reverence. But that is not to say that they are the true way to the Father; that they contain all the light He has to break upon mortal eyes; that their light is not, in fact, so dim and distorted as to prove oftener than not a false guide to lost and weary souls, and even a satanic instrument for their destruction. Confucius, the Buddha, Mohammed, we freely accord a place among the world's greatest. Not otherwise can we explain the enthralling influence they have held through the long centuries over unnumbered millions of their race. But this is not to place them on a footing with the Christ. We rise to do them honor; but we fall down to kiss the hem of His garment.

Two things we may justly demand of a religion that makes any claim to be a world faith: first, that it give us an adequate, soul-satisfying conception of God; and second, that it furnish a solution for the riddle of man—his origin and destiny, his needs, aspirations and longings, his hopes, his struggles and his fears. By its doctrine of God and of man and of their mutual relation, a religion must ultimately stand or fall.

Now, if there be a God, it is reasonable, if not necessary, to believe that He is knowable, and that men everywhere bent on His discovery, may arrive at some true conception of His character. We are the more amazed, therefore, to find how far they have actually come short in this quest. China's great teacher took a distinctly agnostic attitude toward all that was not purely mundane. Centering his attention wholly upon human duties and relationships, he ignored God, or thrust Him into the background. At best God was to him a great abstraction. He had no answer, therefore, for the deepest questionings of the human heart.

But the Chinese, we are told, are a practical rather than a spiritual people, and hence were content to stop short with a mere code of ethics. So we turn to India with its keen spiritual instincts, its long line of sacred writings and its age-long strivings after contact with the Supreme. Here we shall surely find a different result. Yet we find that after endless wanderings which at times seem to bring the searchers almost within sight of the goal only to lose the way again, the result at its best is the cold, metaphysical fact of a Supreme Intelligence, and at its worst a degraded idolatry that is virtually demonolatry. The truth of the divine imminence implied in their Pantheism is distorted into an identification of God with man, and ultimately finds its expression in an unlimited polytheism which becomes a hideous caricature of God.

In the midst of the long development of Hinduism, Gautama, the Buddha, "the Enlightened," as he called himself, comes on the scene. No one who sympathetically traces the story of Buddha will question his thirst for truth, his love for humanity and the general attractiveness of his character. He proved undoubtedly a great reforming force to the religion of his own and other lands. But his condemnation as a religious teacher must ever be, primarily, that he did not reveal God. Rejecting the Brahman's doctrine of God, he offered no substitute. All he could discover was "a revolving course of cause and

effect." But man's soul cannot be satisfied with a negation, and his followers in time were driven to deify himself and his doctrines until they sank back to the lowest idolatry.

When we come to the latest of the great faiths, we must acknowledge a stupendous advance. For Islam is monotheistic. Mohammed's God is a personal, spiritual being. His followers shrink with abhorrence from every suggestion of polytheism and every form of idolatry. How much of this conception the Arabian "prophet" may have derived from his desert meditation, and how much from contact with Jews and Christians, concerns us less than the result attained. To Mohammed God became the great Fact, and submission to His will the supreme duty. This it was, indeed, that gave the conquering power to his sword. Yet with all the vantage-ground of a late-born faith, and despite all the truth that it actually contains, the God that Islam has to offer is an inaccessible God—One whom men must fear, but not One to whom they can draw near. He has an all-powerful hand, but no warm beating heart. The Allah of Mohammed is a great Force that holds the fates of men relentlessly in His hand. And it helps but little to know that this force resides in a personality. It is true he is called "the compassionate, the merciful"; but that is found on analysis to mean one ready to condone transgression. He does not possess the attribute of absolute holiness which made Israel's Jehovah so deeply revered from the earliest days of that people's history.

It is plain then that the best pagan and Moslem thought do little more than furnish a dark background for the incomparable portrait of the Christian's God. God the Father, as Christ revealed Him, is a different being from any we have met in our search through other faiths. A being at once infinitely exalted and inexpressly near; the omnipotent Creator and Ruler, dwelling in light unapproachable, yet a tender, solicitous Father, ever ready to meet His children in the communion of the inner cham-

ber; one who hates sin with a perfect hatred, yet loves the sinner to the point of infinite suffering with him in his guilt; not merely a God whom lost men seek, but one who is ever seeking lost men with the heart of a true Shepherd and a loving Father.

Yet the Christian doctrine of God is no wholesale contradiction of other faiths. Rather is it, as one has said, "the synthesis of all the separate elements of truth" found in all of these. And seldom is there a faith so darkened as not to shadow forth some element of truth. Does not even polytheism, for example, crudely suggest the manifoldness of the divine essence which is expressed in Christian theism? But Christianity is more than the bringing together of truths from other sources. That simple phrase with which Jesus taught his disciples to begin their prayers, "Our Father who art in the heavens" (to translate literally), contains at once all that Pantheism has to teach about the imminence of God, and all that Mohammedanism or Deism can tell us of His transcendence. But a heavenly habitation inevitably suggests also perfect holiness; while the unique and pregnant thought of a personal Fatherhood dominates the whole phrase. Nor is this all. Not only have we from the lips of Christ a declaration of God, comprehending all the truth and leaving out all the error taught by other faiths; but in the personality of Christ, we have nothing less than a manifestation of God. The more we ponder his life and character, the more we are compelled to say with the apostle, "God was in Christ." We find "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" in his face. He is the image of the invisible One, for all the meaning that God has for us, we find in him; and at last, both reason and heart cry out in his presence, "My Lord and my God." Browning makes the dying John in his desert cave exclaim:

"I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth, and out of it."

And many a seeker after God has found this the end of his quest.

We now turn to that other focal point in religious truth—man, and his relation to the Infinite. And here, if we are not to be lost in a maze of futile queries and speculations, we will do well to take our starting-point from Christian teaching. Christianity begins by ascribing to man a high origin. He was made in the image of God. That at once stamps him as a spiritual personality, puts a gulf between him and the brute creation and links him with the Creator himself. The "breath of the Almighty" is his life. He was made for fellowship with the Eternal, made "but little lower than God," the psalmist boldly affirms. Thus at the outset is he crowned with glory and honor.

And no less clearly is he assigned a high destiny. Christianity confirms the voice within that tells him he was not born to die. It answers the yearnings, the questionings and the reasonings of his soul with the assurance of immortality. That assurance is deeply grounded in the love of God that calls him into an eternal fellowship. And it is re-enforced by the great fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead and his return to the Father. All that lies beyond for man, we may but dimly surmise, for "it is not yet made manifest what we shall be." Nevertheless we are not left without some glorious intimations.

But between these two high terminal peaks of man's origin and his destiny, the black fact of sin rears its hateful head. Man has fallen from his high estate. In the free exercise of his God-like faculties, he lifted his hand in rebellion against Him who gave him being. His right to the divine fellowship thus forfeited, he goes forth with the mark of guilt upon his brow and is a prey to the passions his own reckless hand has loosed. With the image of the divine in him sadly marred and almost effaced, what is left for him but to gravitate toward the beast? What remains in him of God-likeness stretches helpless hands heavenward, but the jungle horde that he

has let in drags him ever toward the pit. His only hope is that the God on whom he has turned his back, in His unfathomable grace, will find a way of intervening, cancel his hopeless debt of guilt and restore the power to become the being he was meant to be.

And this is precisely what takes place. At a cost to God represented by the gift of an only Son, man is redeemed from sin's bondage. With guilt blotted out, he can lift his face once more to the face of God. And looking into that Face, its glory is again increasingly reflected in his own. He becomes in standing and in character a son of God. While by the actual coming of the divine Spirit into his heart there to live and reign, he is enabled to face the evil that once ruled him and dragged him down, and come forth more than conqueror. Faced with the loftiest and most searching moral standard, he does not despair. For he can triumphantly assert, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ that liveth in me." Henceforth for him life spells high service to God and fellow-man. And when at last earth with its conflict and its toil shall have been left behind, it will be his supreme joy to dwell "forever with the Lord."

Does not this message of Christianity concerning man elicit at every point an answering response from the depths of man's soul? Here he finds the picture of all he was meant to be and might have been, but, alas, also of all that he is; and then again the picture of all that he may yet be, the answer at the same time to his deepest despair and his largest hope. What do we find, I ask, that will even faintly match this teaching in the sacred books of other faiths? Nowhere else are the high dignity and matchless worth of man portrayed as in the Christian Scriptures. Here only is discovered that affinity with his Creator which predestines him for the loftiest ends.

On the other hand, rarely, except under the influence of Christianity, is there found a poignant sense of the sinfulness of sin and of the sinner's helplessness. Like the dark shadow of guilt that haunted Arthur's court and

finally wrought its ruin, so the shadow of sin hangs over the world. Yet, though men are aware of its presence, the most sense but lightly the dire disaster of sin and their desperate state. Confucius said that "man's nature is good, and if followed will invariably lead him right." Buddha yearned for deliverance from earth's misery, but said nothing of sin. Mohammed's God treats sin as a mere misdemeanor. Only in the Christian's Bible is it tracked back to its foul origin in the fall of man, and its dire effects followed to the death of the sinless One on Calvary. If to some the emphasis that Christianity puts upon sin has been a stumbling-block, deeper souls have found in it a primary evidence of the heaven-born origin of that faith. To quote again that great poet-theologian:

" 'Tis the faith that launched point blank her dart
At the head of a lie; taught Original Sin,
The corruption of man's heart."

Then, as only in the cross do men see sin in its true colors, so only at the cross do they find release from the burden of guilt. It is the old question, "How shall the blood spots be washed from Lady Macbeth's hands?" There is no answer but the blood of Christ. India, indeed, would say, "By the utmost of penance and self-denial"; and Arabia, "Never mind; a merciful God will overlook." But such answers never brought peace to a tortured soul. And when we go on, as we must, to ask how the cleansed hands can be kept from further stain, what answer do we find? Beautiful words, but no healing power; ideals, but no dynamic. China's teacher would bid men in Matthew Arnold's phrase, "Rally the good in the depths of thyself." But he has no new power to transfuse to their souls. How empty and unavailing are all such words when placed beside the message of an atoning Saviour and an indwelling Christ.

And when we go on one step further and ask for some word to stay our souls regarding the life beyond, Confucius frankly says he knows nothing, while Jesus talks

familiarly of the Father's house. Instead of a future life, the hope of Hinduism is the absorption of the human personality in the Infinite. Buddha's "best of being is but not to be"—Nirvana. And how shall we compare the Moslem's paradise with the Christian's heaven? It is a choice between the breast of houris and the breast of God.

Now it is clear that if Christianity stands apart from other faiths and bears the mark of finality, the great reason for this is the fact of Christ Himself. Not his teachings merely, but Himself. It is He that bridges the gulf between God and man. He is both the manifestation of God and the ideal Man. We are not shocked when He says, "No one cometh unto the Father but by me." Yet we would be unspeakably shocked, and rightly so, if another uttered those words. The apostle could say, "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," and speak the simple truth. But for the founder of no other religion can such a claim be made. The Person of Christ and the Cross of Christ are absolutely unique and vitally essential.

The differences between Christianity and other faiths are not incidental or accidental but fundamental. It is not a faith among the faiths of the world, but one that demands the absolute allegiance of all mankind. The statue of Jesus might have been given a place in the Pantheon of Rome, but his followers refused to concede that he was a god among other gods, and in time the gods of the Empire all gave way to Him. Had they compromised, they would have been conquered. While ever treating other faiths with courtesy and sympathy, Christianity maintains a righteous intolerance toward them in so far as they supplant the true faith, and, professing to set men free, only bind them as galley slaves to falsehood and blinding half truths. It cannot in good conscience clasp hands with them as sisters engaged in the common task of leading God's lost sons back to the Father's house. While absorbing and embodying the truths and excellences of them all, it must greatly supplement and virtually sup-

plant them. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Whether from the physical, the intellectual or the spiritual side, it is only through Christianity that men find the more abundant life.

It is aside from our present purpose to deal with the position of those among us who are disposed to deny the fundamental tenets of all religion. We are assuming the correctness of that instinct of man that makes him cling to some religion, and assuming that some prevailing form of religion is essentially true; that man's spirit has not groped in vain through the ages, nor the Great Spirit left him wholly unenlightened. We would merely pause to remind those who question these things that they are ignoring the primary instincts and age-long experience of the race, and, perhaps, forgetting that they owe their very ability and freedom to reason thus to the fostering influence which they would now cast off.

Hear then the conclusion of the whole matter. If Christianity is the unique, final and indispensable faith we believe it to be; if it is exclusive and uncompromising toward other faiths because it is not merely better than they, but the one way by which man may hope to find salvation in any real, full meaning of that term; then it is evident there rests upon those who possess this faith the most urgent obligation to share it with others. The right of Christianity to be a missionary religion implies the obligation as well. Hence our whole argument leads up to a trumpet-tongued call to share the compassion of Christ for lost men and his sacrificial efforts to seek and save them. The great need of this restless, groping, struggling world is the release through multiplied channels of the unspent force of the living Christ.

We listened one day while the relatives of a Christian convert from Islam plead with him to return to his former faith. They had wealth and social position. He was despised and struggling for daily bread. Riches and rank were promised him, if he would return. He had not been, in fact, a very satisfactory convert. We had some-

times harbored doubts of the genuineness of his conversion, and would not have been greatly surprised had their pleading moved him. But as he sat there and quietly said in reply to their proposals that all they offered him was nothing compared with what Christ meant to his life, our poor faith was rebuked, and we had a new glimpse of the value to men of Christ and His salvation. Shall we rob men of that which, once theirs, they will prize above all wealth, honor and even life itself? And shall we rob this unheroic world of the inspiration of such lives?