

This is a passage which must not be used in an attempt to ascertain the Messianic ideas of Jews. It is the work of a Christian.

VI

How completely our Lord revolutionized the Messianic conceptions of His predecessors! He adopted indeed the title "Son of Man" found in Enoch and in Daniel. But how strange are some of the predicates which He attaches to the title. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many." The men who came before Christ did not dream of One who would serve humanity in such a humble fashion, and none save the author of Isaiah liii. conceived of a Messiah who would lay down His life as a sacrifice for sin. They did not think of a Christ so lowly. Nor did they ever imagine One so majestic as our Lord was. We have seen that one apocalyptist went very far in this direction, but so far as most of the writers are concerned nothing could be further from their minds than the idea of a Messiah who would be God manifest in the flesh. God always gives believing men better gifts than they ever anticipate. He is better to us than our deserts or our hopes. It was so when at last He gave Christ. The Reality was high above the thoughts of men as the heavens are high above the earth.

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A Subjective Faith—Its Methods and Consequences.

ONE of the biggest words that has gained currency in religious circles is the word "Faith." It makes an equally strong appeal to all types of Christian men; to the man who is conservative in his religious thinking, and to the man whom we label "modern." But in each case its meaning, its application, the range of ideas which it includes may be widely different. For the theological superstructures which have been built upon this one foundation are legion. Faith itself, however, rests upon another foundation, and however diverse the forms of its interpretation may be, there is underneath them all a basic principle. Perhaps, after all, the basic principle is of more importance than

the superstructures. In spite of the emphasis which we place upon our cherished interpretations, it may be that the elemental thing which constitutes faith unites us all in one spiritual federation.

There are three interesting tendencies in the intellectual life of our times, to which Christian men can scarcely be indifferent. First of all, this is an age of apparent indifference to religion. Perhaps I ought to have said organized religion. But the use of the word apparent is my safeguard. I have used that phrase advisedly, for I am not altogether convinced that the present indifference to organized religion necessarily indicates indifference to Christ. At any rate I should like to believe that there are many people in the world to-day who, although repelled by some of the forms of organized churches, are nevertheless attracted by Christ. It is, however, quite safe to say that this is an age of apparent indifference to religion.

In the second place, this age has also witnessed the failure of materialism. Even if we make an exception of "the man in the street" it is well to remember, as has frequently been pointed out, that he is usually a generation behind in his philosophy. The nineteenth century may still have left its mark upon him, but the real thinkers are far from the position of their predecessors, and the ordinary man will yet follow. Materialism has never proved satisfactory as a workable theory of the universe, although the methods of its refutation have not always been satisfactory. Bishop Berkeley, for example, adopted the short way with the materialists, and attempted to reduce all matter to spirit or ideas existing in the mind. That refutation is scarcely successful. It leaves something to be desired. We feel cheated out of something. But to reduce all spirit to matter is to fail as well. The physical universe and the spiritual meaning written on it are both real.

Going to the other extreme from Berkeley, you find Harriet Martineau looking upon religion as a decaying mythology. She even rejoiced in the prospect of its coming collapse. History has proved how far out she was in her calculations. Not religion, but materialism, the creed to which she pinned her faith, has failed. The whole spirit of our age is a witness to that fact. Men have not found in the material the ultimate explanation of things. The eternal essence of spirit lies everywhere behind the material. All science has been tending in that direction.

In actual practice, this is also an age of the failure of agnosticism. The mind of man is so constructed that it cannot find rest in a place of suspense. Agnosticism never fully meets the demands of a man's mental life. In real life, what counts supremely is belief, not doubt. Men fail, in almost every sphere

of life, for lack of a living virile faith. Indeed, if there has ever been a time in the history of the world when faith was needed, the time is now. And the world's need ultimately becomes our commission.

The intellectual unrest and the questioning spirit of the twentieth century have not by any means robbed us of our gospel. We still have a gospel of faith; a gospel which does not need to be proclaimed in the precise language of dead centuries, but in the language that will make it a living message for our times. Men to-day won't sign creeds as they once did. You do not necessarily proclaim the gospel for your age when you draw up, with mathematical precision, the attributes and manifestations of faith, as evidenced in the first century. The principle remains, but the age demands the restatement of it in the intelligible language of the hour.

What then can be said about faith, that will not immediately focus our attention on those wonderful labels and categories we have manufactured? This much at least can be said; Faith is an activity of the mind which finds its chief source of inspiration in the intuitions. The Bible expresses that truth by saying that "with the heart man believes unto righteousness." Faith is not something which demands visible and sense impressions. It is the outgoing of a man's intuition to find some spiritual affinity in the universe around him.

Jesus always recognized that, and attached considerable importance to it. On many of the great pressing intellectual problems He was altogether silent. He made due allowance for the big part faith plays in a man's life. Man's intuition was an open door to Him, for what the intuition can grasp cannot always be demonstrated by the ordinary rules of reasoning. Is that not a feasible explanation of why Jesus omitted some things from His teaching? He never argued about God's existence. He never discussed the question, "Has man a soul?" He asserted Immortality, but never tried to prove it. He took the spiritual world for granted. In any case, while you may have a material expression of a spiritual fact, you cannot have a material proof of it.

This feature is not by any means the exclusive property of the Christian Religion. Some of the biggest facts of life, most dearly cherished by us, defy the powers of an ordinary mortal to explain them in terms that are purely rational. For example, what man could rationally explain why he loved a woman and made her his wife? He certainly never tried to offer such an explanation to the woman herself. She would have refused him if he had even made the attempt. You won't find a mother writing a treatise to explain the reasons why she sacrifices her own rights for the sake of her child. If she ever thought about it at all, she would

probably get no further than, "He's just mine." The workings of intuition are apparent on every hand and are an open book to the man who has eyes to read.

Even in those moments when we are convinced we are most rational, intuition finds its place. You can never wholly exclude it. In this connection, I must confess some of our well known writers have puzzled me. To take one typical and familiar instance, I have always found it difficult to reconcile George Eliot with herself. With the Christian doctrine of immortality she would have nothing whatever to do; she only believed in—

Joining the choir invisible,
Of those immortal deal who live again
In minds made better by their presence.

Did she not call herself an atheist? This is where my trouble begins. Why did she continue to read *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis? Why, with all the passion at her command, did she tell us about Dinah Morris preaching the gospel on a quiet village green? Was it not the product of intuition? And intuition is the chief dynamic of faith.

But faith is not simply the following of some uncharted course that intuition reveals. The intuition must lead to a positive belief, even if that belief should be subjective to begin with. What is the nature of that belief in its initial and elementary stage? Belief in what? I should be inclined to reply, belief in the spiritual nature of man and the universe. All that is necessary for the preservation of faith is the recognition of a spiritual order.

That phrase inevitably takes us back to the severe conflict that raged between science and religion in the nineteenth century. We all know how to some good people it seemed as if the new discoveries of science were destined to undermine the Christian faith. The spiritual life of man was thought to be in danger. Protoplasmic germs, geological aeons and evolutionary theories gave the saints a very miserable time. That was the situation confronting T. H. Green at Oxford when he set out to write his *Prolegomena to Ethics*. He began to plead for the preservation of the spiritual life, and declared that all that was essential for that, was the recognition of another order than the material. Which is exactly the point where faith begins.

The Christian faith is considerably strengthened by the consideration of some alternatives created by this definition. Is man to be considered a spiritual being? Or is he to be reduced to the dust of the material? Is the spirit or the mind that knows a thing to be put on the same level as the thing it knows? And according to the answers which men give to such questions, so the Christian Religion either lives or is killed.

Many writers and speakers are still telling us to-day that the Genesis story of the Fall is a myth; not merely the story but the conception which it embodies. The judge is called evolution, and according to his verdict man has risen, not fallen. The miracles of the Bible, such doctrines as those of the Virgin Birth and Heaven and Hell, are fiercely assailed. And when these have been successfully demolished, Christianity, they say, is buried. It is impossible to discuss these questions within the scope of this paper. But even if these claims were established to the satisfaction of everyone, they are scarcely fundamental to the preservation of faith. There are other questions still remaining. Is man spiritual? Is the universe spiritual? And so long as these can be answered in the affirmative, faith remains.

That, however, is but the beginning. The recognition of the spiritual has far-reaching consequences. When a man believes in himself as a spiritual being, he will want to make that belief virile, and therefore it will express itself in his conduct. His daily life will begin to reveal the spiritual. He can no longer treat himself as if he belonged only to the material. His spiritual needs will have to be provided for. New legislation will come into being, and the man will actually be saved.

He will be saved from too great an absorption in the passing temporal things of life. He will be saved from neglect of that spiritual kingdom of which he is a member. His very body will be saved from moral corruption. This faith will raise the standard of his ethics. Even death will be regarded by him as a liberation of the spirit, the going out of his spiritual nature into the spiritual universe that waits to receive us into its bosom.

Just here the objective element of faith is beginning to manifest itself. The man who has travelled thus far on the pilgrim pathway of the soul will find his faith rapidly extending. It is not within the scope of my present purpose to trace that further growth and development. But this much at least can be said. The man who treats himself as a spiritual being cannot avoid meeting Christ. And then the Kingdom of God will burst upon his vision; he will be impelled to follow Christ, for He is the symbol, the embodiment of all things spiritual. Divinity will be discovered in the dust and Christ at the centre and circumference of all life's common things.

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