

So the objection is, after all, not to the Incarnation; it is to the sinless perfection of Jesus.

The next difference is that Jews do not believe in atonement and mediation. The Jew does not need a mediator. God is very near. Mr. MONTEFIORE quotes (they are the words of a Christian!):

Speak to Him thou for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet;

Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.

And he does not need atonement. The only atonement he needs is the atonement 'wrought by human repentance and the divine forgiveness,' or, as he otherwise puts it, 'by God's grace and help upon the one hand, by human remorse and effort upon the other.'

Is that all? Is there not yet another difference? Does not the Jew believe in justification by works, the Christian in justification by faith? No. Mr. MONTEFIORE gives up that difference. He doubts if the Christian has done justice to works; he is quite sure that the Jew has not done justice to faith. He is well aware that a Christian writer said, 'Faith without works is dead.' He himself sees that a man's faith is 'the core of his character.' And he says frankly, 'We need both faith, and works.' 'I cannot help believing that this old point of difference between Judaism and Christianity may gradually be done away with. Each will recognize that the fuller truth lies in a combination of doctrines hitherto thought opposed and alien to each other.'

Some Thoughts suggested by the Comparative Study of Religion.¹

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THE present paper is by one who makes no claim to speak as an expert on either the History or the Science of Religions; it makes no attempt to construct a Philosophy of Religion or any theory of its evolution. All I propose is simply to record the impressions that have been made on my mind by the contact into which I have had to come, on paper, if not in the flesh, with religions of all kinds, from the lowest and simplest to the highest and most complex. The thoughts I am to set before you are not the outcome of systematic study of classified religions, as one may study groups of animals or of plants or minerals in a museum; nor do they represent a theory formed beforehand and applied to the various religions that have come under my view; they are the product slowly, almost unconsciously, evolved from the constantly changing kaleidoscopic process that unfolds itself every day to the eyes of one who has to read and

to examine carefully the articles contributed to the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* now in course of publication, under the editorship of Dr. Hastings.

I. The first great fact that grows increasingly clear to me daily is that *man is a religious being*. The old question whether there are tribes of atheists has nowadays become a merely 'academic discussion.' For my own part I do not believe that any sufficient evidence has yet been adduced to prove that any people on earth has been discovered that is wholly destitute of religion, using that term in the wide sense of belief in the existence of some power or powers mightier than man himself, whose favour it is desired to gain, whose wrath it is sought to deprecate. All the great authorities—men like Max Müller, Jevons, Tiele, Tylor, Waitz, and Gerland—are at one on this point. Supposed examples to the contrary effect have been abandoned, in view of fuller information. Thus, Howitt came to abandon the view he once held as to the aborigines of Australia being without

¹ Abridged from an address delivered to the Theological Society of the Aberdeen United Free Church College, on 17th November 1911.

any religion; and the same thing has happened in the case of the natives of Vancouver and of some parts of Western Africa. It needs long residence among, and a complete gaining of the confidence of, primitive peoples to discover their secret beliefs. Even Buddhism, although it rejected the traditional gods of India, made that rejection in the interests of a truly religious spirit. Its aim was to satisfy a religious craving, the craving for redemption. And even the branding of individuals as atheists is not always justified. Both Xenophanes and Socrates were falsely so charged. Lucretius is often cited as an example of one whose creed was blank atheism, but he was not really an irreligious man. What he protested against, in the name of piety, was a religion of terror, which was also often the parent of crimes; he raised his voice against gods who had to be propitiated by bloody sacrifices.

Nec pietas ullast veiatum saepe videri,
Vertitur ad lapidem atque omnis accedere ad aras,
Nec procumbere humi prostratum et pandere palmas
Ante deum delubra, nec aras sanguine multo
Spargere quadrupedum, nec votis nectere vota,
Sed mage pacatâ posse omnia mente tueri.¹

Besides, atheism has never been a lasting phenomenon. Sooner or later it provokes a reaction. Again, tribes that recognize few if any personal gods have a belief in a mysterious power or essence, which is now generally designated by the Polynesian word *mana*, and here we have certainly the elements of a religious conception.

The phenomena disclosed by the comparative study of religions, varied as they are, witness to the existence of a craving that is universally felt, a craving that cannot find satisfaction within oneself, or in the material world, but, however vaguely it may be realized, in the unseen. And so the words which Augustine wrote long ago are justified: 'Thou hast created us for Thyself; and our heart is ill at ease until it finds its rest in Thee.' Granting the existence of this universal craving, there must, unless all teleology be a fraud and a delusion, be some provision arranged to meet it. Food and drink are the natural provision for the universal cravings of hunger and thirst; and so religion is the legitimate satisfaction of these inward spiritual cravings. Everywhere man has sought after God, if haply he might find Him. And this quest and its satisfaction in religion will not die out with the

advance of culture and civilization. In the beginning of his recently published Cunningham Lectures on *The Psychology of the Christian Soul*, Mr. Steven quotes a striking passage written forty years ago by Mr. John (now Lord) Morley in his work *On Compromise*:

'The modern freethinker does not attack religion; he explains it. And what is more, he explains it by referring its growth to the better and not to the worse part of human nature. He traces it to men's cravings for a higher morality. He finds its source in their aspirations after nobler expression of that feeling for the incommensurable things, which is in truth, under so many varieties of inwoven pattern, the common universal web of religious faith.'

But, as Mr. Steven points out, a description of the psychology of religion does not dispose of religion itself. The cravings and aspirations of which Lord Morley speaks have themselves to be explained. Whence came they, and is there no legitimate way in which they can be satisfied? Individuals here and there may refuse to develop the religious instinct, they may check this, like any other emotion of their nature. Nay, there may even be encountered here and there a religious colour-blindness, as there is a physical colour-blindness. Those who are its victims are entitled to our commiseration, and those who refuse to develop this instinct do so to their own loss.

II. In the second place, a careful study of the religions of the world shows that *their essential differences consist in the varying degrees in which they have satisfied the cravings of the human soul*. It is sometimes imagined that one of the results of the Comparative Study of Religion is to destroy the unique character that has been claimed by Christians for the religions of the Old and New Testaments, and to assign to these their place alongside the other great faiths of the world, on a footing of equality with some, and of superiority, or even inferiority, to others. But it is not so. The comparative method is going to accomplish as much for religion, in the way of setting it in a true light and on a sound basis, as it has done in the natural sciences and in the spheres of grammar and philology. If it does nothing more, it will help us to understand Christian doctrine and Christian practice as we have never done before. We all know what, in the hands of Professor Ridgeway, the comparative study of religions has done for the religion of Greece. But we expect more than this. Comparative Religion (*pace* Dr. Owen Whitehouse, we use this phrase for shortness sake, while thoroughly agreeing with

¹ *De Rer. Nat.* v. 1198-1203.

him that it is open to serious objection) is going to supply in future the most potent of weapons to the Christian apologist. If the search for religion is the search for God, the perfect religion is that which secures the perfection of communion with God. Or, to put it in another way, the perfect religion is that which takes possession of man's whole being, which satisfies his intellect, controls his will, and provides proper scope for his emotions.¹ This perfect religion we find in the religion of Christ, or rather in Christ Himself. Man has a thirst for guidance; that thirst is satisfied by Him who is the Way. Man has a thirst for knowledge; that thirst is satisfied by Him who is the Truth. Man has a thirst for life—meaning by this term full scope for his affections and emotions; that thirst is satisfied by Him who is the Life. Other religions have been more or less successful in satisfying a part of man's nature; there are systems whose chief interest is intellectual, others whose mainspring is ethical, and yet others whose basis is feeling or emotion. These systems have offered only partial solutions of the problem. Christ's religion is the perfect solution: it lays hold of the intellect, it deeply stirs the feelings, and thereby moves the will and shapes the life.

All truth is wrapped up in Him who is the Author and the Perfecter of our faith—the truths of mental and moral and even physical science. The time will come when the 'riddle of the universe' will be read in the light of St. Paul's declaration that 'in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible . . . all things have been created through him, and unto him' (Col 1¹⁶), or of the statement in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel that 'without him was not anything' (Jn 1³). Do not the unity and the uniformity of Nature find a worthy explanation in the mediation of the Eternal Word between God and the world? Contrast with this the cosmogonies of ethnic religions. Does not the same function invest with special fittingness the great doctrine of the Atonement? And does it not account for the universality of the religious instinct of which we have spoken; does it not explain the identity of the needs expressed by mankind and the analogies between the means devised to meet these needs? If men are the offspring of God, if Christ is the Light of the world, the Light that lighteneth every man, it will not surprise us to find

¹ Cf. Principal Iverach's *Theism*, London, 1900, p. 227 ff.

traces of a Divine revelation in many lands, or to discover the light shining with remarkable brilliancy in quarters far removed from what would once have been called the pale of revelation. Wherever true thoughts concerning God have been formed, the illumination has come from Him who is the Light of man. The spirit of Christ was bestowed upon other prophets than those of Israel, although the latter received a double portion of it. In ancient Babylonia and Egypt, in Greece and Rome, in India and China and Arabia, we hear the cry of the human heart for light, and the Divine answer to that cry was not withheld. The *πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως* ('by divers portions and in divers manners') method of revelation, spoken of by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, may be predicted of the whole course of the Divine preparation of the world for the Advent of Christ. God spoke to man by many tongues and in many languages; He spoke to them most clearly in the historical revelation of Himself in Israel—a revelation in which the work of the prophets formed a part, a revelation intended to train Israel to be a missionary nation, so that at last the many might be blessed through the agency of the few. But He spoke the last word through Christ. The religion of the future will not be, as some apparently imagine, a new syncretism of all that is best in all the religions of the world. We do not look to the Parliament of Religions for a perfect religion. Christianity already contains this. We may, indeed, have to develop points to which justice has not been done. But in germ all that man needs is here present. All preceding revelation culminated in the person of Jesus Christ; and the continued revelation of Himself which God still conveys through His spirit dwelling in His Church can never supersede but only interpret and develop the teaching of Him in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Keeping in view the fact that the quest of religion is directed to the discovery of God, we note that Christ alone has revealed to men the truth concerning God; or, rather we should say, He Himself is the true revelation of God. Christ has for us the value or worth of God. So much is admitted by many who have no belief in and no patience with what they regard as metaphysical subtleties concerning the Persons of the Godhead and the Divinity of our Lord. It is not a little to get even this length, to be convinced that Christ

understood God as none else has ever understood Him, that His words express to us the truth concerning God, that His attitude to man is the true reflexion of God's attitude. Now, what was the distinctive feature of Christ's teaching concerning God? Was it not His revelation of God as Father? Long before, the Psalmist had declared, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him' (Ps 103¹³); but there we have only a beautiful *simile* after all, and scarcely anywhere else in the Old Testament is even that height reached. In fact, the nearer we come to the time of Christ, the more do we find the Jews disposed to exalt the transcendency of God, and to increase His distance from His creatures. In our Lord's day the spiritual guides of Israel had practically converted God into a magnified Rabbi, more interested in His law than in His children, a taskmaster who laid burdens heavy to be borne on men's shoulders. Through all this thicket of Rabbinical teaching Jesus cut His way to the central truth afterwards summed up in the words, 'God is love.' He did not, like Muhammad, point men to a Sovereign Will before which they must humbly bow, to which they must blindly submit; but to a Father, whose interest and whose pleasure alike lead Him to seek the welfare of His children. And in His own person He gave expression to the true feeling of the Divine heart when He cried: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. . . . For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light' (Mt 11²⁸⁻³⁰).

The natural converse of Christ's teaching concerning God is found in His teaching concerning man. If God be the Father, all mankind are His children. Hence the value set by Christ on humanity, nay, on every human soul. Hence the emphasis of His parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Lost Son. Hence His unflinching optimism, and the hopefulness that led Him to despair of none, to seek the society of the classes despised by the scribes and Pharisees, and to proclaim it as His mission to seek and to save that which was lost. Other religions—Buddhism in particular—have had their Saviours, but the Christian religion alone can show a Saviour whose optimism carried lofty aims to a triumphant issue.

My comparative study of religions has led me to the conclusion that there is only one of the religions of the world that can be regarded as a serious

rival to Christianity, and that is Buddhism. From Muhammadanism, although it is at present a very real danger when pressed on the acceptance of uncultured peoples in Africa, there is nothing to fear when it comes in contact with the higher civilizations. But Buddhism belongs to a different category. It has manifold points at which it appeals to the needs even of cultured men. Like Christianity, Buddhism is a universal religion in that it addresses its call to men everywhere without distinction of nationality. Its audience is suffering humanity. Buddha, like Jesus, claims to be a Redeemer. Both religions alike insist on the perishableness and emptiness of the world, and seek to turn their followers towards a higher life. But there are serious differences, when we compare the personality of the founders as well as the means whereby they taught men to reach the goal. The Christian religion is bound up with the personality of Jesus in a way in which Buddhism is not bound up with the personality of the Buddha. One alone could ever say, 'I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life,' or 'Come to me, and learn of me.' The dying Buddha expressly said, 'You are not to think that henceforth you have no longer a master; the doctrines and the laws of the Order which I have made known to you—these are to be your master when I am no more.' Jesus said, 'He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father. I and the Father are one.' Buddha says in effect, 'He that hath seen me, hath seen the doctrine.' Moreover, there are many Buddhas; there is but one Christ. The Buddhist saves himself by keeping the law, the Christian is saved by trust in a Person. Buddhism, again, finds that the source of evil lies in existence itself: all desire, all will to live, all emotion must be rooted out. Jesus, on the other hand, wars only against the evil will. He aims not at the extinction of desire, but at the setting of desires on worthy objects; his goal is not *nirvāna*, but holiness.¹ With all that is noble in its aims and elevated in its moral teaching, we cannot but conclude that Buddhism falls far short of Christianity in its appeal to the deepest needs of human nature.

III. Every expression of the religious instinct we meet with deserves to be treated with *reverence and sympathy*. It is only by studying it in this spirit that we shall be able to appreciate the merits

¹ On this point see N. Söderblom, *Les Religions*, 1911, a little work to which the present writer desires to express his great indebtedness.

and discover the defects of any particular religion or religious belief or practice. The days are happily gone when it was considered legitimate to stigmatize whole religions as creations of the devil or as the offspring of imposture and fraud. Our missionaries are trained—or at least they ought to be—not to despise or to denounce the religious beliefs and practices of those to whom they carry the gospel, but to try to understand them, to think themselves into the mental and spiritual disposition of their bearers, to go as far along the road with them as possible, and, when they part company with them, to do so for reasons that shall be intelligible and that may appeal to those whom they are seeking to guide to a nobler faith.¹ It would not be a bad thing if the word ‘superstition,’ which has come to be one of what are called ‘question-begging appellatives,’ were banished from the study of religions. Take even such a primitive form of religion as is represented by Fetishism, which is a specialized form of Animism. When the savage has learned very slowly to look inward, to cease to regard himself as an object, to call himself ‘I,’ to realize himself as subject, as spirit, as personality, he begins presently to look upward,² to transfer this idea of spirit to objects around him, and in particular to fix upon certain objects as the home or dwelling-place of a spirit whose powers on his own behalf he seeks to evoke. The particular wonder-working object of the savage’s reverence may seem contemptible enough to us; the devotion paid to it may strike us as absurd and even repellent; yet there is present here that element of mystery which—I say it with all reverence—is present in the sacraments of the Christian religion. As the savage believes in the mysterious *mana* already referred to, so in varying degrees the Christian attaches efficacy to the Sacraments.

Or, take what is a very prominent feature in most religions, the attempt to propitiate the Divine power or powers, or to enter into friendly relations with them. This finds expression, above all, in *sacrifice*. Whatever view be taken of the origin of sacrifice—if, in truth, it has only *one* meaning and

¹ The present writer would enter his most earnest protest (a protest in which probably every student of Comparative Religion would join) against the extremely prejudiced and misleading account given of Brahmanism by Mr. Harold Begbie in his book (just published) entitled *Other Sheep* (Hodder & Stoughton). *Ne sutor supra crepidam!*

² Cf. Ed. Caird, *Evolution of Religion*, Glasgow, 1892, vol. i. p. 189.

not many—whether the gift-theory be accepted, or the theory of communion with the god, we shall find in all religions ready points of attachment for the Christian notions of atonement and communion with God. The costly gifts offered by the heathen to their gods, the readiness in many cases to offer even a child to please these deities, enforce the lesson taught to Abraham long ago that the best belongs to God, while at the same time they furnish the starting-point for teaching the higher truth, which Abraham had also to learn, that what God demands is the sacrifice of man’s will, and not of his child. ‘Obedience is better than sacrifice.’ In like manner, the participation of the deity and his worshippers in a common meal, and even the notion expressed in the crude phrase ‘eating the god,’ have analogies in the Eucharist, which in reverent hands may be utilized both to commend the Christian religion to the heathen and to throw light upon the Christian practice itself.

IV. As what I have just said may seem to emphasize the human element in Christianity by showing how much it has in common with other religions, I think the proper emphasis is rather upon *the Divine element in all religions*. God has from the first been educating men in the knowledge of Himself. I am not one who has any belief in a primitive revelation—a theory to which it appears to me there are insuperable psychological as well as historical objections. The process has been one of storm and stress, of earnest striving and at times of seemingly hopeless groping; but it has been a progress. To take as an illustration our own religion which grew up on Semitic soil—the first beginnings are to be found thousands of years ago in Babylonia, whose wondrous religious literature has been brought to light within recent years. There we find men labouring to explain the origin of things in their Creation myths; we hear the outpouring of the human soul in penitential psalms; we find an appeal to religious emotion in an elaborate ritual system. Centuries pass, and a great religious development centres in the person of Abraham, who teaches his seed after him the knowledge, so far as he had attained it, of the true God. After a period of retrogression, a new religious leader arises in the person of Moses; and from a subsequent retrogression the great prophets arise to recall the people. Another retrogression follows in the legal system which ruled for centuries after the Exile, until the great prophet

John the Baptist came as the herald and forerunner of the last and greatest of the prophets, the God-man Jesus Christ, who ushered in the final, the absolute, universal religion. God's pædagogic method along that line of development was thus vindicated.

We might pursue a similar course of inquiry along the lines of development amongst other peoples. We might examine the search after God amongst the great Aryan races, the Hindus and the Greeks.¹ We might study the religious factors in Zoroastrianism, with its unsatisfying dualism, or the intensely interesting struggle of Buddhism to conquer and eliminate desire. But we must forbear. The lesson enforced by the study of all these religions is that

¹ See chap. viii., entitled 'The Greek Solution,' in Principal Iverach's *Is God Knowable?* (London, 1877), a chapter which has been freely utilized (sometimes without acknowledgment) by subsequent writers.

more or less of Divine guidance has been vouchsafed to seekers after God and the truth in each one of them, that God has taught men, were it only by the failure of their efforts, to welcome the truth that is bound up in the Person of Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The struggle has been a protracted one, and in many quarters it is not yet over; there have been frequent periods of religious stagnation or even of retrogression. Yet we are firmly persuaded that there has been a Divinely guided order of thoughts as well as events all through the ages, and that the knowledge of the true God is yet destined to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

For, while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.²

² Clough.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF ISAIAH.

ISAIAH XXX. 15.

'In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.'

1. JUDAH was a little country, situated between two great military empires, Assyria and Egypt, just as Switzerland is situated between France and Germany. At the time to which the text refers there was great fear that Sennacherib, king of Assyria, would invade the land. The politicians of Judah were therefore very active in trying to arrange an offensive and defensive alliance with Egypt. At this critical juncture Isaiah issued a political manifesto in favour of rational non-intervention. In the chapter before us, in ever-memorable and ever-useful language, he warns his fellow-countrymen against dangerous entanglements with Egypt, and all other doubtful diplomatic proceedings. He entreats them to remember that the two conditions of national security are quietness and confidence; that is to say, minding their own business and putting their trust in God, carefully avoiding any interference with the affairs of other people, and relying, not upon military preparations, but upon doing their duty to God and man.

2. There is a character that is fussy, and flurried, and restless—totally without repose, totally without dignity, always in extremes. There is no perspective about it, no silence, no sobriety, no self-control; it values no blessing which it has, because it is always yearning for some blessing which it has not; it enjoys no source of happiness in the present, because it is always fretting for some source of happiness in the future. It is bred by a harassed age in which we find no leisure; in which

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon;
or, in which, as another expresses it, we

See all sights from pole to pole,
And glance, and nod, and bustle by;
And never once possess our soul
Before we die.

The text, beautiful in itself, has had for many a singular charm. It is the motto of that quiet and holy book which has soothed so many restless souls—the *Christian Year*.