

## II

### FAITH BEING ESTABLISHED

THE problems which confronted me were like those with which many young men of my age who were interested in religion were faced. But they pressed upon me with urgency, because at twenty-five I was appointed to the staff of a theological college as a lecturer to interpret the New Testament to students who were preparing for the Presbyterian ministry in Canada. I understood thoroughly the background and the outlook of the institution. It would, therefore, have been dishonest of me to take the position and to proceed to tear away light-heartedly the props on which the faith of those men of my own age clustered without substituting a better support on which the growing vine could cling. But my task was difficult. I was still groping my way among broken lights, though I could make out the principles on which the new trellis should be constructed. My first task was to work through for myself a few of the greatest books of the New Testament, especially the Gospels and the major Pauline epistles. In these lay the crucial problems. Shortly after I began my work there appeared the well-known, rigidly scientific, *Encyclopaedia Biblica*. Some articles were of the extremest character; chiefly those on the Gospels written by a German, and on the Epistles by a Dutch scholar. The former reduced the life of the historic Jesus to a few fragments, and the latter threw great suspicion on the genuineness of Pauline epistles which had hitherto not been questioned. The origins of Christianity thus became nebulous. These

## 68 Religion on My Life's Road

articles, however, caused me less difficulty the longer I pondered upon them, for the interpretations were based on too sceptical a view, and they did not afford an historic foundation strong enough to carry the weight of early Christianity. I called into use the scientific method of observing the facts of the life and faith which were described in the New Testament. This I did in as judicial a spirit as I was capable of. From Germany I had brought back an uneasy suspicion that the extreme scholars might be more scientific in spirit and in method than those who upheld the authenticity of Christian tradition. But that suspicion was dispelled by the articles in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica*. I asked myself, What is the scientific spirit? This was my answer: It is a spirit which searches for facts and evidence in the most impartial manner, and then by the use of the best available judgment assigns values to such facts and evidence. Von Ranke made the bold claim that he would base his history on what actually happened; but this is an ideal to which only an approximation can be made. It requires the most delicate discernment to sift the original facts in any historical situation from the interpretations which have been put upon them from the very moment of their happening, and thus to estimate the truth or error of a tradition. Two scholars approach the New Testament as two judges approach a case. They may be equally learned and the same evidence is presented to both. But it may appeal very differently to each and they will disagree in their decisions. This is so in historical and literary judgments because of the personal factors involved in the evidence as well as in the judges. It is proverbial that men differ in matters of taste; they also differ in estimating the likelihood of a person acting in this way or that, and in assigning the motives for the action. In other words, probability must be taken into account in interpreting human conduct. The de-

cisions of a judge over a period of time reveal his character as well as his learning and experience. So scholars reveal different attitudes of mind and spiritual inclinations by their interpretations of the New Testament. One finds satisfaction in the Christian faith as regards God and man; it accords with what he knows of himself and with his aspirations for life eternal; it brings harmony into his soul. Another scholar cannot accept the Christian faith as more than a dream or an unverifiable desire, and he accounts for all history by natural environment and the laws of human psychology working within it, such phenomena as are inexplicable being due to an intelligible though as yet undiscovered sequence. Neither of these scholars is necessarily scientific; the term is not to be applied on the basis of such presuppositions or results; its validity is determined by the effort of each to weigh truthfully all the available evidence from history and human nature. Radical results may be arrived at by a thoroughly Christian scholar in the process of his scientific investigation. These same results may be reached by one who does not accept the Christian faith. But in another Christian scholar the quality of his faith may make some evidence reasonable which does not appeal to either of the others. A young student, therefore, is not asked to divest himself of his religious convictions before he begins to study truthfully the origins of his faith. But he must be warned to make allowance for a probable refraction of the path of light in the deeper strata of his convictions which have not hitherto been disturbed. Then he will be able to estimate more truthfully the radiant fact.

Taking the books of the New Testament as a body of writings which were in existence not later than the end of the first quarter of the second century, the most important of them half a century or more earlier, a large amount of reliable evidence exists for the character of Christianity shortly after

## 70 Religion on My Life's Road

the middle of the first century. There is abundant reason to believe that the major epistles of Paul came from his own hand, and that there were nearly contemporaneous written sources, as well as oral, in Aramaic from which our Synoptic Gospels, i. e., Mark, Matthew, and Luke, were composed, the latter two shortly after the end of the third quarter of the first century. My primary question was not who wrote them nor their precise dates. I wished to investigate the historical facts of these consentient writings. It was clear that a new phenomenon had arisen in the world. There was the beginning of a new phase of human history. A unique brotherhood had appeared and was spreading rapidly. From a small particle of leaven which had begun to work in Palestine somewhere in the thirties, a marvellous fermentation was breaking forth here and there in the communities of the western Roman Empire. The fact that a Jew of the standing of Saul of Tarsus flung himself with all his energy into making havoc of the Nazarenes, showed that the Jewish authorities realised that a dangerous sect had appeared in their midst. These Hebrews claimed that they had found the Messiah and therefore that they were the true inheritors of the promises of Israel. This assertion of title contributed to the success of early Christianity, for it induced some of the finest minds not only of the Jews but of the proselytes to search into the right of succession. The followers of Jesus as Messiah boldly proclaimed their primogeniture as the chosen people of God. This infuriated ecclesiastical Judaism; with such impostors there could be no compromise. It was not long until they were recognised by the pagan world as being different from the Jews, and were given the new name Christian. The Roman officials also realised, shortly after the middle of the first century, that they had to deal with a new religious invasion from the east. Gentiles rapidly joined the

groups and changed the outlook of the brotherhoods. This inflow was a proof that something extraordinary had come to pass, for nothing but a compelling conviction could have induced Jews to accept former heathen as equal brethren in the reborn Israel. By many the acceptance was grudgingly given, and there were centres in which the fusion was never made. But where the Apostle Paul had influence former Jews and Gentiles came together, though even there not without frequent frictions. The conversion of the rabbi Saul into the Christian Paul was the most momentous triumph of the Gospel. He tells us that he was in full career after the new sect when he was arrested by a vision of the risen Christ, and from that time on he was a new man and the devoted slave of a new Lord. He left Judaea and for some years matured his thought in unknown parts, but appeared at Antioch as the champion of the Gentiles. Thenceforth there was no danger of the Christians sinking into another impotent sect of Judaism. Paul went as the herald of the Cross offering salvation to Jew and Gentile on equal terms among the cities and along the crowded highways of Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece; and finally as a prisoner he reached Rome. With a statesman's eye he picked strategic centres for his evangelisation, leaving to others fields already entered or more remote. Why he never travelled to the fascinating metropolis of Alexandria we can but surmise. We do not know how the Gospel got its early foothold there. Shortly after the middle of the century there were strong groups of "brethren" in the brilliant but dissolute cities of Antioch on the Orontes, Ephesus, and Corinth; and they soon outstripped in vigor the many long-established mystery religions and surpassed in numbers the schools of the philosophers. Mommsen states that by the end of the century the new religion had a firm foothold in the Imperial court.

## 72 Religion on My Life's Road

These brotherhoods were recruited from every rank in society, though most of them seem to have been drawn from fairly intelligent classes who were engaged in ordinary callings. Not many learned and not many noble were among them, but they had their share of the poor and of slaves. However, brethren who read the epistles to the Romans and to the Hebrews, and who of course must have understood and sympathised with their teachings, may safely be regarded as having possessed good intelligence and high moral character. But again and again we are told that among them were not a few who had lived vicious lives and others who had been despised because of their occupations or practices. From these groups arose leaders, some well known, most nameless, who guided rather than dictated, and took their brethren into consultation. Epistles sent them by apostles and others were read in public and were preserved and probably exchanged with those to other churches. Incidents in the life and the teaching of Jesus Christ, such as became the sources of our Gospels, were told or read. But it is of great importance for the understanding of these societies to observe the universal claim made in the books of the New Testament that all the brethren were in possession of a Spirit, which they regarded as coming from their risen Master. They were fused together by a glow of contagious enthusiasm; not as members of new ethical societies, but as followers of a Person, to whose service they were dedicated by a symbol of initiation, a familiar but changed rite of immersion in water; and by participation in a common meal which they ate with thanksgiving in commemoration of their Lord who was present with them in spirit.

Bound together in a hostile world by a common faith and spirit, they received messages from one another especially through itinerant apostles and their assistants, and they

showed hospitality to travelling fellow Christians. Imagine some such scene as this: it may have been in Philippi;—under cover of night a group meets in the house of one of the best off of the brethren. Among them is a former Jewish family rich in spiritual inheritance but poor enough in this world's goods, a Gentile dissatisfied with the teachings of philosophy, a Roman centurion accompanied by a soldier of his band, a few slaves also snatching an hour from the scanty freedom allowed by a not unkindly owner; the rest, freedmen or average folk, Jews and Gentiles, who did the ordinary work of the world. These brethren did not think of themselves as outcasts, but as having become slaves to a new Lord and heirs of an inheritance promised from ancient days. The decision by which they made this allegiance had been like a sword separating them perhaps from their families, their friends, their race, and the more kindly disposed of their neighbors. But they felt that the Rule of God was manifesting itself in their midst as they got new power to endure and a new endowment of life and hope. Tonight they meet in tense emotion, for friends are greeting a small, stooped man of heavy brow, furrowed face, flashing eye, spent in body from the stripes with which he had been lately scourged, wearied now with the labors of a journey on which he had been in perils of rivers, perils of robbers, perils from his countrymen, perils from the Gentiles, and worn by hunger and thirst, by fastings, cold, and nakedness. This was the apostle Paul. In this, his most beloved church, he lingered, though not for long; he had far to go. But he tells them of the sweeping triumph of the Gospel over foes without, and even within, some of his churches. He is the strongest link among the groups in the western Empire. This fellowship, in which all distinctions of race and social standing are lost in common love for its Head, common hopes and mutual helpfulness, is

## 74 Religion on My Life's Road

a part of a new family, other members of which were groups of citizens of an eternal, imperial city of God rising within the Roman Empire. Their unity was not constituted by an ecclesiastical hierarchy but in the possession of a common Spirit and love for a common Head; "whom," as an apostolic writer said, "not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable."

Those groups, however, had their own troubles; their concord was not idyllic. Then, as today, persons of strong opinions were prone to impose their especial convictions upon others and to impute disagreement with them to some moral fault. Such strong-minded brethren got a following, and they would claim, as they thought honestly, that they were not seeking their own advantage but were lost in the Cause. In all great movements it is hard to detect the exact border where the enthusiast passes from his own interests into those of the Cause pure and simple. If the Cause transcends the selfish desires of the individual, it will react upon him and will fashion his moral nature into something like its own ideals. So it was in the groups of early Christians. Even the most independent were moulded into a common type. The victory of their faith is manifest in the transmission of the books of the New Testament. These contain accounts not only of strong internal disagreement, but even differing views of the mind of Jesus in the Gospels themselves. The Gospel of Matthew sets forth a picture of Jesus for the Jewish-Christians; the Gospel of Luke for Gentiles; and at the end of the century the fourth Gospel was intended to counteract prevalent mistaken opinions. But a similar view of God and Christ pervades the New Testament. Differences of opinion as to how the faith should be propagated and as to emphasis and interpretation have continued ever since,



and have hardened into organised Churches which look askance upon one another. Yet Christendom is still one in its faith in its Master.

What was the character of the faith and life of those brethren? It is evident at once that they believed that they were living in a new age of fresh moral power. Their estimates of value were determined not primarily by the seen but by the unseen. That unseen world from which their power came was very near, and it gave a new significance to the present. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of this world as a scene of passing shadows. Tossed as Christians are on a sea of troubles, they cannot, he tells them, drift into destruction, for they have hope, as an anchor that will not drag, embedded in unseen depths of unyielding realities. The popular mind was enslaved by fear of death, for it carried mortals from the known into the unknown<sup>1</sup>; but the Christians faced the unseen with joy, having a faith, that could not be shaken, that when the house of this tabernacle was dissolved there was awaiting them a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. They had secure confidence that their Master had gone before them to prepare a place for them and that He would soon return to take them to Himself. Thus the other world was not an Elysium of shades, but a home where they expected to live with their Friend. The ideal of their future was the Realm of God, the germ of which existed then in their hearts but would be manifested outwardly, when their Lord would return and there would be a mass repentance on

<sup>1</sup> . . . the mind  
 Conscious of guilt in its foreboding fear  
 Torments itself with goads and scorching whips,  
 Nor sees what end of misery there can be,  
 Nor what limit at length to punishment,  
 Nay dreads lest these same evils after death  
 Should prove more grievous!

Lucretius III. 1017-1023  
 R. C. Trevelyan's translation.

## 76 Religion on My Life's Road

the part of the Jewish people who would recognise Jesus as their Messiah. In these expectations the Christians were disappointed: the Jews in large numbers did not accept Him, and Jesus did not return to establish his Kingdom and to judge the world at a universal, visible, Assize. Undoubtedly these failures of their hopes troubled them, and in some of the later books of the New Testament there are signs of complaint about the delay. But it is remarkable how little difference these disillusionments made in the essence of their faith.

The underlying reason was that it is relatively unimportant for the moral convictions of the individual what theory he holds as to the duration of the world. That is not a moral nor a religious conception. It is his cosmogony, either inherited by long tradition or the result of recent scientific hypothesis. What really matters to a person is whether he believes that he possesses an eternal life of such intrinsic value that it will endure beyond the years which he may spend on earth. I do not regulate my conduct or hopes on any assumption that the universe will continue for millions of years or indeed may run for ever. I may have a dream that some day this planet will be the home of a nobler race than now inhabits it, but it is so unsubstantial that it has little practical effect upon my life as I live it here and now. What counts with me is that my earthly life lasts for threescore years and ten, or by reason of strength for fourscore years. It would be a doubtful boon if science were to lengthen it for a century. But it does matter supremely to me that in this space of time I should win a character which is of imperishable value, and should know that here and now I am in possession of a life which is not limited by earthly conditions of change and decay, but transcends them into eternity. That was the essential faith of the early Christians, and it is the faith of Christians today. The civilisations of the Roman world had

their cosmogonies. The Stoics believed that time consisted of recurring cycles, and that each world-process would follow exactly the course of its predecessor and end in fire; "an everlasting, unvarying round." The Pharisaic Jew, whose cosmogony the Christians inherited, held that the present world-order would soon end in an apocalypse, when God would come in judgment and the righteous Israelites would be brought back to life in a new universe in which Jehovah would rule according to the Law. The ancient cosmogonies all expected a shorter existence for the present universe than modern scientific theories allow. Faith is not dependent on the accuracy of any. But the enthusiastic hope of the early Christians for the speedy return of their Lord did undoubtedly help them to triumph over their ill treatment by their contemporaries. They saw a mighty conflict going on between the forces of evil and good. In every convulsion of the nations, even in every natural disaster, they discerned the throes of a writhing but defeated adversary. They believed that Christ had already won the battle over His antagonist, and that His victory would soon be visibly manifest when He would come to judge the world. In this they interpreted a spiritual conviction in terms of their inherited cosmogony. This belief helped them to scale the height immediately in front of them; and that was all they had to do. Succeeding generations would in their turn occupy valleys beyond and scale other heights in front, for human life is not one vast fertile plain but a series of mountain ranges each challenging the faith of a new-born age. The permanent Christian faith is that, however long or short be the duration of the human race on the earth, the present scene is only a passing phase of human existence, and that the real, the eternal, world is separated from us by a mere handbreadth of time; that the curtain will soon rise and disclose to each of us its glory.

## 78 Religion on My Life's Road

There is, however, this other most important side to the Christian faith: that human life on earth is a momentous fact, and that here and now it must be made as far as possible a manifestation of the Divine Rule, or the Kingdom of God. This the early Christians fully believed, and they created the most original and powerful moral and spiritual society known to history. As compared with other communities the Christian groups exhibited an extraordinary happiness, which became a new virtue:

A conquering, new-born joy awoke,  
And filled her life with day.

The word *joy* was coined with a new meaning; it abounds in the New Testament, occurring in nearly all the books. This joy was the outcome of their belief that they had been rescued by Divine love, through their Master, from all the evils of the present world as well as of that to come. Fear was banished from their fellowship, that fear which was an overmastering power in the external world. There was fear between man and man, between subjects and rulers, between men and the gods. Life was harsh, disaster was frequent, hatred provoked crime. From of old the Greek poets knew well how fear of inherited sin brooded over each generation, and believed only too firmly that guilt was transmitted from parents to children and led to new crimes. Their tragedy moves round this central thought. Each crime was atoned for by the punishment of the individual who committed it, though his heritage had led him into inevitable sin. Man was doomed to learn by inescapable suffering; he was dogged by the fear of implacable gods. Even now fear hangs over the majority of mankind. They see in visitations of plague, in earthquakes, in hurricanes, in excessive wickedness, marks of the wrath of gods or demons. Modern science has dispelled much of the fear that was due to disease, but it has not

removed from the ordinary person the dread of suffering whether in his own body, or especially his mind, or through his friends. Christianity drove out fear for the first time from the multitudes of ordinary people. It replaced it by joy, implacability of the gods by love of a Father, retribution for sin by forgiveness; for a realm of shades it substituted a great cloud of witnesses who are watching the struggles of their friends in the race of life with intense and friendly regard.

Another word, which, though Hebrew in origin, was inspired with new meaning, was *Peace*. This went hand in hand with joy to express a state of mind from which fear had been removed. The brethren within the groups had peace in contrast to the strife which reigned without, and peace within their own hearts which were freed from the dread of sin and its consequences: and all this was because they had found peace in God who had visited them with redeeming grace. Not that the groups were gardens in which the flowers never withered and there were no weeds; at times the blossoms wilted and wild plants did not always yield the gardener's promise; but by contrast with other societies the Christian brethren lived in peace.

The supreme Christian virtue was *love*. The word *agape* was new in content; Christian love was so original that the usual Greek word for love, *eros*, could not be used for it. Love springs from God; God is love; we love because God loved us. Nothing could separate believers from the love of God, who is the Father of His children. His well-beloved Son came into the world to save sinners, and God is in the world reconciling it to Himself. This was the faith with which the early Christians conquered. Love became a motive of surpassing efficacy in the realm of conduct, and distinguished Christian ethics radically from pagan or even Jewish. Love is a virtue of the whole man, intellectual and

## 80 Religion on My Life's Road

spiritual, an incentive to the discernment of truth and a source of unwearied effort on behalf of others. A striking feature of the vocabulary of the New Testament is the large number of words denoting the qualities of a lovable disposition: goodness and beneficence, lavish kindness, open-heartedness, open-handedness, compassion. Though there was at the time in the Roman world a rising feeling of sympathy with those in suffering and a regard for the morally heroic, these fine qualities reached even in outstanding moralists "considerably short of the standard of Christian charity" (H. Sidgwick). With love went forbearance, patience, steadfastness under suffering, spiritual courage, which was substituted for the pagan virtue of courage, the very word for which does not occur in the New Testament. The virtues of gentleness, humility, equity, reasonableness, were redeemed from anything abject or servile, as they were usually thought to be in pagan civilisation. Jesus called the meek blessed because there had been flashed upon them a true knowledge of themselves by a revelation of the Divine purity. Meekness was not insincere self-depreciation, but a truthful refusal to glory in personal merit, because in the presence of Jesus the best of men knew that they came woe-fully short of what they ought to be.

"The crowning triumph of ethical nomenclature, Conscience, got new content and new sanctions in the Christian moral life." The Faith was not a new moral law to be imposed upon the individual, nor was his moral life a bundle of virtues bound together by compelling loyalty to a system. The originality of Christian morals lay in its affirmation that goodness comes from a newly-created conscience through the Spirit of God. Men are good or bad not as they conform outwardly to the human standards of their society, but as they act from a renewed conscience. Christian character is based

on the faith that a person may live in the fellowship of prayer with God, the original and primal Source of all that is true, beautiful, and good. Christ does not, as a dictator, impose statutory conduct on His followers; He is the Supreme authority in conduct because He lived in history the supreme human life.

But it may be asked, Was this moral idealism more than a dream? In how far was it realised in the life of the Christians of the first century? Of course this is a pertinent question and one with which Christianity has been most justly faced through all its history. It must be at once admitted that the ideal was not at all adequately embodied in the first generation, nor has ever been more than partially fulfilled anywhere since. The Christian faith, let it be remembered, is a matter for the individual; it concerns his character, and that character is the result of innumerable hidden thoughts and decisions in daily conduct. Out of the intimacies of life three-fourths of our web of destiny is woven. In the region of the commonplace lies the battlefield for personality. Therefore what we have to consider is whether, where Christianity has had scope, a distinctive ideal and type of life has appeared. I believe that it has. This is to be seen not in the policies of the nations nor in the out-workings of any economic system, but in the average everyday life of those who are not unwilling to call themselves Christians. The new faith began to conquer its world through the home; "the unique union of marriage was the birthplace of an unprecedented and incomparable ethical culture." Jesus went far beyond His fellow Jews in teaching the sacredness and the enduring character of marriage. He enjoined on the husband a chaste and reverent love for his wife, and, on her, modesty and purity. He taught that in these respects man and woman are on the same footing. His followers, though not ascetics, observed

## 82 Religion on My Life's Road

a noble austerity in regard to personal sexual purity; as woman was raised to new dignity and each person was to prove a good neighbor to every man or woman, chastity was made more effective. Children also were held in more sacred affection, because they were members of the household of the faith. The cry of the children and of the helpless was soon answered by an organised system of relief for orphans, widows, and the destitute. The slave also became an accepted brother. In the pagan world he was the tool for the will and pleasure of his master; he was essential not only for the menial tasks of the household or of manual labor, but was a necessary cog in the machine of trade and business; he filled also an important function in the professions and even in the life of culture among the wealthier classes. But there was nothing other than natural kindness to restrain the caprice of masters towards their slaves, and the coarseness of the age tipped the scales low to brutality. Under the influence of Stoicism a wave of sympathy for mankind was spreading over the world, and Judaism had a good record, though it seems to have drawn few of its proselytes from the ranks of the slaves. Christianity introduced no new theory as to the system of slavery. But it revolutionised it by accepting slaves as brethren, and so giving them a consciousness of being men, not things. This was a social fact of tremendous ethical significance. Moreover, Christianity made effective an attitude towards manual labor which had permanent results in the history of democracy. It brought a healthy tonic into the world which was losing its energy through idleness or pride.

Nowhere did the new religion face heavier odds than when it met the fierce passion of the populace for games and gladiatorial shows in the amphitheatre; "The destruction of the gladiatorial games is all its work" (Lecky); Christ had died for the barbarian gladiator and the slave as well as for Jew,



the moral Gentile, or the sinner in the city street. Here I will review the situation as I did long ago: "Christianity enters the world at a time when there was a revival of religious interest, but little to satisfy that interest, a world that was morally depraved, and yet a world in which noble ideals of humanity lay unproductive in many minds. Impotent pathos stood over against asceticism. Suddenly the Gospel is preached, and its followers are not unreasonably identified by the Gentile world with the Jews. But Judaism did not supply the new energy, for it had been ineffective in moulding the morals of that world to higher ends. Christianity is recruited from the intelligent middle classes, with a large number of slaves and outcasts, and a sprinkling from the highest ranks. But it offers no better terms to the rich than to the poor, to the intellectual than to the unlettered. Its moral demands are from the beginning utterly stringent. To face a world accepting lust as humanly inevitable with an inviolable law of purity is even today regarded by many as visionary; to fight the luxury of the world and its mammonism with such a delicate weapon as the gentle Christian spirit might have seemed to court defeat from a coarse and ostentatious age; to dare to resist point-blank the passion for lustful amusement and bloody games was in the view of common sense the height of folly; to cut right across the social strata and to establish a brotherhood upon moral and spiritual affinities without casting everyday relationships into confusion, and to exalt labor to a place of dignity, was to accomplish a social revolution without attendant disasters. What finer flowering of virtue has there ever been? Why did the new religion succeed in making actual on a large scale even nobler ethical ideals than had become effective through Judaism with its prestige of religion, and by Stoicism which had much greater intellectual and social advantages?"

Since those opening years nothing has occurred to modify the essential spiritual and ethical principles of the Christian faith. The quality of the Christian mind remains the same. While today there is not the same emphasis on the Pauline theory of the atonement, no hypotheses as to the origin and nature of evil have been able to dispel from the purest souls the conviction of personal guiltiness, and still, as through the ages, the vision of Christ fills the mind with penitential sorrow. Notwithstanding all the scientific and philosophical investigations into the nature of man's moral life, the Christian faith is today just as strong relatively as it has ever been. As the Figure of Jesus has been made plain by the widespread reading of the Gospels by the common people, His incomparable moral stature, instead of repelling them by its majesty, draws them by its winsomeness to unceasing and hopeful effort to follow in His steps. He has been for nearly two millennia a source for moral renewal, and continues to evoke the immense latent power for religion that lies in the human heart.

I was thus brought back to consider the Founder of this colossal religious and moral phenomenon. The New Testament from beginning to end attributes to Jesus Christ the origin and motive power of the faith. In every book He is the stupendous Personality whom all adore. The four Gospels open the New Testament. They differ greatly, especially the first three from the fourth. Much in them has been coloured by the medium of preaching and teaching through which they have reached us, and the scholar must exercise scrutiny to separate the wrappings of Christian tradition from the historical Figure; but there is no mistaking the same Person in them all. He is a unique Figure in whom are combined the authority of a Gospel of the grace and love of God with the promise of His rule among men and the power

to create that Kingdom. Jesus was not a philosopher nor a dreamer, but from Him went forth renewing energy on an amazing scale. The early Christians were persuaded that no evil could resist Him; that He was such a conqueror that He had defeated death and was still alive with them. Consequently it was natural that He should have been invested by them with miraculous power over the physical world and the bodies of men, and that this conviction should have been heightened by their poetic imagination as the years passed. But in the earliest letters, those of Paul from 50–57 A. D., the same supernatural Figure dominates, so great had been the proof of His power in the lives of Christians. Not less majestic is the Figure which, after historical investigation, is delineated in the primary sources of our Gospels. And the last book of the Bible presents the final triumph of Jesus Christ. From the Gospels to the Revelation I get the impression that the writers were trying to explain an inexpressible Wonder; that there was the irruption into history of an extraordinary Person. Even as a human being, no figure in history has been so moving as the Jesus of the synoptic Gospels. He holds a superb balance as He faces life. From the beginning He made His choice of His Kingdom, and nothing could induce Him to change it. From early in His career He realised that He would suffer for it, and that His purposes of good would be thwarted by His own people. If ever a man had to meet contemptuous opposition and apparent frustration, it was Jesus. He was disappointed in those to whom He had to leave His Gospel so inadequately understood, and, as death drew near, there broke from Him words of agony as though His cup was too bitter for Him. On the cross it might well seem to His enemies that they had triumphed, but there He tells the malefactor by His side that He will receive him forthwith in paradise. From the very first, Jesus

## 86 Religion on My Life's Road

on the cross has become a new interpretation to men of the love and wisdom of God. That spectacle signified that by Divine suffering the Divine Rule will be established in the hearts of men. It has been the most powerful confirmation in the Christian world that love and not evil or hatred will prevail; that God, the Father, will rescue His children from the suffering and sin of this mortal life into His eternal Kingdom.

I am not particularly interested in making philosophical, psychological, or even theological incursions into the depths of the personality of Jesus. Nor do I regard as historical many of the miraculous incidents of the Gospels. They are often the embroidery which loving and amazed imagination wove around His Figure. I do, however, believe that Jesus is not to be accounted for as an ordinary human being, and that there went forth from Him transforming power throughout His life and after His death. I respond to Him as my supreme Leader, authoritative by His own inherent personality, giving me the fullest comprehension of God of which I am capable, assuring me that in the end God, as I see Him in Jesus, will cause His Kingdom to come, partly here, but in its fullness hereafter. The more I study the Gospels, the more clearly does He appear as the One who satisfies both my mind and my soul's desire; the more also does my moral ideal become clarified and my hope for the world established.

Thus far I have described the process by which I reached a degree of historical certitude which made a satisfactory intellectual basis for my Christian faith, especially through the study of the New Testament. But worship was also an essential phase of my religion. Indeed, as my intellectual comprehension of the Faith enlarged, my enjoyment of worship was heightened. Worship is an activity of the spirit which one shares with others. As practised in the Church, it

is the creation of the Christian mind and spirit down the centuries. Prayers are the outpouring of the richest faith of the Church; hymns, set to joyful, familiar, or stately music, are the poetry of its exalted emotion. The sacred song and aspirations of the Greek, Latin, and Protestant churches enable worshippers to enter into the experience of the saints, to become partners in the fellowship of the past; in them deep calls unto deep as the congregation of the living lifts its heart in adoration to the God who also redeemed our fathers in the faith. In a concourse of like-minded worshippers in surroundings that induce a reverent frame, we are, for the time, freed from the urgent world and are purified from the stains of the earthy that is too much with us.

But prayer is private even more than public. We lay bare to God, of set purpose, the intimacies of our inmost soul, though we also share in public thanksgivings and petitions. Prayer, however, is not merely a request for specific things whether in private or public petition. We do, in fact, ask for what we desire, but the intelligent soul is only too well aware that we do not know what we should ask for as we ought. Our knowledge of ourselves is so meagre that we could not, if we had the power, plan our lives with success. We have got such poor results when we have taken charge of ourselves that the issue would be disastrous for us, if there were not a Person to overrule, towards reasonable and harmonious ends, our daily actions, so haphazard and due to the spur of momentary impulse they are. Therefore, though we ask for things as we should like to have them, our controlling aspiration in all true prayer is, Thy will be done. Prayer is a dedication of ourselves to the will of our Father who is the King of the Eternal Kingdom. By it we bring ourselves into His presence. In everyday life we are fashioned by those we love and by those with whom we have constant intercourse.

## 88 Religion on My Life's Road

Happy are we if we have worthy friends; happy if we enjoy, even now and then, the company of great souls. They mould us into something of their own likeness. So in prayer we live consciously in the presence of God; and His Spirit, moving us to enjoy Him and responding to our active impulse, fashions us to His likeness according to the measure that our prayer allows.

The most sacred part of worship is the Sacrament of the Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, or, as it has been called from the earliest days, the Eucharist. In this rite symbolic expression is given to the central fact of the religion of redemption. Those who definitely profess to be Christians, when they participate in this sacrament, have brought home to themselves, more vividly than elsewhere, the conviction that they can enter into fellowship with God Himself through Jesus Christ who died for their salvation. The Church has been torn by controversies which have raged round this solemn ritual; different views will always be held as to the manner in which Jesus Christ is present in the Holy Communion; but there is agreement at least in this, that, through the symbols of the bread and wine, those who participate get confirmation of the fact of redemption and assurance of communion with a living Lord.

Few of my memories are so moving as the recalled scenes of the celebration of this Sacrament. I have watched with emotion people, simple and learned, rich and poor, kneeling at the rail before the altar in a cathedral which subdued the mind to adoration by its architectural majesty and its hallowed historical associations; I have shared the worship of country-folk who had gathered from far and near in an unadorned church, and have joined in the familiar psalmody of that sacred service as it was wafted out into the peaceful summer air; from time to time I am one of a great congrega-

tion in a city who listen as the institution of the Lord's Supper is read from Scripture and then receive the sacramental elements; in whatever psychological frame we take part in this symbolic celebration, we all believe that somehow, in this act of faith, we are brought more concretely than elsewhere into the Divine Presence; our confidence in the reality of the supernatural is renewed; we reach out through the seen into the unseen and the eternal: we are reassured of forgiveness for our sins and shortcomings, and of the fulfillment of our incomplete and unsatisfying mortal existence in an imperishable life of communion with God.