

FAITH, METAPHYSIC,
AND INCARNATION

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FAITH, METAPHYSIC, AND INCARNATION

MUCH must be said in religious thought about the absolute, and it may raise in some a protest against the introduction there of metaphysic—though for faith the absolute is the holy. Stated in the language of religion the absolute is the holy; and the holy is in religion the first interest. Let us, however, examine this protest

A reaction has long been promoted against the metaphysic involved in the Christology of the church. And since the Anglo-Saxons, like the Jews, are not a metaphysical people, as the Greeks were and the Teutons are, and since it is not comfortably thought among us that God should be more in any land than meets the middle register of thought, where alone we are at home, so, we consider, while he may perhaps “geometrize” he does not philosophize. The philosophers do not think his thoughts after him, they only guess. The positive sciences, in which we are so strong, represent for us the main lines on which any God must move. The middle register marks the limits which we must not pass if we are to think judiciously about him—one wonders how the soul could live if God thought as soberly about his Son or his sinners as we strive to think of him—and the result has been the specifically English philosophy of Agnosticism—now happily asphyxiated as we rise to higher thought and breathe a rarer air. The further result is that, in a crisis of thought which involves the whole mentality of the world, culture is not equal to the spiritual situation of the world, though it was so in the Catholic age or when the Puritans had touch and commerce with the great Reformers. A long isolation within our seas, now ended with results none can forecast, has secluded our religion from some leading movements of the world’s thought and has cast some minds upon obsolete patristics and others upon poor pietisms, so we are unready for the modern crisis of faith and vulnerable to rather shallow challenge. Many plod along in a provinciality of thought and an inadequacy of faith which is much more prone to pick up

the this questions of the dilettantist than to grasp the thorough answers of the master.

“We yet do taste
Some subtleties of tho Isle that will cot let us
Believe things certain.”

The two chief mental movements which to-day tend to monopolize the interest of cultural religion and to impair a positive faith in Christianity may be described as Historicism and Psychologism. Historicism tends to dissolve the objective of faith into a handful of facts that will not carry it down the course of time, and psychologism tends to resolve religion into subjective processes or symbols which do not guarantee objective reality, but are, at most, the emergence into conscious action of man's own subliminal resource. Neither the one nor the other can give us a religion, and the tendency of their correction of religion is to correct it out of life. For a religion the first requisite is an objective reality, a reality which is objective to the whole race and which we either reach or receive. According as we receive it we have it as revelation and by way of living faith; according as we reach it we have it by way of discovery, of thought, of metaphysic. But then metaphysic is the movement of thought which historicism and psychologism unite with sentimentalism to reject, and in cases even to despise. Hence, if metaphysics be disallowed in aid, and if religion or faith (which has been described as popular metaphysics) fail, the sense of a real and objective God fails; the note of reality goes out of such religion as we have left, and with that in due course all fails. We become subjective illusionists, surer of mood than of reality. We have more religion than God. We are more occupied with religion than with God, and more influenced by it. We have no stay. We rotate on our own axis, and having no sun we stagger along without an orbit. We are driven to and fro with the hour and its events, with the world and its fashion. Religion itself becomes but another of our vivid interests instead of our vital center. We become unfit, and then palpably unfit to be leaders of life or to control it. The public, which, after all, needs a reality and an authority more than anything else, passes us by disappointed. To placate it we take up practical social enter-

prises, partly in despair and partly in hot fits, and we are not able to carry them, after a time, as we become disillusioned with their results.

The Anglo-Saxon mind, I say, is not metaphysical. We suspect such a pursuit on the whole. We dislike such words as "the absolute" or as "finality," we distrust people who tell us that if God is not absolute he is no God, and if faith is not final it is not faith, and yet we get up a certain toying interest in things like Monism, which cannot even be discussed without grasping the idea of an absolute, whether it is believed in or not. But mostly we are prone to think we have got on wonderfully well with God as a working hypothesis, or as a tacit assumption, or as an entailed property, when he has ceased to be an object of direct and inexplicable certainty for our living, personal trust. And so far, it is true, we have done fairly well. We do not have our feet on rock, but it is wonderful what can be done by skillful shoring and upheld by clever device. We are hung up with surprising success where we cannot stand. We are floated with almost invisible cords from the flies, so to say, and we are able to go through our part, and to seem to stand, in scenery which would not bear our real weight. Religion may lack footing, but the lack is veiled, so far, by the old traditionalism, constitutionalism, and nationalism which suspend our faith. Faith rests on churches deeply interlaced in the whole fabric of the social order or the national mind, which does not care to inquire too deeply on what the church itself rests. So that the lack of personal faith, in the evangelical sense of the word, and the lack of metaphysical interest or aptitude are veiled, and for a time to some extent made good, by these stays. But we are passing into a time when these cannot strengthen the mast. What is the state of its socket? Is its stump rotting in bilge? Questions are being rapidly raised which cannot be answered by a mere appeal to tradition, nor by a mere young optimism. The mast cannot hang from the shrouds. By the present failure of civilization in a Europe called Christian issues are being stirred which cannot be laid by a mere reference to the way in which religion has become inspissated in our social existence or the soul carried by use and wont. Many of the churches drop

the apparatus of history, institution, or nationality which suspend the average soul and give it security over the abyss. They have not the historic sense. They dismiss it with clap-trap about slavery to tradition. They retain tradition only in the form of the Bible, or of an orthodoxy, or, at the other end, a legacy of liberty—all ill-understood. And now that the critics are exploiting even the halfpenny press it is questionable how much longer the biblical strand of the old cable will hold. It is certain, moreover, that the daily and practical use of the Bible among Christians as a means of either grace or truth is not what it was. Orthodoxy has become a pillar of salt, and liberty, for want of a creative center, turns to mere liberalism and that to credal anarchy, and, accordingly, the sense of the abyss is coming home. Thousands now feel that they are swaying where once, though only suspended, they were safely held. The steadying cords, the guys, are cut; will the carrying cords and cables last? Not only individuals but congregations are in this state of oscillation. They grasp at one device after another to give themselves a reason for existing. They plunge into social interests or social work for that purpose, and sometimes into more work than their degree of faith carries; work which may be an expression of restless energy more than of powerful faith; work, therefore, which produces only the limited effect of mere activity and then leaves the workers disheartened because they do not get the returns that can come only from spiritual conviction and moral power. The effect of detachment from a national past was less marked so long as the old theology lasted, with its philosophic affinities and its metaphysical base. When personal faith felt weak the pious community still had a creed there, unwritten sometimes but understood, which claimed to present reality in ordered and adequate Christian thought, and so beneath them people still felt the everlasting arms and they had a tacit but real base for liberty. But these serious theologies are in popular discredit. We hear how absurd metaphysic is, and especially the metaphysic of Orthodoxy. The Chalcedonian Trinity goes, along with Hellenic thought. We learn not only of the futility of metaphysic, but of its mischief for religion; and we prize much the touch and tone of literary religion, and the reli-

gion of the minor culture and the *petit maître*. The metaphysical contact with reality therefore is rudely broken, on the one hand, and on the other the contact with it by personal faith, in the evangelical sense of the great reformers, is much weakened. So little is the Reformation understood that its principle is described, by its very friends, as tho right of private judgment—even when that is no more than opinionated ignorance. This is the *reductio ad absurdum* of religious atomism. It is the necessary outcome of the substitution of religious individualism for personal religion. It is religious atomism (that is, irreligion) working itself out by an innate logic and revealing its paganism in religious chaos; for it is a pagan principle whose source is the Renaissance, the Rationalist Illumination, the Revolution. It is not the principle of the Reformation. That principle is personalism, and not individualism; it is personal faith, which has submission to authority in its very being, since it owes itself and everything to absolute grace, and which has a church lying, inevitable, in its very nature, because it means union with him whose presence dissolves egoism in a common salvation and places the believer in u church by his very act of belief in such an object ns a common Redeemer. The principle is not an individual self-sufficiency in love with its own uninstructed views and more jealous for its rights than concerned about truth, which is what private judgment has but too often come to be. Between a rationalist individualism and an evangelical personalism all the churches sooner or later will have to choose. For these live together like acid and oil. It is u misuse of words as well as a failure of insight which calls it mere polemic to make this issue clear to the easygoing, and sure to the shallow optimist, who is the happier the less he knows, and the more hopeful the less imagination he has to pierce the present and gauge the future. The greater the originality the keener also may be its polemic with the actual situation. There is no such polemical power as Christianity. There is nothing that wars with the world, and with the church as it settles in and enjoys itself in the world, like God's holy love. The New Testament is the most polemical of all books. It is occupied with the most polemical figures in the world—Christ, Paul, and the church. It is polemical and

dogmatic. Therefore it begins and ends in the Cross and its holy war. And it has nothing of the degenerate charity which is so easy to the sciolist who believes himself to have already apprehended, who cultivates a thin judiciousness, and thinks that sharp issues are but sharp tempers striking fire.

But, though not metaphysical, Anglo-Saxondom is in its own way deeply religious, and its faith has all along protested against its native agnostic thought. Its Christianity has at heart always protested against its philosophy, or rather, if one may coin a word, its misosophy. And the churches have, at the deep core of their practical limitations, cherished a general faith which finds the mental habit of the positive sciences too strait for it and which now seeks in Idealism or in Mysticism a place where it may dwell. The metaphysical instinct so deep in faith runs wild, when its satisfaction is denied it by agnosticism, in a grandiose Idealism, on the one side, and on the other in a mystic Monism which will not hear thorough thinking and is, after all, but a spurious or belated metaphysic served often in warm milk with nutmeg. The faith of Christianity reacts against a meager Monism as much as against a dark Gnosticism—which after all Agnosticism is. It is Gnosticism with the current turned off. Certainly the faith of the Church Universal does so react, and, while protest against the Athanasian Creed grows, it is not so much protest against its metaphysics as against its freezing of metaphysic and its condemnation of those whose metaphysics advance upon its own. Not only does the metaphysic in that creed represent at bottom an element essential to Christian faith, and inevitable in its development, but historical relativism especially should remember that it was the high-water mark of the thinking of the world at that age and stage. It is not to metaphysic that we need ever object, but to archaic metaphysic made final and compulsory. When thus abused that Creed ignores history both backward and forward. It ignores the historic Jesus and it ignores the moving church. But whenever intelligent Christianity again reaches any philosophy parallel to that of the Athanasian age it will produce another Athanasian Creed as metaphysical—or more so, as being more adequate to the empire of thought and access to reality

opened since that time. But it will not be enforced with penalties, and it will not be Greek metaphysic. It will not be so intellectualist, but far more voluntarist. Since Kant opened the new age must it not be a metaphysic of ethic? And since the discoveries of recent science about the contribution of matter must it not be a metaphysic of energy rather than of substance? And especially now, since Wundt and his peers, must it not be a metaphysic of psychology, of the moral psychology, and of the psychology of active and positive faith in particular? And it will be neither compulsory nor damnatory, because it will not be the church's faith, but the science of its faith. And it will not be without its mystic note, only it will be the mysticism of the conscience and that of imagination, investing personality rather than nature, history rather than thought, and action rather than essence. But the historic Christ, who was submerged by ancient metaphysic, suffers but little less at the hands of the modern Idealism—a fabric more fine and stately than anything outside Plato. It occupies mighty minds, but also descends to the public as theological liberalism, or a religion of general ideas which are made the criterion of all positive and historic faith and become the popular substitute for metaphysic thorough and scientific. In the critical camp the historic Christ is dissolved, under this influence, where in the orthodox he was buried. And it is a question, which they may discuss who have the data and the leisure, whether it is better to be immured in a great, elaborate, and artistic tomb or to decay under a solvent which destroys the possibility of resurrection. What we have from a despotic metaphysic, or an inadequate metaphysic, or a vague warm metaphysic, or the denunciation of all metaphysic, in a reduction of religious weight and the impoverishment of public faith. Popular belief of course cannot be a belief in metaphysic, unless it is very implicit. But a church whose ministerial belief and teaching reject it with contempt must lose weight and grasp in the long run, and must starve the religious intelligence of the public and its own effect on a world scale. As with the sacraments so with metaphysics—the deadly thing is not the omission of them but their scorn.

Why does Christianity cherish this pertinacious gravitation

to metaphysical belief? The tendency is incorrigible, especially, for instance, in connection with the person of Christ. Why is it that faith, as soon as it has served the more near and urgent uses of the soul, will not consent to be denied access to questions and convictions about the essential nature of Christ and his relation to Godhead? Why does it shrink so passionately from agnosticism about the Incarnation? Is it because the genius of the church is metaphysical and she finds "a higher gift than grace" in "God's essence all divine"? Is it because she has drawn into her communion chiefly those who have philosophical interests and metaphysical tastes? Quite the other way. The great mass both of her members and ministers are nothing of the kind. Most of them, indeed, are people of the other kind, bewildered by metaphysic as such, skeptical of it chiefly, impatient and even angry with it, as involving a kind of effort to which their energies and interests do not naturally run, even in their supernatural consecration—to say nothing of those who regard such interests as no energy at all, but a way of wasting time—while, on the other hand, the philosophers are mostly against the church, or outside. No, the church does not cling so tenaciously to profound conviction about the Godhead of Christ because that doctrine gives popular shape to speculative principles or general ideas, but because it is a prime necessity for the collective (though not always for the individual) faith which makes a church what it is. It is the nature of Christian faith that urges the church, more, indeed, than it consciously knows, upon thought and statement, even of a metaphysical kind, about the absolute nature of the Christ it absolutely trusts. Christian faith, in those classic types which give the true normality, is the sinful soul's committal to Christ for ever and ever. It concerns the undying soul's eternal rock and rest. It is not a matter of aspiration, nor of spirituality, nor of love, nor of ideal humanity. It is the redeemed soul's absolute trust and total self-disposal to its Redeemer for eternity, so that it is a case of more than loyalty—of property. It is the peculiar, the characteristic act of an eternal soul and will. And to belittle it is to belittle the soul and to reduce religion from its place as the life total and eternal to be but one of the leading interests of life. Christian

faith is such absolute faith in Christ. The soul intrusts itself to God-in-Christ for ever. But what ground or stay is there for such an unshakable faith unless we have an unshakable Christ? And how can we have an unshakable Christ for an eternal soul if we have not in him our soul's eternal God? And how can we really have God in him without some suggestion of ontological continuity, however defined? A voluntarist union of will and will is not enough, and we press for something that makes a divergence between them impossible. What is the truth in *non potuit peccare*? We have God in Christ, not simply through him. And in Christ's essential unity with God we have the only condition of that absolute trust in him which is true Christian faith, however loosely the word faith is used for lower levels of religion. A man might pray to Christ as many pray to saints. But that is not Christian faith except at an early stage, perhaps a morning twilight. It is another and a greater thing; it is the supreme Christian thing to "roll the soul on Christ," to make him responsible for it forever, to commit the soul to Christ's salvation and keeping as its committal to a saving God. The soul then finds Christ to be its universe. It finds all the world in Christ, as well as its own eternal destiny of communion with God. What is the real nature of that world?

The necessity, therefore, is not speculative but practical. It is a necessity of the personal and experimental religion of the conscience to treat Christ as God reconciling, redeeming, guaranteeing our eternity. It is a necessity which is but another expression of the finality of Christ's salvation.

I would here repeat that it is not so much the challenge of some revelation in Christ that makes the great religious crisis of the hour, now that agnosticism is dead, and materialism; but it is the challenge of his *finality* as a revelation, of his note of eternal crisis and redemption. Many own a revelation in Christ who do not admit its absolute nature. It is this note of ultimacy and of reality that favors metaphysic. You cannot hold to this finality of Christ's revelation without a faith in the Godhead of Christ which hankers for some metaphysic of it in the church's schools. Other and more sectional religions put a halo about the

founder's head as n mighty saint; but faith in Christ is universal and final because the prodigal soul comes home and finds its Father and heaven in him, and invokes him not as divine but as God—which the New Testament does. It is a religious interest, a practical and not a rationalist, not a philosophic, that urges the church into the deep interior of Christ's person, even to the metaphysic of it. For religion would not be Christian if it did not rouse thought also in the stirring up of *all* within us to bless his holy name. And to think as thoroughly as we are saved is to become metaphysical in spite of ourselves. I know that the impulse of many who denounce metaphysics is religious also. They think metaphysic starves, deflects, and distorts religion. And no doubt they have some ground in history for this, but they have none in reality. The church has certainly suffered from metaphysic. It has persecuted for metaphysic. But so, and more so (it is now said much more so), the State has persecuted thought, and penalized certain political opinions, without therefore dooming political or constitutional science. It is a poor and negative campaign to fight an inadequate metaphysic with none, to meet misuse here with total abstention, or to seek in monistic meditation a stay which can come only from energetic thought. In special connection with the preexistence of Christ the interest became metaphysical only in a secondary way. It is not mere love of dogma (except as dogma means depth, footing, and clarity) that leads Christian thought to pierce the interior of Christ and to find in him not only the key but the Creator of the world. If we read the New Testament with the eye of the biblical theologian we discover that it was not an intense but doctrinaire belief in Christ as the organ of creation which led to a faith in him as Saviour. It was the other way. The faith that found in him the eternal secret and security of its soul found in his vast personality also the key and crown of all souls. It found in him, therefore, the destiny of all history, and so the consummation of the whole world. But it could not stop there. It made then an inevitable step forward by thinking backward, and by finding that the world which was made for him must have been made by him, that he could not issue supreme from the world's close unless

he had been supremo when the world rose. *Nihil in eventu quod non prius in proventu*. The Christ who had become Lord to the first Christian age, and who would be Lord to all ages when history was wound up in the Kingdom, must be the Lord before all ages and before the foundation of the world. And the same thought has been forced on the church from its sense of God's love. The eternal love needs an eternal Son. Could that love find itself again in an idea of its own? Could the living God love an idea as his Son? The lover of an idea might be a philosophic God, but not the Holy Father. And if an eternal Son was a necessity for an eternal love was Jesus Christ not he? Or had the eternal Father two in whom he was perfectly well pleased—one in heaven and another upon earth? If God loved but his world it was only a cosmic emotion. Or was it humanity he loved? Was humanity the eternal Son, with Christ for its most representative and illustrious unit but a unit still? In that case humanity was increate. But if we shrink from that, if God loved a created and manifold humanity, ungathered into one person, loved it not philosophically, as an idea, but heartily, as a race of hearts and souls, then it was a love distracted and dissipated into millions of points without concentration or unity. Therefore his love was without a passion corresponding to his divine unity; it was mere discrete benevolence. It was a love infinitely vagrant, passing from individual to individual, upon some detained and brief upon some, a love merely preferential, so that Jesus was but his best beloved, but it would have nothing in the object of it corresponding to the unity, power, or eternity of God as its subject and source. Love would then not be divine enough to rise above individualism on a larger or smaller scale, and election would not be the whole action and economy of love, the providential order of love, so to say, but would come too near the caprice of favor and the volatility of taste. The eternal Son alone gives to the moral element in love the priority over the natural and the capricious. We have a divine love of humanity only in the eternal Son, only if we are loved in the Father's holy love of the Son. For it would be but a sanguine and amiable surmise of ours that human nature, in itself and us we find it, was so divine as to be the worthy object of God's love, to

say nothing of his habitation. But if the eternal Son made man his "tent," on his way to making the church his body and all men the church, then humanity was such a nature still as could receive and house him (though not express him) without his being either lost in it or soiled. Its constitution remained divine enough for that, even if its moral state had become hopeless and as impotent of itself to draw him by an affinity from heaven as to rise boldly to his side.

All the metaphysic of the Trinity, therefore, is at bottom but the church's effort to express in thought the incomparable reality and absolute glory of the Saviour whom faith saw sitting by the Father as man's redeeming and eternal Lord, to engage the whole and present God directly in our salvation, and found the soul in Christ on the eternal Rock. It is a metaphysic of personality that is involved and of personal action. Also in so far as the doctrine of the Trinity is metaphysic it is not the property of individuals; nor is the belief in it the measure of individual faith. It is a belief so great that it is at home but in the range of the collective faith. It is, first, the matter and property of the collective church; second, of the competent representatives of the church; but, third, it is active in its power with many who are not competent nor forward to discuss it, but are in living relation by evangelical faith with the reality of the saving God it enshrines. A doctrine of the Trinity may be, so far as the crude individual goes, a piece of theological science, but for the church it is a part of its essential faith. It could not renounce it and remain a church. Its power would decay. For the individual it can be implicit, but it must from time to time become explicit for the church in some form corresponding to the age and stage of thought, if the church's great Word is to survive and its general faith is to meet the greatness of its Word. The whole fabric of belief round such a doctrine is an indication that faith which works out in love works out, by the very kindling, subduing, and universal power of love, also in thought. It is all an effort by some of the best minds of the race to take in thinking earnest the church's faith that Christ is Lord, and that he is throned with God because he does for practical experience what God alone can do for the soul. With the experi-

ence of the first church, and its worship of Christ, there was only one choice—the choice of his displacing the Father in the church's religion, or of his becoming the Son in having whom we have the Father also, and forever must have him. And the creeds of the church have all along been in heart and intent its formal expressions of its infinite faith that when God gave his Son he gave himself, that in his Son he *came*, that he dealt with men so closely as he never did before and so finally that he can never do it again, that he gave them not a messenger but his own heart, and not an opportunity of being saved but an achieved salvation. When that faith is raised from popular language and thought out, it means a doctrine of the Trinity, finding in the historic Son the Father's real gift of himself and his achieved purpose, and not a mere intimation nor a movement of willingness toward us. In Christ God did not send a message of his love which cost the messenger his life, but himself loved us to the death, and to our eternal redemption. The revelation of God's love could only be God loving. God alone could reveal God. The Godhead of Christ is therefore much more an element of the gospel of experienced grace than a result of philosophic thought. This is shown by the fate of that modern philosophy which promised to do most by philosophical ideas for the Trinitarian truth. Hegelianism split into two streams, of which the left has carried the day and become the chief motor in those who not only deny a divine Christ but dissolve an historic. It is by no metaphysic that we come to the faith of Christ's Godhead; but, having come there, some metaphysic of it is inevitable wherever religion does not mean mental poverty, the loss of spiritual majesty, and a decayed sense of the price of the soul and the cost of its sin. It is not possible, indeed, to adjust to any category of thought faith's certainty of the absolute union of the sinner and the sinless, of man in his struggle and God in his calm. The Incarnation is a peace that passes understanding. But faith would be so far dead if it did not compel the mind to revolve the theme, explore the gift, and swell the praise.

The reasoning from faith, therefore, would be in this wise: God's love as we have it in Christ his Son must be taken with

infinite seriousness and reality. It is not a partial mood or a passing fancy of God for us; it is God's eternal nature, relation, and purpose to us. If God be there at all, that is what is there. You may of course deny that God is there, or that he does love; but, if he does, that is how he loves—altogether or not at all. The absolute God, the holy, knows nothing of half measures with the world, or half gospels. Christ may have been wrong in speaking of such a God or in believing in him, or we may be wrong in so construing what Christ did believe or say, but if Christ was not wrong, and we are not wrong about him, God's love in Christ was that absolute and eternal love for all mankind which involved the whole and holy God forever, from which love no power can separate us. About this absolute love we need something more than assurance from a third party. When it is the last issue between the soul and God no third party can intervene. Certainty is not to be had by stationing the most luminous and piercing religious genius at some point where he can see both God and man, each being invisible to the other, and where he can report to either hand that the other part is satisfactory and trusty. What we need in Christ is not an external ground for God to trust our faith, or for us to trust God's love. We need to have in Christ God's love itself; God loving; not an effect of God's love, but that love in immediate action and contact with us. Christ's love is really God's love, not the sublimest testimony to it. Christ is not God's love-letter to the world. It is the church that is God's epistle. Christ is God writing it That is Revelation. It is Redemption. How far we have traveled in this beyond the idea of Revelation as something emitted from God! It is God coming as something and doing something. It is not something given by God, it is God giving himself. When we truly pray we pray *for* God, for God's gift of himself, more than *from* God, more than for gifts from God. Revelation is not a word from God, it is God the Word. It is not a man from God, it is God as man. It is not man doing something for God. That is not the essence of Christianity. It is God doing something in man and for him. It is the real action of God's person—direct, yet in the Son. It is the real presence in Humanity of God's being—immediate, yet not unmediated.

Some may hesitate, perhaps, about that phrase—immediate, yet not unmediated. Well, it is much worth hesitation; it is worth lingering on it. It is a stumblingblock to many. It is either nonsense or it covers something so true that nothing but a paradox can express it. The latter is our alternative. It is strange in terms but it is all the more true. It corresponds to a real process. It is even psychological. May I illustrate? Nothing, I suppose, could be more direct and immediate than your sight of me or mine of you. But in fact neither of us sees the other at all. All we see directly is an image on the retina. Indeed, I, sitting at my remote center, may not see even that directly. There may be several processes between that image and my perception of you. Before I could interpret that image as you, and realize that it was a solid weight of body with which I could collide, and a resisting power of will with which mine must deal—before I could develop the image on my retinal film into a real you—I had to go through a long but totally forgotten process of visual education by the aid of touch, by what used to be called the muscular sense, and by much other similar discipline during the first stage of life. That immediate perception we have of each other is condensed and crystallized mediation. It is a vast abbreviation. It is a portmanteau act. It is mediation become habitual, automatic, unconscious of itself. It has mediation embedded in it, subliminal to it. It is mediation become immediate. It is immediate but not unmediated. This is only meant to show that the phrase is not philosophic nonsense, but good science in the region of psychology. It is no less sound in the region of theology. We all admit that our faith in the Father is mediated by history, by Christ's presence in history. But that fact—Christ—might be quite empirical. Christ might be but the first link in a chain, the first medium instead of the standing Mediator. We are not such positivists as to stop there, with that piece of historicism. He is to us all that he was to the first century, or more. Our faith is mediated through Christ in the way of spiritual process as well as part transmission, in the region of the spiritual world no less than the historic, by the present sacramental value of tradition and of the world in the action of God him-

self on us thereby. The historic fact becomes a spiritual sacrament on which God glides into our soul. Indeed, in Christ we have the Word which makes all sacrament. In Christ we feel we have the action of God direct, yet mediated. The mediation does not impair the directness. It did not precede it; it is always acting in it. We have God in Christ at first hand, and seeing him we see the Father. So that the sacramental relation between God and man in Christian history and experience is but the correlate of an essential relation within the Godhead itself. The relation between God and man is not identical with that between Father and Son (as those say who promulgate the doctrine of humanity as eternal in God), but it is parallel, it is correlate. "I in you as the Father in me." And God's love to man in historic revelation has under and behind it God's love to the Eternal Son, for whose sake the Father loves man, as Christ himself loved mankind not for its own amiable sake but for the sake of God and of his miraculous grace in loving us. What we possess in Christ is so much God's love that it is the love eternally directed upon Christ. God in his grace loves us with the same love as he bestows without grace on Christ. By grace we are caught up into the Father's love of the Son. It is not a case of the natural love of offspring transferred by us to God, but it is the action of a more eternal and holy love transferred by God to us in Christ. Christ transmits it vitally, as its eternal living object and not as its mirror; not as a medium, but as a mediator; he does not even testify to it as an historic genius or a prophet with splendid insight into it might do. Now the eternal object of God's love could not be an idea unless God were an idea and no more. It must be in a parity. It must be as real as the living God. God the beloved must be as real, personal, and eternal as the loving God. The beloved Son must be a constituent of the divine nature and personality. For, if not, God was determined into loving by something outside of himself, and something therefore less eternal, which would leave him not absolute and holy God. Only if the beloved Son was God was God self-determined, and eternally determined, into love. By the very nature of God as love we are moved to the belief in an eternally preexistent Christ—and to his real preexistence, not

merely to an ideal. Christ is the object of God's love; not as if that were an intellectual love for the intellectual beauty, not in the sense of the Son's having an ideal preexistence in God's thought or purpose, as if God were an eternal dreamer or infinite speculator enamored of his own thought, but in the sense that he had a real preexistence as personal as the love bestowed. The divine thing in Jesus was eternal in God. And what was the divine thing in Jesus? Some nucleus or core in the historic personality? Some astral entity, as it were, which could be drawn out of the deciduous man Jesus as a finer soul in soul? No; neither real history nor scientific psychology will let us think like that. The divine thing in Jesus covers, and indeed constitutes, the whole historic personality, that whole moral entity, which Peter, James, John, Judas, Caiaphas, and Pilate all knew as Jesus. The divine thing was Jesus Christ. The actual, historic, personal Jesus was no mere temporary correlate of God's love, or of its ideal object. The divine thing that came to us was not a message nor an influence, nor a spirit, but a person, and not a prophet's person but the divine presence. He, his person, *was* the divine thing. He did not contain it. He was not simply its tenement. He was not a prodigious human personality completely filled by the (less personal?) Spirit of God. That were in the end quite docetic. It would mean that the more we developed the divine element the more thin we wore the finite receptacle to give it room. The Son of God as the Son of man was not the divine wine in a goblet of flawless crystal. The divine thing in him was that which made his person, and did not simply fill it. The same personality must be both God and man. Else which redeemed? If it was the indwelling Spirit, then was the personality of Jesus redeemed? Or shall we give up an idea so embarrassing as Redemption? Even human personality is no mere receptacle; it is a power. And God can only be in it by some mutual involution, as power interpenetrates power, or, even more intimately than that, as person lives in person, as the Father dwells in the Son of his love. Jesus, in fashion and person as he moved among us, was the eternal object, peer, and polar continuity of God's love, else we cannot cross the gulf between Christ's conviction and God's reality. If

Christianity is absolute faith (and we cannot trust for eternity the merely probable), the real personal Father had the real and personal Son who is our life for his love to rest on in the depth and mystery of eternity. All the analytic objections or impossibilities which can be raised against such a faith by the lower rational man are our old familiar friends, who disagree in the basement while worship goes on in the church above them. And this Son, as a constituent element of Godhead and not a mere phase of God, was not only sent by the Father but himself came with equal spontaneity into the world to save it. He came *ex proprio motu*, through his own free responsive obedience to his Father's saving will, and through his love to both God and man, in some form of self-emptying and self-renunciation. The Son willed our salvation as surely, as creatively, as the Father, and willed his own work for it. All the acts of Christ's self-sacrifice here were but the explication of the one compendious, renunciatory act of his person in coming here. He came to save God's holy name and purpose by saving man's forfeit soul—first to gratify and delight the Father, then to save God among men, and then (and thereby) to save men for God. God spared not his Son, and the Son spared not himself. So that we may say that, while a personal Humanity is the product of God's love in creation, a personal Christ is the object of God's love in eternity. Humanity is personality in finite detail; Christ is personality in its infinite but compendious and holy power. And we are loved for Christ's sake.

We may, therefore, perhaps, sum up thus:

Christ reveals to us God's holy love. He does so not as a prophet with its message, but as the Son with its presence. His work was God's work, not in report, nor in effect merely, but in action. What, then, does Son here mean? It means that the revelation, as taken home by the faith it creates, is final. Nothing in God was dearer or higher than his Son. When the Son came there was no more to do, and no higher revelation possible. No future revelation can separate us from the love it reveals—that is, can transcend it by a greater and leave it behind. It is absolute and eternal. Christ is the real revelation of God's being, in the sense of its self-communication. He is the one supreme visitation

of God. God's being as love was eternally resting on the Christ who came to us, upon no Christ with an existence merely ideal, as if the earthly Jesus were but an historical avatar of an idea capable of various other visits. But upon this personality the personal love of the Father forever rested, well pleased, in the depth and mystery of Godhead's eternal life. It was a real pre-existence—though here formal thought is soon obliged to stop, and we believe by experience what, we cannot construe in scheme.

I am well aware, I have hinted, of the difficulties on either side of such an idea as Christ's preexistence. Both the man who ignores these and the man who treats the belief as nothing but fantastic theology discount their own right to a weighty opinion because they do not show that they have gone into the subject far enough to discover the difficulties of dispensing with such a thought. It is what the Germans describe, by an untranslatable but useful word, as a *Grenzbegriff*. A *Grenzbegriff* is a notion of which we can form no explicit conception, but which is forced upon our total thought as inevitable. It is an idea which contains the necessity of something transcendent without being able to describe its processes, movements, qualities, or colors. One side of it is known, the other is unknown. Such is matter, for instance, in the region of natural science. It is a notion that carries us over the limit of our sensible or scientific knowledge, but it is indispensable for the reality both of me, who know, and of anything to be known. A *Grenzbegriff* is an impenetrable but luminous reality against which all our thinking is brought up, or rather to which all our thought moves, but which, if it cannot be construed, is yet so rational that it cannot be denied without giving thought the lie and making the conceivable, the formally rational, the test of reality. To admit such an idea is much more rational than to deny it. The necessity is rational, however illogical. It was thought that forced us to it, though it be not amenable to a rational scheme, and it is inaccessible to the processes of conceptual thought. It cannot be thought, and yet it must be owned. Our thought cannot go here, but we do, our soul does. For our thought is but one function of our personality, which has a larger projection and intent. We commit ourselves, by an act in which the whole

person disposes of itself in faith, to a region where, though we cannot see our way, we yet hear a call and feel an outstretched hand. It is a leap in the dark, but it is a vocal dark. The eye fails us, but from the cloud there is a voice, which does not fail, saying, "This is My Eternal Son." So for our Christian faith the eternal preexistence of Christ is as indispensable as it is inexplicable. *How* the Eternal Son could empty himself to the historic Jesus Christ is quite inexplicable, though we may trace analogies, but religion taken seriously, thoroughly, makes the faith eternally inevitable. Our inability to conceive the "how" of a kenosis need not make us renounce the fact. And most of the difficulties about a kenosis turn upon the method rather than the principle.

The difficulty of the Antiochene view, which regards Christ as a human personality specially prepared, and then filled, at a certain time or by a certain development, with the Divine Spirit, is this (and it is what drives one on some form of kenosis): In such a theory the divine is not the element which forms the personality. It fills it when formed, but it does not constitute the personality—where, however, the modern accent falls. It is not compatible with modern views of the historic personality of Jesus as the acting and effectual power. That historic personality, with which we start as a thing so real, becomes a thing less and less real as we ascribe the ruling action to a divine content which is not personal in the same sense, while, on the other hand, if we throw all the personal action on the human tenement we reduce the divine factor to a mere influence. For there could not be two persons in the one man Jesus Christ. Also, on this view we do not secure the divine initiative for the work that engrossed the personality of Jesus. The Divine Spirit is reduced from the doer to the suggester, and God does not redeem so much as inspire redemption. Besides, if human nature must be redeemed to receive the Spirit how can the Spirit fill even the greatest human personality before proceeding to redeem? And could a Spirit that only fills a person, and does not act as a person, redeem human personality? It is such difficulties as these that forbid us to speak of "the Deity residing in that man in transcendent fullness, but in the same way as in the souls of other men." That sounds pious and modest, but it

is inadequate to a situation so serious as to be soluble only by redemption. It is beneath the classic Christian experience, where redemption is the central need. Faith is humble, but it is not modest. It is very bold and daring. And we are therefore led on to think less of a man with a measureless gift of the Spirit than of Godhead becoming man by a kenotic and renunciatory act. This leaves possible the idea of Redemption; the former discourages it.

It cannot be too often emphasized that the chief breach with traditional dogma is partly in the method and partly in the use of it. This appears especially in connection with the doctrine of Christ's deity. In the old dogma the admission of this deity was necessary to make a man a Christian; in the new it is believed because the man is a Christian. We apply the modern principle of belief in miracles to a special and crucial case. The miracles used to be viewed as a help to faith; now it takes all our faith to believe in the miracles. So with the great miracle of the Incarnation. You must be a Christian to believe it instead of believing it to be a Christian. We need all our Christianity to believe it as it took all Godhead to effect it. The incarnation is the ultimate doctrine of Christianity, but it is not the first in the order of individual experience, which is justification. So far the pragmatists are right. We work from results; but backward. Our theology rises out of our religion. We must pass through a certain experience of faith, in which Christ does on man the work of God, ere we can believe him to be God. Without the experimental faith of redemption that belief is impossible, but with it it is inevitable. I have already suggested that the metaphysic of the future seems to be indicated as a metaphysic of the ethic and psychology of the soul in its moral experience. The metaphysic involved is the metaphysic of personal faith as life's life, the metaphysic which that faith implies (though it can produce no faith), the metaphysic not of substance but of energy, of spiritual energy especially, and most especially of redemption, through the faith which answers redemption. It is the metaphysic not of Being but of the Holy Spirit. It is not the condition of faith but the conclusion from it. We must experience Christ in order to realize that

in so doing it is God we experience; we can then go into the metaphysic of that moral fact. The traditional method constantly tends to put formula over faith, and to set theology in the place of religion instead of at its heart. Men may and do define Christ's deity to the practical neglect of his person, and without any communion with himself. We may come to lay more stress on the Virgin Birth or on the Christology of the Logos than upon Christ as our living God and Saviour. We may see more clearly the truths that underlie Christ than we feel and confess him to be the grand fact of God's intervention underlying our life. But it is as such an intervention that we must feel him for New Testament faith. To treat him only as the *beau ideal* of aspiring faith is to do him even more injustice than to treat him as the incarnation of certain eternal ideas. To regard his faith hut as the classic case of our own faith is to be no more fair to him than when we try to reach him by metaphysical formulae. To regard God's presence with him as but the purest nearest case of his presence with every soul is to treat him more as our superlative than as our Saviour. He is the fact and act in which God the Saviour comes to us, and not the great instance of our coming to God. His gospel is one of God visiting us; and he is the visitation of God which he declares. We can never have the same relation to God as Christ had. We can never realize his relation to God as he did. Even religious psychology here comes to a standstill. We cannot follow the spiritual process between him and the Father. He never told that love. It was his own secret. He died before his disciples knew it. He had to die that they might know it. And when they knew it they could express it only in their personal and practical faith as a church. Their theology of it was mainly allusive—as in the great kenotic passage of Philippians.

By such an experience and such a belief he is the foundation of our experienced faith and not simply its historic source. It did not simply begin with him long ago; it rests on him now. It is his gift now. What rests on him is not simply the other end of the historic chain, but the weight of our present souls in every age. His function does not cease, nor does he disappear, when he has introduced us to God, but in him God always descends on us,

emerge in us, seizes us, forgives us, changes us, creates us anew. It is this experience of the new creation that has really demanded from thought the metaphysic associated with Christ's deity—but demanded it from faith's thought and not from thought's faith. For God is will with thought in it, not thought with will in it. The ontological deity of Christ is a necessary condition of the new creation, but my belief in any formula of that deity is not a necessary condition of my being created anew; it is only an inevitable corollary or expression thereof. It is one thing to feel secure before God, but the sense of security (guaranteed, say, by a church) is not the experience of salvation; and it is another thing to desire and possess God, the living God. The deity of Christ is the real means whereby this possession is possible; it is not a matter of assent for attaining the security without personal certainty. The redeemed do not see how they could be redeemed if the redeemer is not God; but no man is redeemed by simply believing that he is. Redemption is so great a miracle that we cannot be surprised that its great thinkers, the theologians, should have put in the forefront the Incarnation as the miracle of miracles. It made redemption possible. But that is not the same as to say that its admission must precede our experience of redemption as a reality. We do not infer the redemption in Christ, deducing from his deity, but we move to his deity regressively from our redemption with its quickening of all our power and insight. It is the experienced power of the Redeemer that forces on us, that has forced on the church, his deity. It is our new creation in Christ Jesus that makes us seat him on the Creator's throne. None but the Holiest could offer the Holiest that which our sin owed; and it is that sense that makes us find our God in him who is our atoning peace. . It is because we are overwhelmed thus with God's visitation in him that with all our heart and soul and mind we begin to ask how it is possible. If indeed we could *fathom* that we should be looking down over the God before whom we ought to bend. But we may at least discern some vital things about Christ's relation to God which do not presume to fathom it, and when we find God actually reconciling us in him we cannot help inferring some more substantial unity between him and God

than between God and ourselves. The inner life of Jesus could not really reveal to man the inner life of God if at his center he was not more God than man, and doing the redeeming thing which God alone can do. But it is in Christ's person, and not behind it, that we must look for the secret; in its historic act and not in its putative essence; in an act of his person (even though that act was begun before the world was) and not in the process or mutual behavior of two natures in that person about whose qualities we have no sure information except in the revelation in him. Through his work alone the Godhead of Jesus reaches us and finds us. But it is a work which the great experience of the church finds not only to impress us but to recreate us, it is a work that it finds begun before the foundation of the world. And if it be metaphysical to venture anything about what transpired in such an eternity then metaphysical we must be.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "P. V. Norcys". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent horizontal stroke at the end.