

OUR EXPERIENCE OF
A TRIUNE GOD.

Quinta Press

Meadow View, Weston Rhyn, Oswestry, Shropshire, England,
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Taken from 'Our Experience of a Triune God',
Cambridge Christian Life 1 (June 1914): 240-6.

Our Experience of a Triune God.

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As we begin life, we rejoice in the world's harmony and rationality, its humanity and promise. The enthusiasm of humanity captures us. One man I know says, "I could take you to the field where it burst upon me at twenty." God is revealed as so natural in His love, as a magnified Father, as the consummation of all things fine and fair.

But sooner or later we come to a rude and raw contact with the muddles, babels, slums, bedlams, and, it may be, hells of life. The old gay harmony breaks up into collision. The fine fabric of our first world is shaken for many, shattered for some. "Die schöne Welt—sie stürzt, sie zerfällt." And the very worst of it is that our own souls are in the collapse. Innocence is ruined there. "Weh! Weh! Du hast sie zerstört mit mächtiger Faust." Conscience is a steady guide no more. It is the accusing angel. The purist criticism of youth, by which we so freely and cruelly condemned others, we turn on ourselves.

The tender Father now becomes the solemn judge—even in the Son of His love. Christ's words, His ideal. His character, which we hailed as so noble, rise up to condemn us more than they cheer us. To the natural and benignant Father succeeds the historic and judging Son. The gentle and genial Jesus deepens into the high and holy, the austere and exigent Christ. And what a crisis comes then! We either turn and leave Him, or else we cleave to Him and turn to rend ourselves. Either we say (or we listen to those who say), "there are other and less humiliating ways of finding the real God than by forgiveness, by His justification

of us." And we plunge for an opiate into philosophy, and find a God indeed but much more as a postulate than a certainty. Perhaps we take up with a 'simple' piety, sometimes to end in a silly. Perhaps we turn to art, literature, social life, and even social well-doing. We take to a humanitarian religion, which tells us we are not so desperately bad at bottom after all, and which bids us take heart, let alone theology about Redemption by an ill-used God, and go to work for the amelioration of ill-used man. And we forget all the time that such optimism has only become possible to this age by the historic work of a Church and Gospel that preached a searching and judging forgiveness in the past. Either we take such lines, I say, or else we are made of sterner stuff, and we refuse those flattering unctions for our soul; and our eyes are opened, and we know we are poor, and wretched, and blind, and naked, and very guilty; and it is now "God be merciful." In the greatness of Christ, the ideals of Christ, we meet the unsparing holiness of God.

Then all our genial Christ goes up in the blaze of His Cross, so to say. We realise that the Father's holiness was most unsparing to the Son of His love. In the suffering of Christ, in the Cross, it is a Holy God we have, who spared not Himself in His own Son. The divine holiness, of which Christ said so little, becomes by His death the one revelation of His life. (The chief thing achieved by our life, and carried away from earth with us, may be something which we said very little about, and which few realised in us.) His love is the love of the holy for the guilty, the most wonderful kind of love (when we take time to think our faith) in a world where love is the marvel of it all. The love of God as the poets taught it, and the poet preachers, and the genial saints, the mere fatherhood Christianity—that is all too short to reach us. When we have come to the worst pass, such love from God does not get to us; it does not find the bottom and the bitterness of our perdition. We are not found for ever till

we are plucked by the conscience from the fearful pit and the miry clay; not till we hunger for holiness as once we did for love and joy, and yet find holiness our dread; not till we thirst for peace with a judging God more than ever we craved for our young ideals in a splendid God.

O only source of all our light and life,
Whom as our truth, our strength, we see and feel,
But whom the hours of mortal moral strife
Alone aright reveal.

The Christ we once took in, almost gaily, as the soul's hero, breaks out upon us as a consuming fire; "As if a man should lean on a wall from which a serpent bit him," The Christ of our jubilant, and even jaunty, confession rounds on us suddenly, as He did upon Peter exalted with his revelations above measure; "Thou Satan!" And the baptism which we lightly thought we could be baptized with like heroes descends to find us cowards or rebels, renegades or betrayers, And there is no spirit left in us before that Holy One, who burst forth as the village guest did, awful in the very breaking of bread.

Then the Revelation of the Holy comes home In our Redemption by the Holy and His Atonement, and by the Holy Ghost; and we never knew what revelation was till then. It was once an idyll for us, now it is a tragedy and a triumph. The old lights are gone. They failed because we were false. They ceased to be truth because we ceased to be true. Because we fell, our stars fell—to be will-o'-the-wisps. And there is but one way to replace them—another revelation, which now must be Redemption, replacing *us*. We discover that we must be redeemed into the power to believe to the end even in our old revelations. We need that holy love to enable us to believe in all love. The blood of Christ does something else than symbolise the divine sacrifice in us; it is the Sacrifice for us. It is not the classic case of all Sacrifice that kindles us; it is the one Sacrifice of God that humiliates us, but humiliates us into a new life in a new world. We are

pulverised into a new creation. Then, we believe not only in the Father and in the Son but in the Holy Ghost and the love He sheds abroad in our hearts. We have found not only a truth but a certainty, a reality, a life that gives value to all truth. We have found not only life but eternity, not only a new world but the eternity of all worlds in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Whom it is poor religion to reduce to three phases either of God's manifestation or the soul's process. For that would leave us with but a variable God—an adaptable God rather than an eternal.

History and experience alike show that the destruction of interpersonal relations within God is reflected in the loss of personal energy and earnestness in religion, which is reduced to a religion of evolution rather than redemption, and of culture rather than faith.

That is what we need in a revelation, and have in Christ's—not fresh and startling light, but sure, final, and eternal reality; not truth but power; not something to see and know, but something that knows us and carries us. That is where real religion begins—when we cease to know anything except that we are known of God, and loved more than known. We try other ways. We pore, and brood, and ask egoistic questions about the meaning of life. There are thousands of the half-awake, the half-born, the soul-hungry, craving or fumbling for the meaning of life to-day, and peering to find it in life's interior, in flashes of genius, in spiritual arcana, in psychisms, occultisms, in profundities, among the wizards that peep and mutter, or the sages who search or soar. Or they turn to a mysticism which is either divorced from history or which forces a protesting history into its crystal moulds. Others think that work will be a narcotic, and from amid the luxuries of life they turn to seek Christian service. All these things may enrich us in their place. But the eternal meaning and last stay of life is not in its energies, and not in its interior. Genius, with its insight, has not what the

saint has with his outlook of faith. We are never redeemed, however we are chastened, by sinking into ourselves. We do not receive our great revelation with closed eyes and introverted strain. Christ is not to be had by decending into subliminal deeps to bring Him up. Revelation is not in a process but in a crisis. And the crisis of all human life is at a point in human history. The meaning of life is only to be known from life's goal, not its career; and the goal of life is known but to God, Who achieved it in Christ, Who made us for Himself, in Christ and Who in Him sees the end from the beginning. It is known for certain but to God, and to those to whom He reveals it by His Son, His Cross, His Spirit. That is the meaning, and truth of history. The truth of man is found not in his own recesses nor in historic currents, but in the destiny for which God made him and saved him. It is in His Cross God has not only revealed our destiny, but ensured it, brought it to pass, in the Holy Christ crucified, whose salvation is the source of our last moral certainty, and who is our Eternal Amen. God died for us in a sense which only a Trinitarian doctrine can convey. Certainty, finality for eternity, a Rock of Ages—that is what we want in the Revelation that secures all other revelations; that is the reality of which they are but metaphors. And that is what the Church finds by the Spirit in Jesus Christ and His Cross where God was present reconciling. The one Revelation that gives any revelation real meaning is the threefold revelation of the sure mercy of the Holy Father to our worst need in the Cross of His Son made certain and final in the Spirit.

The number is great at present of cultivated women who feel a heart hunger gnawing in the midst of every comfort. And, because life has been for them so sheltered and pure, they do not find themselves so readily when we speak of a Redemption from the tragic sin and guilt of the world. Their regards are perhaps more individual than general, more of the heart than the conscience, and their problems are more

capable therefore of a mystic solution. And the like is true of many fine, high-minded, clean-minded youths. It should therefore, be pointed out that such a central Redemption as I have spoken of as the foundation of a faith in a triune God is the note rather of the collective Church facing the whole world and its sin; and it should not be pressed violently, prematurely, into the experience of every individual. To demand that every soul should run through the experience of a Luther or a Paul can only lead to the spiritual unreality which has been the bane of too much popular Evangelism. Doubtless such Redemption of the conscience by the Saviour is the central issue of the world and of the Church in it. But every soul is not the centre of a world or an age; nor is every soul equally near that central fire, though all live by its warmth. And there are outer circles in the great hierarchy of souls, where the central redemption from guilt acts rather as redemption from things unlovely or painful, from the base and from the sore, from the ignoble and from the bitter, from the gross and from the hard, from meanness and from care, from coarseness and from grief—from these things rather than from great, memorable, and world-tragic guilt. Christ redeemed us both from the burden of the conscience and from the burden on the heart, from being the slaves of sin and from being the slaves of calamity, from guilt and from death—by the Cross from ourselves and by the Resurrection from nature. And the message and task of the Church regards both. So we have within it diversities or operation. And the healers and helpers among women are as needful as the evangelists and prophets among men—as needful in their place and perspective, *i.e.* so long as the amelioration does not say to the Redemption, “I have no need of thee.” It is incredible that Christ should have demanded from Mary of Bethany the agonies of repentance as a condition of true faith. Repentance may not be the female side of faith, as love, perhaps, is not the male. So long as Christ—the union of holiness and love—is the

absolute victor and centre of the moral world for the whole Church, some of its members may be more directly called for the finer ministries and intuitions of tender sympathy, and others for the moral commands and committals of holy faith. If only we take the holy in an ethical sense and not merely in an aesthetic, if it be the white heat of righteousness and not the mere good form of piety, if it be moral worship, however rapt, and not mere reverence however fair. If only too the service in the name of sympathy be not a mere narcotic to ease the gnawings of an egoism still unbroken at the core; if only it be not taken up to dull the ache of souls that read Thomas Hardy (or, short of that great genius, his imitators) till they can trace behind all things but a sombre Fate instead of a loving God—a God most patient because Almighty, and slow because secure in a conclusive bliss.

As I have named Mr. Hardy I will close with an expression of my surprise at the narrow culture of the later writers who now hold the reading public for the hour, who do not rise to discuss the moral destiny of a Humanity which is yet their working capital as *litterateurs*, and who absolutely ignore the existence of the deepest passion and concern of human nature, its religion, which makes man man. It is neither their problem or their atmosphere; and is often their contempt. And contempt here is the trade mark and index of the dilettantist.