

ARTICLE VII.

THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS PECULIAR TO
CHRISTIANITY.*BY PROFESSOR DAVID FOSTER ESTES, D.D.,
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It is a fact to be reckoned with that there widely prevails even among Christians to-day a vague notion that religions are pretty much alike, at any rate the better sort; that Christianity, while the best of the lot, yet so resembles the others that it is scarcely enough better to warrant any great enthusiasm in missionary endeavor; that in the most important, the essential, elements it agrees with other religions more than it differs from them. As the case is put by the Japanese scholar Kozaki, the late President of the Doshisha University, "There is a tendency among Western scholars to put too much stress on the resemblances of Christianity to non-Christian religions"; and he adds, "The points in common are not so numerous as is supposed by some, and the differences are so fundamental that the resemblances are often more apparent than real."¹

Two facts have helped on the confusion of which President Kozaki speaks. One is the present-day tendency, very widely diffused and cropping out here as well as elsewhere, to lay stress on likenesses rather than diversities, to combine where any similarities can be traced, ignoring all dissimilarities, — in a word, to emphasize the genus at the cost of the species. To inquire how far this is a remote result of Hegel's influence,

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how far it is due merely to delight in playing with the relatively new comparative method, would lie far outside the present discussion. It is enough to note that a man who has traced a hitherto unnoted distinction is practically felt nowadays to have wasted his time, while he who yokes what have hitherto been regarded as incompatible has won a distinct triumph. Perhaps our children will learn to discriminate when they compare as well as to combine, but now we are living in an atmosphere of combination amounting sometimes to confusion.

Then the fact that the study of Comparative Religion has developed many interesting, not to say remarkable, harmonies with our religion in unexpected quarters, has resulted in some cases in an illegitimate sentiment of indifference to both its peculiarities and those of others. Comparative Religion is the youngest of the sisterhood of theological sciences, and is, indeed, but just now knocking at the door for welcome into the family circle around the hearth of the theological seminary; but, in spite of Harnack's emphatic protest so little time ago, her place, if not already assured, is fast becoming so. Whether Comparative Religion shall finally find a large place in the theological curriculum or no, it is already recognized, if not universally, at any rate widely, that this branch ought to be a part of the training of the missionary; that it should be studied by Christian scholars sufficiently at least to make sure that no theories are permitted to pass unchallenged in its name as scientific conclusions which, instead, are based in reality on prejudice against Christianity; and that every pastor should familiarize himself with its methods and results enough to meet the inquiries and lay the doubts which too often arise to-day through the popularizing of what erroneously pass for assured results of scientific

research in the field of Comparative Religion. Up to this time, however, often it is to be feared without careful consideration, theologians have almost unanimously taken the position so forcefully maintained by Harnack, who said: "It is our desire that the faculties of theology should confine themselves to the investigation of the *Christian* religion, because Christianity in its pure form is not *one* religion alongside the rest, but is *the* religion."² Christian scholars being thus engrossed in the study and inculcation of what may rightly be regarded as the absolute and final religion, by natural consequence the study of Comparative Religion has been too much left to men who were indifferent, or perhaps in some cases even positively hostile, to Christianity. Certainly unjustified and unjustifiable conclusions have been presented to the world as if demonstrated and final truth;³ while, at the same time, some of the ideas which have been most influential in the history of Christianity have recently been by many cheaply held, and the sentiment of indifferent toleration even of error is the easiest way, "And thousands walk together there."

Of late there has been much discussion of what I might call the "irreducible minimum" of Christianity. From Harnack's "What is Christianity?" to Eucken's "Can we still be Christians?" there has been a stream of literature, the aim of which has been to select and emphasize so much of Christian truth as might be considered unavoidable, because if that element or those elements were dropped, the religion would at any rate cease to deserve the name Christian. Nor do I in any way regret this tendency or protest against it. From an apologetic point of view it is to be regarded as most helpful that Christianity should be reduced to its lowest terms, that the non-essential should find its place of relative unim-

portance. Only it is to be remembered that in this process something of importance may all unconsciously and unintentionally be sacrificed. If we were surgeons and undertook to reduce the human body to its lowest terms, and if, after the teeth and hair and ears and appendix had been taken, we then proceeded to amputate the arms and legs because not absolutely indispensable to the continuance of human existence, as has repeatedly been proved, we might find that we had certainly sacrificed, if not life, yet all that makes life efficient. Thus Eucken bids us cast to the moles and bats the very elements which a no less philosopher than Royce had but lately declared to be "vital" in our religion.⁴

Another tendency is to hold that the religion of the future (for which it is strangely desired to perpetuate the appellation Christianity) is to be the residuum common to all religions, or at least to all the greatest religions, after their peculiarities have been distilled away. Or if the tendency stops short of this, it may still more frequently happen that emphasis is laid on the common elements found by Comparative Religion, and it is felt that their wide prevalence is conclusive testimony to their superior importance. But we may learn from Zoölogy, to choose a science almost at random, that differences are on the whole more significant and important than likenesses. The preëminence of the bird is found in its wings, which it does not share with the fish and the reptile. His upright posture means more to man in the comparison than the possession of a backbone, like the dog and the eel. Even what seems inferiority may be immensely valuable in its results. We know now that the prolonged infancy of the child gives us the home and all that goes with it. To ignore differences may be the most unwise thing possible alike from a scientific and from a practical point of view. The state of the case

from a missionary point of view is tersely put by an East Indian missionary thus: "Christianity conquers through its difference from, and not through its approximations to, all other forms of faith."⁵ This naturally suggests as an important question for discussion, What are these differences of Christianity from other religions, What are the religious truths peculiar to our religion, or, to put it formally, What are the differentia of Christianity?

Before proceeding to discuss this question, it may, however, be advisable to note the difficulties which may arise from the uncertain boundaries and sometimes disputed contents of the respective fields which must be more or less explored. By Christianity in the question formulated above is meant of course the historic system of thought which has been commonly called Christianity. With Christianity as a personal possession or as a spiritual life-force, this discussion has nothing to do. The question is not raised at all (to which the writer would, if it were raised, give a most emphatic affirmative) as to whether a man may have the benefit of Christ's saving work, though not accepting the general views of Christians as to Christian truth. Nor is any suggestion intended that the name of Christian should be withheld from any who, like Eucken or the German "liberals," may desire to hold the name after parting with all the ideas with which the name has been historically associated.⁶ It is proposed simply to discuss ideas which have been commonly held among Christians in all ages. "Commonly," we say, for the Vincentian canon is of course inapplicable: we now know that nothing has been held by all everywhere and always. Nor can appeal be made solely to the New Testament to ascertain what Christian thought has been, because much of the truth recorded there has long and widely failed of acceptance. But there is a sys-

tem of thought in the main elements of which there has been such wide-spread agreement that it may unhesitatingly be called Christian, and this historic faith may be traced with sufficient accuracy for all practical purposes, just as the course of a great river can be traced in spite of eddies and shoals and bars and slackwaters. With this system of Christian thought this discussion deals. On the other hand, it is very easy to err in regarding as peculiarly Christian some idea which has found a more or less significant place in some other religion or religions. Constant endeavor has been made to guard against this error, and it is hoped that there will not be found included in our especial treasure anything which so belongs elsewhere as well that it should not be claimed as peculiarly Christian.

Of all the ideas and forces which are peculiar to Christianity and which differentiate it from all other religions, the first to be named is the momentous conviction that Jesus is the personal manifestation of God among men, the Divine Incarnation. It will at once be noted that this involves the fact that Christianity is one of the few strictly historical religions, that we can date and locate its inception, that its founder is personally known and honored. Upon this as a basis, Christians as a whole have accepted him as being at once divine and human. Originally this faith was unconscious interpretation of the overwhelming influence exercised by the personality of Jesus. We do not find this faith emerging for the first time amid the Christological controversies of the third and fourth centuries: these controversies were but struggles to preserve the primitive faith. This faith was not due to pagan influence or philosophical speculations as a result of which an honored man was deified. It is not even John of Ephesus who first sets forth the deity of Jesus: it is

Paul from Damascus who a whole generation earlier attributed the worship of him as divine to all the Christians of the time. Indeed, may we not say that this faith found its first expression when Thomas adoringly prostrated himself, crying, "My Lord and my God"?

The same "problem of Jesus," the true interpretation of his personality, has presented itself afresh in every age. His stainless purity of life and character, which has convinced the world of his absolute sinlessness; his dignity and the augustness of his claims, alongside his meekness and his humility; his teaching, in which are combined a simplicity, a profundity, and an authoritativeness incomparably transcending every other teaching or doctrine; his unvarying sense of unity with the Father, unexampled, never even copied; his death, which forced from Rousseau the familiar confession, "Socrates died like a philosopher; Jesus Christ like a God"; his resurrection; the presence of a new moral and spiritual force in the world which confirms the reality of the resurrection and displays its significance; his manifested power, which shows that the Jesus of Bethlehem, Galilee, and Calvary is now exalted above every name that is named, — these facts, reënforced through the centuries by the ever-fresh manifestations of the power of him who has been through all the ages the focus of the thought, the central force of the activity, the magnet of the affection of Christendom, — these facts, which overwhelmed the monotheistic, we may even say the unitarian, prejudice of Peter, and Paul, and John, and the rest of the first disciples, have continually constrained even prejudiced and unwilling souls to own that Jesus is God manifest in the flesh. The redeemed soul instinctively draws the inference that he who redeems is divine; and so the Christian

ages have been full of songs of adoration to Christ "who is over all, God blessed forever, Amen."

For the Jesus of the perfect life; for the Jesus who spoke as never man spoke; for the Jesus who, looking up, declared himself one with the Father, looking around him, declared himself the center of human devotion; for the Jesus of Gethsemane and Calvary; for the Jesus who came forth from the tomb; for the Jesus who, sitting at the right hand of the majesty on high, reigns over the hearts and lives of all Christians, — for him, I say, only one tenable theory has ever been brought forward, and that is the historic faith of Christendom, that Jesus was God manifest in the flesh. Philosophical theories denying it have flourished for a time, noxious weeds in the garden of theology — Docetism, Gnosticism, Arianism, Socinianism, — but all have withered and died. Modern liberalism, not only opposed on one side by conservative orthodoxy holding fast the head, but also opposed on the other by Ritschlianism and even by those of its own household who insist on consistency, has no standing ground. It must go forward or backward. We may well say that the instinct of the ages is as unerring as persistent. To the adoring soul and church, Jesus Christ has the full worth of God, yes, the Word who became flesh "was God."

Now in this assertion, which has been found to be a constant element in the historic faith of the Church, namely, that Jesus was the Divine Incarnation, Christianity stands apart from all other religions. The unlikeness does not consist merely in the fact that it is the man of Nazareth with whom the Incarnation is connected, but quite as much in the character of the Incarnation which is asserted. So far as the necessary implications of the title Immanuel, "God with us," taken by itself alone, are concerned, Christianity is not

unique. The Lycaonians in their cry, "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men," expressed a thought common to many nations. From the amorous masquerades of Jupiter to the East Indian "avatars" the idea of divine manifestation on earth is not infrequently found. In the case of some of the highest and, philosophically at least, purest of the last-named manifestations, the gap which separates from true incarnation may not to all seem wide; but we are justified in asserting that, if all the elements in the case are taken into account, the Christian idea of incarnation is unique. It involves the permanent association of the divine and the human in the bond of a single personality which is fully human at the same time that it is really divine. This involves no psychological theories as to what personality is, but simply emphasizes the group of phenomena which are included in our conception of personality and which would remain the same phenomena, however personality should be defined. For anything parallel to this Christian conception the writer has found no decisive testimony, so far as he has been able to go, among the results of Comparative Religion.

It may not be amiss to dwell briefly on the far-reaching significance for Christian theology of this unique conception. Incarnation is the highest and best manifestation of God which is conceivable, because it is made in the sphere and through the medium of personality, than which nothing nobler can we conceive. It has proved itself sufficient; for, in the face of Jesus Christ, we see enough of the glory of God for our knowledge, full enough for our faith. And as all that is knowable of the glory of God can be best made known through incarnation, and as all that human personality can receive by incarnation and can then reveal in life, dazzles our eyes as we gaze at Jesus, must we not conclude that this

incarnation is the unique and final manifestation of God in history?

As from the standpoint of Comparative Religion we survey the field of theological doctrine and religious thought, as with greater or less intelligence and interest we consider the practical task of the missionary to carry to those who lack it the religion which has blessed us, we find in the Incarnation one of the great things peculiar to Christianity, one of its most significant as well as striking differentia, if not, indeed, the most so of all. How far it is best to make it in time the first of the religious teachings of the missionary, or in logical order the first of the theological conceptions of the student, lies outside the scope of this discussion. Perhaps not all will agree that of all the truths of Christianity this is the most central, the most compulsive, the most vital. Even if by such it should not be granted that this fact is the foundation, the fountain, the root, of all else that is distinctively Christian, it will yet serve the present purpose as a clue by which largely to guide further thought, since it must be granted by all that historically this truth preceded the other great truths which are distinctively Christian, and since usually the same order holds in individual experience as well. Both church and soul, like Paul, have seen first the risen, glorified Divine Christ, then all the rest which is Christian.

The first result to note, following upon the acknowledgment of Jesus as the Divine Incarnation, is a great enrichment of the conception of what God is. If we compare religions on the basis of the value of the conceptions of the Deity which they respectively present, as is the wise way of some, then we note at once a peculiarity of Christianity which is one of its supremest excellences, in the character of the Christian idea of God.

This enrichment in the conception of God may be remarked first, historically, in the substitution of Christian trinitarian conceptions in place of Jewish unitarian. Perhaps, however, it should be noted in passing that some urge that the doctrine of a Divine Trinity is really not peculiarly Christian but belongs to many faiths. Certainly in many polytheistic religions deities are arranged in triads; but, with a single possible exception, the underlying unity is lacking. The writer has no such first-hand knowledge of Hindu theology as would justify either assertion or denial that the Brahmanic "Trimurti" is closely parallel to the Christian Trinity, although it may be allowed to suggest doubt. But at any rate the doctrine is said to be a scant five hundred years old,⁷ and it holds no such place and has no such consequences in Eastern thought as does the Trinity in Western. So for practical purposes this possible exception need not prevent the inclusion of the divine Tripersonality among the differentiae of Christianity.

It is not, however, the present purpose to enter upon any metaphysical discussion of the Trinity, which the history of doctrine shows always to have been an element of the general Christian faith. A theologian said in conversation some time since, that "it is time to reargue the subject of the Trinity." It may be so, and that it is time to banish all metaphysical argumentation about it to the limbo whither all arithmetical argumentation long since went, and to recognize that the doctrine is really based on Christian experience, that it is a theological attempt to explain what the soul has actually personally experienced. Our religious experience is not the product of dogma; on the contrary, the dogma was born of the experience. In "The Missionary Message," a volume which embodies the results of the thought of hundreds of

missionaries in regard to their work, Mr. Gairdner is quoted as saying: "Contact with unitarian, deistic Islam forces the Christian Church to work out her theology again *experientially*. . . . Christians who preach the Trinity must know the secret of the Trinitarian life. . . . Islam forces us to find the Trinity in the heart of God." ⁸ As the relation to the divine Redeemer and the indwelling divine Spirit gave the doctrine first, so the appeal to-day is to the same experience.

But the present purpose is only to suggest that by just as much as spiritual experience has been enriched by the varied revelations and relations of the Divine in Son and Spirit, by so much has the conception of God been enriched by the doctrine of the Trinity. Mere monotheism possesses, to be sure, whatever advantage there is in simplicity; but simplicity in that sense is only negative, and consequently poor, cold, and barren. In reference to the type of thought which defines God only by thinking away all limitations, by denials, it has been acutely said that thereby "we have created a vacuum and called it God." In contrast, the assertions of the doctrine of the Trinity enrich the idea of God alike psychologically and ethically (if these words may be tolerated in reference to the Deity). As to the first of these points, the great thinker Martineau finds himself driven to posit another eternal being besides God, saying: "God cannot stand for us as the sole and exhaustive term in the realm of uncreated being: as early and as long as he is, must also be somewhat objective to him." ⁹ Unconsciously the church has met this difficulty by seeing in the Logos and the Spirit objects sufficiently distinguished, even while forever undivided, to provide for the eternal possibility of the exercise of the divine consciousness. As Hall states it in discussing the Trinity in his first series of Barrows Lectures which were given

in India: "The simplicity of impersonal essence, attained by the negation of attributes, is felt to be less comprehensive and all-sufficient than the wealth of personality attained by differentiation. God is conceived as realizing Himself within the depths of His own infinity through those differentiations which no mortal mind can fathom, and yet which mortal faith can adore as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."¹⁰ There is the same enrichment in the domain of ethics, in the sphere of love. The moral philosopher demands an object as an essential condition of affection just as much as the psychologist does for consciousness. Practically the school to which Martineau belonged have not faced this problem as fairly as he faced it in the corresponding sphere. Instead, they have in reality posited a being who sat from eternity solitary and alone, and hence, till he created, unloving as unloved. And not only is the trinitarian conception of God intellectually richer than the unitarian, but may not the bareness of mere intense monotheism explain what has been called the "barrenness of Unitarianism"? Does not experience confirm the validity of the doctrine which was itself the result of experience? If we were pragmatists, should we not be forced to be trinitarian Christians simply because of the effectiveness of that faith?

But far more significant than the view as to the personality of God is the peculiarly Christian view as to his character. To Christians, and to Christians only, "God is love." To be sure, there is perhaps no point in this whole discussion as to which there is greater need to confess that Christians have not always been Christian, that theologians have often misrepresented God's character. For one proof it might be asserted almost without qualification that the adoration of the Virgin Mary is ultimately due to the obscuring of the love

of God. But outside of Christianity there is, it may be said, no real thought at all of a God who is essentially love. I note the reserve with which President Hall speaks on this point when he says: "I have no desire to assume that the association of love with the character of God is peculiar to Christianity. I make no such assumption. If others," he continues, "have found their way to the heart of the Eternal and have found it 'most wonderfully kind,' it is the greatest joy."¹¹ But this careful reserve in claim and statement may have been due to tact as well as courtesy in speaking to non-Christian audiences. Certainly, so far as the writer has been able by searching to find out the matter, in Christianity alone is set forth the great fact that God loves the world. In various teachings of other religions may be found scattered rays of this great light, as Mohammedanism has "The Merciful" as one of the titles of the Divine Being, even though we might well think that "The Merciless" would better sum up the Islamic conception of him. But that love is the organizing principle, so to speak, of the divine character; that love is essential, fundamental, fontal, controlling in his every relation with every other being in the universe; that his every act is love, his every thought is love, his will is love, his heart is love; as this is Christian, so it is not found elsewhere than in Christianity, and thus this is one of the distinctive, peculiar truths of our religion.

Yet the assertion that God loves does not exhaust the Christian idea. To complete the conception of the loving God, we must add the thought of the seeking God. That "God is love" is a statement inexhaustibly rich, but that "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son" touches and thrills us even more. Many do not recognize that in the parables of the fifteenth chapter of Luke the story of the

father sitting at home could not, in spite of the pathos of the picture, do justice to the seeking God; and so we have the story of the woman who searched the house for her lost coin, and, above all, the story of the shepherd who went to the wilderness to find his sheep at any cost. The Gospel of the seeking God seems absolutely unique and peculiar to Christianity.

It hardly needs to be put in words that the Gospel of the seeking God finds its consummation in the Gospel of Jesus dying to save. It is not without parallel to worship one who died. The ancient myths of Osiris, Attis, and Tammuz, with the various rites and ceremonies which linked themselves with these names, are familiar. So, too, if not certain, it is probable that here and there in the so-called "mystery religions" which were so prevalent soon after the Christian era there was mention of a "Redeemer-God" or a God who was "Saviour." But certainly in the religions which have persisted till to-day we do not find even these apparent similarities; and when these seeming parallels are thoroughly and impartially investigated, the supposed likeness vanishes, just as the supposed parallels to the Virgin Birth disappear on such investigation, it having been abundantly shown that in no other religion than Christianity was such a Virgin Birth as that of Jesus ever taught or held. So nowhere but in Christianity was God ever represented as dying to save. Religion has been defined as the search of man for God, and this definition may be accepted for other religions than our own, even though we also hold it true that as men have felt and groped their way toward God, their search has not been wholly without his aid. But the idea that a divine redeemer died with the express purpose thereby to save men, that thought so far transcended the farthest and highest stretch of human

reason that, save so far as hinted in Jewish prophecy, imagination never forecast it. Only the fact could give the idea, and so it was originally, as it has remained, peculiar to Christianity.

With this presentation of God as seeking to save, in which Christianity stands absolutely solitary, go two other religious conceptions in which it stands practically alone. These are the conceptions of the sinfulness of man and the holiness of God, two ideas which confirm and reënforce each other. It scarcely needs to be proved that in other religions the conception of sin, even though not wholly lacking, is certainly inadequate. In Hinduism the fact of sin is absolutely denied.¹² Such a view must logically follow from every pantheistic conception of the universe; and sin is as little appreciated in atheistic Buddhism, where nothing is asserted but the unalterable consequences of acts, their character being too much ignored. In Mohammedanism, which pictures God as but an arbitrary despot, sin is deprived of its moral quality; for did the supreme ruler so order, what to-day is wrong to-morrow would be right. That in animistic religions, as in the religions of antiquity, there was practically nothing to develop a sense of sin, is universally admitted.

To the existence of at least a rudimentary sense of sin testifies the world-wide prevalence of sacrifice. In part it may have been due to an instinct of fear or to the desire of an inferior to buy the favor of a superior; but largely sacrifice, even in its most shocking forms, "the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul," may rightly be regarded as testimony to some sense of sin, rudimentary, unreasoned, inarticulate, insufficient, yet actual, a universal instinct which, like the hope of future life, we dare not disregard. And only when the words of Abraham were fulfilled in a sense infinitely pro-

founder than they meant when spoken, "God will himself provide a lamb," then only has the instinct for sacrifice ceased, while at the same time the sense of sin has been intensified beyond measuring.

Individual souls there have doubtless been in all ages and lands whose experience was better than their creeds. As Orr says: "It is indeed singular how sensitive the natural conscience sometimes is, even in heathenism, to wrong-doing as sin, and how unerringly, often, it pierces the grossest veils of polytheism in its conviction of a Power that judges righteously and punishes the evil-doer."¹³ Yet, to use his own words in the same connection: "There can never, however, be the same sense of sin's awful evil, and of its hatefulness in the sight of God, as where, in the light of revelation, God is truly known and the impression of his Holiness is deeply felt." For example, while in the Babylonian "Penitential Psalms," so-called, there is what Rogers calls "the real pang of concern for real moral uncleanness," yet he adds, "Sin is viewed in them not quite as in the Old Testament sense, as sin *per se*,"¹⁴ and Jastrow seems to base these expressions on fear, saying, "The fear of divine anger runs, as an under-current, throughout the entire religious literature of Babylonia and Assyria."¹⁵ Perhaps nowhere outside our Scriptures can there be found clearer apprehension of sin as sin than in the great Greek dramatists; but even their conceptions fall far short of the spiritual experiences of Psalmists and Apostles, of Augustine and Luther and Bunyan and Payson, of many humble Christians whose confessions of penitence and aspiration have sometimes thrilled our souls, — so far short of these that it may be safely asserted that any due and adequate sense of sin is distinctively Christian.

At this point it may be well to note that Christians have

not always and everywhere properly apprehended that which is distinctively Christian, and in reference to no point in the present discussion is this fact more in evidence to-day. Not to speak of the popular lexicology which finds the idea of sin in the ultimate derivation of the Greek word from a root meaning "missing the mark," and even carries this sense over into the New Testament, (a bit of definition which would be purely ludicrous were it not for its possibly serious consequences,) it is also widely, not to say universally, admitted that there is, to use the words of Garvie, "a religious thought today that is improperly optimistic, at least as regards the moral realm."¹⁶ In the language of Sir Oliver Lodge, "As a matter of fact, the higher man of today is not worrying about his sins at all,"¹⁷ while Gladstone is quoted as saying in reply "to a question as to what he considered the greatest need of the age, 'A sense of sin.'"¹⁸ Principal Forsyth says: "Our talk of sin is popularly ceasing to be the talk of broken and contrite men"; and again: "Our speech of sin has not behind it the note of 'my sin, my sin!' And in consequence," he adds, "our thought and speech of Christ loses the authentic note of 'My Lord and my God.' We do not know an 'eternal sin' and an awful Redemption, and therefore we do not know an eternal Redeemer in the Christ we praise."¹⁹ But, granting the existence of the facts which Forsyth asserts, has he not here put the cause for the consequence? Warneck tells us that "In the case of most heathen Christians it is not the knowledge of sin which leads them to Jesus the Reconciler: it is Jesus the Redeemer who leads them to a knowledge of sin."²⁰ Was not this the course of things in the early church, and has it not been the same in every age? And is not this slackening of the sense of sin confirmatory of Forsyth's warning: "The declaration now

that Christianity consists in imitating at a reverent distance the religion of Jesus only shows that we are in the midst of a movement and an apostasy more serious than anything that has occurred in the Church's history since Gnosticism was overcome"?²¹

We must add that in the light of redemption is to be seen not only God's love and man's sin, but also God's holiness. Indeed, the sense of human sin and divine holiness are correlated in the revelatory light which streams from the Cross. The deeper it shows the gulf of sin to be, the higher seems to tower above it the infinite height of divine holiness; the blacker the sin of man, the whiter the holiness of God. In large part what needs to be said on this point is well said by Tisdale: "In no heathen system of religion — in fact, in *no* religion known to us except Christianity and its earlier stage of Biblical Judaism — can there be found the conception of *Holiness* as God's most essential attribute. It is taught throughout the Bible, but nowhere else. Hence the various heathen 'incarnations' of whatever deity were not holy, nor did their lack of that quality in the very slightest degree detract from their Divine claims in the opinion of their worshippers. We see the same thing in Islam in more recent times, whenever deity has been claimed by any heretical sect for its founder. The most noteworthy instance of this is the case of the deified chiefs of the Ismâ'îlians or 'Assassins,' but the same may be said of the worship of 'Alî by the 'Alî-ilâhis, and of the Bâb and Bahâ in our own times."²²

So far from this is the Christian thought that perhaps the more part of theologians incline to assert that the central and dominant attribute of God, by which his moral nature is best designated and in which it is most satisfactorily summed up, is his holiness, and those who would make love rather than

holiness central in his character, are no less ready to echo the words of John, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

Christianity stands by itself, apart from all other religions, also in the duty of man, which is involved in the holiness of God, — "Be ye holy as I am holy," "Ye therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect," — and no less in the power which it offers to reach this goal. It would not be just to say that good morals are not inculcated in many ancient and modern religions, but their difference from Christianity is acutely discerned and clearly stated by Bishop Honda of Japan, who is quoted by Speer thus: "Their ethical teaching is utilitarian rather than religious in its principles and sanctions."²³ This judgment is in closest harmony with what Lecky said of ancient paganism: "The Roman religion even in its best days, though an admirable system of moral discipline, was never an independent source of moral enthusiasm. . . . It was purely selfish. It was simply a means of obtaining prosperity, averting calamity, and reading the future."²⁴ Harnack includes among the elements with which early Christianity had to deal, "the prevalent, indeed, the fundamental opinion that *knowledge of the universe, religion, and the strict management of the individual's conduct*, must form a compact unity, which has nothing to do with the State, society, the family, or one's daily calling, and must therefore maintain an attitude of *negation* (i.e., in the sense of asceticism) towards all these spheres."²⁵ Even in the "mystery religions," while by various rites the initiate was supposed to be introduced into communion with his deity, "there was," as Kennedy puts it, "no necessary connection between the mystical experiences and a changed ethical standard."²⁶ Of course the same has, unfortunately, in practice been widely

true of Christians, but never in all the centuries has any recognized leader of Christian thought failed to correlate duty with ceremony and experience. We often hear misrepresentations of the preaching of past generations to the effect that there was no inculcation of duty from the pulpit until the late flowering of ethical preaching, but closer study of New England preaching, to take an example frequently cited, would show that these statements are absolutely erroneous. As a whole, Christian teaching has continually echoed the cry of Paul, "How shall we who died to sin live any longer therein?"

To this proclamation of duty Christianity, still unlike every other religion without exception, offers the power to perform. It is too often forgotten that Bacon's aphorism, "Knowledge is power," does not hold in ethics. To its moral teaching is added in Christianity the unique doctrine of the Holy Spirit, who regenerates the soul, dwells in it, sanctifies it, imparts alike purpose and power. The Christian idea is clearly indicated by Eucken when he says, "Christianity is a religion of redemption, not a religion of law; that is to say, it makes the critical turning-point, the winning of the new world, depend not on man's resolve or exertions, but on divine grace meeting him and lifting him upwards, a grace that does not merely second his own efforts, but implants within him fresh springs of action and makes his relationship to God the source of a new life, a new creature."²⁷ For the great truth of the seeking God is not exhausted in the gift of the Son to the world once for all, but is supplemented, completed, and crowned in the continual gift of himself to the soul in the Spirit. To be sure, it can scarcely be believed that the Spirit has not been active in the sphere of the Christless religions also; doubtless he has transformed and purified many souls under

every religion as well as in every nation and age, but what is now to be noted is that no other religion than Christianity gives the explanation, offers the promise, and holds out the hope of divine power to complete our salvation.

To learn the effectiveness of this new ideal and power, let us call as a witness one who surely had no prejudices in favor of historic Christianity, Professor Seeley, who said in "Ecce Homo": "That Christ's method, when rightly applied, is really of mighty force may be shown by an argument which the severest censor of Christians will hardly refuse to admit. Compare the ancient with the modern world. [It will be fair to extend the comparison to the whole non-Christian and Christian world.] 'Look on this picture and on that. One broad distinction in the characters of men forces itself into prominence. Among all the men of the ancient heathen world there were scarcely one or two to whom we might venture to apply the epithet 'holy.' In other words, there were not more than one or two, if any, who besides being virtuous in their actions were possessed with an unaffected enthusiasm for goodness, and besides abstaining from vice regarded even a vicious thought with horror. Probably none will deny that in Christian countries this higher-toned goodness, which we call holiness, has existed. Few will maintain that it has been exceedingly rare. Perhaps the truth is that there has scarcely been a town in any Christian country since the time of Christ where a century has passed without exhibiting a character of such elevation that his mere presence has shamed the bad and made the good better, and has been felt at times like the presence of God Himself."²⁸ As we follow Seeley thus, are we not forced with him to recognize in this a peculiarity, the uniqueness of Christianity?

It remains to name only two more of the conceptions which

belong exclusively to Christianity; and the discussion of both must be brief, because one has scarcely taken shape as yet even in Christian thought, and the other can never here be realized. There is a great ideal which was sketched in vaguest outline in the documents which are historically the charters and muniments of our faith, which has been recognized with vision more or less clear by many of the teachers and leaders in all ages, which is clamored for by many in these days, though the demand is not always intelligent or clear, which underlies the great social aspirations and movements of the present era so far as they are Christian — the great family of God, whose center is Christ, whose bond is the Spirit, whose ideal is the greatness of service, whose motive power is love, “because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” In presenting this ideal, which is primarily a spiritual unity, not directly either political or social, but which must ultimately revolutionize politics and reconstitute society, as, indeed, it is already seen to have abolished slavery and fostered democracy, which is universal, rejecting the discriminations against woman perpetuated even by Judaism, rising surely, if slowly, to the recognition that every middle wall of partition is broken down, so that all Christians are brought near to each other in Christ in order that out of all he may make one new man, a new human society in himself, the Holy Catholic Church of the creeds, and which consequently fires every truly Christian heart with a missionary zeal which must flame till there shall be no need to say, Know the Lord, for all shall know him, and our Master’s prayer shall be answered, for all his own shall have become one in him — in presenting this ideal we present something exclusively Christian, though, alas, as

it never has been, so it is not yet the ideal of the church at large.

There remains only to note wherein the Christian doctrine of the future life is peculiar. We are not to think of our religion as standing alone in setting forth the fact of a future life, but we should note, first, that it does stand alone among all the religions which prevail to-day (excepting in this case Judaism) in its teaching of the fact of the resurrection.²⁹ It is not intended now to defend this doctrine, or to inquire its full significance, or even to define its real nature and to guard against the crass materialism which throws discredit upon it on the one hand, or against the over-refined spiritualizing tendency which explains it away on the other hand; it is enough now to note that the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is the peculiarly Christian doctrine of the future life. It is also to be noted that Christianity is unique in the confidence, in the unshakable assurance, with which it speaks of the future, finding this full assurance of our eternal life in Christ, who died, and rose, and is alive forevermore. As Harnack has said: "If we soberly ask ourselves what gives us the courage to believe in a future life, then we answer, We venture it on Christ. He lives and I live with him. . . . He guarantees to us the reality of the future world."³⁰

Finally, we note that Christianity differs from all other religions in regard to the future life exactly as it does in regard to the present, namely, in filling it with a dominantly spiritual content and giving it a spiritual ideal. Over against the animistic notions which make the future but a prolongation of the past, over against the feasting and sensuous joys of a Valhalla or a Mohammedan Paradise, over against the transmigrations of Hinduism and the obliteration of all self which Buddhism expects in Nirvana, is set the Christian con-

ception of eternal life, for a definition of which may well be borrowed words which President Hall used in India. He said that for the Christian "the conception of immortality is a vision of peace that passeth understanding; of the forgiveness of sin and of the putting away of sin through the mercy and sacrifice of God himself; of the liberation of the soul from infirmity and its upbuilding in the likeness of God's character; of everlasting increase of knowledge, unending growth of serviceable power, sublime companionship of like-minded souls, eternal intimacy with the God of love. . . . We look for a city whose Builder and Maker is God:

"Where light and life and joy and peace
 In undivided empire reign,
 And thronging angels never cease
 Their deathless strain;
 Where saints are clothed in spotless white
 And evening shadows never fall,
 Where Thou, Eternal Light of Light,
 Art Lord of all." "

It would not be difficult to frame a creed which would express helpfully the many points in which Christianity is not peculiar, and we might well be profoundly impressed with the great spiritual realities which our religion holds in common with others. Such a creed might run somewhat thus: "With many seekers after God of other faiths, we believe in one God, the Almighty Maker, Ruler, and Judge, who has spoken to men through his prophets and, above all, through Jesus. We believe in punishment for sin, in the forgiveness of the penitent, in the equality of believers (by faith are we saved), in the right life, in the efficacy of prayer, and in a good world after death." But how much beyond measure is this creed enriched when we add the distinctive and peculiar truths of Christianity, when we say: "With Christians of

every age, I believe in God the Father, whose holiness is such that in him is no darkness at all, and who so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, the eternal Logos, who became flesh, being born of the Virgin Mary, and dwelt among men; who died for our transgressions, being made sin who knew no sin, by whose stripes we are healed; who is the way, the truth, and the life; who, being raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the majesty on high, shall reign as Lord till all things are put under his feet. I believe also in the Holy Spirit, by whom we are born again into newness of eternal life; who dwells in us to give spiritual power and guidance; by whom we are made more and more Christlike in character and service. I believe in the Church Universal, which is the body of Christ on earth, the brotherhood of all saved souls in him. I believe in the resurrection of the dead, and that we shall ever be with and like Christ, to whom, with the Father and the Spirit, one God, be glory and honor forever and ever more, Amen."

NOTES.

¹R. E. Speer, *The Light of the World; A Brief Comparative Study of Christianity and Non-Christian Religions* (West Medford, Mass., 1911), p. 259.

²Ad. Harnack, *Die Aufgabe der theologischen Facultäten und die allgemeine Religionsgeschichte in Reden und Aufsätze* (Glessen, 1904), vol. II. p. 174.

³Cf. Morris Jastrow, Jr., *Aspects of Religious Belief and Practice in Babylonia and Assyria* (New York, 1911), p. 414: "It was natural and excusable in the first glow of enthusiasm over striking discoveries that their importance should be both overemphasized and overstated. Tempting generalizations were hastily drawn of a direct borrowing by the younger civilization from the older; and as more and more resemblances between the two were revealed, this discovery involved the originality of the later Hebrew civilization to such an extent that there seemed to be little left that had not been taken from Babylonia or Assyria." Professor Jastrow adds: "The thesis suggested by a more critical examination of the abun-

dant material now at hand is that resemblances in myths and traditions are frequently as deceptive as resemblances in the words of different languages."

In Welnel and Widgery's *Jesus in the Nineteenth Century and After* (Edinburgh, 1914), pp. 411, 412, we read: "Another factor also became prominent in this conflict. Penetrating and accurate work had now been done in the research in the history of religion, and Christianity was shown to have very close relationship to the religions of antiquity. In contrast with earlier research, which had isolated Christianity from other religions, emphasis was placed entirely upon the similarities, and upon the influences they had exerted upon it. So one could easily suppose that Christianity is simply a combination of elements from ancient religions, and Jesus nothing but a god of redemption conceived by the imagination of the pious from the redemptive gods of these religions—that it is simply a new 'Christian' mystery religion. Yet in these works the whole emphasis was placed upon the messianic problem, and the real facts of the gospel and of the life of Jesus played no part."

⁴In the *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. II, (October, 1909), pp. 408-445, Professor Royce names as "vital" the Incarnation and the Atonement.

⁵William Goudie, quoted by J. H. Moulton, *Religions and Religion* (London, 1913), p. 93.

⁶In Macfadyen's paper entitled "Final Christianity," in *Mansfield College Essays* (London, 1902), p. 194, occurs the following: "The movement toward religious realism, which is linked in the popular mind with 'Essays and Reviews,' and especially with Jowett's 'Essay on the Interpretation of Scripture,' has gone to great lengths. It has ended in offering religion without revelation, Christianity without a Christ, a cross without a reason for it, prayers without answers, rewards without penalties, immortality without eternal life."

⁷H. Schultz, in his *Outline of Christian Apologetics* (translated by A. B. Nichols, New York, 1905), p. 158, gives the definite date "1400 A.D.," for its origin.

⁸World's Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910, Report of Commission (Edinburgh, 1910), vol. IV, p. 135.

⁹Seat of Authority in Religion (London, 1890), p. 32.

¹⁰Christian Belief Interpreted by Christian Experience (Chicago, 1903), p. 125.

¹¹Lectures quoted above, p. 89.

¹²Compare the words of Swami Vivekananda in *The World's Parliament of Religions* (Chicago, 1893), vol. II, p. 971. "The Hindu refuses to call you sinners. We are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings, ye are divinities

on earth. Sinners? It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature."

¹² *Sin as a Problem of Today* (New York), p. 72.

¹³ *The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria, especially in its Relations to Israel* (New York, 1906), p. 181.

¹⁴ *Aspects of Religious Belief and Practice in Babylonia and Assyria* (New York, 1911), p. 325. In the *Religion of Babylonia and Assyria* (Boston, 1898) p. 316, Professor Jastrow calls attention to the ritual use of the "Penitential Psalms" and the expectation of what may be called a magical result from their recital, facts which must be taken into account in estimating their significance in relation to a sense of personal sin.

¹⁵ *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (London, 1913), p. 116. An example of this improper optimism is given in the *Literary Digest* for August 22, 1914 (p. 312), as follows: "Morley objects to Emerson because he has so little to say of that horrid burden and impediment on the soul which the church calls sin, and which by whatever name we call it is a very real catastrophe in the moral nature of man."

¹⁶ *Hibbert Journal*, April, 1904, p. 466.

¹⁷ William Orchard, *Modern Theories of Sin* (London, 1909), p. 10.

¹⁸ *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (London, 1909), pp. 51, 52, 54.

¹⁹ *The Living Forces of the Gospel* (trans. by Neil Buchanan, Edinburgh, 1909), p. 262.

²⁰ *Person and Place*, pp. 51, 52.

²¹ *Christianity and Other Faiths* (London, 1912), p. 74.

²² *Light of the World*, p. 25.

²³ *History of European Morals* (New York, 1869), pp. 176, 177. Later he speaks of "the broad separation between the spheres of morals and of positive religion."

²⁴ *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (trans. by James Moffatt, London, 1908), p. 33.

²⁵ *St. Paul and the Mystery Religions* (London, 1913), p. 219.

²⁶ "Can we still be Christians?" (trans. by L. J. Gibson, New York, 1914), p. 7.

²⁷ *Ecce Homo* (Fifth Ed., London, 1866), p. 171.

²⁸ It does not seem necessary to discuss the resurrection teaching of Zoroastrianism, which was probably to some extent perpetuated in Mithraism, as there appear to be no sufficient materials for such a discussion, and as it has exerted no permanent direct influence on the thought of the world.

²⁹ *Reden und Aufsätze* (Glessen, 1904), vol. II, p. 14.

³⁰ *Christian Belief*, pp. 205-207.