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JOURNAL OF
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SECRETARY: E. WALTER MAUNDER, F.R.A.S.

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1914.

558TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,

HELD (BY KIND PERMISSION) IN THE ROOMS OF THE
ROYAL SOCIETY OF ARTS, ON MONDAY,
JUNE 8TH, 1914, AT 4.30 P.M.

THE REV. PREBENDARY H. E. FOX TOOK THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the preceding Meeting were read and confirmed.

The SECRETARY announced the election of the Rev. Albert J. Nast (Editor, *Der Christliche Apologete*), and the Rev. Arthur Louis Breslich, B.A., B.D., President of the Baldwin-Wallace College, Berea, Ohio, as Associates of the Institute.

The CHAIRMAN, in introducing the Right Rev. Dr. J. E. C. Welldon, Dean of Manchester, to the Meeting, said that he felt great pleasure in presiding on this occasion, the more so that he was himself an old Harrow boy, and, as all there knew, Bishop Welldon had been Headmaster of Harrow. The Bishop had asked him to apologize to the meeting on his behalf, since he would have to leave early in order to catch the express train to Manchester, where on the morrow he would be taking part in the memorial service for those who had lost their lives in the terrible disaster to the "Empress of Ireland." He would, therefore, not take up any more time of the meeting, but would at once invite Dr. Welldon to give them his address.

THE SUPREMACY OF CHRISTIANITY. By THE RIGHT
REV. J. E. C. WELLDON, D.D., Dean of Manchester.

SUMMARY.

CHRISTIANITY claims to be the one ultimate universal religion among mankind. But the spirit of Christian missionaries towards other religions than their own should, as far as possible, be one of sympathy. Such was St. Paul's spirit when at Athens he took the inscription Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ on an altar in the city as the basis of his appeal for faith in Jesus Christ and His Resurrection. I have often regretted that there is no epistle to the Athenians among St. Paul's extant writings.

The universality of the religious instinct is recognized by anthropologists of the highest distinction, such as Tiele and

Tylor, and, I may add, by Frazer in his book, "The Belief in Immortality." It is not difficult to trace the evolution of religious belief from Animism to Polytheism, then, with some diversion in favour of a dualistic system, such as Manichaeism to Monotheism, and, ultimately, to that finer Christian Monotheism in which God is held to be not only one God, but to be the Father of all His children upon the earth.

In the comparison of religious systems it is possible to put aside, as not aspiring to universal supremacy, all purely local, tribal, racial, or national religions. Among these religions the most remarkable is, of course, Judaism, as the Hebrew genius for religion was unrivalled, and the Hebrew religious literature has been far more influential than any similar literature upon the moral and spiritual fortunes of humanity. Not less is it possible, I think, to put aside such religions as not only were originally, but have remained, in their essential features, Oriental. To this class of religions belong Hinduism, Parseeism, Shintoism, and, I think it is not unfair to add, Buddhism. All these religions have found, and still find, their natural homes in the East. There was a time when the religion of Islam threatened to inundate Europe; but the overflowing tide was driven back by Charles Martel and John Sobieski, and in spite of Gibbon's ironically regretful words about the lost teaching of the Koran in the University of Oxford, it has never seemed probable that Islam would become acclimatised in Europe, or that Mohammed would be treated as a rival of Jesus Christ.

Two great religions there are which by a singular fortune have flourished, not in the countries where they were born, but in the countries to which they were transplanted, viz., Buddhism and Christianity. But Buddhism, if it migrated from India to Ceylon, Burma, China and Siam, never lost its Oriental character. Christianity is the sole example of an Oriental religion achieving ascendancy over the minds and hearts of nations in the West.

I put, then, first as a proof of the supremacy which Christianity claims among the religions of the world, that it alone has shown its capacity of fusing in spiritual sympathy the East and the West. Jesus Christ, it is clear, contemplated the universality of His religion; for He bade His disciples to make converts of all nations. His Church, after evangelising the Western World, has within the last two or more centuries reacted upon the East, in India, in China, and in Japan. Nor is it too much to say that in all these countries, as also in Africa, the Church has proved its capacity for evoking, at least among certain select representatives of the native population, the

distinctive virtues and graces of the Christian life. It is not necessary to accept all the glowing tribute of a religious reformer like Keshub Chunder Sen to the ascendancy of Jesus Christ in India; but the fact remains, I believe, that even to-day the East and the West are never so nearly harmonized as when in Southern India, for example, native converts, both men and women, are seen kneeling side by side with European missionaries at the Holy Communion of Christ's Body and Blood. For myself, I cherish the hope that, if India embraces Christianity, its intellectual and spiritual effect upon the Church of Christ will be surpassed only by the effect of Greece in the second, third and fourth centuries of the Christian era.

Another point of Christian supremacy I hold to be the Bible. To me the sacred literatures of the world are, upon the whole, disappointing. No one of them is comparable with the Old or, *a fortiori*, with the New Testament. The noble series of the Religious Books of the East, published under the auspices of the late Professor Max Müller, has for the first time afforded the Western World an opportunity of acquainting itself with the literary expression of Oriental creeds. I can only say that those books are in my judgment not only inferior to the Bible, but that the later parts of them are generally inferior to the earlier; whereas the Bible exhibits a continuous moral and spiritual advance from *Genesis* to *Revelation*. At any rate, there can be no higher authority upon Oriental literature than that illustrious scholar, Sir William Jones, and he wrote in his Bible, "I have carefully and regularly perused the Holy Scriptures, and am of opinion that the volume, independently of its divine origin, contains more sublimity, purer morality, more important history, and finer strains of eloquence than can be collected from all other books, in whatever language they may have been written."

Yet another point of supremacy in the Creed of Christendom is its moral elevation. It will not, I think, be denied that Mohammedanism, by its toleration of slavery and polygamy, or Hinduism, by such practices as sati and such ceremonies as the holi festival, to say nothing about the worship of cows, stand upon a lower moral platform than Christianity. The Brahmo Somaj is, in fact, on its moral side a protest against the degradation of Hinduism. Contrast with Mohammedanism or Hinduism the morality of the Sermon on the Mount, of which a critic so dispassionate as Goethe could say that it represented the unsurpassable ideal of human conduct, and the gulf between Christianity and the other religions of the world at their best is

self-evident. If I were to choose an instance as showing how far Jesus Christ has lifted the moral standard of humanity above His predecessors, I would put His treatment of the woman taken in adultery beside the conversation between Socrates and the courtesan as related by Xenophon. The Christian Saint, whether man or woman, is, in fact, the realisation of a type which the pre-Christian or the non-Christian world can scarcely imagine.

Let me add the fidelity of the Christian revelation to human nature. Christianity is based upon the facts of man's inherent sinfulness, yet his natural affinity to God, and his conscious need of redemption or atonement. By the doctrine of the Incarnation it satisfies the human desire of contact with the Deity; in the fact of the Crucifixion it exemplifies by a unique example the principle of self-sacrifice. It sets its seal upon the truth enunciated by the prophet Micah, that not in ritual or oblation, but in obedience to the Divine Law lies the true performance of religious duty. It were strange indeed that the Bible, if it were a purely human book, should always take God's side as against man's; but if holy men of old spake in the Bible as they were moved by the Divine Spirit, then it is natural that the Bible should "justify the ways of God to man." Such a religion as Confucianism or Buddhism seems to stifle the human instinct of prayer and devotion. Other religions admit it, but fail to satisfy it. In Christianity alone is the spiritual side of human nature completely satisfied.

Again, the progressiveness of the Christian revelation distinguishes it from religions which are hidebound by some rigid institution, as Hinduism is by caste, or incapable, as Mohammedanism is, of rising above a certain level. Hinduism and Buddhism are stationary religions. Mohammedanism, as being historically later than Christianity, may be said to be a religion comparatively retrograde. It is a religion of conquest; and if it lifts a pagan society with singular rapidity to a certain height, beyond that height it is apparently impotent to ascend. It is morally and spiritually weakened by its inadequate conception of the Godhead; for the Mohammedan God is a God of Power; the Christian God is a God of Love.

I come then, lastly, to the person of Jesus Christ; for it is His personality which gives His religion its most distinctive superiority to all other religions of the world. It may be not unfairly said that Mohammed, by the defects of his personal life, fails to answer the highest instincts of humanity. Buddha, if he was the Light of Asia, is not, and cannot be, the Light of

the World. There is something morally defective in the very renunciation which his followers treat as the birth and touchstone of his religion. The sinlessness of Jesus Christ, His self-sacrifice, His infallible authority, His unity with God, separate Him from all other founders and teachers of religion. It is true of His Crucifixion as it is true of no other event in any other life, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." He is the Sovereign Head of humanity. If it is asked who is the archetypal man, the man who seems to sum up in himself all that humanity may be and ought to be and longs to be, there can be no other answer than that it is He. So, too, His divine eternal life, transcending death, enables Him, as in the Holy Communion, to impart Himself in mysterious intimacy to His disciples. They live a life not their own, a life which He originates, preserves and sanctifies; they are one with Him, and He with them.

As I look forward and try to estimate what the future may portend, as I see democracy advancing to its full prerogative of power, as I see the nations of the Far East awakening to new life, I feel more and more that the supreme need of the world is to permeate all nations and all classes of men in the nations with the spirit of Jesus Christ. The religious instinct in man is not dead; but it demands a faith which shall satisfy both intellect and conscience. Christianity alone still holds the key of life's abiding mysteries. In the simplification of the Christian Creed, or its accommodation to the variety of national characters and dispositions, in the approximation of the Christian Churches each to the others; above all, in the personal devotion which Jesus Christ evokes from devout hearts and minds all the world over, lies the hope that, as humanity develops, it will bow its head in humble, reverent adoration before the Incarnate and Crucified Son of God.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN asked for an immediate and hearty vote of thanks to the Lecturer, since Bishop Welldon was obliged to leave at once. They had all listened with profit to his clear and impressive address.

It was their duty to consider the religion of other races without prejudice, and to extend to them, as the Lecturer had done, every

fairness and sympathy. But they should agree with the Lecturer in his conclusion, not from the influence of their own personal predilections, but in accordance with the evidence of fact. He would draw attention to one fact in particular, namely, that there was a marked absence from sacred books, other than the Bible, of any answer to three most vital questions—questions that Christianity answered fully.

Man yearns after a Supreme Being, someone outside and above himself to control his life. Other religions give no such conception as that of the Fatherhood of God, declared by Christianity.

Next came the question of access to God by sinful man; how can God and man meet? The only answer possible is through Jesus Christ.

And the third question is as to where man can find the power to live a holy life. These three questions were answered in that noble formula with which they were all so familiar: The grace of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost." These were only learned in Christianity; no other religion could produce such a benediction.

And no other religion had the same unifying influence. He had witnessed some two or three hundred native converts kneeling with Englishmen in a wattle hut on the banks of the Godavari to receive the Holy Communion, and, as he had watched the scene, he thought that nothing could illustrate more forcibly the "Communion of Saints," nothing else than Christianity could have brought together in such communion those of such different races and character.

Lt.-Col. MACKINLAY desired to join heartily with the Chairman in thanking the Bishop for his paper. He rejoiced in the statement that Christianity stood alone; that the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ was the only one; that it was true and all others false.

The superiority of Christianity to all other religions as to its world-wide character was well brought out by comparing it with Judaism, itself of Divine origin. The Jew was forbidden to mix with other races for fear of corruption to himself; he did not seek to make converts, and he was ordered to destroy the wickedness in the land of Canaan by slaying the wicked inhabitants. The followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, on the other hand, were ordered to go and preach the Gospel to every creature, and his disciples early obeyed this injunction, and now Christians are to be found

the wide world over. Heathens are not now to be destroyed, but the Gospel of God's love was taken to them.

Mr. MAUNDER felt that the subject did not lend itself for discussion; they had come to be instructed and edified by the Bishop, not to criticize him. He had been especially glad that the Bishop had pointed out so clearly that he was not taking up the subject of "comparative religions," to use a current phrase, but was claiming that Christianity was supreme, not as the first among equals, but as being unique. For himself, he much disliked the expression "comparative religions." St. Augustine had said that "God was One," not in contrast to many gods, but because He "escaped numeration." Religion meant the binding of men to God. So it was only where One God, the Creator of heaven and earth, was recognized and adored that we could properly apply the term "religion" at all. And there were three faiths that answered to that definition, and these corresponded to the three stages in God's revelation of Himself. Mohammedanism was a far-off and corrupt echo of the patriarchal religion; then came Judaism; and lastly, in Christianity, God revealed Himself in His Son.

Mr. E. J. SEWELL wished to comment upon a single point. To deal with a subject like that of the present lecture, we ought to endeavour to put ourselves in the position of men who had been brought up in other religions, and had met Christianity for the first time. But since we ourselves had been brought up in Christianity, it was impossible for us to take this standpoint. But at the great missionary conference, held in Edinburgh in 1910, there were not only gathered together men who had studied other religions deeply and without prejudice, but they had the testimony of men who had been born and brought up in other religions, and who had been converted to Christianity. Other religions could, and did, point out the difference between the characteristics of spiritual health and disease in men, but it was Christianity alone that supplied the effective power by which the diseased could be restored to health. No other religion opens to man a road by which he can pass from a state of sin to that of holiness.

The Meeting adjourned at 5.45.