

B.H. Streeter, "The Nature of Eternal Life," from *Immortality*, (New York: Macmillan, 1922), pp. 145 - 166.

In the previous Essay it has been shown that the proof of personal Immortality rests in the last resort on the Christian conception of the character of God. Our view of the nature and quality of the life of the world to come is equally determined by this same thing. The life of those in Heaven must be thought of as a participation in the Divine life as full as is compatible with their still remaining finite human beings. We must first of all, then, ask what clear and certain knowledge have we as to the character and quality of the Divine life? This at once brings us up against the question, What do we mean by saying that God is revealed in Christ? Only in so far as we grasp the real meaning of this central feature in Christianity shall we be able to make any progress at all in our present quest. Hence a summary statement on this subject seems to be a necessary preliminary to any further enquiry.

The notion that the same Person could be both completely divine and completely human, *perfectus Deus*, *perfectus Homo*, as the Athanasian Creed puts it, is one which presented insurmountable intellectual difficulties to the mind of that Greco-Roman world to which the early Church had to endeavour to explain and justify its belief. Most of the doctrinal disputes and heresies of the first five centuries were due to the fact that no conception of the Person of Christ seemed intellectually tenable to the average educated man of the time which did not make out that Christ was either less than fully divine, or else not really and truly human. The moral and religious insight, however, of the Christian community could not rest satisfied with any view which seemed to impair, however subtly, the full reality either of His humanity or of His divinity. Hence, since the philosophy of the day was inadequate to suggest any explanation which was intellectually satisfactory, the Church was driven to affirm the complete personal union of the two natures as an inexplicable mystery to be accepted by faith. And it was defended by definitions which aimed less at offering a satisfactory explanation of what was believed than at ruling out such unsatisfactory explanations as had up to that date been formulated.

During the last century, however, it has been becoming more and more clear that the intellectual difficulties felt in the matter by the ancient world – and, indeed, by the majority of people in the modern world – were due to the fact that an attempt was being made to

solve the problem of the relation of God and man in Christ while leaving uncriticised pre-Christian conceptions of the nature both of God and man. If the same Person is both completely divine and completely human, it follows that both God and man are very different beings from what is commonly supposed; there must be in man possibilities as yet unrealised, and in God actualities as yet unsuspected. So far as man was concerned this was early recognised, especially by the Alexandrian Fathers. Athanasius' famous "He became human that we might be made divine" states in a word what was an accepted tenet of his school. But it has taken a much longer time to realise that the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ necessitates a far more drastic revolution in pre-Christian (and, indeed, in most current) conceptions of God than in pre-Christian conceptions of man. Before Christ, the Jew had pictured God as a monarch living in gorgeous splendour, surrounded by celestial state and pomp, the embodiment of power, magnificence, and splendour. The Greek had looked on Him as the Absolute Being of philosophy, immutable, impassible, who could not be thought of even as Creator unless He worked through an intermediary. But neither of these is the God whom Christ called Father; neither of these is the God of whom Christ is the "image" here on earth.

Athanasius made a heroic effort to save the Church from invasion by the extreme form of the half Greek, half Jewish conception of God which Arianism stood for. But he did not go far enough in the direction of thinking out the full implications of his main contention, that the Son is really and essentially Divine and that what we see in Him is the substance and not the shadow of the Divine life. Indeed, no man educated in Greek Philosophy and accepting the Old Testament as verbally inspired could have gone further than he did. Great men should be honoured for what they did, not blamed for what they left undone. But the present age, unshackled by that philosophy and taught by the Higher Criticism to see in the Old Testament not one single authoritative revelation but a long struggle towards ever higher and higher conceptions of the Divine, can, and – if it is not to turn its back on Athanasius – must go further forward along the road he fought and suffered so much to keep unbarred.

The inherent logic of the doctrine of the Incarnation necessitates a revaluation of the natural man's ideas, not merely of things on earth, but also of things in Heaven. If the Son of Man on earth repudiated the methods and ideals of the Kings of the Gentiles who lord and strut, if He taught that he who is the greatest on earth must be servant of all, and that the King of Kings is He who dies for all; and if Christ is, as St. Paul puts it, "the portrait of

the unseen God,"¹ then that must mean that God and the life of Heaven are not what we are apt to fancy. If "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is to be seen in the face of Jesus Christ," then the glory of God must be a very different thing from what most of us would otherwise suppose. If the life of Christ on earth is the picture in time of something which is eternal in the life of God, then God Himself is seen to share the suffering of the world and, at the cost of His own agony, to be overcoming the evil in it. And the pomp and circumstance, the dignity and domination, which seem to us magnificent and grand, are shown to be a hollow fraud. A revolution in our scheme of values is effected which at once puts down the mighty from their seat and exalts the inconspicuous and the quiet.

But, if this be so, it follows that the popular conception of Heaven errs, not so much through being symbolic—that is inevitable—as from the fact that its symbolism suggests as the dominant characteristic of the life of Heaven something lower than what Christ taught us is the highest life on earth. It has in it too much of Solomon in all his glory, too little of the beauty of the lilies of the field. At its lower levels it suggests the splendour of an Imperial court, and even at its highest level it has left out something vital. Painters, preachers, hymn-writers, starting from St. John's vision of the Adoration of the Lamb or from a glorified reminiscence of High Mass in some great cathedral, have tried to depict a Heaven compact of awe, sublimity, and the rapture of mystic adoration. Heaven must include these, but it must include much more. We cannot conceive of a Heaven in which Christ would be content to dwell unless there was to be found in it the counterpart of other things He loved on earth, the wild flowers and the birds, the children playing, friends gathered round the common board, the fellowship of labour and of love, and the quiet hour on the mountainside at dawn.

ETERNAL LIFE

If, then, we take our stand upon the doctrine of the Incarnation, we see at once that the life of the world to come must be thought of as differing from the highest kind of life which we know on earth in degree rather than in kind. And this, be it noted, is exactly how it is thought of in the Gospel of St. John. The conception of Eternal Life in this Gospel gives us exactly the guiding principle we want if we are to attain any clear, definite, and vital notion of the nature and quality of the life of the world to come. To him we call St. John, Eternal Life is something of which we can already experience a foretaste in this world; it is a life to which death is not an interruption but

rather the removal of restrictions and impediments; it is a life of which the important characteristic is, not the place where it is lived, but the quality of the life itself.

Eternal Life is said, by the author of the fourth Gospel, to consist in "the knowledge of God and of His Son Jesus Christ." What does this imply? Not, surely, or at any rate not in the first place, philosophic understanding of the nature of the Supreme Being or historical information about the historic Jesus, such as one may get by reading books or hearing discourses. The knowledge of God and Christ which St. John speaks of is such an intimacy with, such an appropriation of, the personal Divine life revealed in Christ, that he who has it sees eye to eye with Christ, loves the things that He loves, shares His sense of values. The life, then, of the world to come must be thought of, not in terms of average life on earth, but only of the highest life on earth; and our test of what is highest on earth is to be determined by that standard of value which we have learnt from Christ.

The modern man, who is not habituated to expressing the ideals which most appeal to him in religious phraseology, will be disposed to define the highest life as consisting in absolute devotion to the triad Goodness, Beauty, and Truth. Is this essentially different from St. John's definition, "the Knowledge of God and His Son Jesus Christ"? It is possible to be devoted to Goodness, Beauty, or Truth without any conscious or explicit reference to God or Christ; but, in so far as one or all of these are thought of and pursued apart from any conscious recognition of the one Divine in which they have their source and final harmony, there is something incompletely realised. It cannot be too often insisted that all disinterested devotion to Goodness, Beauty, or Truth is really and truly (whether the devotee is aware of it or not) a recognition of, and an act of service to, the One Divine, from whom these flow and in whom they have their unifying principle and ultimate explanation. On the other hand, it must be no less emphasised that it is not possible really to know and serve God unless we recognise Him, not only as the Personal Reality over and above the totality of things, but also as actually present and directly manifested through nature and through man in the actual world given to us by sense and thought.²

If the present life be regarded as a pilgrimage, a preparation for the life of the world to come, our expectations of what will be the chief activities of the next life cannot but influence our idea of what ought to be our chief activity in this. The widespread idea that life in Heaven is to be thought of as one unending act of undifferentiated religious adoration has undoubtedly led to a narrowing of the conception of the meaning of sanctity on

earth – with disastrous consequences. The great tragedy of Christianity in modern times has been, not its failure to attract or retain the allegiance of the vain, the frivolous, and the materially minded, but its failure to appeal to the idealist of today. And this has been to no small extent due to the fact that the ideal which the Church has held up to – or perhaps to speak more accurately, that aspect of the ideal life which it has been most successful ineffectively bringing home to – the imagination of Europe has been narrow and one-sided.

In a matter of moral and spiritual values deliberately to challenge what at first sight seems to be the verdict of the saints, may appear a rash proceeding. I would maintain, however, that what I am challenging is not the verdict of the *consensus sanctorum*, but, at most, the verdict of that section of the saints whom ecclesiastical authority has seen fit to canonise. Nor is it really even this. In the case of many of the canonised saints the nearer we get to their authentic biographies the wider and richer do we find was the ideal in accordance with which they actually lived, and the less conspicuous and dominating an element in their lives is that particular set of interests and activities which are conventionally associated with the idea of sanctity. We not infrequently find, too, that the saints themselves lamented as a weakness what was really breadth of moral vision, and, in deference to the authority of traditional views, deplored what they supposed to be a failure in themselves to the extent of making considerable and ill - judged efforts to force their thoughts, tastes, and desires into accordance with the conventional pattern. The latter part of the life of St. Francis of Assisi is a notable case. And biographers have been even more active in this direction, and have often completely succeeded in doing on paper what the saint was fortunately unable to accomplish in real life.³

Again, the interpretation of their experiences given by the great Mystics has often been to some extent vitiated – probably even the actual form of the experience itself has been to some extent perverted – by a conception of the nature of the Divine derived ultimately from Plotinus. The concrete conception of a richly personal, a feeling and acting Deity, which the Biblical writers are all agreed in holding, is really in marked contrast to the Neo-Platonic idea that God is one whom we can best conceive of by denying to Him any of the qualities or attributes of which we have experience; and that He is a Being whom we can, therefore, best draw near to by cutting ourselves off from all interest in earthly things. The substitution of the Neo-Platonic for the Christian idea of God could not but have important consequences. True, few, if any, of the Mediaeval Saints effected more than a partial substitution

between the two views. In practice they tried to combine them. But the effect of the Neo-Platonic element in their theology, and the ascetic element in their practice, has profoundly affected, and that not for the better, the traditional conception of the Beatific Vision. The *via negativa* which, on its intellectual side, will only think of God in negative categories, and which, on its practical side, mainly seeks Him by turning its back on the ordinary life of mankind, cannot but introduce an element of abstraction and monotony into our conception of what is the highest life of the spirit in the next life as in this.

Something more is said on this subject in the concluding section of the last Essay in this volume, so all I would emphasise here is that the life of God must not only be *said* to be, but actually *imagined* as something fuller, richer, and more alive, as something more concrete, not less so, than the life of man; and that the life of Heaven must be thought of as more, not less, teeming with varied content than that of earth. Life here would be intolerable without variety, and the life of a world which is better than this would have in it more and not less variety than that of this world.

One of the reasons why so few people are interested in the Heaven of popular Theology is that the picture it presents to the imagination of the life of the blessed suggests a life of unbroken monotony. There are those who would defend, or at any rate palliate, the traditional picture by reminding us that in supreme moments, whether of adoration or otherwise, we seem to be lifted as it were out of Time into Eternity and to feel that we could be content could such a moment be prolonged infinitely. But our more sober reflection tells us that even if this were the case there are supreme moments of different qualities and different characters, and we would enjoy not one but all of these. There is the moment when the discovery of new truth dawns upon the seeker–

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;

there is the moment of entrancement at the vision of perfect beauty; there is the moment of the union of soul and soul in love. The passion of religious adoration may interpenetrate and transcend, and, in that sense, may include, all these, yet, unless they are experienced seriatim and in separation, something of supreme value will be lost for ever. And this variety is needed, because the value of supreme moments lies not only in themselves, but also in their permanent and abiding consequences in the enrichment and elevation of the whole life – and that a life which is meant to be lived not in isolation but in harmony

with other souls. To dwell over much on the hilltops of supreme individualistic experiences, and to interpret their meaning and value in the light of an overmastering conception such as that of “the Alone with the Alone,” is ultimately to impoverish them. That which cannot be shared with others – if not directly at least in its results – may possibly be good but it is not the best.

Why was it that of all the symbols current at the time for expressing the joy of the coming Age, our Lord so frequently selected the most homely and seemingly the most material – the common meal, the Supper to which a certain man invited his friends, the table round which we shall “sit at meal” in the Kingdom with present friends and with the great souls of the past? Why on that night when He was to be betrayed had He desired with desire to eat that passover, and, failing that, why did He break the bread and pass the cup of which He was to drink no more till He drank a new kind in the world to come? Surely it all means that to Him the frank, free union in love and friendship, perhaps most often seen on earth round the familiar board – that Kingdom which consists not in eating or drinking, but in righteousness and peace and joy, in that Spirit which was the spirit in and by which He lived Himself-is the highest thing on earth, and is, therefore, a foretaste of the life of Heaven. The nearest thing to Heaven that we can attain on earth is the experience of love and fellowship, of the complete harmony of mind with mind and heart with heart, between those who feel themselves to be lifted out of and above themselves, not only by the depth of their personal affection but by their passionate devotion to some common interest or ideal. This may be found on earth without any religious bond explicitly so-called, but wherever that is the case I would affirm that there is really an apprehension and realisation of the Divine Presence even though it be unrecognised as such. But it is only when personal affection and consecration to a great ideal finds its natural consummation in conscious fellowship in the experience of the Divine Presence that we can understand what St. John means by Eternal Life and can “know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.”

THE CONTENT OF THE IDEA OF HEAVEN

I will now proceed to work out in rather more detail the conception of the character of the life of the world to come which follows it, accepting the scheme of values implied in the doctrine of the Incarnation, we think out the full meaning of St. John’s view of Eternal Life. And lest I be thought to be attempting to read my own personal hopes or foibles into the next life, I will, in every case, base what I advance on some outstanding passage in the New Testament.

Love

No thought is more fundamental to the teaching of the New Testament than that the ideal of goodness itself and all the rules of morality are merely divers expressions of the one inward passion of beneficent desire and activity to which is given the name Love. To the Master, Love God, love thy neighbour, are the great commandments. “Love,” says St. Paul, “is the fulfilment of the law.”

In the famous hymn to Charity in i Cor. xiii. St. Paul develops the great idea that, whereas all other activities-prophecies, tongues, and the like-are relative to the temporary and transient conditions of life on earth, Love is the great exception, “Love never faileth.” This, and this alone, will be precisely of the same kind in Heaven as it is on earth. It is a commonplace of philosophers that we cannot think of God as exhibiting the cardinal virtues except in a symbolic sense; for the very meaning of qualities like courage, temperance, or even justice, is relative both to our personal limitations and the limitations of our earthly environment. It is otherwise with the principle of Love – that is why it is possible that in the character of the Ideal Man the very essence of the Divine should be manifest on earth. And the Love which St. Paul speaks of as that which will not fail or be changed into something very different in the world to come is not the love of man to God – that is not with most of us an experience vivid enough to illuminate an unknown world – but the love of man to man.

The life, therefore, of the world to come must be thought of as life in a society – the New Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God, the Communion of Saints; call it what you will. And the most conspicuous feature of that society will be not merely that the exercise of active love will be as possible there as it is on earth, but that the love will be of an intenser quality, will lavish itself on a wider range of persons, and will be able to express itself more freely and in more diverse ways. Gesture and speech, which as often disguise as reveal our real meaning, may perhaps be superseded, at least they will be supplemented, by an acuter sympathy and insight which shall make impossible the uncertainties, misunderstandings, and embarrassments which hinder love on earth or restrict its range to narrow circles. A society in which every individual thought and did exactly the same would not be a society; individuality, therefore, diversity of character, capacity, and taste, must still remain. But the differences will no longer be a source of strain and friction but will be united into one great harmony like the notes of the very various instruments in a great orchestra.

Work

“My father worketh hitherto and I work,” our Lord is reported to have said to those who objected to His healing on the Sabbath day. Creation, the making that to be which hitherto has not been, is not to be thought of as something which God did once for all in a remote past but as a constant eternal activity. And some shadow, some counterpart of this creative faculty has been given to man on earth. The farmer, the builder, the inventor, the artist, are all in a sense creators. They bring into existence that which, but for them, would not have been. This creative capacity and activity of man-an activity so valuable that we can see in it a shadow and counterpart of the eternal and characteristic life of God – shall it not continue in the world to come? It must continue, though exercising itself on different materials and adapting itself to ends differing from those of which we now have experience, as much as the present work of one who designs an Atlantic liner differs from the making of paper boats which occupied his childhood. What exactly the work will be which we have to do we cannot even profitably guess; but there will surely be different kinds of work for different kinds of people. And for some, if not for all, we may suppose that part of it will consist in labour for the souls of those who have entered the next life lower down in the moral scale than themselves. And why may not the work of some be to watch over and inspire the lives of loved ones still on earth?

Thought

“Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” The pursuit of truth along the line of scientific investigation, though existent’ in the Greek-speaking world, had probably never been a very serious interest in the circles in which St. Paul had lived. A wider and more dominant interest of his age was the passion for truth along the line of philosophic enquiry. Here, again, St. Paul’s early education had probably only brought him in contact with the outskirts of this movement. Though born at Tarsus he had been trained a Pharisee; and though the Pharisees were genuinely interested in righteousness, they supposed they had already attained all the truth that they required. Yet, in spite of this, a passionate interest in the ultimate nature of reality flashes continually through his words; it is the presupposition of his change of faith and the inspiration of all his preaching of righteousness. True, he never elaborated a systematic philosophy of religion, but he produced creative thought which no

subsequent philosophy has been able to neglect. To the Corinthians, indeed, corrupted by the conceit of a shallow intellectualism, he will preach only the Cross of Christ. He declines to gratify them with logomachies. But he tells them that, for the initiated, he has a philosophy. And when in the hymn to Charity he contracts love with knowledge to the detriment of the latter, it is not because he thinks poorly of knowledge and its pursuit. Quite the contrary. It is precisely because he rates knowledge of the truth so high that in praise of love he says that love is higher *even* than knowledge. And what he looks for in the world to come is, not the abolition of the interest in truth, but its full and complete fruition. The notion that the activity of the reason in the pursuit of truth is something on which Religion should look askance runs counter not only to St. Paul’s teaching but to that of all the greatest Christian thinkers. St. Thomas Aquinas, indeed, goes so far as to say that the Beatific Vision is an activity of the intellect, *actus intellectus*, and indeed an activity of the speculative rather than of the practical intellect, and more than once adopts to describe it St. Augustine’s phrase, “*gaudium de veritate*.”⁴

Beauty

The apprehension and enjoyment of the Beautiful is that element in the ideal state of existence which traditional apocalyptic conceptions of Heaven have been fairly successful in bringing home to the popular mind. The glorious vision of the descent of the New Jerusalem which concludes the Book of Revelation, the sublime poetry of which no amount of over-literal and materialistic interpretation could disguise, is mainly responsible for this relative success. But though the apprehension of sublimer forms of beauty must be a necessary element in our conception of the future life, the sublime alone will not suffice. The highest and most complete activity of the aesthetic instinct demands for its satisfaction not merely the grandeur of an Alpine vista, of an Indian sunset, or of a great Cathedral, but the quiet, homely appeal of the violet, the mossy nook, the village church. As I have already urged, our notions of the beauty of Heaven and the splendour of it have been modelled too much on the throne-room of Solomon in all his glory, and too little on the lilies of the field and on the everyday interests of Him whose standard of values we profess to recognise but have none of us yet completely apprehended. Stateliness, dignity, classical perfection are the ideal of Pagan art – Greek or Renaissance. The modern taste, which is not content with Praxiteles or Coreggio unless it can also have Rembrandt or Rodin, is moving nearer to the aesthetic sense of Christ.

Humour

In the Bible there is not much humour, but the place where we find it most is the place where, if the line of argument I am pursuing is correct, we should most expect to find it—in some of the sayings of our Lord.⁵ These instances of humour range from the delicate irony of the suggestion that the Pharisees were such as “needed no physician” to the touch of extravagance in the picture of the man naively volunteering to remove a speck from a friend’s eye while there is half a tree in his own. Only those sayings of our Lord have been preserved which happened to strike the original hearers as supremely interesting and which, in addition, appeared to the second generation of Christians, by whom our Gospels were composed, to have a distinct moral, religious, or apologetic value. Hence they have all been, as it were, passed through a sieve, which inevitably sifted out many things which seemed uninteresting or unimportant to more conventionally-minded followers. Thus only one saying of His implying a judgment on aesthetics (“the lilies of the field”), one only indicating His love for animals (“not one sparrow”), have been preserved. But these cannot have been the only ones of the kind that were spoken, for each implies a whole philosophy; and these two, be it noted, are recorded, not for the sake of showing His love of nature or of animals—the features in these sayings which are of most interest to us – but for the sake of the moral which can be drawn from them. There are, perhaps, not more than half a dozen sayings recorded which are clearly humorous. These are sufficient to prove that humour was natural to Him; and it is a reasonable conjecture that it was a more conspicuous feature in His discourse than at first sight we might infer from the relatively small proportion of recorded sayings in which we can still detect it.

Personally, I should not be satisfied by a future life from which the element of kindly humour was excluded. And the fact that it entered into the mental life of our Lord would seem to justify the inference that there will be something equivalent to it in the next world – otherwise, a real loss of values would take place. Humour is one of those things which is developed rather late in the progress of the race. Primitive humour like primitive courage usually has in it an element of cruelty and brutality, often, too, of grossness. But with the intellectual, and still more with the moral, advance of the community the humour which consists in jeers at the misfortunes of others or which expresses itself in crude practical jokes gives place to a subtler thing, of which the fundamental quality is a keen perception of absurdity or unreality and in which the predominant element is kindness. In a society of real

friends humour is the solvent in which egoism, the root of all unsocial thought and action, is insensibly dissolved. Most of all so when a person sees or even enunciates the joke against himself. The highest form of humour implies the unerring perception of reality which sees at once through shams, pretences, and self-deceptions. It implies a gift of expression which can absolutely fit word, thought, and gesture in the subtlest combination. Again, it implies a keenness of moral perception which can “understand all” and yet refuse to “pardon all” without the expression of a subtle criticism which can purify without wounding, because it speaks not as from a moral pedestal, but from the standpoint of one conscious of membership in a race to which absurdity and self-deception is innate. It can express, indeed it alone can express in little things, a moral judgment without self-righteousness, because it implies the humility which necessarily goes with the recognition of reality. Humour, of course, can be cruel, base, or filthy, but in its highest form it implies a synthesis of the highest intellectual, aesthetic, and moral perceptions. In another aspect it is an expression, the most spontaneous perhaps of all, of the joy of life. It is essentially thanksgiving though not consciously realised as such. Again, it is before all things a social virtue since it is only within a circle bound together by real ties of fellowship and sympathy that it can attain its subtlest, richest, and most spontaneous expression. But if there are to be jokes in Heaven, they will be better and more kindly than most of those we hear on earth.

The Vision of God

“And I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”

Saints and theologians have always admitted, more than that, they have always cried aloud, that it was the unimagined and unimaginable to which they pointed when they spoke of the Beatific Vision. Yet, in spite of, perhaps even partly on account of, their emphasis on its unimaginable wonder, certain ideas and associations, have gathered round the phrase which have led to an actual impoverishment of our notions of the life of Heaven, and have also exercised a misleading and demoralising influence on religious life and practice on earth. For this reason, and for this reason only, I feel that I cannot altogether avoid the subject.

Clearly here, as in what has gone before, the guiding principle of our enquiry must be that “the knowledge of

God and of His Son Jesus Christ," which constitutes the essence of Eternal Life, is something of which already in this world it is possible to have some enjoyment. St. Paul, St. John, and the Saints in general agree in regarding the conscious experience of the presence of God in the life of the world to come rather as an enhancement, an intensification, an extension, and a consummation, of the highest experiences of this life than as something wholly different in kind. But just because it is the highest of all experiences that are here in question we must be especially careful to bring our judgment of what it is that we mean by "highest" to the test of the standard of values which was set by Christ. The conflict is always with us between the Christian and the Pagan conceptions as to what is the essential test and quality of "religious experience" or of the "spiritual"; and we do well to study carefully what St. Paul has to say to the Corinthians on the matter of "spiritual gifts." By the Corinthians "speaking with tongues"—an ecstasy of exalted emotion without clear content or articulate expression was regarded as the type of the highest spiritual experience and activity. St. Paul does not condemn the emotion or even the incapacity of expression; but he clearly regards this incoherent emotionalism as a very great danger; and ranks it as far inferior to the passionate apprehension and clear enunciation of truth and righteousness which prophecy can give. And he proceeds at once to "show them a more excellent way"—the way of the love that never faileth and is the only true and the final canon by which to judge of spiritual values in heaven as on earth.

In modern religion the error of the Corinthians most commonly takes two forms. First, there is what I may call the "cult of the supreme moment," the pursuit, for its own sake, of a religious experience of a wholly emotional character. Secondly, there is the notion that holiness or sanctity or "the supernatural life" is a thing which can exist apart from what is known as "ordinary" goodness, good sense or good taste. The teaching and the methods by which it is sought to attain this spurious religious experience or to realise this falsely conceived sanctity differ considerably according as those who pursue them are influenced by "the corrupt following" of Catholic Mysticism or of Evangelical Revivalism. The danger of the emotional short-cut which thinks to enjoy an experience of God without clear apprehension of and complete devotion to the Goodness, Beauty, and Truth which are the expression of, and the revelation in ordinary life of, the very nature of the Divine, is one of which the great Mystics and Revivalists themselves have often been fully aware. It is the tragedy of all greatness that it can be used to give an added prestige to weaknesses or errors, which

may perhaps have existed in the great man, but in him were either merely the reflection of a general tendency of his time or were at any rate the least characteristic element of his own real message.

If we start with a false conception of what is meant by the worship of God on earth we shall reach a false conception of the life of Heaven. I have tried elsewhere⁶ to work out what I believe to be the true conception of worship. In this place I can only state my conviction that a life consisting in one unending act of adoration—provided always that adoration be thought of as something isolated from, and unrelated to the life of social fellowship, creative work, aesthetic apprehension and active thought—is not the highest life. True worship is an orientation of the whole self which colours, conditions, and pervades these departmental activities. It is not a uniform preoccupation with the realisation of an emotional mystic experience which can supersede them; although in this world certainly, and possibly in the next, definite times may be set apart for concentration on the realisation of the Divine Presence apart from action, thought, aesthetic apprehension, or human fellowship.

That which is revealed to us by truth and beauty and goodness is not something other than the Divine, it is very God; but to say this and this only is to leave unsaid something quite as important. God is a person, and the Vision of God must mean a fuller realisation of this in all its richness and meaning than is possible on earth. The experience which goes with the perception of natural beauty sometimes seems to carry with it the consciousness of an Infinite Presence almost personal; in the next life the qualifying "almost" may disappear. But this analogy will not take us all the way we want to go, and it is hard not to surmise that to finite minds the Infinite Being must always baffle and transcend our apprehension. It is just here that the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation helps us. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son . . . he hath declared him." If this is true on earth surely it will not become untrue in Heaven. If we are right in thinking that the "spiritual body" of the world to come will be such as to completely express the real nature of our personalities, and if even in the body of His flesh and blood Christ could be for men the "image of the unseen God," how much more will He in His spiritual body be able to reveal to us the very nature of the Divine personality, "the fulness of the Godhead bodily"? In this way we can imagine how what now we see through a glass darkly we shall then indeed see *face to face*.

And what, may we expect, will be the effect upon us of this visible personal contact with our Lord? Not, as is so often taken for granted, to dazzle, paralyse, or crush. A

personality that is truly great, great that is in the sense in which Christ reckons greatness, is not one which breaks the bruised reed or quenches the smouldering wick in weaker characters. That is the function of the vulgar Super-man. A really great personality uplifts and inspires, it does not abash; it stimulates the individuality of others, it does not strive to reduce them to a pattern; it encourages them to diverse and spontaneous activity, it does not drill them into a uniform monotony.

The world is so full of a number of things,
I am sure we should all be as happy as kings.

Heaven will be more “full of things” than earth, and Christ is not the supreme Egoist who must always have all eyes directly gazing on Himself alone, but the supreme Friend who will share with us all our interests and our joys in their infinite variety.

“It is I; be not afraid.”

In the picture by Apelles of Agamemnon offering up his only daughter in sacrifice to liberate the Greek fleet from the curse of an offended deity, we are told that on the faces of kings, chieftains, soldiers, and attendants was depicted with a master’s skill every shade of sympathy, pity, horror, and awe; but the figure of the father was so turned that the expression of his face could not be seen. What word or brush cannot express imagination can sometimes compass. But there are things in regard to which even imagination must faint and fail. Our attempt to penetrate the nature of the life that is to be has reached this point.

The principle of the continuity between the life of Heaven and the highest life we know on earth – that necessary deduction from belief in the Divinity of Christ – will carry us a long way towards finding that definite and concrete picture of the nature of the future life which was the goal set before us in this enquiry. It also indicates the direction in which further revelation may be sought. If Christ is for us the “portrait of the unseen God,” our knowledge of God, and therefore of the nature of eternal life will depend upon the extent to which we can enter into and understand the mind of Christ. But this is something which is always growing with the moral and spiritual growth, not only of the individual, but also of the community. In exact proportion to the effective realisation on earth of the Kingdom of God will be the increase in our knowledge of the real nature of the life of the world to come.

But something unrealised and unguessed at by man on earth must still remain. Say that in the life of Christ is

revealed the life of very God, and you say it of the life of One who “increased in wisdom and stature,” who was made “perfect through sufferings,” but who only reached the climax of maturity in His experience of the triumph over death and His entry into a life which is beyond our present ken. The best we know on earth is no mere shadow, it is of the very substance of that which is to come, but it is still only an earnest and a foretaste. There must remain heights and possibilities yet unexplored. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” The fruit of the Vine which we drink on earth is really and essentially Eternal Life, but we shall drink it new in the Kingdom of God.

¹. Col. i.15

². 1 For the further working out of this idea, see my Essay on “Worship” in *Concerning Prayer*.

³. 1 Contrast the Life of St. Francis by S.

Bonaventura with the *Speculum Perfectionis* or the first Life of Celano. I am inclined to accept the view of Sabatier as to the later life of St. Francis as *in the main* correct in spite of the great authority of Father Cuthbert.

⁴. 1 Cf. “Summa Theologiae,” *Prima Secundae*, iii.

4. I have no desire to defend this particular conclusion but I quote it as showing the outlook of the man. What the Church needs to-day is to abandon the letter in order thereby to recover the spirit of the great Theologians of the past.

⁵. Cf. T. R. Glover, *The Jesus of History*, P. 49 fl.

⁶. *Concerning Prayer*, Essay VIII.