

V. THE INCARNATION

THE human race then had broken its right relation of friendship with God: men had lost the way, because they had lost the life (without which the way cannot be followed) and the truth without which the way cannot even be known. To such a world Christ, who had come to make all things new, said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." In those three words—way, truth, life—Christ related Himself quite precisely to what man had lost: as precisely as a key fits a lock. In the precision of that threefold relation, we are apt to overlook the strangest word in the phrase—the word "am."

Men needed truth and life: what they might have expected was one who would say "I have the truth and the life": what they found was one who said "*I am* the truth and the life." This strange word forces us to a new mode of approach. If a man claims to have what we want, we must study what he has. If a man claims to be what we want, we must study what he is. With any other teacher the truth he has is our primary concern—the teacher himself is of no importance save as the bearer of truth, and his work is done when he has given it. With Christ, the teacher is primary: He cannot simply give us the truth and the life, and then have done with us. He

A MAP OF LIFE

can only give us Himself, for He is both. This point must be insisted on, not as a figure of speech, but as a strict fact. It is a map we are making, not a poem; and what is now being said, mysterious as it is, is strictly and literally true. Our study of the road of life has brought us to an examination of truth and life: we cannot understand the road if we do not understand them. But if Christ is the truth, then we must understand Him: if He is the life, then *He* must live in us.

Obviously, then, our map-making cannot progress till we are clear about Who and what Christ is, because the road we are to travel depends even more on what He is than on what He did.

THE TWO NATURES OF CHRIST

Christ is God-made-man: that is He is truly God and He is truly man. He is God—with the nature of God: He took to Himself and made His own a complete human nature—a real human body and a real human soul. He is, then, *one person*—God—with *two natures*—divine and human. Nor is all this mere abstract matter, of no real concern to us. Everything in our life is bound up with the one person and the two natures of Christ. We must grasp this central luminous fact, or everything remains in darkness.

The distinction between person and nature is not some deep and hidden thing to which philosophy

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only comes after centuries of study. It is, on the contrary, a distinction so obvious that the smallest child who can talk at all makes it automatically. If in the half-light he sees a vague outline that might be anything, he asks "What is that?" If, on the other hand, he can see that it is a human being, but cannot distinguish or does not recognize the features, he asks "Who is that?" The distinction between *what* and *who* is the distinction between *nature* and *person*. Of every man the two questions—what is he? and who is he?—can be answered. Every man, in other words, is both a nature and a person. Into my every action, nature and person enter. For instance *I speak*. I, the person, speak. But I am able to speak only because I am a man, because it is of my nature to speak. I discover that there are all sorts of things I can do: and all sorts of things I cannot do. My nature decides. I can think, speak, walk: these actions go with the nature of man, which I have. I cannot fly, for this goes with the nature of a bird, which I have not.

My nature, then, decides what I can do: it may be thought of as settling the sphere of action possible to me. According to my nature, I can act: apart from it, I cannot. But my nature does not do these things—I, the person, do them. It is not my nature that speaks, walks, thinks: it is I, the person.

A man may then be thought of as a person—who acts—and a nature—which decides the field in which he acts. In man there is simply one nature

to one person. In Christ there are two natures to one person: and our minds used to the one-nature-to-one-person state of man tend to cry out that there is a contradiction in the idea of two natures to one person.

But once it has been grasped that "person" and "nature" are not identical in meaning: once it has been grasped that the person acts and the nature is that principle in him which decides his sphere of action, then we see that mysterious as Our Lord's person and nature may be, there is no contradiction. God the Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity,* assumed—took to Himself—a human nature: made it His own: not simply as something which He could use as a convenient sphere to act in, but really as His own: just as our nature is our own. In us the relation of person and nature is such that not merely do we say "I *have* a human nature" (as we might say "I have an umbrella") but person and nature are so fused in one concrete reality that we say "I am a man." So God the Son can say not only "I am God with a human nature to act in" but in the most absolute fullness of meaning He can say "I am man." He does not simply *act* as man: He *is* man—as truly man as we.

This *one* person has *two* spheres of action: Christ our Lord could act either in His nature as God or in His nature as man. Remember the principle

* Something will be said of the doctrine of the Trinity in Chapter VIII.

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stated a few paragraphs back, that it is not the nature that acts, but the person. Therefore, whether He was acting in His divine nature or in His human nature, it was always the *person* who acted: and there was only the one person—God.

Then this is the position. Christ is God: therefore whatever Christ did, God did. When Christ acted in His divine nature (as when He raised the dead to life) it was God who did it: when Christ acted in His human nature (as when He was born, suffered and died) it was God who did it: God was born, God suffered, God died. For it is the person who acts: and Christ is God.

THE ATONEMENT

The next paragraph must be read with the closest attention or the map will not be properly understood.

Because Christ was God *and Man*, He was able to effect the reconciliation of God and man. The human race had broken the first relationship of oneness by sin: and of itself the human race with all its imperfections on it could make no offering to God in reparation for its sin. Literally the human race *could not* make reparation. Yet for the human act of rebellion, a human act of atonement was required: for the sin of human nature, only an act of human nature could satisfy—yet this act of human nature man could not perform. Christ was God

and Man. The acts He performs in His human nature were truly human acts: yet because every action is of the person, they were acts of God, whose every act is of infinite value: Christ could make the necessary reparation. That particular action of His human nature which Christ chose as an offering-in-reparation—a sacrifice—was His death: at the age of thirty-three He was crucified upon Calvary.

This was the atonement. By it the breach between God and the human race was closed. The race was redeemed from that condition of separation from God into which the sin of Adam, the representative man, had plunged it. Heaven, the final and eternal union of God and man, was once more possible to man. For even the holiest man of the time between Adam's fall and Christ's death was still a member of the human race, a member of the race that had lost oneness with God, and as such debarred from heaven. But, by this re-making of the oneness, not only was Life—the Supernatural Life—set flowing with new richness for the elevation of man's soul: but that Life could now in heaven receive the full and complete flowering which before Calvary was impossible to it.

Christ had come "to save His people from their sins": He had come that man "might have life and have it more abundantly." These two purposes are in reality the same purpose—the effect of sin is the destruction of the Supernatural Life: a soul in sin

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is a soul that lacks the Supernatural Life: sin is removed by the pouring into the soul of that life—as darkness is removed by the turning on of the light. So far, then, for the first part of Christ's mission: He had reconciled the human race to God: He had brought back the rich store of Supernatural Life.

CHRIST AS TEACHER

There remains to be considered the other need of man—Truth. As we have seen this involves as a minimum that man shall be taught the purpose of his existence and the laws by which he must live. Christ taught this necessary minimum—and much more. The laws will be discussed in detail in Chapters IX and X: here notice only two things:

(a) He took the ten commandments given to the chosen people of Israel by God some fifteen hundred years before—most of them beginning with “Thou shalt not” and summed them up into two, both beginning “Thou shalt”: for the first three commandments, which set out our duty to God, He expressed concisely as “Thou shalt love God”; and the remaining seven, which set out our duty to our neighbour, He expressed equally concisely as “Thou shalt love thy neighbour.” In other words, all the commandments lie implicit in this twofold love;

(b) Just as the commandments are summarized and made positive, so they are traced back from

external conduct to the internal root of conduct, from actions (commanded or prohibited) to love—a state of the soul: and sins of the mind—or heart—or intention become as serious as sins of the exterior action: the yielding of the mind to lust not only is as bad as adultery, it *is* adultery; the yielding of the mind to murder not only is as bad as murder, it *is* murder. The essence of sin is now clear—it is the soul of man twisting itself out of the right relation to God. That is sin. Nothing else is. And the laws which express the right relation are all forms of *love*.

So much, for the moment, for the laws to be obeyed. On the truths to be believed—including the minimum requirement of the purpose of man's existence, of what was in the mind of God when He made man—Christ is equally revealing and equally fundamental. The purpose of man's existence is to come to God. This includes a multitude of things, but principally, because man is an intelligent being, it involves some revelation of the nature of God: the more man knows of his goal, the more likely he is to make for it effectively. Thus He revealed to man that in the divine nature are three persons—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost: that He Himself was the Second Person, God the Son. Of this supreme mystery of the Trinity and of mystery in general something will be said in Chapter VIII. Here we must consider not the revelation of God that our Lord gave by *teaching*,

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but the revelation of God that Our Lord gave simply by *being*.

Mankind has never been without means of acquiring some knowledge of God: in the Universe we have God's work before our eyes and by examining any work we can learn *something* of the workman. But, in practical fact, not much. We can learn more about a boilermaker by five minutes' face-to-face conversation with him than by five years' examination of the boiler he has made. Similarly, though we learn many things about God from contemplating the Universe He has made, there is something a little remote and shadowy about such knowledge. And this for the further reason that we can know nothing of what is involved in making a universe. But if we could see God—not making a universe—but obeying His mother, feeling hunger, paying taxes, receiving insult: then instantly we should be on our own ground. For all these things we have done ourselves. Now because Christ was God, all these things are there for men to see. God did obey His mother, suffer hunger, pay taxes, receive insult. Christ, then, in a sense, is God translating Himself into our nature. And the difference between God acting in His own nature and God acting in ours is as great as the difference between a man talking in his own language and the same man talking in ours. For in the first case such a man can convey some things to us—but rather by signs than

speech—and we catch what he has to say haltingly and uncertainly: in the second case he really speaks to us and we know what he wants to communicate.

Thus the fact that Christ is God takes on a new significance. As we first used it, it was as a fact about Christ: now we see it as an even more revealing fact about God. Christ—acting in our nature, which He had made His—we can study and make our own: to realize that the knowledge thus acquired of Christ is true of God is altogether revolutionary. For only by learning that Christ is Love have men learnt that God is love: and that is almost the greatest gift of Christianity to the world.

Our Lord's life upon earth seems to have been especially devised with the purpose of bringing man into the closest possible intimacy with God. The general outline of His life is sufficiently well known. He was born of a virgin, the wife of a carpenter of Nazareth, during the reign of the Roman Emperor, Augustus. Then, with the exception of one strange incident when he was aged twelve, there is silence till he reached the age of thirty. Then came three years of teaching and the working of miracles. The leaders of the Jewish people turned against Him and more or less forced the Roman Governor to have Him executed. He was nailed to a cross and after three hours He died. On the third day He rose again from the dead, and after forty days He ascended into the heavens and vanished from the eyes of men. Within this framework there are two

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rich streams of human contact, a greater and a less. The greater, naturally enough, was through His mother. From her He had drawn His human body: if man may call Him brother, it is solely through her. She lived with Him throughout the years before His public life began: to please her He worked a miracle at Cana and began His public ministry sooner than He had meant. When He died, He committed her to the care of John, the follower that He loved best: and this apostle, who became as a son to her, later wrote a gospel, in which from the beginning men have found a deeper insight into Our Lord than in any other. It would have been strange had it been otherwise—if any man could have lived in such intimacy with the mother of Christ and had no richness to show for it.

The second stream was through His apostles—the men He gathered round Him, and prepared with especial care as the instruments for the spread of His kingdom among men. It is important to grasp here the mode of Christ's revelation of His own Godhead. Obviously had He begun with the statement that He was God, the road would have been closed. Some would have disbelieved Him: those who believed would have been far too overcome with terror at the majesty of God and their own sinfulness to make any progress in human intimacy with Him. What actually happened was that these men came to know Him as men can only know one in whose company they constantly are, in every variety of

circumstance. Gradually—or rather with sudden bursts forward followed by fallings away—they came to the feeling that He *must* be God and ultimately to the full knowledge that He was. But before that time they had come to know Him: to know Him as a friend and not only as a master: from men who had companioned with Christ for three years, even the discovery that He was God could not take away the certainty that He was love: so that God, too, must be love. The fruit of our Lady's thirty years with Christ and the apostles' three years with Him, enshrined in part in the gospels, is the very essence of the Christian tradition, woven into the very fabric of the Christian mind.

If we compare the attitude to God of the most pious pagans with that of the Christian the gulf is enormous. In the Christian attitude there is a warm *personal* devotion not to be found elsewhere. For other men have seen the Works of God, but Christians have seen God.

These two truths, *God is love* and *Law is love*, are the two specifically Christian truths, unknown outside the Christian revelation. It is difficult to say which idea would have come upon the world with a greater shock. For outside Christianity, God has seemed to be a master or even a tyrant, but never love: and as a consequence law has seemed to be force, or even cruelty, but never love. And even inside Christianity it is hard to hold, continuous and never dimmed, the idea of God and law as love: for

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there come moments when another face seems to be presented to us; feeling or no feeling, we know. And we know because Christ was God.

Here then in outline is God's answer to man's need. The human race needed first to be reunited to God (that Heaven might once more be open to it), and second it needed the Life and the Truth by which it might attain Heaven once salvation became a possibility. Christ our Lord—God-made-man—made the act of reparation that reunited the human race with God and so made Heaven a possibility, brought back for man the rich profusion of the Supernatural Life, and revealed to man not only the necessary truths of purpose and law but a great store of truth besides. The next question is how man was to obtain what Christ had brought.

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Discussion Aids

Discuss Christ's message, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (with special attention to the word "am") in connection with the fallen estate of the human race. In the light of the word "am" why is it of supreme importance to know what Christ *is* as well as what He did?

The Two Natures of Christ

Discuss fully the distinction between *person* and *nature*, giving examples. Are *nature* and *person* identical? What does *nature* determine? *Person*? How many natures are in man? How many persons? How many natures are in Christ? How many persons? What is the difference in the statements, "I am a man" (of a human being), and "I am man" (of Christ)? Could Christ act in His divine nature? In His human nature? In either case, was it nature or person that acted? Who was that Person? Did God die on the cross?

The Atonement (At-one-ment)

Did the human race have oneness with God be-

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fore the Fall? After the Fall? Was the act of rebellion a *human* act? Must the breach caused by a human act be repaired by a human act? Did fallen man have any power left in him to repair the breach? Were Christ's Acts performed in His human nature, human acts? Were they also infinitely valuable acts of God (because only a person can act and this Person was God)? Could Christ therefore make the necessary reparation for the human race with a human act? Did Christ do so? What human act did He offer? Was heaven after the Fall impossible for man? (Yes, he had lost the Supernatural Life.) Did Christ (the new Adam) remake the oneness of the human race with God? Was the Supernatural Life restored and heaven therefore reopened to the human race? What effect has sin on the Supernatural Life? How did Christ destroy this effect and therefore reconcile the human race to God?

Christ as Teacher

What minimum of teaching is necessary for man? How did Christ in teaching men the laws by which they must live (the Ten Commandments) summarize them and make them positive? Did He broaden the interpretation to reach from matters of external conduct to matters of internal conduct? Give examples. Did He show definitely the essence of sin? What is it? What did He show the laws expressing our right relation to God to be?

DISCUSSION OUTLINE FOR A MAP OF LIFE

What *is* the purpose of man's existence? To attain this purpose, what must man know? What great mystery did Christ reveal to supply man with necessary knowledge of God? Are we considering at this point Christ's revelation of God by *teaching*? By what, then? Has man always had means of acquiring some knowledge of God? What is it? Since the Incarnation, what fuller knowledge of God do we possess? What tremendous insight into the nature of God was given us by Christ? Is it the greatest gift of Christianity to the world? What was the object of Christ's life on earth? Sketch Christ's life. Who on earth knew most about Him? What gospel shows the deepest insight into His life? Why? What great second source of information about Christ's life have we? Discuss Christ's revelation of Himself to His apostles. What is the essence of the Christian tradition? Contrast Christian and pagan attitudes to God. What two great truths are unknown outside of Christian revelation? Discuss. Summarize God's answer to man's need.

Practice: Read the New Testament and know Christ instead of knowing *about* Him.