

The Distinctive Contribution of Theosophy to Christian Thought

*The
Blavatsky
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THE DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTION OF THEOSOPHY TO CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

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I

H. P. BLAVATSKY'S CONTRIBUTION

THE original contribution of Theosophy to Christian thought—through the person of Madame Blavatsky—was decidedly high-spirited and vigorous. She denounced the Christianity of her time, often with much logic and with penetrating acumen, and the Theosophical Society, not altogether undeservedly, acquired the reputation of being anti-Christian. But to understand properly the earlier phases of the Society's work it is necessary to cast our minds back to the conditions of thought which prevailed when Madame Blavatsky brought Theosophy to the Western world. The conflict between religion and science was at its height; and even if official Christianity could no longer make use of the *auto-da-fé*, she was still able to forge and employ the weapon of social ostracism. It will be within the memory of some still living how that the early Darwinists were subjected to petty persecution in one way or another; they were reputed to be godless and atheists, and society people forbade their daughters to call at the houses of such "dreadful people." The letters of Darwin to Huxley are amusing, and yet make very pathetic reading. Nowadays Bishops and Canons of the Establishment are sturdy evolutionists, and even the Catholic Truth Society is able to angle for converts by assuring the public that

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belief in evolution is not incompatible with Roman Catholicism. Things have so changed that we find it difficult to realise how reactionary was the Christian thought of the day. The story of creation in seven days, as narrated in Genesis, was taken quite literally; and in England the Biblical chronology of Archbishop Ussher, which placed the creation of the world in 4004 B.C., found common acceptance. The doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures by God the Holy Ghost was held in its integrity. Belief in everlasting hell-fire was everywhere prevalent; the revolt against it was only just beginning.* Missionary maps were made in which the so-called heathen countries were coloured black, to show how much of the world was still wrapped in the darkness of error. Attention must be drawn to one other doctrine, namely, that of the Vicarious Atonement, held in its crudest substitutionary form; and interwoven with this was the twin doctrine of Evangelical Protestantism, that of Justification by Faith. According to this widely-accepted theory, belief in the cleansing blood of Jesus washes away all sin and, quite irrespective of good works, ensures a place in heaven.

Against a religious obscurantism, of which this is no exaggerated picture, Madame Blavatsky ranged her artillery. Every master-builder must clear away the rubbish which encumbers the site of his intended structure. And if it be "anti-Christian" to have disencumbered Christianity of such distorted theories as these, then I am afraid that many among the leaders of the present generation of Christian teachers must stand condemned with Madame Blavatsky. Madame Blavatsky herself was careful to explain that it was "Churchianity" (as she called it) to which she was opposed, not the religion of Christ.

THE EASTERN WISDOM AND EVOLUTION

Her work was at once destructive and constructive. She was not one of those who tear down religious faith without having something to offer in its place. The Theosophical Society was to open up to the Western world the treasure-house of the

* Canon (afterwards Dean) Farrar's "Eternal Hope" was published in 1878, and Samuel Cox's "Salvator Mundi" at about the same period. It is to be remarked that Origen and Scotus Eriugena were universalists.

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Eastern Wisdom. It was essential to show that the other great religions of the world also contained the highest revelation, and that Christianity could learn much from Oriental philosophy and psychology. The idea could no longer be perpetuated that the Hebrews had the sole monopoly of Divine Truth and, alone of all other nations in the pre-Christian dispensation, worshipped the True God. Above all, it was necessary to insist that in the domain of religion natural law still holds sway; for the most epoch-making event in the thought of the century had occurred—the promulgation by Darwin and Wallace of the doctrine of evolution, a doctrine that was to revolutionise the thinking of the whole world, and to which it was the mission of Theosophy to supply the spiritual corollary.

This, then, was the contribution that Madame Blavatsky made to Christian thought. It needs only to be understood in order to receive the high recognition it deserves.

II

THEOSOPHY A CO-ORDINATING SCHEME

In the five-and-thirty years which have run their course since the death of H. P. Blavatsky the Theosophical teaching has steadily accumulated and developed. As Theosophy has contributed much to the understanding of Hinduism and Buddhism, so also has it cast a flood of light upon the Christian religion. It is with the distinctive contribution of Theosophy to Christian thought that we are to concern ourselves this afternoon. And let me at once make it clear that in speaking of a *distinctive* contribution I do not claim that the ideas which I shall class as Theosophical are found only within the precincts of the Theosophical Society. Many of them are by no means peculiar to Theosophists, though some are. But I do affirm that Theosophy as a coherent system of thought brings a new meaning into Christian teaching, and it is in this general sense that I speak of its making a distinctive contribution to Christian thought.

This is, in fact, the very point which at the outset I desire to stress. Theosophy is a systematised scheme of thought, singularly inclusive and coherent, a *Weltanschauung*, as the Germans say. Its supreme value is that it takes many other-

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wise isolated facts of life and fits them into an ordered and comprehensive world-scheme. Why are we here? Whence came we? Whither going? These are questions which ought to be of interest to everybody. And religion should explain to man the purpose of his existence, why he is in the world, what he is intended to do, his relationship with the world around him, with his fellow-men, with God. Hinduism, as is well known, has its six Schools of Philosophy, and has always maintained the close connection between philosophy and religion. The Upanishads, for example, are permeated with philosophy. Christianity, on the other hand, has no fountain head of philosophy in its Scriptures. Christ (so far as history tells us) founded no philosophical school, as did Shankaracharya and Buddha. The earliest Fathers of the Church were Platonists, but in the Middle Ages the tendency grew increasingly strong, and finally triumphed, to separate off scholastic theology on the one hand, and philosophy on the other, into separate watertight compartments. Philosophising came, in consequence, to be regarded as a secular process. Hence Christianity can claim no traditional philosophy as can Hinduism, and official Western religion has failed in one of its chief duties.

EXCLUSION OF Gnostic DOCTORS

Our Theosophical writers tell us that this poverty of Christianity in the matter of philosophy is due to the exclusion of the Gnostic Doctors from the early Church.* That is no doubt true in a measure. But it is well also to remember that Gnosticism comprehended many rather wild extravagances, both of doctrine and practice.

OUR LATENT DIVINITY

Be that as it may, there is certainly room in Christianity for the Theosophical explanation of the purpose of life, with its teaching as to the Divinity latent in all men and the gradual unfoldment of man's Divine powers through repeated incarnation. Christianity, as such, has addressed itself singularly little

* Cf. C. W. Leadbeater, "The Christian Creed," pp. 23-26 "The Inner Life," Vol. I., pp. 178-180.

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to the reason for existence. Man exists, we are vaguely told, in order that "God may be glorified," or "to know God and to serve Him for ever." * These clauses acquire an added significance if applied to the God within, for it is profoundly true that man's task is to glorify the God within him—to cause Him to shine forth in the perfection of His glory and splendour—and to know that Inner God and do His service.

GOD WITHOUT AND GOD WITHIN

The Theosophical conception of the world-order enables us, furthermore, to reconcile two perpetually conflicting tendencies in Christianity. In the old-fashioned doctrine of the last century God was seen as external to man. The revolt against a personal God was directed chiefly against an extra-cosmic Deity, having none the less human attributes (and of these not always the highest), who from time to time intruded Himself into the cosmos in order to work miracles and abrogate the reign of natural law. In the views of the Atonement then current this idea of a God external to man also takes prominence. The literature of the subject is full of forensic theories of ransom and satisfaction. Christ's Sacrifice was made to appease the wrath of God sitting in judgment on the human race. Against these views of an external God dealing with His creatures by means of covenants and juridical transactions a great wave of mysticism swept in by way of reaction, which laid stress on the Immanence of God in His universe and in man. Suspect at first and ridiculed, mysticism has steadily won its way to recognition in religious thought. But the pendulum always swings to the one extreme after the other, and the danger now is that in the discovery of the God within, men will lose sight of the God without. Much New Thought literature, and that which passes under the name of the "new mysticism," tends towards unbridled subjectivism. If people are taught to look for everything inside themselves, they tend to become self-centred and to lose their sense of values. Theosophy, with its doctrine of the macrocosm and the microcosm, introduces an element of sound commonsense into this

* "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever" (The "Westminster Catechism").

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welter of emotional subjectivism. It is true that the Kingdom of God is within us and that we are heirs to those good things which pass man's understanding. Yet our life is but a slow and gradual process of unfolding the flower of Divinity within ourselves, and that Divinity is often more unfolded in other persons than in us. The Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is usually a stronger Christ than that as yet awakened in your heart or mine. And the one kindles the other into greater activity.

DIRECT KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. GROWTH OF THEOLOGY

It would be possible, granted the requisite time, to take one doctrine after another of the Christian faith and see how Theosophy extends and enriches their meaning. There is, however, one great contribution that Theosophy makes to the thought of Christianity, one which is indicated by the name "Theosophy" itself—the theory that direct knowledge of spiritual things is possible to man. Any impartial critic must admit that Christian theology occupies itself with a great many subjects that are beyond the range of ordinary human faculty. The original matter of these doctrines is regarded as revealed truth; but as in the course of time disunion and heresy arise in the Church, doctrines come to be defined and formulated, and thus gradually accumulate into a system of theology. In "The Soul of a Bishop" H. G. Wells creates a striking situation, in which the bishop, who has been much occupied with definitions as to the nature of God, is given a potion to drink which sends him out of his body. He finds himself experiencing a new sense of freedom and of the spaciousness of things. Catching sight of his brain, he is struck with the absurdity of trying to express all this heightened sense of reality through "that little box of brains." So it is, my friends, with theology. Its discussion is felt to be barren and profitless because in handling it we are employing faculties of our being incommensurate with the task. What has the lower mind to do with the mysteries of the Divine Existence? There is only one way of apprehending the deeper spiritual truths—that is to be, to become, the thing discussed. One does not understand love by talking around and about it, but rather by loving.

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UNION WITH THE GOD WITHIN—KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNIVERSE WITHOUT

Now Theosophy maintains that man, by virtue of the Eternal Spirit within him, can know God. That this direct knowledge is possible has been the contention of the long line of philosophers called Theosophists, or mystics, stretching back to the earliest days of philosophic thought. Since man is a fragment of God (or has the Divine Spark in him), it is possible for him to know God, Whose Nature he shares. And by unfolding the powers of God within him (which is the purpose and method of his evolution) he approaches slowly, yet with utter certainty, towards union with the Divine Omniscience, gaining in that growth an ever fuller knowledge of the universe which is the expression or manifestation of God.

REVERIFICATION OF SPIRITUAL TENETS

This view of things at once opens up new horizons of thought. It lessens in no way the value of Scripture or Tradition, which contain much of the original teaching of the Christ, and are therefore a precious heritage. But it means that spiritual truths are at all times capable of reverification by spiritually-developed men, and that it is as possible to speak with the authority of first-hand knowledge in this twentieth century as it was in the first century of the Christian era.

PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD. REVELATION

As a simple illustration of what is meant, we may take a subject which is one of perpetual controversy among Christians—the question of prayers for the dead. The older churches—the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox—encourage their people to pray for the faithful departed. Protestants at the Reformation all rejected this custom. Such prayers were excluded from the Anglican Prayer Book, but have been widely restored in the Anglican Church through the Catholic Revival, much to the distress of its Protestant section. It is a practice which rests rather on Tradition than on Scripture, for there is no clear warrant in Scripture (save in the Book of Maccabees,

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belonging to the Apocrypha, which Protestants do not accept).^{*} How simple the whole matter becomes for the Theosophist; for a comparatively slight quickening of the higher faculties latent in all men enables one to see the dead and to ascertain beyond shadow of doubt that they are helped by our prayer and loving thought. I chose this particular subject by way of illustration because it is not so far removed from our grasp. There are other doctrines whose verification takes us up into far higher reaches of spiritual consciousness; and yet others—some of those relating to God—which are so far above the possibility of our apprehension that they must be included for the present in the category of pure revelation outside the possibility of our verification.

The experiences of the higher consciousness are such that points of view which down here seem contradictory are in that condition often realised as supplementary to each other. I have sometimes wondered if it would be really too absurd to say that one endorsed the orthodox faith and at the same time held all the heresies. This much, at any rate, is profoundly true: that the soundest student of theology or metaphysic is he who develops the higher powers of the consciousness, such as enable him to contact directly the truths to be investigated, and not he who talks about them and theorises in terms of the intellect.

Kenosis. COLLECTIVE EMBODIMENT OF GREAT BEINGS. PENTECOSTAL OUTPOURING

I go back to Mr. Wells' remark as to how impossible it is to express the deeper mysteries of the spirit through our little brain-boxes in order to point out, in passing, that this is one way of approach to a problem which has greatly occupied theologians, namely, the theory of *Kenosis*, according to which Christ, in taking upon Himself human form, voluntarily "emptied Himself" (which is what the word means) of certain Divine attributes.† We do well, I think, to bear in mind that

^{*} *Vide* also 2 Timothy i. 16–18; iv. 19. Some infer from the narrative that Onesiphorus was dead. But this is guesswork; he might merely have been separated from his family.

† *Vide* the long essay on "The Consciousness of our Lord," in Bishop Gore's "Dissertations."

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the consciousness of the Great Ones embodies itself in collective as well as singular manifestations. The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity is incarnate in the whole universe, and the Christ, the World-Teacher, is the special epiphany or manifestation of the Second Person to the world—the channel through which those forces flow. It is impossible for the plenitude of that great Consciousness to be expressed through any human personality, however great and splendid, for physical embodiment is in itself a limitation. On the last occasion when the World-Teacher came the Pentecostal outpouring seems to have descended on His Church after His life upon earth. I sometimes ask myself whether the significance of the great Theosophical movement, which has on this occasion preceded His Coming, is not that through it a stupendous Pentecostal outpouring may take place at the time itself of His Coming—nay, has it not already begun?

A THEOLOGY ONLY JUSTIFIED IF IT HAS THE CHARACTER OF A THEOSOPHY

In taking leave, then, of our subject under its aspect of philosophy I would conclude by saying that a theology can only justify itself and aspire to permanency in so far as it partakes of the character of a theosophy. Proceeding on this train of thought, we are soon led to the conclusion that the same mystical experience is reached by people of different religions and that it cannot be claimed as the exclusive possession of any one faith. Theosophists have continually maintained that all the great religions have their roots in the Divine Wisdom. Well did St. Augustine say: "The very thing, which now is called the Christian religion, existed among the ancients and never did not exist from the beginnings of the human race, until Christ Himself came in the flesh, from which time the true religion, which already existed, began to be called Christian." *

III ETHICS

On the side of ethics Theosophy has also its contribution to make. In the first place, it helps us to compose the vexed

* *Retractatus*, i., 13, 3.

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question of human relationships by its special view of the brotherhood of man. That brotherhood, originating from the great truth that we are all sons of the one Divine Father, exists as a fact in the higher worlds of man's being. As our President has often said, we do not have to create it, it already exists. It is man's duty, and at the same time the indication of his progress, to bring down this brotherhood as realised experience into the lower worlds of being. There is a duality in every man. On the one side, he is the product of evolution through the lower kingdoms of Nature and the lower stages of human development, and has carried along with him many animal propensities. On the other, he is a mirror of the Divine perfection, still rough and unpolished and distorting the perfect Image of God, but occasionally reflecting lights of dazzling and superb splendour. The animal residua make for separateness and confusion, and we do well to begin our attempt at brotherliness by looking for the glimpses of the Divine Light in our fellows and cultivating our appreciation of these. A man who is dirty and rude is not a brotherly object at the level of his dirt and rudeness. But he is at the buddhic level, and we had better begin there (or at whatever reflection of it we can touch); and having seen the Divine Pilgrim in him, we shall presently be able to relegate the dirt and the rudeness to their place of proper subordination.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

It is impossible to discuss ethics in relation to Christian thought without considering the bearing of the Sermon on the Mount upon the subject. The ethics of the Sermon on the Mount are not, of course, peculiar to Christianity. Five centuries before the Christian era Gautama, the Buddha, taught: "Hatred ceases not by hatred at any time; hatred ceases only by love."* But the influence of this sublime ethical teaching of the Christ on the world has been marvellous and far-reaching. Unfortunately, it has come to be regarded as of universal or general application to all Christians, and since it naturally comes into direct conflict with the foundations of our civilisation, an alarming discrepancy is observable between precept and practice. In the event of war, for instance, there

* *Dhammapada*, xlviii., 37.

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is a natural instinct of patriotism which prompts a man to take up arms in the defence of his country, to say nothing of the reasoned logic that, granted the imperfection of human society, the Sermon on the Mount is unpractical idealism. As Bishop Magee of Peterborough * said, if it were put into practice society would go to pieces in a fortnight. That Christianity should have an official code of ethics which has to be disregarded and treated as inapplicable during the most solemn crises of human life (as in the case of the Great War) is obviously a source of weakness. And we saw during the Great War how the ineptitude of the churches was reproached upon them.

NOT FOR THE MULTITUDE.

MYSTICAL MEANING OF TERMS USED IN SCRIPTURE

The spiritual consciousness of man responds to so noble and beautiful an ideal as the Sermon on the Mount. Only it has to be regarded as a counsel of perfection and put into application so far as circumstances will permit. It is here that Theosophy does us the great service of bringing logic and sincerity into our conception of Christian ethics. Dr. Besant has very lucidly pointed out that the Sermon on the Mount was not preached to the multitude at large, but to the Disciples. "And seeing the multitudes," says St. Matthew, "he went up into a mountain : and when he was set, his disciples came unto him." † St. Luke also suggests that it was to the Disciples that He spake, for, though the narrative refers to a great multitude of people who came to hear Him and to be healed of diseases, nevertheless it continues : "And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said. . . ." ‡ The narrative in Luke also states that the Sermon was preached on the plain, though he had previously spent the night in prayer on the mountain. Dr. Besant reminds us that "the mountain" was a technical term of the Mysteries. It evidently refers to a condition of spiritual consciousness, and when understood in that fashion gives new meaning to many passages in Scripture. The Law was delivered to Moses on the

* Afterwards Archbishop of York.

† Matthew v. 1.

‡ Luke vi. 20.

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mount.* Moreover, the Tabernacle was made after the pattern which was shown to Moses in the mount,† and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews also interprets this in a mystical sense.‡ Christ was transfigured on the mount.§

In view of all this, it is not extravagant to claim that the Sermon was addressed to the Disciples, and not to the world in general, and was in the nature of instruction specially applicable to those dedicated to the religious life, or to that of the *sannyasin*, to use the Eastern term.

ETHICS RELATIVE. PATH OF FORTHGOING AND PATH OF RETURN. THE CASTE SYSTEM

In her pamphlet on "The Relativity of Hindu Ethics," admirably reasoned and most philosophical (if I may be permitted the comment), Dr. Besant shows how that the ethics on the *Nivritti Marga*, or Path of Return, are necessarily different from those of the *Pravritti Marga*, or Path of Forthgoing. In the original caste system of Hinduism the ethical duties of people were graded according to different stages of evolution and the *dharma* that were theirs. Those of the *Kshattriya* or warrior caste were different from those of the *Brahmana*, or priestly caste. It would be difficult, and perhaps dangerous, to introduce a system of graded or relative ethics into our Western civilisation, where democracy has confused the castes worse even than in India. But it might well be recognised that the Sermon on the Mount was never intended to apply to the man in the street. As things now are, the critics of the Churches and the adversaries of Christianity have the arguments their own way. It is demoralising to affirm your belief in a theory which in effect you do not, and cannot, practise. A sensible declaration of Christian ethics is urgently needed which shall take into account the inequalities of human development and the fact that the state of civilisation at any given period of the world's history is largely determined by the actual capacity for righteousness of the people who compose it. Until the close of the *Manvantara* it is useless to expect people to be perfect.

* Exodus xxiv. 12-18.

† Exodus xxv. 40.

‡ Hebrews viii. 5 ; ix. 23.

§ Matthew xvii. 1 *et seq.*

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IV

WORSHIP AND CEREMONIAL

Christianity may conveniently be studied under the three aspects of philosophy, ethics and worship; and we now come to the third and last of these divisions, that of worship. As I said at Adyar last Christmas: "Theosophy makes its own contribution to the elucidation of religious philosophy and ethics, though in both of these departments one can go reasonably far without having to use the key of Theosophy to unlock further recesses of knowledge; but in the understanding of religious ceremonial we can advance nowhere without the aid of Theosophy.*

ORIGIN OF CHRISTIAN RITUAL AND SACRAMENTS.

DR. COBB'S VIEWS—LITTLE NEW BUT THE HIGHER LIFE

Christianity, like Hinduism, is essentially ceremonial in its manner of worship. It possesses a number of rites coming down from the earliest tradition of the religion, of which the most important are called Sacraments. Occult research goes to substantiate the belief that the Sacraments were instituted by Christ. It has been contended by anti-Roman controversialists that the ritual and ceremonial element is a later importation into Christianity from surrounding paganism,† and this view has found some support from modern sceptical scholarship. Opinions upon this point and upon the question as to how far Christianity at its inception was influenced by the Mystery religions are much divided. The truth is that upon most questions of Christian origins the evidence available is too scanty to justify the sure grounding of any one of the many theories advanced. Scholars will argue from the bias of their temperament and of the age in which they live.‡ I permit myself, however, to quote the

* "The Revival of the Mysteries," Convention Lecture, Adyar, December, 1925.

† *Vide* "The Two Babylons," by Rev. Alexander Hislop, and "Paganism in the Papal Church," by W. J. Wilkins.

‡ Reincarnation gives support to the idea that groups of people who make vocal special tendencies of thought incarnate at periodic cycles. The Montanists are much in evidence nowadays.

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opinion of one who, although favourable to the mystic *exegeses* of religion, is a critical scholar and student of historical tendencies. Rev. Dr. W. F. Cobb goes so far as to say: "Recent research has proved as convincingly as anything can be proved that, so far from Christianity arising from an exclusive and closed system of truth in the midst of surrounding error, it is more true to say that its roots ran deep into contemporary life, and that there was little that was new in it except the higher life which came down to earth in the person of its Founder.* Further, "If it be urged that Christianity bears every mark of having been originally a growth inside Judaism before it underwent a process of 'acute Hellenisation,' and that therefore it is illegitimate to seek to explain its origins from outside Judaism, we reply that at the beginning of our era Judaism itself had yielded to the eclectic movement which was the dominant intellectual force in the Roman Empire between the death of Alexander the Great and the birth of Jesus Christ, and had opened its doors to every religious impulse which was to be found between India and Spain. So far, then, from the fact that Christianity appeared as an offshoot from Judaism being any proof of its exclusive character, it is much more a proof to the contrary. Judaism had become the host of all the speculations of all the existing religions. . . ."†

MANIFESTATION DEMANDS FORM. OBJECTION TO FORMS AND CEREMONIES ILLOGICAL

Now the objection commonly made against the sacramental system is a twofold one—though it would be truer, perhaps, to say that the objection is vaguely felt rather than clearly reasoned. First of all, there is a widespread objection to forms and ceremonies, to which is commonly added a dislike of "bowing and scraping," whatever that latter term may signify. I have often pointed out that this objection is illogical. So long as we have to deal with manifestation, so long have we to deal with form; where there is Spirit and Matter there is Life and

* "Mysticism and the Creed," p. 20.

† *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Form.* We cannot escape from forms and ceremonies until the Divine Breath is again indrawn and the manifested universe ceases to be. Every action of ours in the course of the day is really a ceremony. Think of the marvellous ritual of the body, of which the breath, the beating of the heart and constant change of self-expression are typical. The Quaker who thinks that he has dispensed with all forms and ceremonies in religion has not really done so. He has only substituted others of a simpler, and perhaps less effective, kind. What is really meant, then, in the common phrase about disliking forms and ceremonies is a dislike of certain *special* forms and ceremonies. Indeed, I suspect that sometimes the person who professes most loudly to dislike forms is he who cares most about them and is consequently critical of imperfect ones. That dislike is in some cases a relic or *skandha* brought over from a past life of persecution by the Church; usually it is due simply to ignorance and want of understanding, much on the same principle that the insular Englishman finds "foreign" customs peculiar and irritating.

THE SPIRITUAL IS NOT DIVORCED FROM THE MATERIAL. MANICHÆAN HERESY—MATTER AND EVIL

The other objection to the Sacramental theory is less crude, though usually not very clearly defined. It exists—and, in fact, is extremely widespread in these days—as a vague idea that true religion is something "spiritual" and therefore independent of physical rites or objects. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth," † is the favourite text quoted in support of this idea. The question

* It is interesting to note that the Theosophical theory is adumbrated by Coventry Patmore among his mystic aphorisms. People "forget that science is certainly acquainted with at least one kind of substance which is not matter, and which has none of the properties of matter; I mean ether. What hinders, then, that there should be many kinds of substance, each more subtle than that below it, as ether is more subtle than matter; and why not correspondent ranges of being until you reach the absolute and undervative substance, God?" ("The Rod, the Root and the Flower," p. 85).

† John iv. 24.

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really turns on the point whether the spiritual is divorced from the material, or the superphysical from the physical. To suppose that there is this divorce between the realms of spirit and matter is to become accomplice in the wicked heresy of the Manichæans, who are supposed to have held that matter was inherently evil.

SUPERPHYSICAL PROCESSES INITIATED FROM THE PHYSICAL

As Dr. Steiner pithily says : " In the end it all resolves itself into the fact that man ordinarily carries body, soul and spirit about with him, yet he is conscious only of the body, not of the soul and spirit, and that the student attains to a similar consciousness of soul and spirit also." * While in physical incarnation our superphysical processes are largely initiated from the physical body, and it is through and from that body that we have to work. The lotus is planted in the mire of earth. Hence religion, far from leaving the physical body out of consideration, must, in fact, devote much attention to it ; and the mediation of Divine grace by physical objects is eminently reasonable as a theory.

MYSTICISM AND OCCULTISM NOT INCOMPATIBLE

In actual practice nobody contends that the material cannot be the vehicle of the spiritual. People flock to hear a popular speaker, whose words of burning idealism make real to them the life of the spirit ; and music, painting, architecture, sculpture, or the beauty of the landscape can all convey inspiration in the physical world. There is no justification for the idea that physical things are not channels of spiritual power, or that all inspiration must come directly from within, and not from without. There are springs of spiritual life which well up within the individual soul, but there are also sources of that self-same life in the world outside, whether in objects or in people. To attempt to limit the operation of Divine grace to some closed internal process of the soul is irrational. The mystic

* " The Way of Initiation," p. 142.

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tends, as a rule, to centre himself far too exclusively on his own internal experiences. I once heard it said—in reference to the Theosophical Society—"You can never make a Society out of mystics, for each man there is a law unto himself; you can only make up a working body out of occultists," and the remark has ever since remained impressed upon me. I suspect that there are many more balanced occultists than there are balanced mystics, for, while I have met many occultists who could understand and sympathise with the way of the mystic, I have never yet met a thoroughgoing mystic who had any patience with the way of the occultist. After all, the two ought not to be incompatible; why should not a man be both occultist and mystic? The Roman Catholic Church, whose norm of worship is sacramental, is certainly the one which can show the greatest heights of mystical achievement. Indeed, I should be inclined to suggest that it is through regular use of the external steadying power of the Sacrament that inner mystical development of the religious type can most safely be cultivated.

THEOSOPHY EXPLAINS THE *Modus Operandi* OF THE SACRAMENTS

Theosophy is able to explain the *modus operandi* of the Sacraments with considerable clarity and precision, just because it gives us an understanding of the superphysical worlds. "One reason why the whole idea and practice of the Eucharist strikes so many people as unnatural, meaningless and anachronistic is . . . that the rest of life is so unlike it, says a Non-conformist writer."* People whose outlook on life is bounded by the physical plane fail quite naturally to understand ceremonies whose whole foundation rests on the interaction of the visible and invisible worlds. It is as though they were trying to solve a jigsaw puzzle from which several of the component parts (represented by the superphysical worlds) were missing.

SENSE OBJECTS AS *Media* OF SUPERPHYSICAL FORCES

On these grounds the use of lights, colour, incense, sound and music, architecture, distinctive vestments, gesture, symbols

* Rev. W. G. Peck, "The Values of the Sacrament," p. xv.

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in the ceremonial processes of religion is rational, because all are, or can be, vehicles and channels of special forces. If it be objected that there is much of complication in all this, the answer is obvious. The advocates of simplicity in all things are voicing a natural reaction from the confusion and ostentation of modern civilisation. But they seem often to forget that man is a complex being and for the proper education of his faculties often needs a complex environment. Do we find any trace of simplicity in Nature—in the panorama of the star-decked heavens, in the verdure which clothes the earth, or in the animal life with which it teems? And if one man be complex, how much more so an aggregation of some hundreds of men! Moreover, true as it is that a highly-developed man can dispense with outer aids and work by the developed power of the God within, yet he is what he is, only as the product of a highly complicated past. The complexity exists in himself instead of in his environment.

THE MEANING OF A SACRAMENT

Let us turn now to the rites called Sacraments. Probably the best definition of a Sacrament is that given in the Anglican Prayer Book—"an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ Himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof."* Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say, "an inward and spiritual grace given to us through an outward and visible sign," thus making the Sacrament essentially the grace rather than its vehicle. The word "sign" may here be understood as sigil, or equivalent of "symbol," which last-named word comes from the Greek *symbolon*, meaning "thrown together," and thus means a "correspondence" between the visible and invisible worlds.† Theology

* A Catechism.

† The same idea is involved in the distinction between "accidents" and "substance" in the doctrine of transubstantiation. The "accidents" (Lat. *ad* = to, and *cadere* = to fall) are the outer phenomenal physical manifestation of bread and wine. The "substance" (Lat. *sub.* = beneath, and *stans* = standing) is the superphysical basis or subsistence thereof. It is the "substance" which is changed "across" (Lat. *trans*); the accidents remain.

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takes cognizance of two factors in the external composition of a sacrament, namely, the "matter" and the "form." The "matter" is the material used, such as water, bread, wine; the "form" is the words pronounced, which determine the meaning of the act. It should be noted that the "outward and visible sign" ("matter" and "form") always stand in relation to the spiritual change which the Sacrament effects. Thus in Baptism the pouring of water signifies the washing away of sin, and also the descent of heavenly blessing, the dew of Divine Grace. The fact that the physical actions have a natural meaning is of interest in that they suggest to the mind and heart thoughts which are in harmony with the spiritual process accomplished, and thus open the way to its action on the recipient. This is the purpose of the *porrectio instrumentorum* and of the delivery of the Working Tools.

BAPTISM

The theological idea of Baptism is that it remits "original sin" inherited from the fall of Adam. The Theosophical explanation of this is that the child brings over *skandhas*, i.e., tendencies towards either good or evil, from past lives. Baptism tends to arrest the development of the germs of evil, while giving an impetus to those of good, so that the good may have a better chance of prevailing over the evil. The neophyte is at the same time "grafted into the mystical Body of Christ," or, in other words, admitted to the fellowship of that mystical organisation, existing not alone on the physical plane but also in the higher worlds, which serves as the vehicle for the power and blessing of the Christ.

CONFIRMATION

In Confirmation, which is intended to be administered after the Ego has entered into the normal measure of his relationship with his vehicles, that link with the Christ is further extended. There is once more a cleansing of the personality, and now a strengthening of the Ego in the atmic, buddhic and causal vehicles by the power of the Holy Spirit. Of this the laying on of the bishop's hand, the signing with the cross of sacrifice, and

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the anointing with consecrated oil is the outer symbol. Oil is at once a fuel, suggesting the fire of the Holy Spirit, and a healing balm.

HOLY COMMUNION

In the Holy Communion the matter is bread and wine; the form is the words of consecration. As bread and wine feed and nourish the physical body, so does Christ's life, of Whom they become the vehicles, nourish us spiritually. Christ is thereby incorporated in us, and we in Him; we become for the time being *alter Christus*, and should strive to act as though we were He.

HOLY ORDERS. CHRIST THE TRUE MINISTER. APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

In Holy Orders the linking of the candidate with Our Lord, which was begun at Baptism and Confirmation, is carried on to still closer degrees of union. In the "Science of the Sacraments" Bishop Leadbeater gives a chart of the details of this process, showing how the various Orders affect the higher principles of their recipients. This is how it comes to be that the Christ is the true Minister of all Sacraments, not the human personality who in the exercise of his office is His instrument. This is the real explanation of what is called the doctrine of the Apostolic or Episcopal Succession.* It is the Lord Himself Who baptizes, Who confirms, and Who administers the Sacred Sacrament of His Body and Blood. In reality, nothing could be more impersonal than this conception of sacramental procedure, and to emphasise still further the submergence of the

* Madame Blavatsky is often quoted as rejecting this doctrine in "Isis Unveiled," Vol. II., p. 124. An examination of the text shows that the doctrine there rejected is that which is properly known in theology as the Supremacy of St. Peter, and has no connection whatever with the doctrine of the conferring of Holy Orders. On the question of St. Peter's connection with Rome scholars are divided. Bishop Leadbeater has stated that in the early Church the head of each community was called Peter (the Rock), and that the difficulty which faces clairvoyant investigators is that of finding so many Peters. (*Vide* "The Hidden Side of Christian Festivals," p. 291.)

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priest's personality, he is so clothed as to suggest in every way the office and not the man. In this Sacrament the "matter" is the imposition of the Bishop's hand or hands and the delivery of the instruments of the office conferred.

ABSOLUTION ; UNCTION ; MARRIAGE

Of the remaining three Sacraments, Absolution straightens out the distortions in the relation between the lower and higher self caused by wrongdoing. It does not enable a man to escape from the *karma* of his wrongdoing, but it does help to raise him from that state of spiritual death which we are told is "the wages of sin." Unction fortifies against sickness or prepares for death, and Marriage unites the contracting parties in due spiritual sympathy.

THE SACRAMENTS ORDAINED BY CHRIST, AND HE IS OPERATIVE IN THEM

The definition of a Sacrament says that it was "ordained by Christ." When we speak of Sacraments we ought to mean certain special rites in which Christ is operative in a direct and special sense. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity is present everywhere in His universe, yet in the consecrated Host we have a special intensification and localisation of that Presence; He is more immediately present. It is well to emphasise this point, for much modern mysticism loses itself in vague and sentimental talk about all life being sacramental, and equates a Sacrament with a symbol or simply with the expression of life through form. A family meal may be the scene of much glad affection and corporate feeling, but it is not therefore a Sacrament in the technical sense of the word.

UNITY OF LIFE. A "FREE GIFT OF GRACE"

Our definition goes on to say that this "inward and spiritual grace" is "given unto us." We receive a free gift of grace. It is the idea of the unity of all Life. As we help those who stand below us on the ladder of evolution so can we be helped by Those Who stand above us.

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“EX OPERE OPERATO”

On the remainder of the definition there is no need to comment here, save to mention that occult research supports the *ex opere operato* theory of Catholic tradition, and does not make the virtue of the Sacrament depend upon the subjective disposition of the recipient (*ex opere operantis*). The spiritual response of the worshipper has much influence on what he receives from the Sacrament; but the consecration of the Bread and the Wine takes place objectively on the altar and not by virtue of its reception with faith by the worshipper.

CHRISTIAN “MAGIC.” EVELYN UNDERHILL ON MAGIC

It is the custom of modern apologists for the Sacramental system hotly to disclaim all sympathy with any “magical” view of the Sacraments. When Bishop Leadbeater describes the Sacraments as “the magic of the Christian Church” he excites frenzy and exacerbation in the tents of the orthodox. Yet it is after all only a question of names. As Evelyn Underhill aptly says: “In magic . . . we have at any rate the survival of a great and ancient tradition, the true splendour and meaning of whose title should hardly have been lost in a Christian country; for it claims to be the science of those Magi whose quest of the symbolic Blazing Star brought them once at least to the cradle of the Incarnate God.” And again: “Orthodox persons should be careful how they condemn the laws of magic, for they unwittingly conform to many of them whenever they go to church. All formal religion is saturated with magic.”* Magic, rightly understood, is but the science of using the forces of nature and of supernature. If natural law be the Will of God in operation it cannot be undignified or profane to study its *modus operandi*. Bishop Leadbeater, in his “Science of the Sacraments,” writes with much detail of the mechanism of the sacramental processes, but no critic would be impartial who asserted that his attitude towards the holy realities involved is in any degree less reverent or spiritual than that of a Roman or Anglican theologian. The attempt to involve your opponents in the opprobrious practice of magic

* “Mysticism,” p. 182.

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is no new chapter in the history of the *odium theologicum*. Athanasius "was formally condemned of rebellion, sedition and a tyrannical use of his episcopal power, of 'murder, sacrilege, and magic'; was deposed from the See of Alexandria, and prohibited from ever returning to that city." *

THEOSOPHY ALSO ELUCIDATES MYSTICISM. EASTERN YOGA AND WESTERN MYSTICISM

If I have chosen in this lecture to show how Theosophy vindicates the principle of sacramental worship, it is because that is an unpopular cause and can, therefore, bear with a little championing. But none the less does Theosophy help us to understand that other aspect of worship which looks for God in the shrine of the human heart, and it shows that these two are not antagonistic to one another, but complementary. Nowhere is the science of mystic contemplation more understandingly treated than in those Oriental scriptures which our great President has done so much to promulgate and to expound. If one takes up a book like Father Poulain's "The Graces of Interior Prayer," one glimpses the Yoga of the East in Western garb, and realises how true is the claim of the eclectic Theosophist that mystical experience is the same in essence the world over, knowing no barriers of race or creed.

NECESSITY FOR SYSTEMATIC TRAINING AND PURIFICATION IN THE UNFOLDING OF THE HIGHER CONSCIOUSNESS

Personally, I must confess to a dislike of that emotional subjectivism prominent in the writings of so many Western mystics, from which it is a pleasure to turn to the homely philosophy of Angelus Silesius or the marvellous perception of Novalis or Coventry Patmore. If we contrast the exercises in meditation derived from Theosophical sources with those prescribed in books of Christian piety, the balance of method and commonsense seems to me to be decidedly on the side of the former. On all questions connected with the New Psychology, New Thought, Psycho-Analysis, Theosophy, as our President has said, "is truly as a lamp in a dark place, as all

* Newman's "The Arians of the Fourth Century," p. 284.

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who are willing to use it will find." * Moreover, it brings to the subject the vitally important contribution that exercises to unfold the powers of the consciousness and the attempt to reach union with God can only safely be undertaken *pari passu* with systematic purification of the vehicles, the method of which receives extensive treatment in Theosophical literature. Otherwise there is danger of hysteria and neuropathy. The higher forces, coming down into a brain and a nervous organisation unprepared to receive them, are liable to shatter.

THEOSOPHICAL ATTITUDE IN REGARD TO THE CHRIST

Of the contribution that Theosophy makes to our understanding of the position and office of the Founder of the Christian faith it needs a tongue more eloquent than mine to tell. The identification of the Christ with the World-Teacher, the Head of all faiths and the Inspirer of all religious progress, Who comes out into the world in each successive age or dispensation to re-proclaim the essential Truths of religion and morality in a form suited to that age, and Who will soon be amongst us again, is a message of sublime inspiration. What will be the form of the message that He comes to give we do not know; but at least this much it is not presumptuous to say: We can prepare the world and ourselves for His Coming by spreading the great teachings of Theosophy and by living that life of altruism and high endeavour which proclaims a man before the world as a true Theosophist.

* Foreword to "Theosophy and the New Psychology."

