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we now call vitamins and had the power of prolonging life.' The result of this is seen in the abnormally long life enjoyed for ten generations after the Flood. It will be seen that the historical trustworthiness of the early Genesis narratives is established by taking away their naïveté and

naturalness and 'interpreting' them. The six days were periods, the Flood was local, the serpent was not a serpent, Adam was not the original man, the ancient patriarchs could live for hundreds of years because they were charged with vitamins from the Tree of Life.

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## Christian Faith and the Historic World-Order.

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No thinking man, in days when history is being made, can fail to ask himself about the meaning of the happenings which are taking place around him. There is no longer the sense of security and peacefulness in a well-ordered universe, gradually being brought under the control of man, that belonged to our forefathers. The world seems to have broken free of man's dominion; stability and security alike belong to the past rather than to the present; and what the future holds no one dare confidently predict. It is with one aspect of this problem that our subject has to do—in what way are the events of the historic order to be related to Christian faith in God? Do the fingers of a man's hand still write, in hours of crisis, the word of Judgment, as on the wall, over against the candlestick, of Belshazzar's palace? Do the fingers nailed upon the Cross still mean that God is love—that He who so loved the world then must love it still? Are we entitled to say that particular happenings are to be interpreted in the light of religion and its teaching? Are we to see God's hand in the ending of one era and the beginning of another, in the breaking down of the old and the instituting of the new? How far may peace and war, prosperity and adversity, victory or defeat, be linked up with the divine will and purpose? Such are some of the questions which we may be asked to consider in thinking about Christian faith and the historic world-order.

In order to introduce the subject, let us take time to glance briefly at one or two views of the relationship of history and faith. Let us notice first a familiar truth—that the denial of history is also a denial of Christian faith. By the denial of history I mean a system of belief, or a philosophical

theory, which reduces all events to a uniform level of meaninglessness and robs them of real significance. There is, for example, the idea, so familiar in the ancient world and prevalent still in Eastern lands, of a periodic cycle, within which all events repeat themselves without beginning and without end. Again, there is the assertion, as old as Greek philosophy, and re-stated in different ways by more recent thinkers, that truth is timeless and necessary, and can never be found in the temporal or the contingent.

If either of these views be accepted, history loses all reality, for nothing in the recurring or the transient order of events can bear relationship to anything more ultimate than itself. To borrow an illustration from Karl Heim,<sup>1</sup> the story of humanity is like a train travelling on a railway track infinitely long, on which it moves forward from station to station, but, because we see no satisfactory end to the journey, we must attempt to leap out of the train and escape from the course of time into some non-temporal sphere where alone is to be found the satisfaction which we seek. *Mutatis mutandis* this criticism, directed against the idea of truth as necessary and timeless, might be passed also on the theory of endless periodicity with its wheel of time from which men seek to escape. Neither theology nor history can find value in such conceptions. With the denial of any ultimate meaning to history, there goes also, and significantly, a denial of Christian faith.

It is, indeed, through religion that men are brought to attach significance to historic happenings. The Old Testament is full of a sense of the meaning of events and the purpose linking one

<sup>1</sup> *The New Divine Order*, 53, 57.

with another, which the annals of contemporary nations conspicuously lack. The belief that nothing takes place without far-reaching effect, and that from even a trivial and obscure happening great issues may result, gives to its writers, with their religious insight, a true sense of history. And so 'the book remains alive, alive with the exultation and the agony of a great-hearted nation, alive with the voice of God, who through it speaks to men.'<sup>1</sup> Still more important is it to remember that the New Testament tells of an historic happening and testifies to its meaning for faith. It was, St. Luke recounts with full historical detail, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar . . . Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, that the word of God came unto John,<sup>2</sup> and thus, as Dean Matthews has pointed out, 'the Christian faith and the Christian experience of God are inextricably bound up with history.'<sup>3</sup> The theory of a recurring cycle of events may allow men to believe in a sequence of revelations, as in the repeated dying and coming to life of a nature deity who seems to show himself again and again to men in similar fashion. The idea of timeless necessary truth may be compatible with the thought of a general, gradual revelation in every historic era and its events. But for Christian faith all the stress is laid upon what happened in the Incarnation—at the Cross—in the Resurrection; upon the historic fact of the Atonement. The New Testament tells of a unique revelation which can never be repeated however long the course of history, and which is inseparable from the events in and through which it came to be.

With this in mind, we may turn our attention to two other accounts of faith's relation to the historic world-order. There is, on the one hand, the belief that God is within history—that His will can be discerned in the whole course of it, and that the world-order is in itself a progressive revelation of His purpose. On the other hand, there is, in direct opposition to such a view, the assertion that God is not in history—that, if there be a God, He stands aloof from the world-order and apart from human life. The thesis to be put forward here is that, while neither of these statements can be accepted by Christian faith, yet underlying both there is at least an indication, however faint and distorted, of a truer view.

Let us examine, first, the proposition, 'God is within history.' God, it is commonly held, is to be found in the story of the world, ever leading men

upward. Each century brings fresh advance, and the divine purpose is being consistently worked out with the passing years. Characteristic of such a theory as this is what Professor John Baillie describes, in another connexion, as 'the determination that this world in which we live shall be made a better place to live in; that we will be wiser than our fathers were and our children wiser than we; that knowledge shall with every year that passes "grow from more to more."'<sup>4</sup> This way of thinking is summed up, as Dr. Baillie points out, in words like these from Tennyson:

Thro' the shadow of the globe we sweep into the  
younger day;  
Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.

So men come to congratulate themselves on being wiser than their fathers were, and to rejoice in the glories of their civilization and the advance which each generation makes in the divinely ordained progress of the race.

A variety of this type of thinking, which, incidentally, reveals its insecure foundations, is to be seen in the humanism of the twentieth century which has followed so closely and, perhaps, so inevitably on the idealism of the nineteenth. No longer are we told that God is in the historic process, directing and guiding the advance of humanity. Men are now self-sufficient and may claim their independence. In whatever form it comes, whether that of the Communist or of the Fascist or the Nazi, or in humanism that remains aloof from world politics, there is here the assertion that continuous progress is a law of human history; that within the race there lie the seeds of greatness; that blood and soil, to quote the favourite phrase, are the fundamental things in life, and that from them the ultimate triumph of that which is best in humanity will be assured. If we have to choose, in the formula which Karl Barth has used so freely, between Scripture and 1933, there lies no doubt which humanism will prefer, seeking, as it always must, to enthrone its own theory of life, and to disparage faith in the super-human, even if it has endured throughout the centuries.

About such a way of thought, however, even in its less advanced forms, very serious questions can be asked—and are being asked to-day. We, who are faced with a story of failure and disaster, cannot refrain from wondering, 'Is this the best that God can do? Is He really in this disappointing story of man's failure and defeat? Does He allow the world to be spoiled, as it is being spoiled to-day,

<sup>1</sup> A. C. Welch, *Post-Exilic Judaism*, p. xi.

<sup>2</sup> Lk 3<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> *God in Christian Thought and Experience*, 83.

<sup>4</sup> *And the Life Everlasting*, 28 f.

by forces that seem to make for unrighteousness and dispeace?' We are asking ourselves whether progress is as inevitable as once it was thought to be. Is the picture of an ideal world in process of being realized as true as the artists who delighted in drawing it believed? May it not be that something has been left out in those calculations which set before us a future radiant and beautiful like the sunrise? Would the story of the Incarnation and the Cross have any place in such a steadily progressive advance of humanity as men have so often rejoiced to contemplate? What has been forgotten, we may argue, is simply that in a sinful world there is no necessary development or inevitable progress. We are learning, as Archbishop D'Arcy points out, that it is 'now quite impossible to draw a hard-and-fast line between the prehistoric and the historic. Nor can the prehistoric be cut off by any impassable barrier from the still earlier records of anthropology and geology.'<sup>1</sup> But have we learned that it is no less impossible to divide off man's fall and the story of sin's beginning from the history of all the centuries that have followed it? Whether we place the Fall within the historic epoch or in prehistoric times does not greatly matter compared with the recognition of its significance in the world still. What we see is not the world as God would have had it be, but the world as it has been made by human pride and self-sufficiency. The building of towers of Babel did not cease when men began to speak different languages. The facts which make us ask whether God is really in history, leading it forward to perfection, suggest their own answer. Man has, by his sin, been thwarting the very purpose of God for his life, and history is the field in which the consequences of his folly are made apparent. So far from telling us only of the way of progress by which God is leading men ever forward, it is the record of their rebellion and attempted independence—full of signs of their waywardness and disobedience.

Yet, for faith, such signs are mingled with indications that God is still weaving the pattern of history, marred though it be by the sinful instruments of His will. And here is the truth which, as I suggested, appears in a distorted form in the idea of God's being found within history. Because the Creator still controls the world which He has made, in self-consistent righteousness, the inevitable outcome of sin is failure and disaster. Only through God's constant government of mankind are His judgments manifest. Though the world be entangled in ways of sinfulness, creation has not

fallen out of its Maker's hands. God still brings in new epochs, raises up great leaders, and guides events which change the lives of millions—the history of empires and continents. Yet He remains veiled from the eyes of those who seek Him only in such happenings as these, as though He were uniformly manifest in everything that takes place. He is not within history, but above it—the Lord of history, as He is the Lord of all life.

The second account of God's relation to the world-order of history, which contradicts the first, begins with the assertion that God is not in history. It describes history, in pessimistic fashion, as a falling away from man's original innocence, or from the God in whose image he first was made. Everything in history is evidence of failure and disappointment. The race is farther off from heaven than it was in its infancy, and the very helplessness of man to control the world and to use wisely the abundance of Nature's bounty is only evidence to confirm what has already been discovered elsewhere—his own misery and unhappiness, and the turning to his destruction of the very highest efforts and endeavours he may make. So Matthew Arnold, to give one illustration only, pictured Goethe looking

on Europe's dying hour  
Of fitful dream and feverish power;  
His eye plunged down the weltering strife,  
The turmoil of expiring life.

Manifestly faith cannot accept this interpretation of history—yet let us look for a moment at the truth which it does suggest, however perversely. The picture of human failure cannot be painted too darkly if it is to be true to the facts. The pessimist may be nearer the truth than the self-complacent optimist, who would heal the troubles of his people lightly. The situation is so hopeless that nothing men can do will ever put it right. But faith, which alone recognizes the gravity of man's sinfulness and the extremity in which he stands, recognizes also that God has not forsaken His world. Not only does He control and uphold it; not only is He above the historic order, directing and governing it; He has come into the heart of history in a great act of redemption. There is a foreshadowing of this in the Old Testament, where we see a people wise enough to acknowledge that disaster is not unmerited and that 'even defeat has a meaning, since it does not come from blind chance, but from One who has the world in His keeping.'<sup>2</sup> Because God had begun to show in the midst of her His saving power, He would not forsake Israel. It is

<sup>1</sup> *Providence and the World-Order*, 134.

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Welch, *op. cit.*, 19.

the burden of the prophetic message that He comes not in judgment only, but, after judgment, in grace. Faith looked forward then to a time when God would come into the very midst of humanity to condemn men's sinfulness and yet to be the God of their salvation. Faith looks back now to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection, as the historic events in which is seen this breaking into history of God Himself. A poet has pictured the light from the Upper Room :

Not a spark in the warren under the giant night,  
Save where in a turret's lantern beamed a grave,  
still light :

There in the topmost chamber a gold-eyed lamp was  
lit—

Marvellous lamp in darkness, informing, redeeming  
it !<sup>1</sup>

So into the darkness of the world there came the revealing of God's love, that history might have at its centre the reconciling act of love in Jesus Christ. So far from asserting that God is not in history, faith declares, in triumphant accents, that God has entered into the very heart of it.

We have, then, in place of the two propositions with which we began, two others—God is above history . . . and God enters history. Between these there is no contradiction. The one declares that, as Creator, God still controls His world ; the other asserts that, as Redeemer, God has entered that world to save men from their sin. The Creator is veiled in history by the sinfulness of His instruments. The Redeemer is revealed, and yet concealed, in lowliness and humility—the lowliness of the manger at Bethlehem, the humility of Gethsemane and Calvary. And between Creator and Redeemer faith sees no dualism. A Redeemer who is not also Creator will be no longer the Lord of all ; a Creator who is not also Redeemer will not be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It seems to follow from what we have said, first, that the universe is not a closed order in which nothing new can ever happen. The Creator God, we may assert, brought the universe into being on such lines that redemption is a possibility. History may be the vehicle, not only of the controlling power and over-ruling providence of the God who brought all things into being, but also of His redemptive love. Paradoxically enough, to say that God is not in history is at the same time to declare that history is such that it needs the entrance into it of a redeeming God. Secondly, we must believe that the earth is still the Lord's though it be marred and spoiled by the sins of men. God

<sup>1</sup> Robert Nichols, 'The Tower.'

may be denied and rejected, but He is still the Upholder and Source of all things. It is not into a world that has passed entirely beyond His control that God has come. Traces, however distorted, of His original purpose do remain, and the idea that God is within history is really based upon a misconception of this truth. In the third place, faith declares that the ultimate unity of Creator and Redeemer is revealed in Jesus Christ. The Son of God can come into the world because the universe has been fashioned by the Creator on redemptive lines, but He can also so come because the universe which is to be redeemed is still under the Lordship of the Creator God. And thus coming, Jesus is conscious of no distinction between the Father God and the Creator, between God who is the Lord of history and God who enters history for man's salvation. It is indeed to tell men that the Almighty God is their Heavenly Father, or conversely, that the God who loves them with an everlasting love is the eternal Creator and Upholder of all things, that Jesus comes. The same God who comes into history in Jesus Christ has been above history from the first of time, and the Son who becomes Incarnate is the Word which was with God in the beginning.

Faith must, however, begin with redemption rather than with creation. God's breaking into the world in Jesus Christ is at once the centre of our believing and the clue to the meaning of history. There is no argument from the happenings of history in general to the redemption of man by God in Jesus Christ. We do not say that because there is a time of prosperity, or an age of peace, or an epoch of great progress and advance in human well-being, God, who has done this in the historic world-order, will redeem, or has redeemed, His people from their sins. What faith does say is that because God has come to the world in Jesus Christ He will not forsake those whom He loves with this everlasting love—that His care for men will be unceasing, and that His purpose for them will be steadfast—that their hope in God may be sure in spite of every fear, since even the worst of evil will be subdued and overcome. We do not argue from the history of the world to the grace of God which is in Jesus Christ, but we say that, because of this grace which has come to the sinful and undeserving, the historic world-order will not end in misery or in failure, but in something corresponding to the righteousness and love which have thus been manifested among men. Only faith which has apprehended God's redemption of the world can discern in the past and present the Creator's guidance and power, and can trust the

future to His wisdom. Thus Christian thinking about history centres on Jesus Christ, His struggle with, and victory over, sin. Everything became different after Jesus lived and died and rose again. His coming is not just an historic event to be linked up with others in the world before and after it. It is to be preached as God's great act of self-revelation. As a recent writer has put it, 'Historical data and reminiscences you can rationalize; a living Lord you can only proclaim.'<sup>1</sup> Christ's own claim is that the whole earth is to be won and changed by His death and resurrection, and to the greatness of His power the apostles and evangelists testify as they seek to turn the world upside down. In Him the Kingdom of God has come into history, and the course of history henceforth is to be interpreted always and only in the light of the Kingdom which is not of this world, but which is God's gift revealed to men in Jesus Christ. 'It is obvious that the entire New Testament in all its parts where it speaks of Jesus the Christ means by this name an event which is not only gradually but fundamentally above all other events, and one which essentially can happen only once. . . . Jesus the Christ means . . . the beginning of that which is beyond all temporal change, the coming world of God and salvation.'<sup>2</sup>

If we go on to ask what is the great characteristic of this unique event, we shall find that God's coming into the world is not, to borrow a familiar phrase, 'a form of peaceful penetration.' He comes to wage warfare against the sin which thwarts His purpose for men and spoils their lives. The defeat of sin at the Cross manifests the redemptive power of God. Jesus meets the power of evil there at its very strongest, and by His victory over it gives new meaning to life and brings new possibilities into the historic order. At the Cross there is no blurring of the issues. The gravity of man's situation and the cost of his redemption are made plain. Sin is manifest in all its hideousness and is overthrown by the power of self-sacrificing love. Christ's refusal of the cup of wine mingled with myrrh to dull His pain is symbolic of the conflict of Calvary between a redeeming God and the sin which He condemns—a conflict to be fought out to the uttermost.

We have here a guide to the meaning of history which enables us to see again the inadequacy of the theories already considered, and to state our view of the historic world-order in the light of Jesus Christ. So far from having no meaning, history is

momentous and crucial, because at the centre of it stands a Cross. So far from being the story of human striving and endeavour, it is to be interpreted by this act of God. So far from being a uniform record of progress, it is an inexorable struggle and conflict—a battlefield where the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world fight until the latter shall be overthrown. So far from being only the story of man's falling away from God, it includes the wonderful truth that God in His amazing love has come not only to judge but to seek and to save. Even before Christ came men had thought of a mysterious power working against God, and it was by no mere chance that over against the figure of the Saviour on the Cross the Early Church should set its conception of the arch-enemy, the anti-Christ, who symbolizes the massed forces of evil with which the Son of God joins issue at Calvary. Nor was it without the true instinct of faith that men in every generation have declared, with Luther, that in this struggle there can be no zone of neutrality (*medium regnum*), but that on one side or the other each historical event and movement must take its place. The struggle still continues. God's revelation is still veiled in the lowly figure of One who bore His Cross. Men may still reject the Chosen One of Israel. The very possibility of faith implies the possibility of unbelief. But God's attack on the world is ever being renewed. The coming of Christ was not the action of an impulsive moment, but the showing forth of God's abiding attitude toward men. He still brings men under the shadow of the Cross and wages war upon sin, and turns the very folly of man's pride to His own great purposes of love. Blindness to the truth that God might break into His world in redeeming power led men to crucify the Lord of Glory, and we dare not let such blindness veil our eyes to the fact that the God who came in Jesus Christ is a God who has not ceased to come into the world which He created at the first, which He redeemed once and for all at Calvary, and which is the constant object of His care and love. We may agree with Tillich when he says, in criticism of certain current opinions, that 'the year 1933 cannot be brought so close to the year 33 as to gain redemptive significance' without forgetting that the one revelation, unique and never to be repeated, is to be apprehended still by men in their varying situations and different circumstances, and that the Holy Spirit is ever taking the things of Jesus and revealing them to men, enabling them to say that Jesus is the Lord.

How are the events of history, great and small,

<sup>1</sup> J. S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ*, 8.

<sup>2</sup> E. Brunner, *The Word and the World*, 36.

to be related to this conflict? The answer lies, as it seems to me, in the doctrine of the Church. The Church of Christ, as we know it, and as we are only too well aware, has become itself entangled in the sinfulness of the world. The criticism to which it is exposed and the sense that somehow or other the thought of its greatness has ceased to have meaning for the modern mind, are only indications of this perplexing truth that the Church, which is the instrument of God, His army waging warfare upon the earth, is not free from the very failures which beset the world's life. None the less, part of our doctrine of the Church, using the word in the widest sense, is that to it has been committed the task of serving Jesus Christ, of preaching His gospel, of testifying to His power and doing His will. To the Church belongs the custody of the Word and Sacraments in and through which the great redemptive act of God in Jesus Christ is continually set forth. It has for its aim the proclamation of one Saviour and Lord of all, and for its task the bringing of all things in the historic order of the world into subjection to its only King and Head. The Church demands from its members decision and responsibility and seeks to show to the world the way of Christ. It is, in a true sense, like the remnant of which the servant of the Lord spoke in the Old Testament, through whose patience and endurance the larger community in which it was set might ultimately be saved. There is a filling up that which remains of the sufferings of Christ in order that His work may be made more manifest and His will more fully done upon the earth. The Church believes, moreover, that its message to men brings new possibilities of goodness. The endless resources of the Holy Spirit are promised to all who believe. They are not left alone, but led into a fellowship with God Himself that makes all things possible for them. It is not through economic policies that the history of the world is to find its true fulfilment. It is through the testimony of men and women of faith for whom alone the ultimate choices and decisions are real. The historic events which perplex and bewilder us have underlying them a multitude of such choices—choices in which the unbeliever feels no such compulsion as the Christian to follow God rather than men. Only as Christianity is extended throughout the world will the choices which determine historic happenings be themselves determined by no counsels of expedience, selfishness, or pride, but by the will of God. To put it in a single word, it is by the conversion of men and women to Jesus Christ—the winning of individual souls for Him in full and

true surrender—that the progress of the conflict is to be measured and the history of the world determined. To an age accustomed to think of epoch-making events upon which civilization depends—to nations concerned lest the structure built up through so many centuries should crash in ruins—it may seem ludicrous to speak of the conversion of some unknown life as of moment in the scheme of things. Yet, just because the God who is above history is one with the God who enters history, each human act is linked with the creative power of God and set in the light of His redemptive act as well. Because God is Creator, all actions in the complex interplay of the world's life are influential beyond our dreams. Because God is Redeemer, each action is judged by His purpose of love revealed once and for ever at Calvary, and by it a blow is struck for Christ or against Him in the spiritual warfare which has the whole world as its battlefield. We have the record of how a slave, sold into Egypt long ago, became a man of authority whose career changed the course of the world's history. A prophet, out of the hour of his own suffering and his nation's trial, brought a new message, telling men that the worship of God is not limited to any land or place, and that He will make a new covenant with them in days to come. A few citizens of the Roman Empire—not many wise, or mighty, or noble—are called to be heralds of the new faith, and become more influential than the rulers and statesmen of their day. Are we to say that the manifestation of God's controlling power and the working out of His redemptive purpose in such ways as these is no longer to be looked for? Is it not, rather, faith's conviction that God, who governs the lives of all, may still, in the wonder of His grace, use even nameless folk in every hour of the world's history for His purpose of love for men?

We must remember, finally, that our civilization and the structure of society as we know it belong to the temporal, and not to the eternal, order. They may be overthrown, but faith will not be destroyed along with them. Judgment may begin, as the prophets held it would, at the very temple itself, but the divine purpose will be fulfilled at the last. There may be no end to the conflict until the consummation of all things in Christ, but faith holds the conviction that, in some fashion and at some hour, the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them will pass away, and history will end in the assured triumph of Jesus Christ. Thus the Church is called not only to bear witness to its Lord and serve Him on the earth, but to watch and pray for the coming of His Kingdom. This conception

of an end is peculiarly Christian. Manifestly it does not belong either to a philosophy which asserts the timelessness of truth, or to any theory of periodic cycles of existence. Even when it appears elsewhere, it is, as has been argued, derived from Christianity. Those who insist on the steady advance of the human race should logically accept the idea of infinite development, each step revealing the possibility of further progress, rather than that of a process eventually to be complete. Pessimism should find a more congenial theme in the dreary prospect of mere endless existence than in the foreboding of judgment and destruction which has been borrowed from Christian teaching.<sup>1</sup> For faith, however, belief in such a consummation is all-important. Not only is it linked closely with the idea of personal immortality,<sup>2</sup> but it is also essential to the Christian view of history, for which each event and epoch will have its own place in the line of happenings which leads to the end of all. 'The Divine and that which is opposed to the Divine, must stand face to face finally in a consummation which gathers up in itself all that has gone before. For only then can the theme of world-history be brought to a decision. . . .'<sup>3</sup> It is true that the present life of the world is linked with the future. In our Lord's words, the Kingdom of God is among men already, veiled by its own humility and unrecognized by the sinfulness in the midst of which it is set. Yet we may believe that, as for the individual eternal life here and now is no mere empty form of words, so in the world's life there are things which shall not pass away. If this be so, each time and each event, each moment and every hour, has its own relation to the consummation. Each crisis, as we call it, is critical not for a single hour or a day or two at most, but critical in its relationship to the end of all crises. The eras of the world's history stand related to the eternity that is beyond them all. How does each event bear upon the purpose of God

<sup>1</sup> Cf. E. Brunner, *The Mediator*, 37. 'This idea of a world history which will attain fulfilment is the Christian strand in the web of thought woven by German Idealism and later by Positivism.' Cf. also the thought of continued existence rather than a catastrophe ending in the pessimism of non-Christian lands.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. in the conviction that the individual cannot be fully blessed while the world still groaneth and travaileth in pain, and the thought of the end of the world as the hour in which the blessedness of each believer and of the whole creation are united in indissoluble joy. Cf. John Baillie, *op. cit.*, 250 ff.

<sup>3</sup> K. Heim, *The New Divine Order*, 86.

which is one day to be fulfilled? How will it appear, viewed in the light not of our transient, mutable opinions, but of the judgment which is to come when the Creator God, who is the Redeemer, will bend all things into accordance with His own mind and will?

Thus to the relationship of each historic happening to the creative act of the God who is above history, and to the redemptive purpose of the God who enters history, there is to be added this third relationship linking all events to the consummation by which God will bring history to an end. History had its beginning in the creative act of God, who watches still over a fallen world. It has its centre in the saving love of God manifest at Calvary. Its ending will be God's act also, in His judgment at the last day. The beginning and the end are beyond the reach of historical investigation, and while the death of Christ may be historically verifiable, yet such research alone can never discern the true meaning of it. But faith is sure both of the fact and of its significance, and for faith also the beginning and the ending of history, as well as its centre, are bound up with Jesus Christ. He is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last. He is the Word without whom there was not anything made that was made. He is the Word which was made flesh and dwelt among us—the incarnate One, crucified and risen. He will come again, and at His second coming subdue all things unto Himself. Each human act and every historic happening is set in inescapable relation alike to creation, to redemption, and to the end. The Creator may be concealed in the disappointing, sinful history of fallen humanity. The Redeemer may be veiled from the eyes of those who will not see the Father in the Son and reject the love that passeth knowledge—and history is in part the story of such rejection and refusal. But in the end God will be so made manifest that men must see Him as He is. No longer will He be guiding the course of the world's history, seeking men, inviting them to come to Him, asking their faith. He will rend the heavens and come down to destroy all the forces that are against His purpose and to glorify every one that trusteth in His name. Christ shall come not in the humility of Bethlehem or in the shame of Calvary, but with clouds and great glory, whom every eye shall see, whom none shall be able to mistake. He will no longer take upon Himself the form of a servant and be made of no reputation. He shall be highly exalted, and at His name every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that He is Lord to the glory of the Father. Thus, we

must believe, the historic world-order, which has been controlled continually by God's creative power, and into which His saving love has come, shall find its completion and its end in the manifest-

ing of Jesus Christ in the fulness of His power with great glory, that God may be all in all to the creation which He has redeemed from all evil.

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## The Christmas Glory.

BY THE REVEREND R. W. STEWART, B.D., B.Sc., ABERDEEN.

'And we beheld his glory.'—Jn 1<sup>14</sup>.

THE mind of the Eastern Church and of a school of thought among ourselves has always been fascinated by the mystery of the Incarnation. The Nativity of Christ is the first fact in the history of redemption. While the Western Church has centred its thought upon the Cross and Passion of the Saviour and the personal and psychological reality of the forgiveness of sins, the Eastern mind returns continually with speculative wonder to the Christmas story:

Love came down at Christmas,  
Love all lovely, Love Divine.

And Christmas-tide summons even those who may be disinclined to grapple with the ultimate problems of being, to have regard to the existence of a deep mystery. A friend once visited Wordsworth in his Westmorland home on a day when mist and falling rain veiled everything beyond the nearest dyke. 'One might as well be in a flat land,' he said. 'No,' replied the poet, 'it means a great deal to know the hills are there.'

When in reference to His birth the poet prophet of Revelation calls Jesus 'the root and offspring of David,' he seems to feel that no earthly epithet is adequate to describe Him round whom

blow  
The authentic airs of Paradise,

and so he adds, 'He is the bright, the morning star.' So the Fourth Gospel begins not by tracing His lineage like Matthew to Abraham, or like Luke to Adam, but by stating His relation to God. 'In the beginning was the Word.' To look at Jesus is not just to look back upon the career of a man in history, it is to gaze at an eternal reality within the being of God. John does not delay to discuss, as philosophers have done, how the Incarnation could happen. To the fact that it did happen he gives his testimony in words that have been called the greatest theological sentence ever written.

'The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth.' The thrill of a personal experience is in that 'we beheld.'

He has been our fellow the morning of our days,  
Us he chose for housemates and this way went.

The coming of Jesus into this world of sin and woe had been a revelation of glory, and at the recollection the measured words in which John tries to sum up the gospel begin to ring with music, and the solemn statement ends like a song.

A common note in our Christmas hymns is surprise at the lack of splendour at the Redeemer's birth. 'There was no room for Him in the inn'—

a mother laid her Baby  
In a manger for His bed.

The Scriptures dwell without embarrassment upon His complete humanity. He grew in a humble home doing humble work. He was trained in ways of Jewish piety. He asked questions as men do about things they do not know. He expected fruit on a leafy fig-tree and was disappointed to find it had none. He chose Judas for a disciple, hoping to use him for high service. There is no statement in the Bible of any advantage He had in His earthly life save this, that He lived in unbroken fellowship with God. Paul sums it up, saying, Christ 'made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.' The writer to the Hebrews underlines the contrast between the earthly life of Jesus marked by obedience, suffering, temptation, and His Risen Life 'crowned with glory and honour.' But John has a different view of the same facts. He, too, remembers the Man who was his companion on the dusty roads of Palestine and sat weary by the well of Samaria, but he says that that life was glorious all the time.