Papers on Rationalism

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Active Neology

A journal of the day sent me gives the Dean of Westminster's theory of inspiration, which is really a denial of God in it. Scientific discovery [?] is assumed to have revealed facts plainly inconsistent with Genesis taken literally, and to cast Christians on Origen's mischievous allegorising. The Dean is one of those who do not go as to miracles all the lengths of many Germans, Dutch, and Americans, to say nothing of some Britons. He talks of the vast difference between the historical evidence for our Lord's miracles, and that for many of the O.T. miracles. But such a defence cannot long resist the dead weight of unbelief. Evidence of sense was enough to render inexcusable those who saw; but it is slight compared with God's testimony in Scripture. If men did believe on evidence only, the Lord did not believe in them (John 2:24, 25). Man must be born anew for God's Kingdom; and this is of the Holy Ghost through faith, greater than any miracles, which are a sign to unbelievers, but have per se no power to bring sinners to God. Modern scientists, who dare to assail scripture will have to mend their hypotheses as well as their exegesis; in fact they are scarce better than heathen philosophers. But think of the folly and the sin of professed Christian teachers being influenced by speculative anthropologists, astronomers, biologists, geologists, against God's written word! Ascertained facts are very distinct from human theories, and have never been proved to clash with Holy Writ, ardently desired as this issue has been by some.

As to the Dean's principles, they are not of faith and cannot please God, any more than secure the truth to man. "Biblical criticism proper" is the reducing of the current text, injured by human copying and also by editorial guesswork, to the very words of the Holy Spirit as originally written. But neo-criticism is essentially infidel; because it consists of man's mind sitting in judgment on what no Christian can reasonably doubt to be the deposit for faith through the inspired writers. What he calls "the science of literary and historical investigation," or the self-styled "higher criticism," is unbelieving, illegitimate, and spurious, certainly as applied to Scripture, and uncertain for any other ancient book, such as Homer for instance, in the hands of even a first-rate scholar like Karl Lachmann.

The church of God did not take its stand on any such humanitarian ground, but persevered in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread and the prayers. Christians accepted without question, as our Lord taught them, the written word as authoritative and beyond controversy. It was after the departure of the apostles and prophets (the foundation on which the house of God stands), that wicked men and impostors came out more openly, as the "apostles warned, to push their school of doubt and incredulity, with all the evils in its train. "I know (said not the least) that after my departure will come among you grievous wolves, not sparing the flock. And from your own selves will rise up men speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29, 30). The Christian student, nay the highest teacher, is not called to any such investigation as judging the scriptures, but to judge himself and others, and even what assumes to be the

church, by the scriptures. Indeed it became a necessary question to judge which is the church, from the time that it openly split into bodies holding no intercommunion, aggravated since the Reformation by the gradual swarm of rival societies claiming to be churches. Thus, only one can be according to scriptural truth; and if this one had just grounds, it would surely take the place, not of boast, but of humiliation and grief that things had come to such a pass, where, once was blessed unity.

If we turn, as the Dean did, from the abstract to concrete facts, his statements are equally shallow, unintelligent, and unfounded; as is the case with all rationalists, even of experts in Hebrew and Greek; which learning has little or nothing to do with their novel criticism. The command to Noah of one pair of animals is contrasted with another to take seven pairs of the clean: the first as by God's command; the second as Jehovah's, with corresponding differences in each case. "In this way we discover that two early accounts! written by writers of a different style!! have been welded together by the final author of the Book of Genesis!!!"

So this is his first sample of the revolutionary criticism, of "the science of literary and historical investigation!" It is a mere dream of imagination playing on the surface of facts and words, without the least understanding of the truth which the Divine Author was giving through its writer. Elohim is "God" in His sovereign dealing, as of creation. Jehovah is "the LORD," in His unfolding special relationship. Is not this incontestably true in both respects? Let then men search the Scripture and believe as they ought; or, if they venture to deny it, proclaim

their wilful ignorance. For this explains the case to the honour of God, the unity of the writer, and the profit of the reader. And the difference of the names is not only accurate but indispensable without a circumlocution beneath a revelation. This too gives occasion to the beautiful differences which accompany divine wisdom. How absurd to conceive that “writers of a different style” are required, “welded together by the final author!” Yet the Dean is modest in imagining only three; for even Dr. Driver exceeds, and he is far from keeping pace with his German leaders in their crusade against this Holy Scripture as given through Moses, if we truly own the Lord Jesus. Take one verse (Gen. 7:16) to squash the bubble: “As God commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.” Two writers! because as “Elohim” care of male and female animals is expressed, while the special concern as “Jehovah” appears to shut Noah in. And the third tacked the two into his patch-work without a single ray of light, and not even an idea! What a whimsical scheme!

The same principle applies still more manifestly to Gen. 1 - 2:3 as compared with Gen. 2:4-25. Let us consider it. The chapters are not two differing accounts, but two aspects of the same revelation; as to which historical investigation, no less than science, or this new and absurd pretension to “the science of literary and historical investigation,” claims new light beyond our Lord and His apostles. Now chap. 2 has no reference to creation save in ver. 4, the transition link with the relations established among His creatures by Him, who therefore is spoken of accurately and necessarily, not as Elohim, but Jehovah Elohim. Accordingly we have none of the general details of creation, so minutely given in

chap. 1, but new matter in chap. 2 of what bears on man for special relationship, morally rather than as head of creation. Here only we learn that Jehovah Elohim formed man of dust of the ground like other animals, but, unlike any, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Others had the breath of life by creative will physically; man alone by Jehovah Elohim's inbreathing, the cause of his soul's immortality (for good or for ill unspeakable), whilst life perished for others with their bodies. He only of earth has direct moral responsibility, and must in resurrection give account to God, as other scriptures prove.

Therefore it is that chap. 2, not chap. 1, tells us of the garden or park which Jehovah planted in Eden, where He put the man He had formed, not only stocked with beauty and beneficence for the being in relationship with Himself, but having in its midst the tree with peculiar privilege, and another tree to test his obedience, the first man's responsibility. All this was not, nor could be, in chap. 1, but properly and only where Jehovah Elohim gave the keynote; not the creator God as such, but also the personal name, the moral Governor who in due time revealed it in His covenant with Israel: a fact of the profoundest interest and import to the only nation as such brought into relationship with Him of old as their God, the sole living and true God.

Without pretending to explain every other detail, we may all discern that only to chap. 2 falls the beautiful moral ground on which Jehovah Elohim acted in making him a helpmeet, his counterpart, separately and subsequently out of himself, after allowing man the remarkable title to give each living soul of the lower creation its name, as pertaining to their sovereign: a

striking refutation of another Dean's ridiculous and unbelieving dream that man learnt to talk gradually from the chirpings of birds and the cries of beasts. But woman alone was built by Jehovah Elohim out of man's rib for their special relationship, and therefore appropriately recorded here, and not in chap. 1. Does not this commend itself to every purged conscience and true heart? Does not the bearing of the chapter, and especially when both are compared, convict not of error alone but of sceptical sin those carried away by the scheme of Elohistic and Jehovistic fragments and one knows not how many more redactors German ingenuity feels it necessary to invent in order to eke out these idle unmeaning dreams? Let the self-applauding "higher critics" remember that they too must give account to the Lord of glory, Who with His apostles and prophets vouches for the Bible's authority, as well as its genuineness and authenticity.

The fatuous and unspiritual hypothesis of Astruc yields nothing but Dead Sea fruit or even worse. The respective distinction of God's creation, and of the relationships laid down by Jehovah, is of great interest and importance, quite sacrificed by these would-be sages, who leave out God as the author, and deny Moses as His instrument.

What might help to show the untenableness of the theory is that the same distinction pervades all Scripture. Take the Psalms, where none of their fragments can apply: the difference of Elohim and Jehovah is conspicuous there throughout (and marked particularly in the first and second books); as expressive of what we have seen in Genesis, as exclusive of what the neologians say. Take again Jonah as a clear example

of the same truth as against the fancies of these unconscionable critics, if critics they deserve to be called; for they really are free-thinkers.

The N.T. in its own blessed way presents the corresponding difference in “God” and “Father;” for this last, and not Jehovah, expresses the Christian relationship. Compare John 4:21-24; as indeed it is true and plain from the Gospel of Matthew to the end of Revelation in its own peculiar way.

The function of a sound and Christian critic is to detect and cast out every slip, or what is worse, any quasi-correction, which crept into the original text through the copyists. In the O.T. this is chiefly in names and dates. In the N.T. are more serious additions, as in Acts 8:37, Acts 9:3, 4 (from elsewhere only), 1 John 5:7, 8; and omissions, as in 1 Cor. 9:20, 1 John 2:23. But though these and the like have their importance, especially for those jealous for God’s word to the minutest degree, as believing in its plenary inspiration, they affect most slightly the reliable and blessed testimony of God in the Scriptures. And the most ample grounds are in general extant to convince any upright mind, whatever may be the case. True criticism goes on the ground of faith in God’s authoritative and certain written testimony to man; the soi-disant “higher” believes in no inspired deposit in the Pentateuch, etc., in the Psalms, or in the Prophets, according to the measure of their incredulity. And this ungodliness cannot stop there, but will at length undermine the N.T., Christianity, and Christ Himself for themselves and their admirers.

W. K.

Rationalism - 1 Cor. 2:6-16

It is not my business at this or any time to weaken the place of reason as given of God to man. It is an instrument fine, active, admirable, in its own sphere. Rationalism is the abuse of reason, by no means necessarily its result. Rationalism is reason intruding into the sphere of God and His revelation, so as in effect, if not openly, to deny both. It is this that I shall seek to combat, and this above all, not so much by exposing, as might be easily done, the folly of its course, and the danger of its issues, but as much as possible by the presentation of the truth. Now Rationalism does not pretend to the truth; on the contrary its constant aim is to render the acquisition of truth an uncertain thing. It would thus plunge man back again into that very darkness from which the revelation of God was given to bring him out.

The apostle, in the passage just now read, touches on the root of this snare for the spirit of man; and the same principle, it is needless to say, is found almost everywhere in Scripture. The very fact of there being a Bible is of itself the witness against man’s self-assertion, for the Bible throughout assumes that it is the word of God, — not merely that there is an element of God in its pages, which reason has to discover and separate from the human elements that surround it. It is not so that God teaches or intimates or allows in any part of His word.

Happily too we stand at such an epoch in the revelation of God to man that we can bring in what all but an open infidel must acknowledge to be a most decisive

authority. I am not now alluding to the assumptions of men, whoever they may be. I allude to the holiest and humblest of those born of woman, — to One who was man as truly as ever there was one, but to One who counted it not robbery to be equal with God. The authority of the Lord Jesus Christ ought at least to be definitive; and He, the Lord, has spoken not once only, for whenever He employs the word of God at all He makes it the ultimate authority from which there is no appeal. He guards it so fully as to exclude the notion that there might be that in the word of God which betrayed the infirmity of the earthen vessels His grace employed. Though man wrote, it is never styled the word of man, but God's word: yet He used human instruments; but these, the instruments, were so inspired of God as to display and to preserve their own distinctive features, whilst they perfectly furnished God's truth and only this. Such was in part the wisdom of God in inspiration. It did not set aside man, but it brought in God, and this with invariable perfectness: to bring Him in partially would have been to introduce the old element of difficulty and uncertainty.

That such is the fact cannot be denied by any soul that receives the words of the Lord Jesus as they are given by His disciples; and it is quite certain that He always speaks as one who gives us the words of God, and that He promised His followers the power of the Holy Ghost in order that they should communicate the word of God, one of these chief followers, no doubt ignorant of Jesus in the days of His flesh, nevertheless as to labours not only in word but in deed not a whit behind the chiefest, being the great apostle Paul. (John 3:34, John 7:16, John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3; 2 Peter 3:15, 16.)

Let us for a moment consider the gravity of this fact. I cannot allow you to take the ground of owning how good, how lowly, how perfect was Jesus, and then to cavil at His words. I know that Rationalism does so. May I be permitted to say that it exposes its folly in so doing? There is nothing more offensive than to talk in a patronizing way of the Lord Jesus, — to own the unsullied integrity of the Saviour, and at the same time to deny the inevitable conclusion which follows from His words and from His ways. I am aware that it is the fashion of some to insinuate that the Lord Jesus was not above the prejudices of His day — that He shared in the notions of the Jews. Can those who say so believe that He was and is God? Has God prejudices? Does He not move above the thoughts of the day of man on the earth? Now the Lord Jesus has committed Himself throughout the whole course of His ministry to the most simple, distinct, reiterated utterances on a subject which yields to no other in vital moment, — which concerns you, — which concerns each child of man, — which does not concern the believer only but the unbeliever, — for which every soul must give account to God. Impossible therefore to find anything that touches one more practically, more immediately, or more solemnly.

All through we have the Lord Jesus, first in a general way, next also in the smallest detail, in joy, in sorrow, in what concerned others, in what concerned Himself, in life, in death itself, at all times and under all circumstances, showing us His estimate — God’s estimate — of the Scripture, the written word of God. And this came out in a remarkable way, and at a time when even those who freely handle Scripture, and in

anything but a becoming spirit, must acknowledge it to be decisive; for there are those who would insinuate that our Lord Jesus “in the days of His flesh” was not above the possibility of being affected by the passing opinions of the age.

But will they say so of Him risen from the dead? Is it come to this, that resurrection itself does not deliver — nay, not even Jesus — from that which belongs to a world where sense and the workings of mind, and tradition may no doubt cast their chequering influences on man’s mind and expression? I again ask, Is it so in the resurrection state for any? Assuredly we have the Lord risen from the dead; we have His words; we have one of the sweetest and most deeply interesting scenes of converse between the Lord and those who loved Him, when tried immensely by His death. Why? They understood not the Scriptures. And the Lord meets them where they were. What is the weapon that He uses? He, if any one, might surely have spoken out of His own unfathomable depths of mind, — might have opened those rich and mighty streams of divine truth that could and would have burst from His heart to roll away the difficulties of those that clung to Him, cast down by the very cross wherein He was accomplishing their redemption. But no, our Lord takes up the Scriptures — the plain written word of God.

He begins with Moses; He quotes the Psalms; He points to the prophets — the well known threefold division of the Old Testament. I refer to this, because it proves in the most decisive way that the difficulties of speculation, on which so many have stranded are in fact their prejudices — that they are the passing clouds of this day, not the truth of God. It is false, yea blasphemous, that

the Lord, the eternal Creator, yielded to the prejudices of His day, but true that the men who thus object are carried away by the irreverent thoughts of their day. He does indeed stamp with His own divine authority the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible. He gives it to us just as it was then known among the Jews.

Undoubtedly too the Jews had passed through deep trials and great changes at that time. Then, if ever, the Old Testament Scriptures must have suffered somewhat from transmission. Impossible, save by the most immediate care of God, that the transcription of the Hebrew Scriptures should have quite escaped damage during such a fearful crisis as Israel had experienced. Up to this date, you must remember, they had been as a whole translated into but one language besides the original Hebrew. For although obviously the diffusion of God’s word into a number of different tongues may act in each to admit of the mixture of man’s infirmity in the translation, nevertheless the comparison of these different tongues tells just in a contrary way. The result is that, where these various versions made at different times by so many distinct parties agree, his must be a singularly constituted mind which can get rid of the force derived from such united testimony. Now, at this very time, when our Lord employed Moses and the Psalms and the prophets as witnesses, there was not nor could be that wide-spread testimony which is derived from the Scriptures being diffused all over the world; it was after much had occurred calculated to ruffle the surface of the word of God, but before there was the counteracting power of one translation checking another in detail, yet in the mass conspiring to guard the revealed truth of God.

Neither is this subject to be considered simply in a broad point of view, but in practical application. For example, take our Lord in either His ordinary ways or the most extraordinary passages of His life. It is always the same weapon He uses. Regarded with Satan, in the scene of the temptation in the wilderness, the word of God is the one means of repelling him; and even Satan did not venture at that day on the expedient of the present — the insinuation that the divine authority of the Scripture is compromised by errors in copying, by the difficulties of preserving it intact, or the like. There was a plain issue between the enemy and the Saviour; but all depended on obedience, on meeting him by constant faith in the word of God. Then again, in the course of His ministry as of His daily walk, the continual reference is to the Scripture as the arbiter of every doubt or controversy that could be raised — the true, the divine, and the only solution of every enigma in this dark world.

I have referred to these applications of a practical kind, in the first instance, but we may take the general principle into consideration for a few moments, in order to show how admirably revelation meets the wants of man and the glory of God.

God did not make man in the condition in which he is now; He did not throw the world into its moral confusion, not to speak of its physical misery. He that can conceive a divine being to have made man as he is, and the world as it is, must have the notion of a demon, an Ahriman, instead of the true God. That infinite power should create man to be the victim of such sorrow, to have his heart distracted with varied, intense, and ceaseless misery — to have, according to the word of

God itself, evil inbred in his very nature (a doctrine enforced by the facts of every day), he that could conceive God to have so made man in such a world has the least worthy notion of God that even Rationalism could conceive. The word of God alone supplies the key, and explains this otherwise inscrutable riddle. According to that word He made man upright; the world and every creature in it He formed good; but man departed from God, and lost Him morally. No wonder, if foundations are out of course — God left and man fallen through self-exalting rebellion, that there should be misery; for the only possible spring of happiness is in the communion of God with His creatures. Sin necessarily destroys it; and man having lost Him becomes a prey to all the evil that the enemy of God can bring into the world, more deeply and if possible irreparably, to sever man from God. This is the account of the Scriptures, and there is none other that can compete with it or explain all, so as either to justify God or to clear up the state of man. To make God Himself the author of man's moral evil is heinous wickedness, and man's conscience knows it, even when he might wish it to excuse himself. Here then at the outset the immense and singular value of God's word comes in; and upon this too a remark of general import may be seasonable.

I say "God's word," — not at first "Scripture," but God's word; for His word was spoken before it was written. Then as ever the word of God became the sole link with God of man departed from Him. Sin had broken the relationship between the Creator and the creature. The word of God meets man even so through the revelation of another; for man had no sooner fallen into sin than God appeared upon the scene, and pledged, not Himself

as such, but in the most tender way the Seed of the woman as the conqueror of him that had brought in the evil — the bruiser of the serpent's head. That word of God became the resource, if not yet the resting-place, of faith. It might have other words added in due time; but that first pledge of grace was enough for faith to receive, and find in it the spring of a new nature by looking to the Seed of the woman — the Lord Jesus Christ. The word of God is revealed before there can and in order that there may be a blessing for man — a blessing for man fallen from God.

At that time the circumstances wherewith to prove divine wisdom and goodness were unlike what we know as our own. The length of man's life on the earth was enormous. It did not reach, it is true, that space to which man is yet destined even on earth. Man will never arrive at his proper and full measure here below, till the Second Man comes to take the world under His government. Complete blessing for man in the world is reserved for the woman's Seed — for Jesus. Still, the life of man was only short of the due period of its ultimate display (though even then dissolution may not be). It never reached a thousand years, — all but a thousand years, we may say in general terms, but never so much. This will be the common term for man ere long; but it is reserved not for his witty inventions — for no panacea that he will discover; it will be the honour of God for Jesus, and for Him even with man here below. At that day we can well understand therefore how fitly the word of God was not yet committed to writing; but in due time, when man's age was shortened, and it was no longer individuals with whom God had suited dealings in grace, but when a people was called out, we see the

perfect wisdom of God in then committing His word to writing.

This as a whole was called the law, contained in its great foundation in the Old Testament, — of course generally, but more particularly in the five books of Moses — not without a most remarkable companion, the book of Job, the witness of what God is to a man, to one outside, and not merely to a Jew. And, wonderful to say, the Jew, ignorant of this priceless and peculiar treasure, is nevertheless the very channel to which we are indebted for its transmission to us. He does not see that his narrowness is rebuked by it; he does not perceive how God's mercy to the stranger is assumed and indeed asserted in it; he does not conclude that He who was the God of Israel is the God who had compassion for man in his need and wretchedness, the sport of Satan's power, but always under the mighty hand of God, who accomplishes His own sifting and gracious purpose — a purpose decided on before Satan tempts — a purpose which Satan only consummates in attempting to hinder, corrupt, and destroy.

Moses is followed by a multitude of other testimonies in due time. It is of this collection of writings called the Scripture that our Lord speaks, and it was from this that He borrowed from time to time as occasion called for it. But, when or for whatsoever end cited, even He constantly used it as decisive authority. Thus we have the principle laid down in the question with the Jew which the fifth chapter of John's gospel presents to us. There Christ justifies the judgment which is coming by the weight and variety of the evidence addressed to their conscience. There was first the Baptist whom the Jews acknowledged for a prophet. There was next a

greater witness in the works that Jesus did — His miracles — never before approached in magnitude or in character; for the works of Jesus had a speciality in their import, and not merely in their grandeur. Then again the Father Himself bore witness of Jesus up to that time. But the Lord reserves for the last place, and therefore the greatest of all morally — what? His words? Nay, but the writings — of whom? Of the very man who, if this century is to be listened to, has written none of these books called by his name — at most but scanty legends made up many centuries after into that which is styled the law of Moses. Not such is the language of the Lord of glory. HE has commended, used, and reasoned on the books of Moses as in point of authority possessed of a character superior to any words that could be spoken. This is a point of capital importance. He censures the Jews for slighting rather than believing Moses, and decides that, if they did not believe the writings of Moses, it was in vain to expect their believing His words. This does not at all imply that the writings of Moses in themselves were more simply, or thoroughly, or characteristically divine than the words of Jesus: God forbid such a thought! But it is Jesus Himself who sets the writings of Moses, as a medium of authority, in a place which no spoken words could have. Who can deny that this is the doctrine of John 5? Can any man bring any other conclusion in fairness from it ?

The words are plain: and here is another point to which I may address myself for a moment. Men talk about the “obscurity” of Scripture. It is not for me to doubt that Scripture must be profound; it cannot be that that which is the revelation of God should not be incomparably above man. But is it therefore obscure? Certainly not in

the sense of that vague and dark uncertainty from which men suffer who are conscious of their own weakness. I can understand a person with a dense cloud of words, just because he has little matter. I can understand one that, perhaps without even intending it, thus involves himself, just because his thought is anything but clear; but the reverse is true as to Scripture. Not only did God see all things as they really are, but He would convey the truth (for this was the object of revelation) in the manner most suited to man, and nevertheless by the instruments whom it best suited His glory to use at one time, whether in the Old Testament or in the New. This He has done. He has not in any way shut out the style, the manner, the heart, the character of each man inspired to write. All these things are impressed upon the Scriptures. Particular authors have their own way and tone. This is one of the great beauties of revelation — the vast variety of those that were employed. But then the main distinguishing feature which Rationalism denies is, that it is the word of God — the chosen, the appropriate, the specific name of Scripture.

On the other hand I grant you that there are those who would apply the term “Word of God” exclusively to Jesus. It is true that Jesus is the Word of God. Thus the link between Jesus and the Scripture is immensely close and characteristic. I make this remark because, as is so often found, these oppositions will be proved to have a link which reconciles them. It is true on its own warrant that Scripture is called the word of God; it is true that Jesus is called the Word of God; but it is true that Scripture is the word of God emphatically, because God has continually before Him Jesus as the object of that written word. He is the personal Word of God from all

eternity; Scripture is the written word of God in time, but then having its link of connection in this — that the thread, so to speak, which unites all Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is the reference of the Holy Ghost directly or indirectly to Jesus Christ the Lord.

Now why is this? For a reason of the deepest import; and, as being of a general character, we may glance at it for a moment. Jesus is THE TRUTH. The truth is to be found nowhere else. You may find other things, but the truth is in Him, and severed from Him it is nowhere else. It is remarkable that Scripture never calls the Father the truth, nor ever uses an expression of which Rationalism is exceedingly fond — that God is the truth. I grant that not a few divines say so too. They are not aware that they are rationalizing when they thus speak. No doubt they mean nothing wrong; but very surely they are wrong. Scripture is right, and nothing but Scripture is divinely authoritative. How comes it then that Scripture calls Jesus the truth ? and why is it that neither God nor the Father is ever said to be the truth? The reason is this: God could not be said to be the truth because “the truth” means the expression of what a person or thing, is — the revelation of what it really is. The statement which reveals another fully and truly is the truth. Consequently God, being the self-subsisting One who alone can say I AM, has been pleased to reveal Himself, not in the written word only, but in and by One who is God and became man, and thus alone could be the expression of Himself to man. The truth means the expression of what God is, not merely the being of God. Hence the blessedness of revelation by the personal Word, the Son who when none saw God at any time

declared Him the Father. Christ is called therefore in Scripture “the image of the invisible God.”

Do you know why it is that rationalists lean to and employ the expression that God is the truth, while they shrink back from the declaration of Scripture that Christ is the truth? Because they assume the ability to know God directly and immediately themselves, — because they instinctively if not formally exclude a mediator. The system maintains that man is competent to search out God without another, without a revelation, without a personal expression of Him. Such is its fatal vice. It may not be carried out to the same extent in all: piety, reverence, tradition may arrest its full conclusions. But if Rationalism be regarded in its principle, and consistently carried out to its last logical results, there is the absolute exclusion of the truth as revealed in the person of Christ. It is the assertion either of man’s ability to know God without any means except his own mind, or it sinks into sheer despair. Thus when carried out it always tends either towards the Pantheistic idea of man being a part of God, or to the atheism that denies the God he cannot thus know. Such is the philosophy of the day in various forms.

But the truth cuts up the principle by the roots. Christ is the only One who objectively presents the truth — that truth which was revealed in the words of Scripture; for here was just the difficulty. The creature, as such, cannot of himself know God. It is impossible for one that has merely a relative being to know the absolute. There is necessarily an infinite distance between God the Creator as such and the creature as such; still more, when the opposition of sin enters the account, and makes it not merely a difference in nature, but a moral

gulf which separates. And how then is this immeasurable gap between God and the creature, severed withal by sin, to be met? How is the vast distance to be filled up? By One who can come down from God to man, — by One who, deigning to humble Himself in love, does not merely bring Godhead into contact with humanity, but comes down to be a man in the midst of men. In this is seen what orthodoxy most justly insists on (and it cannot be too much insisted on), — the grand fundamental truth which lies at the bottom of all truth from God and of all hope for man, — that the same blessed person is as truly God as man, as truly man as God. For on one side we have One who is in Himself absolute (He is God); on the other side none the less does He come down into relationship with man (He is man), — One who, if He were not man, could not make God known to man, but One who, if He had only remained God, could not have bridged the space between God and man. But becoming man without ceasing to be God, and uniting God and man in the same person, He is just the one to give us the truth as it could not be otherwise known. The Father remains in His own unapproachable Godhead; He does not become relative. It is the Son, the man Christ Jesus, who becomes the Mediator between God and man.

But then this is not the only want of man; because the heart of man still rebels, and no matter what the love, the goodness, and the truth which God reveals in Christ, no matter what the need, the misery, the sense of guilt in man; neither the grace that is on the one side, nor the abject evil and wretchedness on the other, of themselves can bring men to God; — in truth, if this were all, they fail to overcome the resistance that the carnal mind

makes to God. And how then is this difficulty vanquished? By another great fact in the divine nature, clearly set forth in the word of God. Not only is there One who is the truth objectively, even Jesus, but there is One who has the power of bringing the truth in grace into the heart of man, in virtue of God's counsels, and of Christ's redemption, communicating a wholly new nature. Who, what, is He? The Spirit. Hence it is said in 1 John 5:6, that the Spirit is the truth. It is said of the Holy Ghost no less than of the Son — of the Son because He brings the truth in His own person; of the Spirit because He makes that truth my own. The Spirit is the immediate link by bringing the written word and mixing it with faith in those who hear it. Such is the way in which God settles the matter, and there is nothing that shows divine wisdom and grace in a manner more blessedly distinct. Let me ask too, who can complain of lack of clearness even when we listen to the most abstract truth? It would be hard to find any communications made with greater simplicity throughout the compass of the revealed word of God. Yet here we are touching on the highest truth — the very nature of God Himself; here we are touching on the deepest wants of man: nevertheless what can be plainer?

It is well to state another fact. The reason why the word of God is not understood by man is not from any obscurity in the word, but from the will — the alienated condition of man's own nature as departed from God. The truth is that the word of God is too plain for him. There is the real fault, if man only realized what the true difficulty is, — and you will find it true continually. I grant you this: there are cases where an honest doubt

exhibits more working of conscience than a mere traditional faith. A man who merely accepts things generally received because they are so believes man, not God, and under pressure will give all up. He got what he calls his faith easily, and the day hastens when he will part with it easily: it has never sunk down — never been planted of God in his soul. When you are in earnest about a thing, you do not so readily believe what is said. If you don't care the least about it, you may believe anything, and you may deny anything. Easy going and otiose faith is mere indifference.

A person tells you a story: well, you feel no particular interest in it, and you answer, "I suppose so;" you are not in a position to confront the informant with a counterproof, even if it seem suspicious. You let it pass. It may be so. What does this prove? Simply that your heart is not concerned in the matter. But a person tells you that a large fortune was left you a month ago in France, and at once you turn round. Why so? Because you are interested in the thing. You say, No, you cannot believe it is so; you have no relatives there; and you demand full proof. In this you are interested, though the effect of the interest is that you seem obliged to doubt the tale. You would like it to be true, but still you have serious difficulties. It is just so when persons are interested in the testimony of the word of God. Indeed it is so when the Spirit of God has so far met the heart's indisposition to receive the blessing of God that it really desires what scripture says to be true. Then men enquire, believe with the heart, and are saved.

But the real ground why man fights against the word of God is because it slights and judges man as he is, laying bare all his faults. There is nothing that man likes so

little as his own exposure; there is nothing he will fight more keenly for than to show he is not in the wrong. I grant you that when a man is abandoned to all that is evil, — when utterly unjust, he knows not even shame, and may allow anything to be said without feeling about it; but I am now supposing men in their ordinary state, when the last thing a man will honestly allow is that he is quite wrong.

As a whole Scripture necessarily directs itself to this, — yea, the word of God before it was written, — for there never was a word of God bearing on man's estate, since the fall, without that effect. There was a word given of old meant to be the rule of conduct in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; they might eat anything else; but this was forbidden. They eat, and fell; but there never was any word revealed to be the resting-place of faith except what prostrates the first man and exalts the Second, thus laying bare man as he is fallen from God, but bringing in the Second Man, the Lord Jesus, as the only deliverer.

This then is the great difficulty for man in Scripture. Every part of it tends to a moral end. It is not merely a book that contains truth, but it has this moral character, dealing with the nature of man, and letting in the will of God. All Scripture speaks thus. There is not a single portion of Scripture which has not moral elements in it. If God were only giving a genealogy, He does not separate the truth even from what looks to be a list of dry names. Take, for instance, the first chapter of Matthew. You know, I dare say, that rationalists will have it that Matthew could not even count fourteen right; and as for Scripture facts, according to their sage

conclusion, the apostolic writer did not know as much as a Sunday scholar. So much for the discernment and wisdom of men. Do you think they believe it? Perhaps so; I will not dispute that matter; but at any rate, whether they are satisfied with their own statements or not, I must affirm that this chapter — and I am speaking now of its list of names, which is the driest part of it, as men would say — bears the stamp of God upon it as truly, though not so evidently, as John 17. It is clothed with a deep divine purpose in every particular. Who but God would have thought if it were only of his beginning with David and Abraham, and bringing these two capital points together from the very first? Why not trace up to Adam, like Luke? No; David and Abraham alone were right in Matthew. If Luke had either begun with Abraham and David or ended with them, there would have been no such perfection in the Spirit's design by him as there is now.

For what am I using these facts? To show that all Scripture is instinct with a purpose of the deepest wisdom, and moral power, and divine grace. Whose purpose was it? Am I contending that Matthew knew all this? Perhaps he did not. It is nothing at all to our present question whether he did or did not. The great thing for you and for me is this, that it was God's purpose, — that it was a wisdom above Matthew's; and yet it is such that, though extant from the first in the word of God, how many of us have passed it over, how few have even noticed it! Why? Because we so little enter into His hidden wisdom. But there it is; and it is just the fact as to Scripture, that not the most enlightened teacher or glowing preacher who ever spoke put a single beauty into it; he only helps you to

see the beauty that is there. This serves to show by the way that true ministry is in no way weakened by the assertion of the divine authority of Scripture. Neither again is the authority of the church weakened by it.

On the contrary, it is Scripture which gives the church authority; as it is Scripture which furnishes the great store of materials for ministry. At the same time here is the essential difference: ministry is not an ultimate authority in itself. In fact it is not properly authority: the idea of ministry is serving, even if it were the exercise of the gift of rule. For I grant that there are among those that minister such as rule. My advice to those that rule, if I may be allowed to offer any, is to do that work with firmness, however lowlily, as much as anything else. Rule is no less divine a gift for ministry than preaching and teaching. It is well, no doubt, to take care that they are rulers of the Lord’s giving before they enter on that grave task. But, however -this may be, what I want to show is, that Scripture, so far from interfering with or weakening whatever is good and of God, not only furnishes the finest and most abundant material for the use of those who are serving the Lord, but has another use yet more distinctive — indeed unique. Scripture is not merely a source of truth, an infinitely richer source than all other mines of spiritual lore in the world put together, but it gives you pure truth without error on every subject of which it treats. Not that it talks the science of the nineteenth century: and there is just the wisdom of God. Neither does it talk the science of the first century, or of any other. It stands alone with a wholly different origin, nature, character, and aim. Confessedly the language of science has often changed; it has often had to mend, just because it is imperfect, as

it is human. But there is the word of God, which, while it condescends to the humblest, never changes for the highest. It is the expression of the unchangeable One; it is the permanent communication of truth, and for all souls, places, and times. There is nothing similar nor even second to it.

But I wish also to show that, while the church, as already referred to, is not and could not be the truth, any more than ministry, Scripture is the truth, as being not only its best source, but its only standard. Such is the blessedness of the Scripture God has given. It is the standard by which we can test every statement that is made by man. There, above all, it writes its own divine character. The written word is the truth even as Christ is. If Christ were not the truth, scripture would not be so in the same way in which it is. Christ personally — the written word as the standard of truth — is the test for everything that can be said or written now, in the hands of all that fear the Lord, whether it be those that minister or those that are ministered to. What an invaluable prize to have the perfect standard of truth, and not only a means of knowledge! This means we may have from one another. A man, woman, child, a tract even, it has been remarked, might be the medium of communicating the truth; but none of these is the standard: only the word of God is. Scripture has this character, and this because throughout Christ is its constant object, directly or indirectly, — Christ who is the truth.

Thus it does not matter what you are looking at, test it at once by Christ. Supposing, for instance, I want to know who and what God is, — how is it to be learned ? I might search out and weigh all the works that point to a

divine mind and hand; but where is the man to gather thence a full, clear, adequate conception of what God is? I answer, look at Christ. What Christ said was the word of God; what Christ showed was the way of God; what Christ wrought was the work of God. I cannot know God Himself except so far as I behold Him in Christ. As the Lord Himself said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” It was not that the Son was in any personal sense the Father, but assuredly He was the only one competent to reveal the Father. No angel would suffice. An angel could only show me a creature. A divine person, the Son, the image of the invisible God, — He lets me know what God is.

Again, supposing I make a totally different inquiry — one which might seem so opposed as to be incompatible with the display of what God is in the same person of Christ — I want to get a true conception of man: where am I to look for it? At you, or myself, or any other? No; I grant you that we are men. But oh! it were sorrowful to think that there was no brighter ideal of humanity, sorrowful to think there had never been any exemplar better than ourselves. But there was, there is. Where? Adam? No; he was man, the first man, it is true; but what I see in Adam is a man that fell, a man that gave up God for an apple. Ah! it is a poor picture of man. I see God acting there for the trial of man’s responsibility; but there is nothing that gives me the true elevation of man in Adam. Let me look at Christ. Ah! there is man. There I find that which my heart loves; there is that which gives me the true nobility and perfection of man; there I can rest.

We might go through all other objects; for it does not matter what is chosen. Thus, suppose I want to know the wickedness of man — surely we cannot find this in

Christ! No; but I must bring in Christ none the less to find its full manifestation in others. Looking at man at any time, no doubt we find evil in abundance. I see man wicked when he fell in Paradise, and no less wicked when he killed his brother outside it; I see man in all corruption and violence till the Lord swept him away; I see man setting up demons and idols before the law, and I see him basely rebellious under the law; but where shall I find man as he is, where at his worst? Not till I see perfect goodness come into the world in the person of Christ. It is always Christ who is the test of every object. He is the truth. Never do we get the truth of anything until we compare it with Christ; and, on the other hand, if we honestly apply Christ, there we have the truth as it never can be found otherwise. All else is but piecemeal. A partial view of man is given at this time, and a partial view at that; but bring in Christ and then man appears as he really is. Christ goes not merely among poor men, but among, the rich; not only before the profane, but before religious people, — Pharisees, Sadducees, Pilate, Herod, or anybody. Thus every soul is put to the test, for Christ is the truth, and Christ only.

Just in the same way must I seek, supposing I want to gain a just idea of what heaven will be. What then is it? A place of gold and precious stones? Nothing of the sort. I know that these are employed as figures of the Bride or the glorified church in the Apocalypse; but it is to me certain that a man who has merely this as his conception of heaven is more a Mahometan than a Christian. All believers ought to know very well that such is not the meaning of the word of God; and God Himself, therefore, gives us divine landmarks that we may not be ignorant when He is using Scripture figuratively, and when He is

using it symbolically. There is no such difficulty as unbelief affects to find. Men do the same thing in principle almost every day, as we meet with in the language of Scripture. Supposing you tell me that you “flew” down the street, we do not suppose that you borrowed wings, yet we know very well what you mean; you are only using a very intelligible and expressive figure. Supposing you tell me that another “crept” down the street, are we to suppose that he went on all fours? Thus, no matter what the figure that is used, there are landmarks by which one may learn whether the thing, is intended in its literal import, or whether it is a strikingly figurative method of stating what is meant. This makes no difficulty at all. It is only uncommonly stupid or uncommonly wilful people who are stumbled by such expressions. If the Bible be accepted as God’s word, He must look for docility, not wilfulness, in those who profess to believe in Him; but He takes account of everybody — the poorest and the lowest; and there is nothing that delights one more in Scripture than the manner in which God has respect even to the child or the feeblest soul imaginable. And Christ is the One who brings it all out. Thus I know what heaven is, because it is the place where God is displaying His own excellence by crowning the man that was rejected from and by the world. It is the place where Christ is glorified, where He is accepted in love, light, and glory, where God Himself puts honour on His Son.

But further, as we learn from Christ what are the elements of heaven, by the very same application of Him, one may know why and how it is that the simplest soul who receives the gospel will be in the nearest circle round the Son of God in the heavens. And another thing

is discovered which otherwise might perplex some — how it is that the amiable, the moral, the benevolent, might nevertheless be lost, instead of going to heaven. How many do not understand this!1 Is not God just? Certainly. How then is it that God should cast into hell a conscientious, benevolent, and kindly person, amiable, refined, all that is delightful in human society? For this simple reason: the test of every soul is Christ; and if the most correct, the most elegant, the most intelligent in every other pursuit, were to turn all those qualities, and make them the reason, as is constantly done, for rejecting Jesus and refusing to be saved as poor sinners, I affirm it to be most righteous with God to condemn them. For they despise His grace.

I press this truth on every soul here: salvation flows from grace; salvation is for the lost; salvation is for those that want it. It is not help merely; salvation is far more than help. When God owned the Jews as His people, He gave them helps, ordinances, priesthood, every moral test, and ritual aid. What was the result? The crucifixion of His Son Jesus Christ. The use of every help in the hands of weak and guilty man ends in the rejection of the Lord of glory; and when man has done his very worst, God, if I may so say, does His very best; for blessed as it was to give Jesus, to send Him on an errand of love into the world, it was still more blessed to give Him to die for His enemies, and to turn that death which was their worst sin into the only door, not of hope only, but of salvation for the poorest of sinners. This is what He has done. This is the truth; and there if not purblind we may see the highest kind of justice too — God’s justice now revealed in the gospel. For it is no longer a question of claiming righteousness from man, as the law

did, but on God's part of revealing it; and this is the precise meaning of the expression that we have all read in Romans 1, 3, 10, to which I would briefly draw your attention, so that you may learn it from God himself in His own word for your soul, — "the righteousness of God."

This is a new kind of righteousness — God's justifying justice, through the redemption that is in Christ our Lord, because of His blood and death. It is the justice of God, who now justifies the unjust by faith of Jesus; it is for lost ones who believe in Jesus, by whom God can afford to reconcile to Himself His enemies. And how? By Jesus Christ. It is His righteousness by Christ's work. This is the truth. Therefore, plainly, it does not matter what you look at, whether salvation or perdition, whether the ground of the rejection of the most moral or the reception of the most depraved, all finds its explanation in this — that God measures everything by Christ. If He is refused, all is lost; if He is accepted, all is changed — old things pass away, all things become new.

How different is God's standard from that of the philosophers, who said that man was the measure of all things! They could not have uttered a greater lie; for I use plain words about a very serious thing, and refuse pleasant compliments where the deepest interests are at stake. I say that the grand standing maxim of the Greek philosophy was a falsehood. Not man but Christ is the measure of all things. He of whom we have been speaking — the Truth — alone truly measures all things. Accordingly this is just the reason why I press it so strongly this day. The word of God is the written form of it — the fully-expressed manner of giving it to us in Scripture. But do you not see one that runs through all

the book — a person that we can and do love above all?2 I can understand valuing, prizing, honouring a book; but we can love a person as even a book cannot be loved. Hence it is that you cannot have real faith in Jesus without love to His person, as He is Himself the full expression of God's love, found nowhere else in perfection. For although there are manifestations of divine bounty and goodness everywhere around us, there is always a sad falling short, and how often moral perplexity and contradiction even for the thoughtful, in this world! There is, no doubt, a beautiful exuberance of life in the spring; but as surely as possible there is the extinction of its leaves and fruits before the winter closes. And so if there be the bloom of man's life, there is more palpably the inroad of decrepitude and death at last. Everything in this world is thus tarnished and spoiled; the reason of which is simply that man is departed from God. But then another Man is gone up to God, and is glorified straightway — not in heaven alone, but in God Himself. And there is the true place to behold man now — in Christ's person. It is not only that we see the true man now, the perfect image of what man is in Christ; but we learn the God-given place of man in heaven at the right hand of God. And Christ is gone to prepare a place for us.

More than this; it is only by looking at Christ that I know the future according to God any: more than the present place of the Christian. The nations are wearying themselves in the very fire for vanity, trying this expedient and that to improve the world. I do not wonder that statesmen have weary heads; I do not wonder that there is constant change and disappointment; for in point of fact it is only man trying

to patch up a thing that cannot be mended. But then here is what God will do. With Him is no patching up, but the bringing in what He calls a new creation. This is what God has in hand. He does not mean alone to bring glory to Himself by taking men up to heaven to be with Christ there, and reign with Him, but also to bless men under Christ's reign on earth. And how does one know this? By bringing Christ into the consideration of man here below. God has promised Christ the earth, and all things; for He did not merely reconcile those that believed, but all things. Consequently it is there we see the triumph of the truth as against all the rationalizing of men. Rationalism merely allows of man's experience whereby to judge all else. According to it man cannot work miracles, and therefore there were none! man cannot prophesy, and therefore there could not be prophecy! Everything in this school is founded on man's little circle of power, knowledge, and experience; but man is far from being the measure of everything, — is, in fact, the measure of nothing. Christ is the measure of all things. Christ is the truth, and that is what I have wished to press on you.

I desire not to protract this lecture beyond a reasonable length. I have tried to bring forward, as opposed to Rationalism, the great distinctive features of the truth in Christ. Men will say as to the word of God, that there is fine poetry in it, wonderful biography, admirable maxims of prudence such as are found nowhere else, and the most profound morality. All most true, but all in vain; for what is the good of grand poetry and true history and the soundest maxims of human life and the deepest insight into the heart, if after all one perishes, as assuredly they must who have not received the truth?

Further, there are none who fall into such perdition as those who go out from the bosom of Christendom. It was bad enough for the Jews to reject Christ; but Christendom is guilty of a worse apostasy from far greater privileges and from the most certain truth. Depend upon it that Rationalism is one of the most powerful currents that is flowing on and carrying down in its stream all who trust it. The Lord deliver from that which can only lure to destruction — deliver from that system which exalts man and lowers the Christ whom it professes to honour, but really rejects as the Truth.

The Lord give all who hear faith to receive Jesus Christ the Son of God, and then to read the word of God as the divine expression of Jesus — the personal Word brought before us in the written word. This will be our safeguard, and we shall need all: it is the divinely given one, specially for the last days. It is not faithful ministers (although I am sure God will have them as long as He is gathering the church from the earth); it is not the church (for itself requires to be secured, and therefore is not the security): the word of God is. It is not even the Spirit Himself, although there cannot be the power of the word without the Spirit: you cannot know the value of Christ the truth unless you have the Spirit the truth. Nevertheless the test of having the Spirit the truth, and of not being a prey to fanaticism, is that the soul is attracted and subject to the Lord Jesus, the Son of God; and this cannot be without faith produced and nourished by the word of God.

Appendix

The following extract from Mr. J. S. Mill on Liberty, chapter 2, will illustrate the utter blindness of the

natural man where Christ is not seen and applied by faith as the embodiment of God's mind and will. Hence the absurdity of concluding that the ideal of Christian morality is negative rather than positive; that in its precepts 'thou shalt not' predominates unduly over 'thou shalt;' that a body of ethical doctrine is only possible by eking it out from the Old Testament (that St. Paul, hostile to this, assumes a pre-existing morality; namely, that of the Greeks and Romans); and that it is a great error to persist in attempting to find in the Christian doctrine that complete rule for our guidance which its author intended it to sanction and enforce, but only partially to provide. How solemn too to see that superstition and infidelity alike bring in law, heathen philosophy, and ecclesiastical development, because they both ignore Christ, who alone gives the written word its fulness of meaning and power of adaptation, as they both set aside practically and even in principle, though not in name, the free action of the Holy Spirit, in order to claim church authority on one side and human liberty on the other. Development is manifestly common to both; for Christ is not seen by either as the Second Man any more than as the last Adam. (1 Cor. 15) The Christian knows Him as setting aside Adam and all the race included in that first man — knows Him as magnifying the law, but withal bringing in perfection which the law did in nothing. Thus He is not only the Second Man, but He is the last Adam. Perfection is in Him only. Progress after Him is a lie; and no lie is of the truth, says St. John. Pretension to a fuller or higher morality is in part that spirit of antichrist which was to come; "and even now already is it in the world."

Mr. M. thus writes: “Before pronouncing what Christian morality is or is not, it would be desirable to decide what is meant by Christian morality. If it means the morality of the New Testament, I wonder that any one who derives his knowledge of this from the book itself can suppose that it was announced or intended as a complete doctrine of morals. The Gospel always refers to a pre-existing morality, and confines its precepts to the particulars in which that morality was to be corrected, or superseded by a wider and higher; expressing itself, moreover, in terms most general, often impossible to be interpreted literally, and possessing rather the impressiveness of poetry or eloquence than the precision of legislation. To extract from it a body of ethical doctrine has never been possible without eking it out from the Old Testament, that is, from a system elaborate indeed, but in many respects barbarous, and intended only for a barbarous people. St. Paul, a declared enemy to this Judaical mode of interpreting the doctrine and filling up the scheme of his Master, equally assumes a pre-existing morality; namely, that of the Greeks and Romans (!); and his advice to Christians is in a great measure a system of accommodation to that; even to the extent of giving an apparent sanction to slavery. What is called Christian, but should rather be termed theological morality, was not the work of Christ or the apostles, but is of much later origin, having been gradually built up by the Catholic church of the first five centuries, and though not implicitly adopted by moderns and Protestants, has been much less modified by them than might have been expected. For the most part indeed they have contented themselves with cutting off the additions which had been made to it in the Middle Ages, each sect supplying the place by fresh additions,

adapted to its own character and tendencies. That mankind owe a great debt to this morality, and to its early teachers, I should be the last person to deny; but I do not scruple to say of it that it is, in many important points, incomplete and one-sided, and that unless ideas and feelings, not sanctioned by it, had contributed to the formation of European life and character, human affairs would have been in a worse condition than they are. [This means, that to the free-thinker's mind mediaeval Christendom has been better for man than the pure and simple Christianity of Christ and His apostles!] Christian morality (so called) has all the characters of a reaction; it is in great part a protest against Paganism. [Quite true; but how does this consist with Paul's assuming the pre-existing morality of the Greeks and Romans? This I should have thought to be in great part an adoption of Paganism, not a protest against it.] Its ideal is negative rather than positive; [Is not Christ its ideal? Is He negative rather than positive? or can blindness be more absolute?] passive rather than active; [What! He who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil? Undoubtedly He was also the Sufferer beyond all, but this seems a small matter to the man who feels not his ruin nor the need of redemption;] innocence rather than nobility; abstinence from evil rather than energetic pursuit of good; in its precepts (as has been well said) 'thou shalt not' predominates unduly over 'thou shalt.' [It is clear that the allegation here is based on the traditions of a guilty judaizing Christendom, not on the teaching of Christ and the apostles, which is and is meant to be the exercise of a new spiritual nature in obedience, righteousness, and love, instead of the mere prohibitions of the law addressed to Israel.] In its horror of sensuality it made

an idol of asceticism, which has been gradually compromised away into one of legality. It holds out the hope of heaven and the threat of hell as the appointed and appropriate motives to a virtuous life, in this falling far below the hope of the ancients, and doing what lies in it to give to human morality an essentially selfish character by disconnecting each man's feeling of duty from the interests of his fellow creatures, except so far as a self-interested inducement is offered to him for consulting them. [The truth is that the gospel alone is right; for it deals with man as a sinner and lost, needing therefore to be saved: this done, it acts on him by the highest motives of known divine grace in Christ to obedience, righteousness, and love. In both its parts how incomparably beyond heathenism, which denies the depths of human need and the heights of God's favour! It does condescend to the real necessities of the sinner, but it lifts him out of his abject wretchedness into fellowship with the Father and the Son: if this be to meet selfishness, it assuredly is to slay it, and replace it with the enjoyment and active power of divine love.] It is essentially a doctrine of passive obedience; it inculcates submission to all authorities found established; who indeed are not to be actively obeyed when they command what religion forbids, but who are not to be resisted, far less rebelled against, for any amount of wrong in themselves. kind while, in the morality of the best Pagan nations, duty to the State holds even a disproportionate place, infringing on the just liberty of the individual; in purely Christian ethics that grand department of duty is scarcely noticed or acknowledged. It is in the Koran, not the New Testament, that we read the maxim, 'A ruler who appoints any man to an office, when there is in his dominions another man better

qualified for it, sins against God and against the State.' What little recognition there is of obligation of laws in modern morality is derived from Greek and Roman sources, not from Christian; as even in the morality of private life, whatever exists of magnanimity, high-mindedness, personal dignity, even the sense of honour, is derived from the purely human, not the religious part of our education, and never could have grown out of a standard of ethics in which the only worth, professedly recognised, is that of obedience. [This last is of God; the "purely human" is Satan's cheat for man far from Him. "My kingdom," answered Jesus to another freethinker, "is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence." Soon the kingdom of the world will be His. The Christian follows Him in both respects.]

"I am as far as any one from pretending that these defects are necessarily inherent in the Christian ethics, in every manner in which it can be conceived, or that the many requisites of a complete moral doctrine which it does not contain, do not admit of being reconciled with it. Far less would I insinuate this of the doctrines and precepts of Christ Himself. I believe that the sayings of Christ are all that I can see any evidence of their having been intended to be; that they are irreconcilable with nothing which a comprehensive morality requires; that everything which is excellent in ethics may be brought within them, with no greater violence to their language than has been done to it by all who have attempted to deduce from them any practical system of conduct whatever. But it is quite consistent with this to believe that they contain, and were meant to contain,

only a part of the truth, that many essential elements of the highest morality are among the things which are not provided for, nor intended to be provided for, in the recorded deliverances of the founder of Christianity, and which have been entirely thrown aside in the system of ethics erected on the basis of those deliverances by the Christian church."

It is vain to speak patronisingly of Christ or Christianity. Either He was the Word (and the Word was God) made flesh, or an impostor. If He is God over all blessed for ever, though He became man to die for man in infinite love, it is folly to argue that His sayings, supplemented by the subsequent teaching of the Spirit, when the disciples could bear all the truth, leave any part either wanting or superfluous. Mr. U. utters only the presumptuous language of unbelief, for which he must surely give account. There is grace with God through that very Christ now: there will be judgment then. May he and my reader be wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus!

"And this being so, I think it a great error to persist in attempting to find in the Christian doctrine that complete rule for our guidance, which its author intended it to sanction and enforce, but only partially to provide. I believe, too, that this narrow theory is becoming a grave practical evil, detracting greatly from the moral training and instruction, which so many well-meaning persons are now at length exerting themselves to promote. I much fear that by attempting to form the mind and feelings on an exclusively religious type, and discarding those secular standards (as for want of a better name they may be called) which heretofore co-existed with, and supplemented the Christian ethics,

receiving some of its spirit, and infusing into it some of theirs, there will result, and is even now resulting, a low, abject, servile type of character, [What! Mr. Mill was CHRIST'S character "low, abject, servile"? This is the Christian's "type of character;" and who can pretend that He derived His morality from Greek and Roman sources — that love, purity, lowliness, and devotedness, at cost of all to God's will and glory which shone in their fulness in Jesus of Nazareth? But no; he that admires the morality of the "secular standards," if he spoke out the truth of his mind and heart, must own his hatred and contempt of Christ's life who came solely to do God's will,] which, submit itself as it may to what it deems the Supreme Will, is incapable of rising to, or sympathizing in, the conception of Supreme Goodness. [Was not Christ the ever obedient one? Was He incapable of rising to, or sympathizing in, the conception of Supreme Goodness? Are we not to walk as He walked?] I believe that other ethics than any which can be evolved from exclusively Christian sources must exist side by side with Christian ethics, to produce the moral regeneration of mankind; and that the Christian system is no exception to the rule, that in an imperfect state of the human mind the interests of truth require a diversity of opinions. [It is clear that a revelation of God, of His truth, is ignored and denied.] It is not necessary that in ceasing to ignore the moral truths not contained in Christianity [such as "honour" i.e. personal pride !] men do ignore any of those which it does contain. Such prejudices, or oversight, when it occurs, is altogether an evil; but it is one from which we cannot hope to be always exempt, and must be regarded as the price paid for an inestimable good. The exclusive pretensions made by a part of the truth to be the whole [which is inevitable to

every man save the instructed Christian, who has learnt to use the fulness we have received in Christ] must and ought to be protested against; and if a reactionary impulse should make the protesters unjust in their turn, this onesidedness, like the other, may be lamented, but must be tolerated. If Christians would teach infidels to be just to Christians, they should themselves be just to infidelity. [This is precisely what the Apostle shows himself, and what every Christian can afford to be; for even the infidel is not without a conscience, and must own that which is amply sufficient to expose the sin and folly of his own infidelity.] It can do truth no service to blink the fact, known to all who have the most ordinary acquaintance with literary history, that a large portion of the noblest and most valuable moral teaching has been the work, not only of men who did not know, but of men who knew and rejected, the Christian faith."

Thus lawlessly writes a man, who, not having seen and believed in the Son of God, has not life and is in darkness, hating the true God whom he knows not, and misrepresenting the Christian morality, which cannot be understood apart from Christ, who is its living model and the sole spring of conformity to it as now made known to the Christian by the Spirit in the power of His own resurrection. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, not to the mere works of innocence which befitted an unfallen Adam, nor to the legal position of a people in the flesh like Israel under Sinai, but unto good works [does this mean honestly "'thou shalt not' predominating unduly over 'thou shalt'"?] which God before prepared that we should walk in them. Undoubtedly in those who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit, the righteous demand

(δικαίωμα) of the law is fulfilled, yet the result is produced by being under grace, and not under the law. For the law works wrath not love, and is the strength of sin, not of holiness. The law is lawful if one use it lawfully; and even Mr. M. ought to be aware of this, still more any one who truly names the name of the Lord, that the law is not made for a righteous man (and surely the Christian should be this and more), but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, etc. Be ought to be aware that the apostle Paul affirms that this is according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, who will judge men ere long by Jesus Christ the Lord. If He will be "just to infidelity," where and how must the infidel be?

1 I am certainly not disposed to defend the system laid down by Sir W. Hamilton and defended by the present Dean of St. Paul's, believing that they have laid themselves open to the not unsuccessful attacks even of men hostile to revealed truth. Yet who that fears God can but shudder at the language of the critic, bolder than man should be in talking of God as set forth in the very imperfect words of those he censures? "If (says Mr. J. S. Mill, in his Examination of Sir W. Hamilton's Philosophy, 2nd edition, pp. 102, 103) instead of the 'glad tidings,' that there exists a being in whom all the excellencies which the highest human mind can conceive, exist in a degree inconceivable to us, I am informed that the world is ruled by a being whose attributes are infinite, but what they are we cannot learn, nor what are the principles of his government, except that 'the highest human morality which we are capable of conceiving' does not sanction them: convince me of it, and I will bear my fate as I may. But when I am

told that I must believe this, and at the same time call this being by the names which express and affirm the highest human morality, I say in plain terms that I will not. Whatever power such a being may have over me, there is one thing which he shall not do: he shall not compel me to worship him. I will call no being good who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow-creatures; and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go." Now it is plain that the principle on which Mr. M., like all other unbelievers, goes, is that of judging the word which will judge him at the last day, when the lost, no less than the saved, when those under the earth, as well as all on it and above it, shall bow every knee, and with every mouth confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Mr. H. must bow: may it not be in perdition!

2 See Appendix.

Kings and Priests

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Kings and Priests

“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9:24-28)

The subject on which I am to speak this afternoon might appear altogether opposed to that of Rationalism, which we had last week; but the opposition is only in appearance. No doubt in the minds and intention of many it is a real antagonism; and far be it from me to doubt that, as godly men have been tinged with somewhat of Rationalism, so on the other hand probably even more have suffered from Ritualism. There can be no question to any upright mind, adequately acquainted with both the word of God and the facts growing out of the present state of thought among the children of God in the world, that there are, carried away in these contrary directions, persons who have a true living knowledge of God through the Lord Jesus. But this proves nothing whatever as to the character of either system in itself. It shows that the children of God themselves have, in the bare fact that they are His children, nothing to preserve them from the snares of the adversary; that, even though they have been born again, in consequence of allowing human thought and feeling they may be swayed in either direction.

Rationalism and Ritualism Distinguished

But further, underneath the seeming opposition of the two systems, there is a link, and consequently often no small sympathy, and will, I have no doubt, afford the enemy of souls power in his own time to blend them together in a union for which neither might be prepared at the present moment. The reason of this lies in the very simple fact, that as Rationalism is a deification of human powers, in which man presumes by his own mind to judge the word of God, and is therefore the infidelity of the intellect when either carried out to its results or

judged in its principle; so on the other hand Ritualism is the infidelity of the imagination, very often with piety underneath it, with a love for the Saviour that may preserve from the full consequences of the system, but in itself always savouring of and tending to idolatry.

Now the power of deliverance, as well as that which makes manifest its real character, is what we may most profitably dwell upon at this time. It is no pleasure to dissect that which is evil. The momentous thing is to supply God's remedy; and as I endeavoured to bear this in mind in speaking of Rationalism, so I shall for the most part restrict myself at this time to that which may, by God's grace, preserve souls from religious infidelity, giving them divine grounds to judge and reject Ritualism in all its fruits as well as its roots.

Gospel Truth Preserves from Rationalism and Ritualism

Thanks be to God, the remedy is not far off; it is nigh us in our mouth and in our heart. The truth of the gospel is the best guard, not against Rationalism alone, but also against Ritualism. It is impossible for a soul that really understands the gospel — I do not mean one that is merely born again, but one that intelligently knows by grace the word of truth, the gospel of salvation — to be dragged into either. There may be persons drawn away for a time into anything; but it is impossible for a person who understands the gospel simply, and who carries its truth really before his soul, and, above all, who has Christ Himself as the object revealed to his heart in love by that gospel, to be left under the snare of either, if indeed to be drawn aside into it at all. I shall show therefore that, if Christians hold fast what God has given

them in the Lord Jesus, and also in that mighty work which Christ has accomplished, and which God now reveals by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, Who makes it known to us more particularly in the New Testament, there is a divine preservative which no power of the enemy can break through.

You will have noticed that in the verses just read we have the Spirit of God showing us the relation of the truth and facts of Christianity to what was really a ritual system — the only ritual that God ever acknowledged. In Israel there was a system of religious shadows, furnished by God Himself. Undoubtedly therefore, if this were all the revelation of God, we ought every one of us to be ritualists. For the believer there can be no question either that God set it up, or that God maintained it by His authority until it had done its work. It was by no means the primitive system, for God took care that promise should be before law and those shadows which in the law were systematized, commonly called the Levitical economy.

Christ Jesus Gives Us the Truth

But the truth of the gospel shows that the Lord Jesus came into the world to give us the truth, which Rationalism, far from having found, confesses that it has not, because it is only in quest of truth — does not profess to know, and even doubts the possibility of knowing. Not only has Christ brought us in Himself the truth for the simplest soul that receives Him, and not only is He in Himself the very same Christ for the simplest as for those who are most spiritual, but, besides that, He has wrought a work, the consequences of which

are infinite and absolutely exclusive of Ritualism and of the ground it assumes.

God has not left us to gather what these consequences are; He has revealed them. He states distinctly some of them in the verses already read. He tells us there that Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands. These holy places belonged to the ritual system of Israel, and they are divinely declared to be “figures of the true.”

Ritualism therefore does not give us the truth any more than Rationalism; it gives us shadows, while Rationalism only leaves men in darkness. It gives us figures of the true, but nothing more. It gives us not the very image, but at best types. Rationalism is a negative and deadly system, gives nothing, and would destroy all. The ritual system according to God did, in an emblematical way and to a certain extent, present the truth which Christ was about to bring in — not the whole of the truth, far from it, nor even any part of it in its fulness.

It is impossible for any one, for any thing, to be an adequate representation of Christ. We must have Christ Himself in order to have the truth. But we are told in this chapter that Christ “obtained eternal redemption.” This He did being lifted up from the earth as a sacrifice. We are told further that He has entered “into heaven itself.” Thus, if everything in Him is a reality, there is none in the condition of the creature as it is, except indeed the sorrowful reality of sin; but, properly speaking, we cannot call sin a reality, except for judgment. It is the alienation of man’s heart from God, self-will, lust, passion, pride, vanity — yea, it is all a lie against the nature that God made. Being a departure

from God Himself to the view of the creature it has, save in its guilt and misery, no right to be called a reality. There was once reality, when God made the heavens and earth, and placed man in the Paradise of delight, when man and all that God surrounded him with was very good but that reality faded when man sinned; and from that day till God displace the world of sin by Jesus Christ our Lord, it is not according to God, but a vain show in the flesh, though in part with shadows of good things to come.

But there is no reality according to God here below; it has become but a wilderness, where there is no way except to faith. Christ came down to it. He is the reality, and He has done a real work for God and man, as we are taught in this very Epistle (and in all the rest, speaking now in a general way). This it is which, received into the heart by faith, brings the sinner out of what he was — out of the lie in which fallen nature lives, or rather is dead — brings him into the truth and the grace of God which are the fruits of love according to His will. God leads the believer into consciousness of relationship with Himself, and thus, while walking through this world, prepares the soul to await another reality, to await heavenly glory, where Christ Himself is gone before, to await too (though not for Himself) this earth to be made worthy of the God Who created it, to be worthy of Him Who has reconciled all things unto Himself by Jesus Christ (Col. 1:20).

Christ Takes the Place of the Figures of Moses

Now the apostle has his soul filled with these truths, and brings them before those to whom he was writing. They also particularly needed it; for they had been

accustomed to a ritual system. It was more important for them than for any others to know whether Christianity was a prolongation of that with which they had been familiar among the Jews, or whether it was an altogether new system — not without a certain preparation of the way for it, not without promises going before, and shadows as we have seen, but in itself wholly new — in contrast with ritualistic Judaism. And this contrast is precisely what the apostle here lets us know: “Christ has not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”

Consequently, we now have all according to God; as there is but one Christ, so but one sacrifice, and, speaking now of what is needful for God and for the deliverance of man from his ruin, we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Consequently, it is shown there is no necessity that “He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others.” Continual repetition was part of the ritual system; and Christianity stands in contrast with it. He has offered Himself once and for ever. Were it necessary to offer Himself repeatedly, He must also often suffer. The two things cannot be separated: for then must He, we read, “often have suffered since the foundation of the world” (Heb. 9:26). The idea of a fresh offering of Christ to God without His fresh suffering is not merely a mistake, but is in direct antagonism to His word and to the foundation of Christianity.

“But now once,” it is said, “in the end of the world” — speaking of the world as the theatre of God’s dealings, not as the mere physical system but the consummation

of the various ages that have been running their course, by which man was put to the proof, and, among other tests, very specially by the ritual system — “But now once” in the end of all the experimental ways with man, “in the end of the ages hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”

Christ Brought God In and Put Sin Out

Thus we find in the Lord Jesus and in His death two grand truths: (1) He came to bring God into the world; (2) He came to put sin out of the world. Rationalism is plainly and certainly ignorant of both; if Ritualism own the first, it assuredly ignores, and in effect denies, the second — i.e., God’s putting away sin by redemption. Far from controverting the incarnation, Ritualism makes much of it for its own ends; but it is very sure that the principle is inconsistent with redemption, save in figure. It is impossible for Ritualism to live in presence of the fundamental truth of the gospel, that Christ suffered to “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” Has He done it or not? Has He failed to do what He came for? Has He indeed, or only once even in figure, “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself?”

That there was accomplished on the cross the sacrifice of Christ Himself not even the ritualists deny; nor does one believe that they mean to deny that He put away sin by His death. We are not now discussing what men would say, but judging what their system means. We are searching what Ritualism really is, as judged by the living word of God. I affirm then that, during God’s maintenance of a ritual system for special and worthy purposes, there was no such thing as a sacrifice that would put away sin before God. There were sacrifices;

but the very opposite was their character and their result, as we are told in Heb. 10:1-3. They brought sin to remembrance. They kept the fact of man's defilement constantly before the eyes of the Jew. It was well that it should be so, being to him a most wholesome lesson as far as it went. It was of God's mercy, and in itself right and good that man should be made to feel his sin till it was put away; and it was not, could not be, then put away. But if I believe the truth of the gospel, sin is put away by Christ's death. Granted that it is, so much the worse for him that does not believe in Christ. The truth and the blessedness of the fact remain for faith; but assuredly it is so much the more terrible for him who substitutes something else for Christ — so much the more fatal, not to the rationalist only, but also to the ritualist.

We must not be deceived by sounds nor by appearances. We are responsible for the truth now, because the truth is revealed. And, let it be observed, that now all is out between God and man without a veil. There was a veil, but it is rent. Mark the time and fact well: when Jesus died, the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom. Has this no significance? Everything has that God reveals; but surely no facts more so than those of the cross. Up to that time man was not in the Divine presence. But God had come down to man. He was here on earth in the person of the Lord Jesus. He that had seen Him, the Son, had seen the Father.

But there was more than this manifestation in the death of Christ. In a certain sense He brought God nigh to the sinner during His life; in His death He brings the believer to God. Do you believe this? If you really receive and act on it, you are not a ritualist. If you

believe that you are brought nigh to God, I ask according to what measure? Use your own weapon, you who love Jesus and know Him; have recourse to your own standard. Never give Christ up; never lose sight of Him as the Truth; never fail to bring Him in, whatever the difficulty, whatever the question. Your vantage-ground is that you have Christ, and that you know it. Therefore do you seek humbly, holily, but believingly, to apply the Christ Whom you have received from God and Whom the Holy Ghost has made known to your soul by the word of God.

Brought Nigh through Christ's Death Not Incarnation

Now you are brought nigh to God, not according to the measure of a Jew, nor even of a Jewish priest, nay, nor even of the Jewish High Priest. You will not say therefore that my doctrine lowers the privileges of a Christian. I am persuaded that there is too often a painful deficiency in the way in which these evil steps of retrogression to Judaism are apt to be met. Mere protest against them is cold and powerless, that is, by the negative process of showing their fallacy here and there. This kind of opposition will never stand in the day either of dark trial or of alluring promise. The heart of man wants something solid; and God would make it sure too. God, according to His own grace, has revealed His own truth, His own power, His own wisdom in Christ the Lord; not merely so, but also in Christ's redemption. And this unique fact is the standing witness and effect of it; the veil is rent.

Ritualism Denies the Rent Veil

It is not merely therefore, that God has come down to me, but that He has consecrated for me a way to Himself — a new and living way through the veil (Heb. 10:19-22). Ritualism denies this; it renews and again insists on the veil. Who gave it such authority? Not God Who tore it down in answer to Christ's cross. What warrants the renewal? It is treason against His word. It is in effect a plain, flagrant, inexcusable denial of the revealed effect of the death of Christ. Let it be again said that I accuse no man among their ranks of an intention to nullify the gospel; but it is impossible for an intelligent Christian not to arraign the system, no matter by whom it may be held — be it by one that you hope to be Christian, be it by one that you are as sure as you can be that he is a Christian. Grant all this, which I do with all my heart: yet a Christian's holding such an error does not make the error less serious, and cannot consecrate what is contrary to Christ.

I maintain then, that Ritualism is a return from Christianity to figure, and that its doctrine and its practice ignore the nearness to God into which the gospel brings the believer by Christ's work. Is not this true according to the plain word of God which you have before you in Heb. 9 and 10? This truth you know I am not wresting; for your consciences cannot evade its force. I appeal to you in the presence of God Whose word you have before you. You might doubt if one were stringing together a cluster of passages which might dazzle or perplex; but I purposely dwell now on a single luminous portion of Holy Writ. One is enough, if there were no others.

But I hope to show briefly that throughout the New Testament since the accomplishment of redemption, the same truth is taught in different forms. It is impossible that the truth of God should be inconsistent with itself. All the scriptures which treat of Christianity are admirably harmonious, their testimony is uniform, and all demonstrate that Ritualism, though not a rejection of Christ's person, is distinctly a virtual denial of the efficacy of Christ's work as now declared in the gospel of God.

A Special Earthly Priesthood Revived

Thus Ritualism has for one of its pillars the assumption that God has still an earthly priesthood. The assertion of a holy caste of ministrants on earth, who draw near to God for the Christian, thoroughly sets aside the gospel of Christ. Remember that it is no question of Christian ministry. I yield to no man in firmness of conviction that ministry is a divine and permanent institution of Christianity. The truth is that Christian ministry and earthly priesthood are antagonistic, instead of being the same thing. For ministry, Christian ministry, is the service by a divine gift, which brings the truth of God to bear on the soul of man. It is a service toward the unconverted, to bring them to God by the gospel, and toward the converted, to instruct them more fully in the truth of the gospel and of the whole counsel of God in Scripture generally.

But earthly priesthood is quite another thing; and so far from its being part of the institutions of the gospel, the attempt to set it up is beyond just doubts the sin of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. 16). For it is the presumption of a man, who might be a Levite or a leader

of the people, to supplant the authority of Moses, and to stand in the place of Aaron, the apostle and the high priest of the Jewish system. It is really a blow struck at Christ's priesthood, as it was against Aaron chiefly that the rebellion of Korah was directed.

The Epistle of Jude (verse 11) will show you that this is no mere fanciful application of a type, which has no bearing on the perils of Christians. Indeed I should scorn to take advantage of those who are but ill versed in the types of Scripture. I dare not use what I did not believe on the fullest examination of Scripture to be the truth, but this, though it is enough for me, will not do for you. I beg you therefore to compare with Numbers and Hebrews what we are told by Jude. We learn there (verse 11) that not merely the way of Cain and the error of Balaam apply now, but also that men are to perish in the gainsaying of Korah. What is this but, since Christianity was revealed, the setting up of men to an earthly priesthood so as to infringe the glory of the Lord Jesus? According to Hebrews He is the true and only Priest in the sense of one that stands between God and our souls.

The Present Christian Priesthood

No doubt there is, in another sense, a priesthood under Christianity; but this only furnishes a further instance that Ritualism is irreconcilable with the Christian's place, as it is a fresh proof of what I have already endeavoured to show, that the power of Christianity is lost where its positiveness is forgotten and men reduce it to a negation of this or that error. There are those who constantly desire to maintain the truth by saying that there are no priests now. I should reverse the matter,

and say, that what the New Testament declares is that all Christians are priests, that is, all who are brought nigh to God. Not that all are ministers of the word; those that minister are the few for the good of the many — of all. No Christian, because he is a Christian, is a minister of the word. Ministry depends not on a man's being a Christian, but on the question whether he has received a distinct power or gift as it is called in Scripture — the gift of the grace of the Lord Jesus, in which he is bound to serve Him whether in the gospel or in the church. Consequently, if we look at Christians, they differ in point of gift. Some are not called to serve the Lord in that way at all; and even those who are called to serve have gifts differing, as the apostle says in Rom. 12:6-8.

When we come to the Christian priesthood, there is one common position for all Christians; and why? Because we are brought nigh to God. The truth of the gospel supposes, not an earthly institution, but that Christians are priests, and that this is the only real priesthood which God now owns, save Christ's on high. Even our Lord Jesus Christ was not a priest upon the earth, and when here He exercised no such functions. This is the direct statement of Scripture. The same Epistle to the Hebrews (chapter 8:4) affirms it: so false in every way is the ritualistic system as applied to Christianity. Even He Who is the foundation-stone of all blessing for man, the life and righteousness and glory of the Christian under the gospel — even He was not a priest as long as He lived on the earth. Lifted up from the earth, He became a sacrifice; ascended to heaven, He entered the sanctuary which the Lord pitched, and not man, and was there, according to the work of God, the great High Priest. And who are the priests? If the Lord Jesus fills

the type of Aaron, and incomparably more, if Aaron was but a feeble shadow of what Christ is as high priest, who are the sons of Aaron? They are those whom He is not ashamed to call His brethren: “Behold I and the children whom God hath given Me.” Who are the children? Christians. He Who sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one, as the same inspired writer tells us in the second chapter of the same Epistle (Heb. 2:11, 13).

Consequently we see how the doctrine of the types exactly agrees with the plain statements of the gospel. For if He suffered once, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God, He has brought us so perfectly that there can be — there is — no priest between us and God save Himself. And the Lord Jesus, so far from keeping us from God, is the very One Who by His death brings us to God, and ever lives to make intercession for us.

Again, this is the present position of the Christian, not merely the future one. When we go to heaven, we shall not cease to be priests. When the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ over the earth comes, we shall not cease to be priests; on the contrary, instead of it being as now a position for faith to enjoy and realize, we shall be displayed as kings and priests; we shall reign with Christ. But the gospel, the truth of the gospel, as revealed in the Epistles, shows that every Christian is in the place of priest now, not in a merely figurative but in a most real way, for there is always a reality according to the gospel. Christianity gives the reality of the truth and grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This may help to show the immense importance of the theme before you. Moreover, it shows how unbelieving is

Ritualism, though in appearance more respectable than Rationalism, not so bold perhaps, certainly more reverent in its postures — if not in its impostures. It may salute with a kiss, it may bow down to Jesus, it may give Him ample honour in word; but judged by Scripture, by the ever-living word of God, its heart is far from Him. Yea, it is no more true worship of the Lord Jesus than when Israel of old, wrought on by Satan's power, dared to liken a calf of gold to Jehovah; for unquestionably the Ritualism of Christendom does not even adhere to the figures of the true. By no means would it be justified if it did restrict itself to ancient shadows of "good things to come": I have already shown that, even if it did, it were not Christian. For Scripture affirms that it is idolatrous for Gentile Christians to consecrate to Christian uses the ritual elements given to the Jews (Gal. 4:9).

The So-called Christian Fathers

In point of fact, however, Ritualism goes much farther; and it is a striking fact, too, not known by everybody, that, in spite of its boasted reference to the old writers that are commonly called the "fathers," it has developed enormously since these days. Take, for instance, its strange millinery with colours more suitable to harlequins or the most fantastic of stageplayers, in which men indulge who call themselves Christ's servants — I beg pardon, Christian priests: do the "fathers" sustain them here? By no means. Not that the "fathers" will ever be to me a standard either of practice or of orthodoxy. I know them too well to admit such a dream for an instant. It may suit such as have never compared them with the word of God; for I own that it is possible to study them deeply, and to be completely

stupefied by them. Indeed, there are few greater wonders to my mind than to see men of sweet affections, and of superior ability and attainment, who yet seem given over to minds void of discernment when they cite the “fathers.” Why they could and do write far better themselves, whenever they follow the word of God; nevertheless they bow down to them, just as a Romanist does before the wafer he worships as his God, or before the virgin whom he trusts to intercede for his soul.

Not less painfully one sees good men whose consciences and minds seem holden, when they are in presence of the musty remains of these ancient writers. But even they never contemplated what has come to pass in our own day; for it is remarkable that they brand as no better than good-for-nothing people those who scarcely went so far as to indulge in gorgeous vestments. Clement of Alexandria, if I recollect aright, treats such symptoms even in the germ as utterly disreputable. The truth seems to be, that the dresses that have long become ecclesiastical were originally merely the dresses of the people of that day. There were vast changes brought in when the barbarians overran and overthrew the Roman empire; and that which used to be merely the civil dress of a Roman became, by an extraordinary turn, the ecclesiastical dress of a so-called “Christian priest.” They had a particular dress for fast days, and another dress for feasts or ordinary days. This is pretty much, I believe, the origin of that which has long been metamorphosed so strangely, but at the same time so singularly abandoned by some pretenders to ecclesiastical antiquity in our own day. But enough of this.

The “Fathers” and the Scriptures

I go back still to the solemn fact already referred to — the connecting-link between Rationalism and Ritualism, and the more so because the connection is apt to be unsuspected.

I remember an incident which may illustrate this a little. A friend of mine who was once travelling to Oxford did not identify for a moment an old university chief who was sitting by him. Many years had elapsed since their separation, nor am I aware that there was any particular acquaintance even in earlier days. They were no longer young, and now they are both gone. The question put to his fellow-passenger by my friend was this: “Pray, sir, can you tell me how the Rationalists are getting on at Oxford?” It was an awkward question to one who was a principal leader of Rationalism; for he was, at any rate in physical science, the most distinguished of the seven who since then attained unenviable notoriety by the “Essays and Reviews.” He was silent for a moment; but I suppose he saw that the questioner’s face did not indicate one who would be disposed to insult another by an unbecoming enquiry — a question which I am persuaded he would not have put if he had recognized Mr -.

(The “Essays and Reviews,” by six clergymen and one layman of the Church of England, were published in 1860, and were condemned by the bishops in Convocation, 1864.)

After a pause the professor answered, “As fast, sir, as the Tractarians will let them.” “What do you mean?” said my friend. “This,” said the other — and it puts the case pithily enough, and is no bad confirmation of what I

have been insisting on already — “The Tractarians say that the fathers are as good as the Scriptures. The Rationalists answer that the Scriptures are no better than the fathers.”

The reply brings the case clearly to an issue, and shows us that under wholly different surfaces — intellectual audacity on the one hand, which dares to speak against the word of God, and on the other hand the outward piety or at any rate the genuflexion of Ritualism — there is really the same root of infidelity at bottom. There is the supplanting of the plain truth of the inspired word. Both get rid of it, depriving, the soul of that which is the only means of a living link between God and man. It does not matter what the means or forms may be, whether the negative process of Rationalism, or the more positive claim of Ritualism: if man comes in — whether it be with his rites or his reasoning — so as to exclude God’s word, or step between its authority and the soul of man, it comes to pretty much the same result in the end.

It remains to show further, as to this, the general teaching of the New Testament. I have confined myself to a particular passage; but, as before, instead of exposing in Ritualism what is crude, painful, and evidently evil, I am willing to take it as it presents and loves to present itself-to take it in its best shape from its ablest defenders. It is always fair, if not obligatory, to do so. The more we have to blame another, the more should we let him put in the best appearance, and have the highest credit that your conscience can admit of. Always set out an adversary in the most favourable light you can; you have no business to be an adversary if your cause will not bear this. Why should you lower another?

Why harbour an exaggerated or uncharitable thought? It is no unkindness nor want of humility, but on the contrary real love — love for God and for His children — to state with all plainness that divine truth which is ruined by Ritualism, ignorant of His nature and of its own opposition to God.

Ritualism is Built on Incarnation Only

As to the doctrine of Ritualism then I am not now about to say a word of excesses in form and practice, and I refuse to dwell on what might be called the abuses of the light-minded people that adopt it. I will not bear hard on the giddy young men and women, or on their guiltier seniors. We must turn to look at the gravest and wisest among those that are its leaders. Now, as asserted by those that are most competent, in its fairest light, this is the essential principle of Ritualism: it does not disbelieve in Jesus as a divine person; far from denying that the Son of God was a man in the world, it takes its stand on the grand truth of the incarnation — a truth I hold to be most precious and essential to Christianity. Incarnation means not only God in the world, but a divine person Who has taken manhood into His person. It is the union of God and man in the same person. Ritualism is an imaginative system, built on the truth of incarnation. It maintains that when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was in this world He brought down all needed blessing — power, goodness, love, truth — to bear upon the souls and bodies of men. It holds that the only way for a man to receive the blessing is by coming in contact with His humanity. But then He died on the cross, and is gone. Ritualism always passes lightly over the grave of Christ, rarely dwelling on it, except as a

weapon for dealing with the affections, or as a display of divine love. This the falsest systems may do, as Socinianism itself. So the Jesuits were always famous preachers of the cross thus far, with warm appeals to fear or feeling.

Ritualism cannot be said to go beyond this, even taking into account those that might be real believers. For I wish to set it in the light in which they would wish it put themselves. They hold then that, when our Lord Jesus departed from this world, the church was that divine system in which the benefits of Christ's incarnation were to be perpetuated for man on the earth; that consequently the church has made this good by her officials or the clergy. We all know that Ritualism is a common belief at the present day, although of course it had its springs before. They hold that by certain persons, in an uninterrupted line from the apostles, who were the personal companions of the Lord Jesus incarnate here below, the benefits of His incarnation are kept up in a given channel, and assured by outward signs or seals, which are the adequate means of conveying the blessings of incarnation to such as submit to them. This is the system. They hold accordingly that any one who disputes this must be a Rationalist, and that this is the difference between an orthodox man and an unorthodox.

Christ's Atoning Death Slighted

But in fact it is the Ritualists themselves who, without any intention to be unorthodox, are really quite opposed to the truth of the gospel according to God's word, their system being incompatible with what God has revealed. For, it will be observed, their principle on its own

showing slights sin, sets aside its judgment, and ignores redemption. On its own theory it is a simple continuation of what was found when the Lord Jesus had not suffered on the cross. The Son was as truly incarnate before He died as after. His sacrifice, His death, His resurrection, are altogether distinct from incarnation, though impossible without it. It is granted freely and cordially that incarnation gave us not only the person of the Son of God, but also the condition of humanity in which He could accomplish redemption. As long as He remained simply divine, there could be no link with man; but when He did become a man, no doubt there according to the blessed will and ways of God was the state of the person Who was to die in atonement. When He was merely incarnate, it was not yet done.

Observe too the consistency of the system, so far as regards its idea of an earthly priesthood, and of sacramental ordinances as the only means of salvation — for this is the doctrine. When our Lord Jesus Christ was here below, when He, the Son, became incarnate, before His death and resurrection, He carefully acknowledged priesthood according to the law — a priesthood vested in Aaron and his sons, which in no way belonged to Himself. And as He respected the Jewish priesthood, so He maintained all the shadows of the law. In other words He threw His own divine weight into the support of the ritual system till the cross closed it. The time was not yet come for God’s grace and glory to displace it. It would have been contrary to God’s mind to have overthrown it then, and the Lord Jesus, in word and deed as in person, was the expression of God and of His ways. Consequently, as long as the Lord was on the earth, we see His adhesion to the temple, feasts,

sacrifices, everything. Nay, in the case of His own person we know it was so from the first, as we find in Luke 2. The Lord observed the times and seasons, and owned fully that earthly system of ritual which God had brought in by Moses.

The Rending of the Veil

But the moment He died on the cross, the whole system in principle disappeared before God. It was dead. The death of Christ sentenced to death the ritual system; it did infinitely more, but it did that. Then, as we have seen, the veil was rent; and it was not man, nor an accident; it was God Who rent it. How could Ritualism subsist with a rent veil? How could it abide for those who had received the Lord Jesus and were by His blood entitled to go straight into the presence of God?

And what a wonderful witness of this truth appears in the converted robber who died by the Lord's side! "To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise." What more unequivocal proof could be that it was not a bare theory, but, on the contrary, it was, as all the truth is, most practical! In fact, it was for the souls of men and the glory of God, for present wants and eternal blessedness. Accordingly, therefore, that converted robber proclaims the falsehood of the ritualistic system.

Dr. Newman and the Converted Robber

(Dr. J. H. Newman was leader of the Oxford Ritualistic Movement, afterwards joined the Church of Rome (1845), and became Cardinal (1879-90).)

I am aware that the ritualists would answer otherwise, and I remember how it was used by one not behind the chief of them — a man no longer, it is true, in the

Protestant ranks of Ritualism, but in Rome, the natural home and necessary end of it all. It was in a sermon intended to act upon his old companions; and something like this was his comment: “Without church or sacrament, without priest, without confession, at once through faith the dying thief received the Saviour and went to heaven.” Many would say, “What admirable doctrine!” Others would add, “How extremes meet! Think of Dr. Newman preaching the doctrine of Plymouth,” the free and full grace of God in the gospel! But not so; it is evil, root and branch: let me tell you why. What he taught is, that the strength of the faith of the converted robber was so great and precious in God’s sight, that He, in consequence of the necessary lack of the church and sacramental channels, was pleased to honour the faith of the man so much as to give him this great indulgence Now I affirm that this is a denial of the Gospel: no man who understood it could teach thus. It is vital error, really leaving out Christ and His work, and making all of what was in the man.

But God forbid that anyone here should go away with the thought that I am pronouncing on the author of this discourse: I would only compare his doctrine with the truth of the gospel; and I do reject that which opposes the gospel, without a word about his own personal condition, of which I know nothing. It is better not to speak of what we do not know; but, as a servant of the Lord Jesus, I do speak of that which He has taught or preached, and I say that it is untrue that God saw such a meritorious value (for this is the doctrine) in the faith of the thief under those circumstances that it counterbalanced the want of church, priest, and sacrament. All such thoughts are simply religious

imagination without the smallest warrant from the word of God. They are not the mind nor the language of faith.

No! what the converted robber does in reality show is the value of Christ and His blood, the present, immediate, everlasting efficacy for a most guilty but now repentant soul of that which Jesus wrought for sinners on the cross. There sin was judged; there was God's grace shown to the very uttermost. There was a soul that in the face of every obstacle received it with simplicity; but not a thought of anything in himself that could be an offering to God, not a trace of presenting, as it were, his faith, and God accepting this as of such signal value in His sight, that He could and would dispense with what in strictness ought to have been for souls in order to salvation. Not so. The robber had what ought to have been; he had what alone can suffice for a sinner with God. Not that I deny for a moment the place of the church; for I must tell you that I am a churchman — a high churchman if you will — and that, viewing the church whether as the body of Christ or as the house of God, I have the strongest convictions of what is true and obligatory on the Christian in respect of it.

Every Christian a Churchman

Do not suppose any play on the word church; for indeed I hold it to be the place of every Christian man to be in the truest and fullest sense a churchman. It is not enough for a man to be a Christian without being a churchman; nor is it the same thing. Nor do I admire the Augustinian subterfuge of an invisible church. I mean no offence to my dissenting friends who are present, but I am thoroughly convinced that they are wrong, and that most evangelicals are little if at all better. That is to say,

I have been for many years satisfied that societies, or voluntary companies, are a practical denial of the church of God. Therefore, as far as the principle is concerned, however far apart in application, I shall go quite as far as Dr. Newman or Dr. Pusey, although I abhor the embrace of Babylon, which has seduced the one, if not the other. I do not regard the woman that sits on the seven hills as the church of God, but, on the contrary, as a spurious counterfeit, as the chief and central spring of all the dark and turbid streams of Ritualism; for she sits also by “many waters.”

But I maintain, that, before the question of the church comes, a man is put to the test thoroughly by the truth in Christ; and this is of vital moment in every conceivable way. It is not the church first, and then Christ; but Christ first, the church being merely the complement, though of all importance. And sure I am that if a man holds simply but intelligently withal to Christ, he will be little disposed either to Romanism or to Dissent. He will be content with the church of God, as He puts it in His word, and makes it good in fact, spite of all the external ruin; and this is what I mean by being a churchman. I repeat that I do not mean merely in an invisible way, which is wholly unscriptural. Before the church began, there was invisibility for the saints, save individually: the very object of the church here was a visible witness, though it will only be perfect in glory, and it has failed like all else. At the same time, I maintain that there is the reality of the church of God on the earth, as “ruined man” supposes a man, though in ever so wretched a state.

Now, what makes plain the importance of this is, that the truth of the gospel deals with the soul, with man as a

sinner altogether guilty, but it also shows God's dealing with its evil in His own grace, yet putting it away righteously; that is, in the maintenance of His own character. It is here that Ritualism is so offensive and utterly hostile to the truth of God. If you substitute the incarnation for the atonement, for redemption, you set aside the judgment of sin; you make the atonement a mere accident — something at the very best which comes in as a sort of make-weight of the incarnation; you thus ignore its only proper place. Whereas the truth of the gospel is founded on a Christ, not incarnate only, but Who has died both to put away the "old man" with all its evil and to begin a new creation — Who has entered into a new and most real place, not the ruined scene of sin and fallen man. For He Who was God as well as man, Who was not in a fallen condition, but as man was "the Holy Thing" (Luke 1:35), went down under all the consequences of the fall on the cross, and there achieved the perfect victory. Now the Holy Spirit is sent down from heaven to proclaim the present immediate results of that victory to every soul that believes. This is the gospel.

Romans and Righteousness

In the foregoing statements I have referred to the facts of the Gospels; but if we take up Romans, it is the same thing. There it is not incarnation only, but Christ that died, and Christ that arose; and the Christian acquires a corresponding place. Consequently it is not the vagueness of Ritualism any more than the darkness of Rationalism — cold, comfortless both of them indeed; but what is really presented is that God has fairly and fully brought out all the evil, in order to put it away.

Christ “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” Consequently now it is not mercy only. I grant you the coming of Christ to the earth was most rich mercy; but there is more than mercy now. The death of Christ has laid the foundation of righteousness. It is not only that He was the Righteous One; He was this in everything here below; but now the wonderful thing is, as the gospel shows, that there is righteousness to justify the believer, yea, the ungodly. It shows that God is righteous now on behalf of him who has received Jesus, regarding him without a spot or stain in His sight. On that day the converted robber was fitted for heaven, and thus is every soul made meet that believes the gospel. By a suffering Christ (1 Peter 3:18) we are brought to God, brought in grace and power by faith. We know Him thus, having in the gospel learned His love in our greatest need.

But then it is not merely this. We are also brought into a new relationship. There are many who believe in Christ, and are quite sure that God has forgiven them their sins. I would to God that every Christian, be he Dissenter, or Anglican, or whatever — I would to God that every person who has received the name of Jesus stood “full of the remission of sins,” as Luther calls it. He said the church was full of remission of sins. I would to God that every individual were really so, that he had the simple, full, happy, constant sense of being forgiven.

I do not mean by this that a man is to be without grief and shame if he has slipped aside and dishonoured the Lord. By such a plenary forgiveness I do not mean that if a man falls into evil he is to make light of it because it is all forgiven. Who teaches such doctrine? But I do hold that what God has given him by the gospel is not lost by

his folly; and because he is forgiven in the sight of God. he is called upon to humble himself and confess to the Lord; he can go to God about it because he has a great High Priest. It is here that the high priesthood of Christ comes in. It is not even going to Christ, still less to a man upon the earth, but going by Christ to God; and the reason is that God in the Gospel has now proved His perfect grace and salvation by giving all freely to my soul. Consequently, as it is against God that I have sinned, I use that Saviour, and am entitled to use Him, as my High Priest — to go to God and acknowledge my sin — to have it fairly and fully out before God, with the certainty that His grace will restore my soul, and it does.

But this supposes that the believer is in a settled relationship. He is in the relationship of a child of God; and more than this, he is a member of the body of Christ. But it may be well to warn you of the great mistake of supposing that membership of the body of Christ is simply a question of faith. There must be besides faith something more; and the sum of it is, that on the ground of your faith you receive the Holy Ghost, baptizing you into the one body (Acts 1:5, 11; 1 Cor. 12:13).

Thus it may be seen that the position of a Christian is a living relationship both individually and corporately. You will understand therefore why I spoke of the difficulty of conceiving an intelligent Christian that is not also a firm churchman in the true sense of the word. In short, he is not merely an individual. This he is, and he is first of all an individual brought to God; but then he shares in the infinite blessing of being a member of Christ’s body, and this now on the earth. This I mean by being a churchman. Such was the church as it was known in

early days: why should it be otherwise now? Why should anything else suffice now? What do we value? Is it what comes from God, or what is of man? This is the question.

Christian Privileges Surrendered

Hence, through all the Epistles, beginning with Romans, we find the great truth that the Christian's place is by Christ's death and resurrection, not merely by His incarnation. Thus are maintained two principles — first, God glorified by the Lord Jesus as to everything that could harm us; next, the believer justified from sin, as well as from his sins. When incarnation is put instead of the gospel, it brings you back where the work ought to be done; you are waiting for what you have not. This is the state in which Ritualism leaves you; consequently you must needs go and take advantage of religious ordinances. What are they? Promises. It would be presumptuous, according to Ritualism, for a man to know that his sins are forgiven; it would be presumptuous for one to say that he is a child of God; it would be presumptuous to take the place of certainly being a member of the body of Christ, except in the vague sense that every man of the world is who behaves decently and goes to church. Now in Scripture all is real, and not only so, but is made known; it is communicated in power to our souls, because all our action has to be founded on a known relationship. Why, you ought to know this yourselves.

Systematic doubting has a ruinous effect. No wonder that, where incarnation takes in effect the place of Christ's redemption, there are doubts unremoved. Ritualism takes away what Christianity has revealed as come, as it also sets up a veil which leaves man outside

of God's presence. As long as there was a veil, God dwelt in the thick darkness, and man was on the other, the wrong, side; whereas the essence of Christianity is that God has both come down to me and brought me to Him while I am in this world. No doubt it is a matter of faith, but this does not make it to be any the less a reality. Indeed, the facts of faith have a substance in them far beyond the facts of sense. They are both real, but the facts of sense may disappear, while the facts of faith never will. You are brought into an eternal reality when put in contact with the world of faith; but you are brought in now.

This is Christianity. You do not wait till you get to heaven to be heavenly. This is part of the new relationship. Again, you are dead with Christ, not merely dying. The ritualist is trying to die. He is endeavouring, poor man! to put to death that old man that won't die. There is always a killing, but it is never killed; and no wonder. The fact is that there is no power but God's that can deal with it; and it is God Who has done it in the cross of Christ. The believer, the Christian who understands the gospel, starts with this precious truth.

Ritualism and Baptism

And this shows the place in which the institutions of Christianity come. I hope there is nobody here that makes light of baptism or the Lord's supper; but I dare say there are a great many here who but little understand their true import. Now I am not going into debatable points, but I will state the certain truth of God. It is notorious that baptism is used by the ritualist as a means of getting life. That is what he means when he talks about "baptismal regeneration": he means that

a person is brought into life by that act duly administered by one who is in the apostolic succession. I am not maligning or exaggerating in any way. They would say so themselves in stronger terms, if possible. Yet mark how the whole system perishes before the divine word.

In the first place, according to Scripture, baptism is never the sign of life-giving but of death-giving. It is the sign of having part with Christ in His death. It is never presented in Scripture as a means of quickening. Those who say so are altogether wrong in the very principles of Christianity. Death is what we want; and not merely life. There was always life-giving in the sense of quickening. Do you suppose that before the Lord Jesus came into the world there were not persons quickened? This was before anything was heard of baptism. To be sure: who can doubt it? Do you suppose that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not receive quickening from the Son of God as much as you and I? But they were not baptized for all that; and I am not going to give up my baptism, nor what Scripture tells me baptism means. I am not going to listen to people who tell me it is either the means of new birth or only the sign of it. I hold it to be the outward sign of a most blessed truth peculiar to Christianity; and the truth is this — not quickening (which is not peculiar to Christianity, but common to all saints from the beginning) but that I am dead with Christ, which never could be said till Christ died. Consequently the Christian starts with this as the grand truth on which he is called to act, not by trying to die like a monk or a nun, endeavouring to kill the “old man,” but by believing and acting on his faith that God has slain it, that we are crucified with Christ and nevertheless live, that the “old

man” is dealt with by divine judgment on the cross of Christ, and that I, receiving Christ, have all that blessing now.

Assuredly our blessed Lord did not die for Himself. Scripture has no thought of it, but the contrary. There was no “old man” in Christ: the man that says so is a heretic. The truth of the gospel is that He Who had no sin dies for us who had nothing else, and the consequence of His mighty work is that we are not only quickened, but delivered from sin by His bearing its judgment. He did not leave the “old man” as before. That was the condition of the Old Testament saints. It was not gone for them; to us it is. I do not mean by this that we are perfect in the sense that there is no such thing as the flesh in us; but what Scripture shows is that I am entitled by the death of Christ to treat my “old man” as already judged. I am entitled to take all the comfort, as completely as if it were actually gone for ever. It is gone in the sight of God as truly as it will be when Christ comes. At His coming we shall have all the results manifestly; but now I have them to my faith, and am called to act according to such a place in the sight of God.

It is instructive to see that Ritualism, like every other human system, denies this, while after all it is one of its great boasts to give a fuller than ordinary value to baptism. You will invariably find that the people who boast of their soundness about baptism are, as I believe, wrong about baptism. The best course is never to boast of anything but Christ. You are always right there; but the moment you begin to boast of this doctrine or of that, I would not give much for your doctrine after all. But when content to have only Christ to boast of, He will

be with you, and will make your doctrine to be good and sound, not by your magnifying your own possession of it, but by your holding simply to Christ. We have got all the truth in Him, and may the Spirit of God make us increasingly true to Him!

But there is more than this. I said that first of all Ritualism is false in its theory of baptism — in the very meaning of it; but, further, even as a system it is most inconsistent, because the principle is that these blessings of the incarnation are only through the appointed channel or the well-known ordinances; but every thoroughgoing ritualist would acknowledge at once that Christian baptism is valid even if administered by a woman, and of course by a man. Thus they hold they every Christian is competent to baptize in emergency; that is to say, it is valid. No doubt they do not think it orderly, but still they acknowledge it to be real. The Romanist does so. That is the doctrine of Catholicism, no matter what its form may be. Dissenters and most Evangelicals do not allow this, strange to say; but all Catholics so called, east, west, north, south, agree in it. Now, if this be the case, if baptism be the means of getting life, there is the most fundamental blessing of Christianity, according to Ritualism received entirely apart from the apostolic succession duly administered in the appointed way. Thus, even in its foundation, it cannot stand; for, as usual, God takes care that a thing which is false shall be inconsistent. It is a mark set up as it were by the roadside to warn people that there is danger here, and that the truth is elsewhere. The tale does not even hang together. The witnesses do not agree.

Ritualism and the Lord's Supper

Take the other ordinance, the Lord's Supper, and the same result appears. What does the Lord's Supper set out? The incarnation? Not at all. The Lord's Supper shows that He Who became incarnate died. But this ever-recurring institution of Christianity is not individual like baptism, which is strictly so, and properly speaking is outside the church. Properly speaking it belongs to me as a Christian. Were there no such thing as the corporate system of the church, I should be, and ought to be, baptized as a Christian; but the Lord's Supper has no place except in the church. No person therefore is at liberty to take the Lord's Supper by himself.

The Lord's Supper is not according to Christ's intention or its own meaning unless on the ground of the church of God; nor ought one to partake of that bread or that cup except on the divine foundations of the church of God according to His word. We are not at liberty to give up or to alter; we may not bring in our own thoughts or modifications under any pretence whatever. This has nothing to do with the question of the church being in a state of confusion. I grant it; but there is the more reason why we should hold to the truth of God if we know it — to the unbending word that God has given. Be as gracious as you will to those who do not understand it; but let your carefulness be for the Lord's glory by your own holding fast the truth. Make allowance for others. Grace would do it; but hold you fast under all circumstances to what you know to be the will of the Lord Jesus.

Now, in the Lord's Supper, supposing that the mass of God's children anywhere had gone off, some here, some

there, and there were only two or three that joined in taking the Lord's Supper according to Christ's institution, what is the meaning of it? Is it not so far a witness of the one body of Christ? It would be very presumptuous for two or three persons to say. "We are the body of Christ"; but it would be no less presumptuous for them to take the Lord's Supper on any other ground than that of Christ's body. If they are not thus, it is an unauthorized human act; on the other hand, they must hold fast to His name as members of His body, and simply partake of that bread in His name. This is its meaning. It is the remembrance of Himself; but it is the showing forth of His death, not of His incarnation.

Here again see how utterly false the ritualistic system is. In short, it is a wilful, deliberate, systematic going back to what existed before the death of Christ; it is the annulling of what God has introduced now, and what the Holy Spirit is holding to. The incarnation was a step towards the great end; the end was the judgment of sin, and the establishment of righteousness through the death of Christ, but displayed in Him risen from the dead.

Ritualism and the Risen Christ

This brings me to another point. My relationship is with Jesus risen. Undoubtedly He came down and took part of flesh and blood; but why? "That through death He might destroy him that had the power of death" (Heb. 2:14). It was not merely to continue the benefits of what He did when He was living. He did indeed attract when He was alive, but substantially the disciples that followed the Lord Jesus in His life were on the same ground as the

Old Testament saints They saw and heard more; but it was simply this — that their eyes saw, and their ears listened to, the One for Whom the Old Testament saints had been waiting; but when His death and resurrection took place, and the Holy Spirit was given, the whole was changed, and Christianity came in; and the going back to what was before the death and resurrection of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit tends to apostasy from Christianity, although real Christians may be entangled by the snare.

This is surely serious if true. Let me just direct you very briefly to a few Scriptures. Take 1 Corinthians 6:17: “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” It is not a question of joining Him in flesh when He was here below. No doubt He took flesh and blood: but this is not the link of union. “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” Again, who can deny that the expressed doctrine of 2 Corinthians 5:15 is that “He died and rose again, that we should not live unto ourselves, but unto Him that died for us and rose again”? Then Paul says, “Though we have known Christ after the flesh” (that is, when He was incarnate, and when the ritualistic system was still in force) — “Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more.” Now that Christ is dead and risen, and the Christian brought into association with Him at the right hand of God, the surpassing glory of the new position completely eclipses any connection that was formed when He was here below. As long as Christ was here, there could not be union. There might be that which looked onward to this high privilege, but it could not yet be given righteously. Now it is, and we are brought into it, and hence the connection of the Holy Spirit with it. It

is not merely by faith, but by the Holy Spirit, which is a very important truth indeed to bear in mind. Our link with Christ, I repeat, is by nothing less than the presence of the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, acting in us individually and also as the body of Christ.

I have referred to Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ” (not incarnate, simply), “nevertheless I live.” Take again Ephesians 1:20-22, and you will find that Christ only became the Head of the church after He died, rose, and went to heaven. The doctrine of Ephesians first presents Christ when He died, and then He is seen raised up, and now seated at the right hand of God; and only so does He become the Head of the body.

Now, we belong to that body, or we are nothing. If we are now in living association with Christ by the Holy Spirit, we are of Christ’s body, exalted at the right hand of God; and that body had no existence till the Head was there. So in Colossians 1:18 it is said, “Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.” Christ is then the beginning. When He was here below, He was not the beginning; He alone was going to be, as risen. He alone was to be the Head of the church, but this required the putting away of sin. How could the Lord Jesus be united to us while our sins were not blotted out? and how could the Holy Spirit dwell in us when sin was not judged? We see therefore how all the truth hangs together. Sin is gone, righteousness established, union is formed by the Holy Ghost with Christ risen and glorified at the right hand of God.

This is, I believe, the truth of Christianity. The gospel touches on the mystery that was hidden from ages and

from generations. Need it be said that this is what we are called to testify? Not the church only or chiefly, but above all Christ Whom God has given Head over all things to the church. It is the body to which we belong; the Christ of Whom we are members.

May the Lord grant then that holding fast the truth, we may bear witness to it! It is the best answer of all to Ritualism.