

## THE PHILOSOPHIC STUDY OF RELIGION\*

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ONE wonders, sometimes, at the magic power which resides in names—as in that of the wonderful and mysterious great-great-grandmother in George MacDonald's *Princess and Curdie*. Names are not things—though in so saying we have no wish to raise an ancient question once more!—but they nevertheless have the power to shut off, arbitrarily, the further consideration of things, or of other things than those in hand; and to open up new ranges of perception, to release new meanings, to rise to heights whence wider horizons, fresh backgrounds, new significances appear. Words have a 'power of the keys,' 'to shut, and none shall open; to open, and none shall close.'

Two such magic names are Philosophy and Religion, words whose spell reaches across long ages of time and touches, directly or indirectly, most human hearts. And when these words are combined, as in some double and compounded formula of the hidden art; when we speak of 'the Philosophy of Religion,' what meaning have the words in their new relation? Might one reverse the process of compounding, and speak of the 'Religion of Philosophy,' and get a meaning out of it—as one might reverse or transform a mathematical equation? Indeed, I feel sure a meaning would result: one thinks of holy men of old, of consecrated intellectual geniuses like Plato and Spinoza, and many another, whose philosophy was a religion as well, and for whom the life of reason and the life of religion were set in no contradiction but were fruits of the selfsame vital tree—the abandonment of the soul, the loss of self, in the pursuit of the supremely Real.

But 'Philosophy of Religion'—this is our theme; what meaning has it, what meanings does it open up, and what does it exclude?

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What is its object and purpose? What are its prospects and promises of success? Is it more than a hint of what passes human knowing, like the essence of essences, like the inside view of an atom, like the 'sound' of a color or the 'color' of a sound? Or is it, on the contrary, a solid, substantial, and entirely un fanciful segment in the rounded whole of empirical, factual knowledge?

Now it has happened that 'Philosophy of Religion' has been so understood—great is the power of names and of their associations and family relationships—so that some thinkers and students have supposed religion could be reduced to formulae, and 'Philosophy of Religion' be set on the shelf beside 'Philosophy of Mechanics' or 'Philosophy of Magnetism.' Indeed, the parallel suggests at once the era when Philosophy of Religion was thus understood. Men also wrote of 'Philosophy of History,' and reached similar results: History became a great machine, with successive thrusts and counter-thrusts of great driving rods, with successive expansions and contractions pushing or produced by the mighty pistons of the active human consciousness. And 'philosophy,' in this particular cycle of meanings, became only the synonym of explanation, formulation, analytical description, or even of mathematical exposition. I do not wish to underrate all this: it was one step in the process by which Philosophy of Religion has arrived at its present state; and there is meaning still, a permanent meaning, in the term which finally supplanted it in this phase of investigation, namely, the 'Science' of Religion. But the danger was real that in such an understanding of the Philosophy of Religion, i. e., as scientific explanation, research itself should lose sight of 'the many-splendored thing' of which it was in quest. Just as Biology had to advance beyond Anatomy, and study the living, not the dead, organism; so Philosophy of Religion has had to move forward from the analysis, classification, and formulation of dead or dying religions to the study of the living religious impulse, with its varied and sometimes unpredictable manifestations, with its curious fashions, its strong undercurrents of feeling, its inexplicable and indeed ineffable elements, its mysticism and its heroism, its 'war in the members,' its instinctive urge to abolish certain instincts, its strange ancient ways and its flaming novelties, its roots in folk-way and primitive custom, its ethereal rationality and its logic-defying 'reasons' for the things religious men and women do. In a word,

the history of religion has had to be supplemented by the Psychology of Religion for a thoroughly sound basis to be provided the modern Philosophy of Religion.

Finally, still another interpretation has been offered: Philosophy of Religion is the investigation of the light religion has to cast upon the major problem and question of all modern scientific and philosophic research, viz., man's place in the universe, and the meaning and purpose—if any—of his fitful parade across the briefly lighted stage of human society upon this small, aged, and lonely planet. That is, instead of explaining religion, either in terms of some mechanistic formula—a notion derived from the beginnings of the present machine age, when the idea of machinery first strongly seized upon the imaginations of men—or else in terms of science taken in the later and broader sense of modern biology and psychology; instead of explaining religion, men seek to explain the universe, and themselves in relation to it, and they call upon religion for whatever valid interpretations it has to make of the riddle of existence. One might almost say that the history of the Philosophy of Religion in the 19th century and later has run through these three stages, taken broadly—in the succession of Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher, Pfleiderer, James, and some among our contemporaries.

But the question recurs, Is this what Philosophy of Religion means? Does any one of the suggested series of limitations really exhaust its meaning or significance? I must confess that, as for myself, though the emphasis in each seems strongly needed—especially the last two—and though strongly preferring the last of all, if a choice must be made, no one of them is exhaustive or completely satisfactory. What I propose is the choice of an objective that shall embrace all three—and still leave room for more. What I mean to say is this: 'Philosophy of Religion' is not the definition of a certain mass of subject-matter, or the anticipatory description of a set of all-embracing, all-explaining formulae; Philosophy of Religion means a method of approach, of study, of asking questions, or reaching out toward reality; in brief, 'Philosophy' of Religion means the philosophic study of Religion.

And what has such a method of approach in view, what are its prospects, what does it promise? As Professor Bridgman has said of the science of Physics,<sup>1</sup> it is one thing to ask questions—

<sup>1</sup> *The Logic of Modern Physics*, pp. 28 ff.

anyone can do that, from the babe in arms to the hoary questioner, 'ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth'<sup>2</sup>—but it is quite another thing to ask the right questions, either questions that admit of an answer, or that are relevant, and lead to some answer, even if not the one intended or anticipated.

Now the philosophic study of religion, as I understand it, is no resignation of the philosophic quest in general, no shedding of the pallium, but is still the ardent pursuit of truth, wherever and howsoever arrived at; it is still 'thinking in terms of the whole;' it is still the unflagging quest for that view of reality that corresponds, really corresponds, with human experience in all its length and breadth, its height and depth, in richest knowledge and ablest skill, in strictest logic and in sublimest achievement of ethical character; philosophy is still philosophy—the love of the true, the beautiful, and the good. Nor, in this definition, does religion cease to be that factor in human experience which comes nearest achieving this realization of the whole—certainly for the broad mass of men and for many of the noblest—religion, which binds men into unity, which sweeps aside the mists and bids men see larger backgrounds than are envisaged in their daily toil, which steadily urges upon men that old divine discontent with things seen and temporal and bids them search for things unseen and eternal. It is no formula we want, no mere explanation of certain historical phenomena; it is reality. We wish not merely to understand but to live.

A great, pervasive, overwhelming tide of realism is sweeping the world in our generation. Shams and artifices are mere dykes of sand before this rising tide: 'time makes' even 'ancient good uncouth,' and only what really is, can endure. Whether or not ancient formulae hold, whether any formulae at all will hold, we demand to find out the best and worst that life holds, and from the bottom of our hearts we crave contact with reality. Though it slay us, we must seek it. Though Pandora's box spread endless ills, though the sphinx himself warn us against asking the fatal question, we cannot refrain, for we are made like that. Of certain things, one 'just *must* know,' and that is all there is to it. For my part, I find this spirit of our age exceedingly exhilarating. It may be carried to excess—in things that do not really matter in such a quest; as in asking the wrong questions, meaningless, stupid, or even idiotic ques-

<sup>2</sup> II Tim. iii. 7.

tions or questions that lead nowhere, whether answered or not; or questions that have already been asked and answered ten-thousand times and more. But the essential question-asking, reality-pursuing quality in the modern mind is, at least to some of us, a mark of what may really be holy zeal, and may lead eventually to one of the profoundest and most universal religious movements the world has ever seen—all the profounder and the more widespread now that civilization is tending toward a unity the whole world around. This is itself at least a latent phenomenon of religion, and one of the latest. I could illustrate it in a dozen ways, if there were time: in the current movement toward Church-unity, one of the most obvious examples; in saner missionary efforts; in universal education; in the motives leading men in the direction of social welfare and justice, of international peace, world hygiene and sanitation, world-wide medicine and surgery, religious and political tolerance—all these illustrate the burning thirst for reality that has taken possession of men's souls. Why should we retain social shibboleths and antiquated political formulae that only dig trenches for men to die in like vermin; why uphold ancient ecclesiastical prejudices which only lead to spiritual sterility and futility, to ridiculous competition, and effectually paralyze the religious sense of men?

Reality we want, as never before, and no fine-spun systems of dreamers sitting comfortably in their studies, far from the crush and turmoil of life! That note I hear all the time, and on all hands, and in philosophy no less than in common life; and that note, I believe, is no discordant one, but the signal of an oncoming change in the motif, the arrival of what is to be the major movement in this vast symphony of the inner life of man. It is itself very close to religion, perhaps the very harbinger and prophet preparing the way for the coming of a new era in spiritual development.

Now if it be true, as many persons hold, that philosophy is not a purely timeless pursuit, and that the spirit of each age is reflected in the philosophy which it produces, we shall not be greatly surprised if the ethos of our age is reflected in its philosophy of religion. That is, the method of the philosophic study of religion will be—so far as it is possible under the circumstances—the method of the pursuit of knowledge in general and of reflection upon phenomena generally which is in vogue in other departments

of human interest. The method, in a word will be scientific, so far as that method applies in a philosophic study—of religion or anything else. And the spirit will be this spirit of inquiry after reality, of pursuit of truth wheresoever and howsoever to be found.

For the Christian Church, or churches, this will mean an entire reshaping of our old-fashioned apologetics; indeed, it may easily turn out that a thorough-going philosophy of religion will take the place of the old apologetics—and this without loss, but rather with gain, to the ends which true religion has at stake. "Ye shall know the truth; and the truth shall make you free."<sup>3</sup> Religion has nothing to fear from the new method, the new freedom, so long as it is freedom in the service of truth. And for those who stand outside the immediate circle of the Church's membership, this new approach surely means clearing away the obstructions which have for too long impeded progress. There are those, alas, who can scarcely think of religion dissociated from some particular type of ecclesiasticism—the formalism of one, the fanaticism of another, or the chill and arid intellectual dogmatism of some third type. The philosophic or thought-out exposition of religion, or its dialectical defense, has too often included a defense of things really indefensible, or partial, or even partisan. 'Mint, anise, and cummin' have been tithed, while 'the weightier matters of the Law' were left out of view.<sup>4</sup> So that Religion and Ecclesiasticism have come to be identified—whereas, no genuinely religious man or woman, however highly valuing the outward expressions of the Visible Church, would for a moment admit the justice of such an identification.

Now it so happens that this brings us face to face with the first problem of the philosophic study of religion, and indeed of any philosophy of religion, viz., What is religion? What is the extent, and what are the limitations, of this particular field of philosophical inquiry? We might halt at this point for the rest of the evening, discussing various definitions of religion, and finding value, no doubt, in every one of them. But I doubt if, in the end, everyone present would be satisfied with the chosen definition; and so I venture to face that danger at once, rather than later, and offer—if not a definition—at least a general statement: Religion is the awareness of God, and the consequences thereof. Those

<sup>3</sup> John viii. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xxiii. 23.

consequences may be enormous, and far-reaching: in laws, standards, customs (as seen in the history of religions), in private and public worship, in priesthoods and sacrifices, in rituals and in sacred writings, in ascetical abnegation and inspired rhapsody and mystic transport—all depending upon the social outlook and the 'psychology' of the individuals involved. Hence religion has many and diverse vestures and embodiments. The revelation comes 'in many parts and after divers manners.' But the heart of it is one, and really continuous—even when viewed as a purely human historical phenomenon. At heart, it is the awareness of God; and for religion—i. e. for religious men and women—this means, in one form or another, revelation: God chooses that man shall become aware of Him; the Universal touches the particular; the Infinite Spirit breaks through the bonds of finitude; the Absolute embraces the individual. Put it in whatever language you prefer, philosophical, poetical, or prosaic, religion is apparently unable to do without the conception—if religious men think at all—of the Divine coming in contact with the human. So that 'awareness of God' may be only the inebriate dance of frenzied nature-worshippers; or it may rise to the heights of the Prologue of St. John and the Catholic faith in the Incarnation, or to mystic ecstasy; yet all along, in the simple language of religion, God is 'making Himself known to men.'

But of what value is this experience, someone will ask. Cannot we do without it in this modern age of independence of ancient forms of thinking and inherited patterns of feeling and behavior? I must answer this by another question: What would life be worth if the values which religion has enshrined in the past, and still enshrines, were blotted out? What would life be worth if the ethical values were obliterated? And where, as a matter of history, have ethical values obtained dominance in human society, and maintained this dominance, save in alliance with some form of the awareness of God? It is useless to point to religions that have no God; for in such religions the mass of their followers have, as a matter of fact, worshipped a God, or gods; while, for the elect, some universal principle or law has taken the place of God and functions in His stead, as the object of 'awareness' or the principle from which flow the 'consequences' which make up the concrete manifestations of the 'religion.' Nor is it wholly relevant to point to the discordance and antagonism between one ethical system and

another, or even between the ethical principles of one religion and another. The systems clash—but that is often because they are systems; in less systematic form, in less articulate, individual expression, they more readily flow into one another, accommodate themselves to one another, and unite in safeguarding those basic values which give worth to human life. Nor, finally, is it conclusive to point to the lowly origin of our sense of ethical values, or to distinguish this sharply from the religious sense. Granted that the ethical values originated in even sub-human social orders, in the ethics of the herd, the pack, the lowly colony or group of animals pitting its strength against a difficult or dangerous environment, and unconsciously but inevitably demanding patience, honor, self-sacrifice, from its members—or what in human behavior goes by these names: granted all this, it is still significant that with the emergence of religion the group-consciousness found therein its most powerful ally and support. If ethical origins may be traced back to sub-human biological stages, so also, one would almost venture to guess, may religious origins: that is, the motives that religion cherishes, in chief the consciousness of the 'Superhuman,' the 'Awe-ful,' the 'Wholly Other'—to use Professor Rudolf Otto's terminology—these motives and this consciousness are so deeply laid in human nature that one would not be surprised if they sprang from a biological origin. Which is by no means to say that that is the end of them. Does a sub-human origin of speech, in the rude sounds of the lower animals, disqualify the orator or the singer? Does it keep presidential candidates from making speeches, or millions of citizens from listening to them, by radio or otherwise? And it is surely significant that on their upward march, religion and ethics have become more and more closely allied: the sense of ought, and along with it the sense of someone, something, outside, above, objective to and set over against the human consciousness. The identification of the voice of duty with the voice of God underlies the history of the higher religions.

But if we thus grant the value of religion, a still further question arises as to its validity. The experience may be valuable—we hold that it is—but is it true? Or if partly true and partly untrue, how are we to distinguish the true from the false? It is here that philosophy of religion must lean most strongly upon its philosophic training and inheritance. What is the criterion of truth in any department of knowledge or of thought? At once we shall be



told by some that it is demonstrable correspondence with fact; by others that it is logical consistency, that it must 'hang together,' and demonstrably meet the requirements of thought. (These two answers, by the way, almost completely divide the world of philosophy, past and present—if taken in a broad sense.) But it may be asking too much to require religious experience to demonstrate its correspondence with external fact. It may do so, up to a certain point; but it may not be able to exhaust the whole range of potential fact. Do we ask of aesthetic judgments that they shall correspond with facts? Yes, we do; taken in the large sense, and recognizing certain qualities in 'facts' not given in immediate sense-perception or in scientific analysis. A dozen strokes of the violin-bow may mean only so much energy at work, so many vibrations produced, so much sound; or they may mean, in their real essence, something nearer akin to the flight of a swallow or the charge of a brigade or the death of a child. If the essential quality of human life is, perchance, spiritual and not material, then the 'facts' to which religious experience may be required to correspond will be of a higher and vaster order than those of physical sensation. No one here, I suppose, will contradict this statement. If not, then we proceed to the next consideration, namely, that the 'facts' to which religious experience must correspond may be themselves indemonstrable and yet real. I am quite free to grant that the arguments for the existence of God may one and all succeed no futher than in setting up 'the noblest hypothesis' to explain human life, the ordered universe, the moral sense, or the all but endless recessive series of causation. With Professor Webb I agree that the theistic arguments are reasons men have given for a faith, springing out of experience, which they could not help but hold.<sup>5</sup> But the same is true of other existences. How prove your own existence, as a conscious, self-directing, super-physical being? *Cogito, ergo sum* may be a logical inference for the man himself; for all others it is an act of faith—or 'the noblest hypothesis,' under the circumstances. For there are not wanting those who would reduce human cogitation, and with it the existence of a free, self-directing, individual personality, to the behavior of atoms in an inherited pattern which has been moulded by the long, slow process of biological adaptation and evolution. I do not think such scepticism is necessary, or even warranted; in philosophy, as in

<sup>5</sup> *Problems in the Relations of God and Man*, pp. 154 ff.

human thought and life generally, there are some things one must take for granted; for apart from such assumptions the whole process refuses to work, to go, to make even the initial start. And the idea of God—or rather, the real, objective existence of God—is the initial assumption presupposed in most religious experience. I feel that we are often in danger of too much abstractness in studying religion. We treat it as an idea; we deal with religion as if it were dissociable from experience; we propose such questions as, ‘Can religion function without God?’ and forget that religion is nothing if it is not experience, that the intellectual element is secondary and derivative, and that we cannot know religion unless we get really inside the experience which gives it meaning and makes it religious. There is no reason, so far as I can gather, why a philosopher of religion or a student of philosophy should not say his prayers, attend and share in public worship, examine his conscience and live a religious life in simple earnestness and humble piety. Only so can the language of religion acquire its full meaning, and the student find out for himself what religious men are talking about when they use words that really have a sense and connotation hidden from the casual hearer or superficial investigator. It is in experience—not hectic, over-wrought emotionalism, but normal, daily, pedestrian religious experience—that the student will begin to grasp the finer shades of meaning in the language of saints and seers, inspired prophets and religious philosophers.

Something of the same dissatisfaction attends the second proposed criterion of validity, viz., the test of ‘rational coherence,’ ‘demonstrable correspondence with the requirements of thought.’ For your judgment of rational coherence may not be mine, or any one’s else. Your social background and that of a Hindu or a Bantu or a Turk may be quite distinctly different; and the ‘requirements of thought’ may correspondingly vary. One may require a hierarchy of emanations interposing between the Absolute and the individual, the Infinite and the finite; another may require a God seen in every action and event; another a transcendent God who, nevertheless, stands in closest contact with the visible world of phenomena, working His purpose out through events, ordinary or extraordinary, ‘natural’ or miraculous. A solution might be to cast up ‘the world’s best thought’ on the subject, and then validate this with the imprimatur of authority. But this will not do, imposing as such an authority might be made, and valuable as it

would be for some purposes. For philosophy must be free and entitled to testify, like St. Athanasius, if necessary, *contra mundum*. The basis I propose is one broader still: not rational coherence, merely, but *truth to life*. For there are situations in human life where rationality has little to offer; where we can think and ponder without rest and be no nearer a solution; where not thought, primarily, but action is required—action guided by thought, perhaps, but by thought more heavily loaded than usual with emotion; by thought, but thought too deep for reasons or for words. In such hours the habits of a lifetime come to the fore and the man's real self, deeper than his intellectual nature, stands out clear in the open. For there is a self—a mind, perhaps, at any rate an activity of some sort—deeper than consciousness and deeper than rationality. It may be only the crude biological vital center of the individual life; or it may be the channel uniting him with the universal life; or perhaps it is that divine seed or spark implanted by the creative hand of God (and men have called it one or another of all three); whatever it is, the real self, or an important part of it, lodges there. And religion means man's attunement with his whole environment in the very center of his being, at one with the universe, at peace with God, in a coherence deeper than thought and with a rationality deeper than logic. Herein lies the real validation of religious experience. It satisfies requirements larger and more mandatory than those of rational thought; and it satisfies rational thought, as a rule (certainly for the normal religious individual), because it satisfies requirements which thought itself must satisfy. In a word, the world is much bigger than we think it is, with these intellects of ours, born to guide us through certain ranges of phenomena just as eyes were born to use light, and feet for locomotion, and hands for manipulating small, loose objects. And in this bigger world, religion, or the religious consciousness, and with it the moral sense, represents an adaptation just as real and just as valid as the physical senses or the biological instincts or the rational intellect. It is possible to be adjusted to God, and adapted to the spiritual qualities or factors in the universe, quite as much as it is possible to be adapted to a space-time environment and to the competition for survival or for ready access to a stable food-supply.

But how are we to explain the varieties and contrarities of religious experience, on such a theory? The answer is the old one of the mystics: the light is not various, but one; variety is the work

of the prism through which it passes. In essence, all religion is one, and truth or falsehood in religion is a matter of gradations, not of absolute contradictions. The pious Buddhist, the saintly Mohammedan, the godly Christian and the pious Jew are not, in truth, worshipping different Gods—that *cannot* be, for God is one. They approach by different routes; their progress is measured not so much by relation to each other—that would be a difficult problem in calculus—as by relation to the common center and goal of all their striving. They are all *en route* to God, 'who is their home.'

If I may be allowed to summarize this argument in a few words it will be as follows:

*First*, the Philosophy of Religion, like other branches of Philosophy, must go back once more and set out afresh from first-hand experience, leaving aside, at least at the outset, the metaphysical or other intellectual constructions of the past, and facing religious experience itself in its widest reaches and meanings. This, as I believe, cannot be accomplished unless the philosopher of religion has himself a rich and various inner religious life, is himself aware of God, and is willing to carry out the consequences of such awareness in his own life and in the life of his own particular corner of the world.

*Second*, the affirmations of religious men in all ages and climes must be taken fully into account, from the crudest and humblest to the loftiest and most complex. No science is developed in isolation, in these days; nor is any full-orbed philosophy likely to grow out of purely private speculation. The 'realistic' and the 'social' notes in modern thinking are more than accidental features: they are vital and inescapable factors in all modern thought, philosophic or any other, which can claim wide satisfaction or offer permanent solution of our problems.

*Third*, this very quality of tolerance, catholicity, comprehensiveness, must be acquired as soon as possible by our teachers and students alike. The philosopher of religion who should leave out of reckoning the non-Christian types of religious experience would prove himself incompetent from the outset for his task. But the same ought to be true of anyone who proposed to leave out of consideration the Protestant or the Catholic types of Christian experience, the orthodox and dogmatic or the evangelical or the mystic. There are values here—rich veins for exploration and exposition—underlying every one of these terms. Every one of them represents

some pathway to reality, more or less direct. And the older forms of piety, e. g. Calvinism or Puritanism, ought to be studied with all the historical sympathy and understanding we can muster. Perhaps I ought to choose Catholicism for my example. For it has often happened that philosophers of religion have neglected Catholicism—either on account of the inheritance of strong Protestant prejudices or because of the difficulty, unfamiliarity, or inaccessibility of the subject. This does not mean that our philosopher of religion should adopt an attitude for which all ‘forms’ of religion are indifferent, and ‘one as good as another.’ That is to pre-judge the situation, and effectually to close the mind against the discovery of fresh values, and to anticipate a conclusion, *ex hypothesi*, which renders all further research futile and meaningless.

*Fourth*, he must emulate the example of one of our most eminent metaphysicians and ‘accept’ the data of religious experience ‘in simple piety.’ There is time for criticism, plenty of time; but first let us get the facts clearly before us, or what are assumed to be the facts, or are claimed as such by those who assert them. The witness must be given ‘the benefit of the doubt,’ when doubt exists, and must be presumed to be telling the truth unless obviously he is lying, or has a clear motive for fabricating his testimony, or contradicts himself. To me it is an impressive fact that all men everywhere or almost everywhere, agree in the broad fundamental asseverations of the religious consciousness—in the reality of the unseen, in the existence of a Power or Wisdom outside of and superior to man, in the ‘categorical imperative’ of righteousness and self-sacrifice to higher ends understood as obedience to His will, or harmony with the universe, or submission to ‘the reason of things’ generally. Mystics, for example, in India and in America, in ancient Greece and mediaeval Germany and modern Chicago, tell us something about the inner life and the possibilities of union with the Supreme. I cannot find that their testimony was agreed upon beforehand: and instead of conflicting it seems to be mutually confirmatory to a large degree. Catholics pray, and so do Quakers; and despite their conflicting theologies and discrepant patterns of experience, they do find peace and strength and joy and illumination. There is reality in it, and I cannot help but conclude that prayer is at least one mode of access to the highest Wisdom and supreme Love in the universe. It does not seem possible that they can all be wrong, and the truth be either that there is no God or that He is inaccessible and

unknowable. The presumption is that they speak the truth, and that 'God is, and is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.'<sup>6</sup> I do not mean that the truth of religion stands or falls with unanimity or universality of testimony; there are ranges of truth in every sphere of human interest that cannot be so established. But the existence of such evidence certainly creates an impression favorable to its truth, and deserving to be reckoned with by the philosopher of religion as among his most primary data.

I sometimes wish we could really go back and start over again with some of our problems, setting out as Plato and Aristotle set out in a territory not too well known, mapped out in advance, and covered with sign-posts and other memorials of great names in the past or of theories fallen into decay. Such a wish is of course preposterous—there was a *tradition* even in Plato's day, and even in Homer's, and probably there has been, in science, philosophy, and religion ever since men began to observe, to think, and to pray. At the very least, however, our philosopher can study the theories of the past sufficiently to think through some of them, and emerge on the other side. Whereupon he himself is confronted with the primary situation, as it faced earlier students and thinkers, with the question, What is the ultimate truth of all this? Such study of the past is bracing, not unnerving, and the student is a student of philosophy, or of religion, and not merely of its history.

But supposing we *could* attack the problems afresh and at first-hand, as the founders of the tradition themselves attacked them, would not one of our first observations be the following?—Here is a mass of various but not wholly discordant testimony, a mass of testimony springing out of inner experience, experience that we ourselves may share in some degree. The all but unanimous witness is that this experience is not fallacious, and that God, the spiritual world, the inner core of life and the meaning of human destiny may really be apprehended and truly, not falsely, known—though not, perhaps, exhaustively. Then we should proceed to what Plato and his successors called Theology,<sup>7</sup> the rational knowledge of God or the gods, and the consistent elaboration of whatever hypothesis or 'myth' best accounted for the facts and 'saved the appearances,' as the Stoics said. So much of our time is taken up with the examination and criticism of theories that men grow bewildered and wonder

<sup>6</sup> Heb. xi. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Rep. 379A.

if anything exists to correspond with the subjects or relations under debate. That was the western world's criticism of Scholasticism—but it is a danger by no means limited to one period or school of thought. And though my hope may be a forlorn one, I still believe there is something to be said at least for such an emphasis in the philosophic study of religion. Puzzled as we are often times by the many minor and secondary questions, let us not lose sight of the primary and ultimate ones. There have in fact been philosophers who resembled the man in *Robinson Crusoe's Further Adventures*, who sawed off a limb to dislodge a bear but was himself on the outer end of the limb.

My *fifth* observation is that religion is to be studied, by the philosophic student, in its actual practice, not only in books, in liturgies and sermons, in sacred scriptures, in the records of the past. And the very heart of it comes nearest being unveiled in the act of worship. Here the Numinous is actually felt by most religious men; and without worship, religions tend to decline. When the warm, pulsing, vibrant life-stream of religious worship fails, the religion is doomed—unless, as often happens, that doom is averted by a religious revival. As William James put it a generation ago, religion functions through 'prayer, guidance, and all that sort of thing immediately and privately felt,' rather than through 'high and noble general views of our destiny and the world's meaning.' Moreover, somewhat in contrast to James' later treatment, this sort of immediate apprehension of the divine is to be studied and known in its normal rather than its abnormal phases. The saints, the converts, the twice-born have something to tell us; but so have the pious everyday folk who love justice and mercy and walk humbly with their God. And it is not impossible that their testimony, less dramatic but wider in extent, may prove of even greater importance in the construction of an outlook upon reality in the light of religious experience. If this is so, it has a good deal of significance for the present-day student, when towering genius in religion seems to be growing rare, and at least the first half of Browning's prayer to be fulfilled:

'Make no more giants, God,  
But elevate the race.'<sup>8</sup>

'Pedestrian' religion, if it be centred in God and really in contact

<sup>8</sup> Paracelsus.

with the supernatural, is good enough for our purposes; indeed, it has some qualities that recommend a preferential consideration—for example, it does not so readily disappear in the alembic of the abnormal psychologist.

Finally, let me offer a parting affirmation of my belief that this new method has all the future before it. The range of possible experience in the external, space-time universe is by no means yet exhausted: far from it! Some of us have still to take our first aeroplane ride! Nor are the mysteries of nature by any means exhaustively explored and catalogued by our scientific investigators. Nor has philosophy yet written its final chapter—we study its past in large measure in order to prepare for its future developments, as the diver goes back and runs toward the springboard for his plunge. Nor have we made much more than a beginning in the philosophic study of religion. Here lie rich veins for the patient miner, vast ranges of data for the ardent collector of facts, for the classifier and tabulator of phenomena. But above all, religion itself, true spiritual religion, is still in its infancy, as an adaptation of life—and of thought, following life, but guiding it as it follows—as an adaptation of human life to a wider sphere of reality than ordinarily enters our ken. As a Christian, I believe profoundly that 'the best is yet to be' and that untold riches of light, of guidance, of knowledge and illumination, of nobler ethical achievement, of further spiritual discovery, lie on before us in the uncharted future. And as a Christian I may say that, for me, it is Christ Himself who leads in that direction.