



ESSAYS OF DOROTHY L. SAYERS

Part III

CREED OR CHAOS?

CREED OR CHAOS?

And when he is come, he will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

- John 16:8-11

Something is happening to us today which has not happened for a very long time. We are waging a war of religion. Not a civil war between adherents of the same religion, but a life-and-death struggle between Christian and pagan. The Christians are, it must be confessed, not very good Christians, and the pagans do not officially proclaim themselves worshippers of Mahound or even of Odin, but the stark fact remains that Christendom and heathendom now stand face to face as they have not done in Europe since the days of Charlemagne. In spite of the various vague references in sermons and public speeches to the War as a 'crusade', I think we have scarcely begun to realize the full implications of this. It is a phenomenon of quite extraordinary importance. The people who say that this is a war of economics or of power-politics, are only dabbling about on the surface of things. Even those who say it is a war to preserve freedom and justice and faith have gone only half-way to the truth. The real question is what economics and politics are to be used for; whether freedom and justice and faith have any right to be considered at all; at bottom it is a violent and irreconcilable quarrel about the nature of God and the nature of man and the ultimate nature of the universe; it is a war of dogma.

The word dogma is unpopular, and that is why I have used it. It is our own distrust of dogma that is handicapping us in the struggle. The immense spiritual strength of our opponents lies precisely in the fact that they have fervently embraced, and hold with fanatical fervour, a dogma which is none the less a dogma for being called an 'ideology'. We on our side have been trying for several centuries to uphold a particular standard of ethical values which derives from Christian dogma, while gradually dispensing with the very dogma which is the sole rational foundation for those

values. The rulers of Germany have seen quite clearly that dogma and ethics are inextricably bound together. Having renounced the dogma, they have renounced the ethics as well—and from their point of view they are perfectly right. They have adopted an entirely different dogma, whose ethical scheme has no value for peace or truth, mercy or justice, faith or freedom; and they see no reason why they should practise a set of virtues incompatible with their dogma.

We have been very slow to understand this. We persist in thinking that Germany ‘really’ believes those things to be right that we believe to be right, and is only very naughty in her behaviour. That is a thing we find quite familiar. We often do wrong things, knowing them to be wrong. For a long time we kept on imagining that if we granted certain German demands which seemed fairly reasonable, she would stop being naughty and behave according to our ideas of what was right and proper. We still go on scolding Germany for disregarding the standard of European ethics, as though that standard was something which she still acknowledged. It is only with great difficulty that we can bring ourselves to grasp the fact that there is no failure in Germany to live up to her own standards of right conduct. It is something much more terrifying and tremendous: it is that what we believe to be evil, Germany believes to be good. It is a direct repudiation of the basic Christian dogma on which our mediterranean civilization, such as it is grounded.

I do not want now to discuss the ideology of Germany, nor yet that of Russia which, in rather a different way, is also a repudiation of Christendom. Nor do I want to talk about our own war-aims and peace-aims, and how far we are single-minded about them. All I want to say on this point is that, however deeply we have sinned—and God knows we have done plenty of evil in our time—we have not gone so far as to have altogether lost all claim to stand for Christendom. There is a great difference between believing a thing to be right and not doing it, on the one hand, and, on the other, energetically practising evil in the firm conviction that it

is good. In theological language, the one is mortal sin, which is bad enough; the other is the sin against the Holy Ghost, which is without forgiveness simply and solely because the sinner has not the remotest idea that he is sinning at all. So long as we are aware that we are wicked, we are not corrupt beyond all hope. Our present dissatisfaction with ourselves is a good sign. We have only to be careful that we do not get too disheartened and abashed to do anything about it all.

The only reason why I have mentioned Germany is this: that in the present conflict we have before us, in a visible and physical form which we cannot possibly overlook, the final consequences of a quarrel about dogma. A quarrel of that kind can go on for a very long time beneath the surface, and we can ignore it so long as disagreement about dogma is not translated into physical terms. While there is a superficial consensus of opinion about the ethics of behaviour, we can easily persuade ourselves that the underlying dogma is immaterial. We can, as we cheerfully say, ‘agree to differ’. ‘Never mind about theology,’ we observe in kindly tones, ‘if we just go on being brotherly to one another it doesn’t matter what we believe about God.’ We are so accustomed to this idea that we are not perturbed by the man who demands: ‘If I do not believe in the fatherhood of God, why should I believe in the brotherhood of man?’ That, we think, is an interesting point of view, but it is only talk—a subject for quiet after-dinner discussion. But if the man goes on to translate his point of view into action, then, to our horror and surprise, the foundations of society are violently shaken, the crust of morality that looked so solid splits apart, and we see that it was only a thin bridge over an abyss in which two dogmas, incompatible as fire and water, are seething explosively together.

Now in this assembly I may take it for granted that we are generally agreed as to what is good and what is evil. However little we may have lived up to our beliefs, I take it that we are ready, if challenged, to cry, like the paladins in the *Song of Roland*:

Paiens unt tort e Chrestiens unt dreit
(Pagans are wrong, Christians are in the right.)

The thing I am here to say to you is this: that it is worse than useless for Christians to talk about the importance of Christian morality, unless they are prepared to take their stand upon the fundamentals of Christian theology. It is a lie to say that dogma does not matter; it matters enormously. It is fatal to let people suppose that Christianity is only a mode of feeling; it is vitally necessary to insist that it is first and foremost a rational explanation of the universe. It is hopeless to offer Christianity as a vaguely idealistic aspiration of a simple and consoling kind; it is, on the contrary, a hard, tough, exacting, and complex doctrine, steeped in a drastic and uncompromising realism. And it is fatal to imagine that everybody knows quite well what Christianity is and needs only a little encouragement to practise it. The brutal fact is that in this Christian country not one person in a hundred has the faintest notion what the Church teaches about God or man or society or the person of Jesus Christ. If you think I am exaggerating, ask the Army chaplains. Apart from a possible one per cent of intelligent and instructed Christians, there are three kinds of people we have to deal with. There are the frank and open heathen, whose notions of Christianity are a dreadful jumble of rags and tags of Bible anecdote and clotted mythological nonsense. There are the ignorant Christians, who combine a mild gentle-Jesus sentimentality with vaguely humanistic ethics—most of these are Arian heretics[1]. Finally, there are the more or less instructed church-goers, who know all the arguments about divorce and auricular confession and communion in two kinds, but are about as well equipped to do battle on fundamentals against a Marxian atheist or a Wellsian agnostic as a boy with a pea-shooter facing a fan-fire of machine-guns. Theologically, this country is at present in a state of utter chaos, established in the name of religious toleration, and rapidly degenerating into the flight from reason and the death of hope. We are not happy in this condition and there are signs of a very great eagerness, especially among the younger people, to find a creed to which they can give whole-hearted adherence.

[1] Or possible Adoptionists; they do not formulate their theories with any great precision.

This is the Church's opportunity, if she chooses to take it. So far as the people's readiness to listen goes, she has not been in so strong a position for at least two centuries. The rival philosophies of humanism, enlightened self-interest, and mechanical progress have broken down badly; the antagonism of science has proved to be far more apparent than real, and the happy-go-lucky doctrine of *laissez-faire* is completely discredited. But no good whatever will be done by a retreat into personal piety or by mere exhortation to a 'recall to prayer'. The thing that is in danger is the whole structure of society, and it is necessary to persuade thinking men and women of the vital and intimate connexion between the structure of society and the theological doctrines Of Christianity.

The task is not made easier by the obstinate refusal of a great body of nominal Christians, both lay and clerical, to face the theological question. 'Take away theology and give us some nice religion' has been a popular slogan for so long that we are apt to accept it, without inquiring whether religion without theology has any meaning. And however unpopular I may make myself I shall and will affirm that the reason why the Churches are discredited today is not that they are too bigoted about theology, but that they have run away from theology. The Church of Rome alone has retained her prestige because she puts theology in the foreground of her teaching. Some of us may perhaps think it a rather unimaginative and confined theology; but that is not the point. The point is that the Church of Rome is a theological society, in a sense in which the Church of England, taken as a whole, is not, and that because of this insistence on theology, she is a body disciplined, honoured, and sociologically important.

I should like to do two things this afternoon. First, to point out that if we really want a Christian society we must teach Christianity, and that it is absolutely impossible to teach Christianity without teaching Christian dogma. Secondly, to put before you a list of half a dozen or so main doctrinal points which the world most especially needs to have drummed into its ears at this moment——doctrines forgotten or misinterpreted, but

which (if they are true as the Church maintains them to be) are cornerstones in that rational structure of human society which is the alternative to world-chaos.

I will begin with this matter of the inevitability of dogma, if Christianity is to be anything more than a little mild wishful-thinking about ethical behaviour.

Writing the other day in *The Spectator*, Dr. Selbie, former Principal of Mansfield College, discussed the subject of: 'The Army and the Churches'. In the course of this article there occurs a passage that exposes the root-cause of the failure of the churches to influence the life of the common people.

‘ . . . the rise of the new dogmatism (he says) whether in its Calvinist or Thomist form, constitutes a fresh and serious threat to Christian unity. The tragedy is that all this, however interesting to theologians, is hopelessly irrelevant to the life and thought of the average man, who is more puzzled than ever by the disunion of the Churches, and by the theological and ecclesiastical differences on which it is based.’

Now I am perfectly ready to agree that disputes between the Churches constitute a menace to Christendom. And I will admit that I am not quite sure what is meant by 'the new dogmatism'; it might, I suppose, mean the appearance of new dogmas among the followers of St. Thomas and Calvin respectively. But I rather fancy it means, a fresh attention to, and reassertion of, old dogma, and that when Dr. Selbie says that 'all this' is irrelevant to the life and thought of the average man, he is deliberately saying that Christian dogma, as such, is irrelevant.

But if Christian dogma is irrelevant to life, to what, in Heaven's name is it relevant? —since religious dogma is in fact nothing but a statement of doctrines concerning the nature of life and the universe. If Christian ministers really believe it is only an intellectual game for theologians and has no bearing upon human

life, it is no wonder that their congregations are ignorant, bored, and bewildered. And indeed, in the very next paragraph, Dr. Selbie recognizes the relation of Christian dogma to life

: . . . peace can only come about through a practical application of Christian principles and values. But this must have behind it something more than a reaction against that Pagan Humanism which has now been found wanting.’

The ‘something else’ is dogma, and cannot be anything else, for between Humanism and Christianity and between Paganism and Theism there is no distinction whatever except a distinction of dogma. That you cannot have Christian principles without Christ is becoming increasingly clear, because their validity as principles depends on Christ’s authority; and as we have seen, the Totalitarian States, having ceased to believe in Christ’s authority, are logically quite justified in repudiating Christian principles. If ‘the average man’ is required to ‘believe in Christ’ and accept His authority for ‘Christian principles’, it is surely relevant to inquire who or what Christ is, and why His authority should be accepted. But the question, *‘What think ye of Christ?’* lands the average man at once in the very knottiest kind of dogmatic riddle. It is quite useless to say that it doesn’t matter particularly who or what Christ was or by what authority He did those things, and that even if He was only a man, He was a very nice man and we ought to live by His principles: for that is merely Humanism, and if the ‘average man’ in Germany chooses to think that Hitler is a nicer sort of man with still more attractive principles, the Christian Humanist has no answer to make.

It is not true at all that dogma is ‘hopelessly irrelevant’ to the life and thought of the average man. What is true is that ministers of the Christian religion often assert that it is, present it for consideration as though it were, and, in fact, by their faulty exposition of it make it so. The central dogma of the Incarnation is that by which relevance stands or falls. If Christ was only man, then He is entirely irrelevant to any thought about God; if He

is only God, then He is entirely irrelevant to any experience of human life. It is, in the strictest sense, necessary to the salvation of relevance that a man should believe rightly the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Unless he believes rightly, there is not the faintest reason why he should believe at all. And in that case, it is wholly irrelevant to chatter about ‘Christian principles’.

If the ‘average man’ is going to be interested in Christ at all, it is the dogma that will provide the interest. The trouble is that, in nine cases out of ten, he has never been offered the dogma. What he has been offered is a set of technical theological terms which nobody has taken the trouble to translate into language relevant to ordinary life.

‘. . . Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.’

What does this suggest, except that God the Creator (the irritable old gentleman with the beard) in some mysterious manner fathered upon the Virgin Mary something amphibious, neither one thing nor t’other, like a merman? And, like human sons, wholly distinct from and (with some excuse) probably antagonistic to the father? And what, in any case, has this remarkable hybrid to do with John Brown or Tommy Atkins? This attitude of mind is that called by theologians Nestorianism, or perhaps a debased form of Arianism. But we really cannot just give it a technical label and brush it aside as something irrelevant to the thought of the average man. The average man produced it. It is, in fact, an immediate and sophisticated expression of the thought of the average man. And at the risk of plunging him into the abominable heresy of the Patripassians or the Theo-Paschites, we must unite with Athanasius to assure Tommy Atkins that the God who lived and died in the world was the same God who made the world, and that, therefore, God Himself has the best possible reasons for “understanding and sympathizing with Tommy’s personal troubles”.

‘But,’ Tommy Atkins and John Brown will instantly object, ‘it can’t have mattered very much to Him if He was God. A god

can't really suffer like you and me. Besides, parson says we are to try and be like Christ; but that's nonsense—we can't be God, and it's silly to ask us to try.' This able exposition of the Eutychian heresy can scarcely be dismissed as merely 'interesting to theologians'; it appears to interest Atkins and Brown to the point of irritation. Willy-nilly, we are forced to involve ourselves further in dogmatic theology and insist that Christ is '*perfect God and perfect man*'.

At this point, language will trip us up. The average man is not to be restrained from thinking that 'perfect God' implies a comparison with gods less perfect, and that 'perfect man' means 'the best kind of man you can possibly have'. While both these propositions are quite true, they are not precisely what we want to convey. It will perhaps be better to say, 'altogether God and altogether man'—God and man at the same time, in every respect and completely; God from— eternity to eternity and from the womb to the grave, a man also from the womb to the grave and now.

'That,' replies Tommy Atkins, 'is all very well, but it leaves me cold. Because, if He was God all the time He must have known that His sufferings and death and so on wouldn't last, and He could have stopped them by a miracle if He had liked, so His pretending to be an ordinary man 'was nothing but play-acting.' And John Brown adds, 'You can't call a person "altogether man" if He was God and didn't want to do anything wrong. It was easy enough for Him to be good, but it's not at all the same thing for me. How about all that temptation-stuff?' Play-acting again. It doesn't help me to live what you call a Christian life. John and Tommy are now on the way to become convinced Apollinarians, a fact which, however 'interesting to theologians', has a distinct relevance also to the lives of those average men, since they propose, on the strength of it, to dismiss 'Christian principles' as impracticable. There is no help for it. We must insist upon Christ's possession of 'a reasonable soul' as well as 'human flesh'; we must admit the human limitations of knowledge and intellect; we must take a hint

from Christ Himself and suggest that miracles belong to the Son of Man as well as to the Son of God; we must postulate a human will liable to temptation; and we must be quite firm about 'Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead and *inferior to the Father as touching His manhood*'. Complicated as the theology is, the average man has walked straight into the heart of the Athanasian Creed, and we are bound to follow.

Teachers and preachers never, I think, make it sufficiently clear that dogmas are not a set of arbitrary regulations invented *a priori* by a committee of theologians enjoying a bout of all-in dialectical wrestling. Most of them were hammered out under pressure of urgent practical necessity to provide an answer to heresy. And heresy is, as I have tried to show, largely the expression of opinion of the untutored average man, trying to grapple with the problems of the universe at the point where they begin to interfere with his daily life and thought. To me, engaged in my diabolical occupation of going to and fro in the world and walking up and down in it, conversations and correspondence bring daily a magnificent crop of all the standard heresies. As practical examples of the 'life and thought of the average man' I am extremely well familiar with them, though I had to hunt through the Encyclopaedia to fit them with their proper theological titles for the purposes of this address. For the answers I need not go so far: they are compendiously set forth in the Creeds. But an interesting fact is this: that nine out of ten of my heretics are exceedingly surprised to discover that the Creeds contain any statements that bear a practical and comprehensible meaning. If I tell them it is an article of faith that the same God who made the world endured the suffering of the world, they ask in perfect good faith what connection there is between that statement and the story of Jesus. If I draw their attention to the dogma that the same Jesus who was the Divine Love was also Light of Light, the Divine Wisdom, they are surprised. Some of them thank me very heartily for this entirely novel and original interpretation of Scripture, which they never heard of before and suppose me to have invented. Others say irritably that they don't like to think that wisdom and religion have

anything to do with one another, and that I should do much better to cut out the wisdom and reason and intelligence and stick to a simple gospel of love. But whether they are pleased or annoyed, they are interested; and the thing that interests them, whether or not they suppose it to be my invention, is the resolute assertion of the dogma.

As regards Dr. Selbie's complaint that insistence on dogma only affronts people and throws into relief the internecine quarrels of Christendom, may I say two things? First, I believe it to be a grave mistake to present Christianity as something charming and popular with no offence in it. Seeing that Christ went about the world giving the most violent offence to all kinds of people it would seem absurd to expect that the doctrine of His Person can be so presented as to offend nobody. We cannot blink the fact that gentle Jesus meek and mild was so stiff in His opinions and so inflammatory in His language that He was thrown out of church, stoned, hunted from place to place, and finally gibbeted as a firebrand and a public danger. Whatever His peace was, it was not the peace of an amiable indifference; and He said in so many words that what He brought with Him was fire and sword. That being so, nobody need be too much surprised or disconcerted at finding that a determined preaching of Christian dogma may sometimes result in a few angry letters of protest or a difference of opinion on the parish council.

The other thing is this: that I find by experience there is a very large measure of agreement among Christian denominations on all doctrine that is really oecumenical. A rigidly Catholic interpretation of the Creeds, for example—including the Athanasian Creed—will find support both in Rome and in Geneva. Objections will come chiefly from the heathen, and from a noisy but not very representative batch of heretical parsons who once in their youth read Robertson or Conybeare and have never got over it. But what is urgently necessary is that certain fundamentals should be restated in terms that make their meaning—and indeed, the mere fact that they *have* a meaning—clear to the ordinary

uninstructed heathen to whom technical theological language has become a dead letter.

May I now mention some of the dogmas concerning which I find there is most ignorance and misunderstanding and about which I believe the modern world most urgently needs to be told? Out of a very considerable number I have selected seven as being what I may call ‘key-positions’, namely, God, man, sin, judgment, matter, work, and society. They are, of course, all closely bound together—Christian doctrine is not a set of rules, but one vast interlocking rational structure—but there are particular aspects of these seven subjects which seem to me to need special emphasis at the moment.

1. God—At the risk of appearing quite insolently obvious, I shall say that if the Church is to make any impression on the modern mind she will have to preach Christ and the cross.

Of late years, the Church has not succeeded very well in preaching Christ: she has preached Jesus, which is not quite the same thing. I find that the ordinary man simply does not grasp *at all* the idea that Jesus Christ and God the Creator are held to be literally the same person. They believe Catholic doctrine to be that God the Father made the world and that Jesus Christ redeemed mankind, and that these two characters are quite separate personalities. The phrasing of the Nicene Creed is here a little unfortunate—it is easy to read it as: ‘being of one substance with the-Father-by-whom-all-things-were-made’.

The Church Catechism—again rather unfortunately—emphasizes the distinction: ‘God the Father who hath made me and all the world, God the Son who hath redeemed me and all mankind.’ The distinction of the Persons within the unity of the Substance is philosophically quite proper, and familiar enough to any creative artist: but the majority of people are not creative artists, and they have it very firmly fixed in their heads that the Person who bore the sins of the world was not the eternal creative life of the world, but an entirely different person, who was in fact the victim of God the Creator. It is dangerous to emphasize one aspect of a doctrine at

the expense of the other, but at this present moment the danger that anybody will confound the Persons is so remote as to be negligible. What everybody does is to divide the substance—with the result that the whole Jesus-history becomes an unmeaning anecdote of the brutality of God to man.

It is only with the confident assertion of the creative divinity of the Son that the doctrine of the Incarnation becomes a real revelation of the structure of the world. And here Christianity has its enormous advantage over every other religion in the world. It is the *only* religion which gives value to evil and suffering. It affirms—not, like Christian science, that evil has no real existence, nor yet, like Buddhism, that good consists in a refusal to experience evil—but that perfection is attained through the active and positive effort to wrench a real good out of a real evil.

I will not now go into the very difficult question of the nature of evil and the reality of not-being, though the modern physicists seem to be giving us a very valuable lead about that particular philosophic dilemma. But it seems to me most important that, in face of present world conditions, the doctrines of the reality of evil and the value of suffering should be kept in the very front line of Christian affirmation. I mean, it is not enough to say that religion produces virtues and personal consolations side by side with the very obvious evils and pains that afflict mankind, but that God is alive and at work *within* the evil and the suffering, perpetually transforming them by the positive energy which He had with the Father before the world was made.

2. MAN—A young and intelligent priest remarked to me the other day that he thought one of the greatest sources of strength in Christianity today lay in the profoundly pessimistic view it took of human nature. There is a great deal in what he says. The people who are most discouraged and made despondent by the barbarity and stupidity of human behaviour at this time are those who think highly of *Homo Sapiens* as a product of evolution, and who still cling to an optimistic belief in the civilizing influence of progress

and enlightenment. To them, the appalling outbursts of bestial ferocity in the Totalitarian States, and the obstinate selfishness and stupid greed of Capitalist Society, are not merely shocking and alarming. For them, these things are the utter negation of everything in which they have believed. It is as though the bottom had dropped out of their universe. The whole thing looks like a denial of all reason, and they feel as if they and the world had gone mad together. Now for the Christian, this is not so. He is as deeply shocked and grieved as anybody else, but he is not astonished. He has never thought very highly of human nature left to itself. He has been accustomed to the idea that there is a deep interior dislocation in the very centre of human personality, and that you can never, as they say, ‘make people good by Act of Parliament’, just because laws are man-made and therefore partake of the imperfect and self-contradictory nature of man. Humanly speaking, it is not true at all that ‘truly to know the good is to do the good’; it is far truer to say with St. Paul that ‘the evil that I would not, that I do’; so that the mere increase of knowledge is of very little help in the struggle to outlaw evil. The delusion of the mechanical perfectibility of mankind through a combined process of scientific knowledge and unconscious evolution has been responsible for a great deal of heartbreak. It is, at bottom, far more pessimistic than Christian pessimism, because, if science and progress break down, there is nothing to fall back upon. Humanism is self-contained—it provides for man no resources outside himself. The Christian dogma of the double nature in man—which asserts that man is disintegrated and necessarily imperfect in himself and all his works, yet closely related by a real unity of substance with an eternal perfection within and beyond him—makes the present parlous state of human society seem both less hopeless and less irrational. I say ‘the present parlous state’—but that is to limit it too much. A man told me the other day: ‘I have a little boy of a year old. When the war broke out, I was very much distressed about him, because I found I was taking it for granted that life *ought* to be better and easier for him than it had been for my generation. Then I realized that I had no right to take this for granted at all—that the fight between good and evil

must be the same for him as it had always been, and then I ceased to feel so much distressed. As ‘Lord David Cecil has said’: ‘The jargon of the philosophy of progress taught us to think that the savage and primitive state of man is behind us; we still talk of the present “return to barbarism”. But barbarism is not behind us, it is beneath us.’ And in the same article he observes: ‘Christianity has compelled the mind of man, not because it is the most cheering view of human existence, but because it is truest to the facts.’ I think this is true; and it seems to me quite disastrous that the idea should have got about that Christianity is an other-worldly, unreal, idealistic kind of religion which suggests that if we are good we shall be happy—or if not, it will all be made up to us in the next existence. On the contrary, it is fiercely and even harshly realistic, insisting that the Kingdom of Heaven can never be attained in this world except by unceasing toil and struggle and vigilance: that, in fact, we cannot be good and cannot be happy, but that there are certain eternal achievements that make even happiness look like trash. It has been said, I think by Berdyaev, that nothing can prevent the human soul from preferring creativeness to happiness. In this lies man’s substantial likeness to the Divine Christ who in this world suffers and creates continually, being incarnate in the bonds of matter.

3. SIN—This doctrine of man leads naturally to the doctrine of sin. One of the really surprising things about the present bewilderment of humanity is that the Christian Church now finds herself called upon to proclaim the old and hated doctrine of sin as a gospel of cheer and encouragement. The final tendency of the modern philosophies—hailed in their day as a release from the burden of sinfulness—has been to bind man hard and fast in the chains of an iron determinism. The influences of heredity and environment, of glandular make-up and the control exercised by the unconscious, of economic necessity and the mechanics of biological development, have all been invoked to assure man that he is not responsible for his misfortunes and therefore not to be held guilty. Evil has been represented as something imposed upon him from without, not made by him from within.

The dreadful conclusion follows inevitably, that as he is not responsible for evil, he cannot alter it; even though evolution and progress may offer some alleviation in the future, there is no hope for you and me, here and now. I well remember how an aunt of mine, brought up in an old-fashioned liberalism, protested angrily against having continually to call herself a ‘miserable sinner’ when reciting the Litany. Today, if we could really be persuaded that we are miserable sinners—that the trouble is not outside us but inside us, and that therefore, by the grace of God we can do something to put it right, we should receive that message as the most hopeful and heartening thing that can be imagined. Needless to say, the whole doctrine of ‘original sin’ will have to be restated, in terms which the ordinary modern man, brought up on biology and Freudian psychology, can understand. These sciences have done an enormous amount to expose the nature and mechanism of man’s inner dislocation and ought to be powerful weapons in the hand of the Church. It is a thousand pities that the Church should ever have allowed these weapons to be turned against her.

4. JUDGEMENT—Much the same thing is true of the doctrine of judgment. The word ‘punishment’ for sin has become so corrupted that it ought never to be used. But once we have established the true doctrine of man’s nature, the true nature of judgment becomes startlingly clear and rational. It is the inevitable consequence of man’s attempt to regulate life and society on a system that runs counter to the facts of his own nature. In the physical sphere, typhus and cholera are a judgment on dirty living; not because God shows an arbitrary favouritism to nice, clean people, but because of an essential element in the physical structure of the universe. In the state, the brutal denial of freedom to the individual will issue in a judgment of blood, because man is so made that oppression is more intolerable to him than death. The avaricious greed that prompts men to cut down forests for the speedy making of money brings down a judgment of flood and famine, because that sin of avarice in the spiritual sphere runs counter to the physical law of nature. We must not say that such behaviour is wrong because it does not pay; but rather that it does not pay because it is wrong.

As T. S. Eliot says: ‘A wrong attitude towards nature implies, somewhere, a wrong attitude towards God, and the consequence is an inevitable doom.’

5. MATTER—At this point we shall find ourselves compelled to lay down the Christian doctrine concerning the material universe; and it is here, I think, that we shall have our best opportunity to explain the meaning of sacramentalism. The common man labours under a delusion that for the Christian, matter is evil and the body is evil. For this misapprehension, St. Paul must bear some blame, St. Augustine of Hippo a good deal more, and Calvin a very great deal. But so long as the Church continues to teach the manhood of God and to celebrate the sacraments of the Eucharist and of marriage, no living man should dare to say that matter and body are not sacred to her. She must insist strongly that the whole material universe is an expression and incarnation of the creative energy of God, as a book or a picture is the material expression of the creative soul of the artist. For that reason, all good and creative handling of the material universe is holy and beautiful, and all abuse of the material universe is a crucifixion of the body of Christ. The whole question of the right use to be made of art, of the intellect, and of the material resources of the world is bound up in this. Because of this, the exploitation of man or of matter for commercial uses stands condemned, together with all debasement of the arts and perversions of the intellect. If matter and the physical nature of man are evil, or if they are of no importance except as they serve an economic system, then there is nothing to restrain us from abusing them as we choose—nothing, except the absolute certainty that any such abuse will eventually come up against the unalterable law and issue in judgment and destruction. In these as in all other matters we cannot escape the law; we have only the choice of fulfilling it freely by the way of grace or willy-nilly by the way of judgment.

6. WORK—The unsacramental attitude of modern society to man and matter is probably closely connected with its unsacramental attitude to work. The Church is a good deal to blame for having

connived at this. From the eighteenth century onwards, she has tended to acquiesce in what I may Call the ‘industrious apprentice’ view of the matter: ‘Work hard and be thrifty, and God will bless you with a contented mind and a competence.’ This is nothing but enlightened self-interest in its vulgarest form, and plays directly into the hands of the monopolist and the financier. Nothing has so deeply discredited the Christian Church as her squalid submission to the economic theory of society. The burning question of the Christian attitude to money is being so eagerly debated nowadays that it is scarcely necessary to do more than remind ourselves that the present unrest, both in Russia and in Central Europe, is an immediate judgment upon a financial system that has subordinated man to economics, and that no mere readjustment of economic machinery will have any lasting effect if it keeps man a prisoner inside the machine.

This is the burning question; but I believe there is a still more important and fundamental question waiting to be dealt with, and that is, what men in a Christian Society ought to think and feel about work. Curiously enough, apart from the passage in Genesis which suggests that work is a hardship and a judgment on sin, Christian doctrine is not very explicit about work. I believe, however, that there is a Christian doctrine of work, very closely related to the doctrines of the creative energy of God and the divine image in man. The modern tendency seems to be to identify work with gainful employment; and this is, I maintain, the essential heresy at the back of the great economic fallacy which allows wheat and coffee to be burnt and fish to be used for manure while whole populations stand in need of food. The fallacy being that work is not the expression of man’s creative energy in the service of Society, but only something he does in order to obtain money and leisure.

A very able surgeon put it to me like this: ‘What is happening,’ he said, ‘is that nobody works for the sake of getting the thing done. The result of the work is a by-product; the *aim* of the work is to make money to do something else.’

Doctors practise medicine, not primarily to relieve suffering, but to make a living—the cure of the patient is something that happens on the way. Lawyers accept briefs, not because they have a passion for justice, but because the law is the profession which enables them to live. The reason, he added, ‘why men often find themselves happy and satisfied in the army is that for the first time in their lives they find themselves doing something, not for the sake of the pay, which is miserable, but for the sake of getting the thing done.’

I will only add to this one thing which seems to me very symptomatic. I was shown a ‘scheme for a Christian Society’ drawn up by a number of young and earnest Roman Catholics. It contained a number of clauses dealing with work and employment—minimum wages, hours of labour, treatment of employees, housing, and so on—all very proper and Christian. But it offered no machinery whatever for ensuring that the work itself should be properly done. In its lack of a sacramental attitude to work, that is, it was as empty as a set of trade union regulations. We may remember that a medieval guild did insist, not only on the employer’s duty to his workmen, but also on the labourer’s duty to his work.

If man’s fulfillment of his nature is to be found in the full expression of his divine creativeness, then we urgently need a Christian doctrine of work, which shall provide, not only for proper conditions of employment, but also that the work shall be such as a man may do with his whole heart, and that he shall do it for the very work’s sake. But we cannot expect a sacramental attitude to work, while many people are forced, by our evil standard of values, to do work which is a spiritual degradation—a long series of financial trickeries, for example, or the manufacture of vulgar and useless trivialities.

7. SOCIETY—Lastly, a word or two about the Christian doctrine of society—not about its translation into political terms, but about its dogmatic basis. It rests on the doctrine of what God is and what

man is, and it is impossible to have a Christian doctrine of society *except* as a corollary to Christian dogma about the place of man in the universe. This is, or should be, obvious. The one point to which I should like to draw attention is the Christian doctrine of the moral law. The attempt to abolish wars and wickedness by the moral law is doomed to failure, because of the fact of sinfulness. Law, like every other product of human activity, shares the integral human imperfection: it is, in the old Calvinistic phrase: ‘of the nature of sin’. That is to say: all legality, if erected into an absolute value, contains within itself the seeds of judgment and catastrophe. The law is necessary, but only, as it were, as a protective fence against the forces of evil, behind which the divine activity of grace may do its redeeming work. We can, for example, never make a positive peace or a positive righteousness by enactments against offenders; law is always prohibitive, negative, and corrupted by the interior contradictions of man’s divided nature; it belongs to the category of judgment. That is why an intelligent understanding about sin is necessary to preserve the world from putting an unjustified confidence in the efficacy of the moral law taken by itself. It will never drive out Beelzebug; it cannot, because it is only human and not divine.

Nevertheless, the law must be rightly understood or it is not possible to make the world understand the meaning of grace. There is only one real law—the law of the universe; it may be fulfilled either by way of judgment or by the way of grace, but it *must* be fulfilled one way or the other. If men will not understand the meaning of judgment, they will never come to understand the meaning of grace. If they hear not Moses or the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.
