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## FALSE MYSTICISMS AND CHRISTIANITY.

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Substitutes for evangelical Christianity—some of them pseudo-Christianities or at least Christianities to which the epithet “evangelical” could in nowise be applied, and some of them not within the range of the term “Christianity” at all—have been offered for men’s acceptance ever since Christianity began. It has not always happened, however, that among the group of substitutes which at any given time have made their appeal one common factor could be discerned. But today that is how the situation stands. A glance round the various forms of faith which are just now leading a certain number of adherents to forsake evangelical Christianity and to enroll in their ranks leads to the conclusion that, at any rate in the case of many of them, a common factor does exist. And if this be so, it is worth while to identify the common factor; to enquire whether its presence—as the point of union among many differences—in the faiths competing with Christianity does not point to the existence of a genuine human need which the competing faiths at least partially satisfy; to enquire further, whether the competing faiths really provide the satisfaction they seem at a first glance to give; and above all to enquire whether in Christianity itself, rightly understood, a better satis-

faction for that need may not after all be found. To some such enquiries as these the present paper is intended to find a reply.

1.

The point of union among many proposed substitutes for evangelical Christianity is here—that they profess to indicate a method whereby man may link himself to the ultimate Life of the universe, becoming one with God or with whatever Ultimate is set in place of God by the systems concerned. They profess, in other words, to satisfy the mystical instinct, and this not only for thought, but for actual experience and life. They aim at **breaking** down the separateness and isolation whereof humanity is conscious: they propose to make humanity whole by making it lose its own wholeness and become but a part in a larger whole; and they set themselves to bring about, as the supreme good realizable by man, a condition, as between man and God, which no such words as “harmony,” or “fellowship,” or “likeness,” but only such words as “oneness” or “identity,” will adequately describe. Their object is to rectify the emergence of the individual upon the cosmic process—which emergence is declared either to have marked a slanting off by that process from its true and proper line or to have been a temporary and parenthetical break; and they point the way to that submergence of the individual in the eternal life-tides by which once again the perfect order is to be restored. Experience, they declare in their varying voices, approaches the ideal in proportion as experience in the ordinary sense (implying an out-standing and up-standing personality in the midst of a world which pushes against it and clutches at it and demands resistance from it) vanishes away; and they profess to guide us to that final vanishing which will show—though presumably there will be no one there to mark it—that at last the perfect thing is come. In this way they set themselves

to feed man's hunger, not only for knowledge of, but for actual union with, whatever God there may be.

If we throw our mind's survey across many of the systems which today lure men and women from Christianity in the historic sense of the term, we see at once of how many of them this description holds good. To no inconsiderable number theosophy, for instance, is as it were a new star in the east, guiding them where salvation is to be found; and theosophy holds up absorption in the "all" as the final paradise into which its "Masters" have already penetrated to such an extent that their voices only come back upon us faintly and far, and which faithful devotees, now picking their way through many repetitions of the painful ordeal of individual existence, may hope at last to attain. Eddyism, grotesquely mis-called "Christian Science," lays down as its fundamental tenet what it terms "the allness of God"; declares not only that the individual is to lose himself in the one and only "Mind," but that already, if he only knew it, no such thing as his own personality exists; and bids him think his own separateness away. Systems naming themselves the systems of "higher thought" instruct us to search unto the deeps of our own nature, promising us that there, if the search be earnest and thorough, we shall come upon a sort of reservoir of life wherein eternal Being has permitted some of its stress to be collected, so that we may leap in and find our own being by losing ourselves there. On the conception of being "in tune with the Infinite" book after book of quasi-philosophical cast rings the changes, the dominant note through all the variations being that the individual must perfect himself, not by accentuating and developing his individuality, but by blurring its outlines and so opening its upper and lower sluice-gates that in the rush of the infinite sea it may be overwhelmed. And in the case of the pseudo-Christianities—the systems which with one breath say "Entreat me not to leave thee" to Christianity and with the next gener-

ously explain to Christianity what Christianity has really meant through all the centuries of its existence—the persistent idea is that man's salvation lies in realizing his own life as the last stretch in a process of self-unfolding on the part of the divine life; and that Christ, insofar as He is Saviour, saves because in Him the realization of that fact reached its loftiest pitch, His perfect realization of it becoming an example and a baptism of inspiration to us in our lower estate. Indeed, most of the current substitutes for Christianity assert boldly that in their rejection of *evangelical* Christianity they are really recalling us to *true* Christianity; for evangelical Christianity, they declare (with what measure of truth we shall presently see), has become a mere intellectualism, a mere matter of accepting certain beliefs, instead of a means of actual participation in the divine and eternal Life; and what Christ Himself originally proclaimed was the secret of that participation which they now re-proclaim. What is aimed at by all these systems of thought—though indeed some of them scarcely merit a name so large—is the satisfaction of the mystical instinct, the bringing about of an actual union between man and whatever God they confess. Different as they are in many things else, on that chord their voices blend.

That so many proposed substitutes for evangelical Christianity should in this respect be at one—and that so many systems at one in this respect should be winning adherents not a few—goes far to prove the prevalence of that mystical instinct to which they make their appeal. And, indeed, the instinct itself is a quite legitimate one, an instinct inextricably bound up with warm and eager aspirations after a spiritual experience of reach and depth. (Of course the other instinct—the instinct which demands the assertion and development of personality—is equally clamant and equally worthy with the instinct which demands the union of personality to something greater than itself. And whether the systems alluded to,

supposing them capable of satisfying the mystical instinct along their own suggested lines, would not accomplish that end at the excessive cost of doing too great violence to that other instinct is a point which will come up for at least incidental reference before our study is done.) Whatever may be the particular causes of its up-rising today—whether the cause be a reaction from the practical materialism into which life's stress and competition have forced so many, or a subtler reaction in the direction of *being* from that emphasis upon *knowing* which during decades of intellectual enquiry has necessarily prevailed, or some deep-lying spring of feeling undiscovered as yet—neither the fact of its prevalence nor the fact of its worthiness can be brought into dispute. Not the fact of its prevalence; for by their appeal to it, and their proffered satisfaction for it, do the systems named obtain their votes. Not the fact of its worthiness, for the instinct demands union with the eternal, a sinking of self into something higher and greater than self, an experience whereby the part may be made to serve the whole, a raising of the individual life (even though the cost be death) up to a plane whereon the individual life and all its interests are drowned under the flow of the Life that is from everlasting to everlasting—and these desires have been the marks of the saints through all time. Those substitutes for Christianity which propose to show how the separateness of the individual may be toned down or lost in union with the ultimate Life of the universe may at least plead that they offer what not a few are wanting, and that the instinct to which they address themselves is among the holiest ones that human nature knows.

But all the more urgent, therefore, is it to enquire whether they make their professions good. If they could fulfill their promise, while in respect of the mystical instinct which they claim to satisfy Christianity had little or nothing to offer, their case would be strong. How far does their power of satisfying that instinct go? If we answer

that question, and then turn to ask and answer the same question in regard to evangelical Christianity, we shall be able to measure what advantage, if any, the proposed substitutes possess. On the other hand (if this much may be said as a sort of anticipation of the subsequent verdict) we may find, as we compare the two, that while the proposed substitutes for evangelical Christianity have less power in the desired direction than they claim, evangelical Christianity itself has reserves of power in that same direction which, when reckoned up, leave the advantage wholly on its side.

## 2.

Do these substitutes for Christianity fulfill their professed aim, make their promise good?

It must be borne in mind, in meeting this question, that the problem of satisfying the mystical instinct is a practical problem in the sense that it is a problem of modifying actual experience, of bestowing upon experience something which it does not at present possess. It is not simply a problem of finding an explanatory formula to cover existing facts: it is a problem of changing existing facts and producing a new fact. It is not simply a quest for truth: it is a quest for power. The satisfaction of the mystical instinct involves not merely a fresh reading of what we are, a fresh explanation of how we came to be what we are: it involves the discovery of a secret whereby we may *become what we are not*. That much, at least, every one who knows himself will declare. For the fact of our own personality and of its separateness from the ultimate Life stares us in the face: it is, indeed, in our consciousness of these facts that the problem begins; nor can we hope that the separateness of our personality from the ultimate Life, and our consciousness of it, will automatically pass away at last if only we wait in patience till the process of things works itself out to its

appointed end, since the obvious tendency, at work from the world's beginning and from history's dim dawn, is to accentuate them both. Even if it be said (as we shall immediately note that it is said in various degrees of emphasis by the systems with which we are dealing), that the consciousness of an individuality marked off from the ultimate Life is a delusion out of correspondence with reality, and that in respect of this matter humanity has throughout all its experience been "made subject to bondage" by a lie, the problem remains an essentially practical one nevertheless. For the delusion is there, and must be removed. Whether the question be one of correcting a really existing separateness or of banishing the false consciousness of a separateness purely imaginary, in either case *something must be done*. Either upon the separateness or upon the mistaken imagination of it, some actual and active power must be brought to bear, if the mystical instinct, the desire for union between the One and the All, is to have its hunger fed.

But it is precisely here that these substitutes for Christianity break down. What they bring to bear upon our consciousness of severance from God, from the ultimate Life, is no dynamic, but a simple belief; and they remain mere intellectualisms when all is said and done. For the most part, their solution of the problem is that the consciousness is a delusion, and that we must set things right by believing it to be such. (Once again, in discussing the matter, there steals to the edge of one's field of thought the suspicion that if these systems really possessed the power they claim they would accomplish too much, and in satisfying the one instinct would do violence to another equally strong. But once again, let that pass.) The process by which they arrive at this reading of the matter is indeed easy enough to follow; and perhaps their final conclusion is inevitable if once their starting-point be taken up. It is with inability to accept what is involved in such an approach of God to man—in such

an invitation to union and such an offer of union—as historic Christianity proclaims; with inability to accept any movement down upon the order of the world from beyond the world itself or any movement out of the order of the world whereby it comes into touch with a movement initiated elsewhere; with inability to accept anything like miracle in short; it is with this that they begin. But, then, if this inability is to be recognized as regulative of the situation and as setting up a barrier which thought, when it reaches it, must not attempt to overthrow but before which it must stop short—and if, at the same time, the mystical instinct is to be satisfied—no alternative remains to declaring that our consciousness of present separateness from the ultimate Life is out of correspondence with the facts. For once admit that life as known *within* the order of the world—in other words, human personality or what we take to be such—stands over against an ultimate Life *without* the order of the world, admit the distinction between the two, and it is only by the touch of the Life without upon the life within, or by the passage of the life within over to the Life without, or by the mutual approach of the two, that union can be brought about: with the falling of our choice upon any one of the three possibilities, the conception of a break into or out of the world's order enters into our scheme; and this is to say that the idea of miracle—the very idea which we began by wishing above all things to shut out—has forced the door again. It is *within* the order of the world that the whole process of union, the process whereby the mystical instinct is to be satisfied, must, on the given conditions, be carried on. And the only way in which the process can be thus confined is by declaring that human life and the ultimate Life are already, *within* the world's existing order, one and the same—by declaring, in brief, that the witness of consciousness to our own personality is falsely borne. At any rate, this is what is done in varying degrees of completeness by all the systems we have



in view just now. According to them all, we are to find our salvation by fixing our thought upon the *fact* of oneness or identity between ourselves and the Eternal Being, upon the *fact* of the "allness of God," upon the *fact* of our life being enclosed within the larger Life like a drop enclosed within an infinite sea: the process of redemption from the disaster of a too sharply accentuated individuality is really a process of self-persuasion, leading, for its happy issue, to a conviction that no such redemption is either necessary or possible; and by the steadfast contemplation, as a truth, of the idea that God and man are one we are to make the idea come true at last.

But this is to leave us, as has been said, with a mere belief, not with a real dynamic through whose operation the satisfaction of the mystical instinct can be brought about; and it is in a simple intellectualism, necessarily barren of any practical results, that the whole thing ends. The underlying fallacy in it all is the idea that a *belief* can change a *fact* or bring a *new* fact into being—a fallacy perhaps more glaring in this instance than in most. We may believe as strongly as possible in the oneness of man and God; but the belief cannot make them one if they are not, nor destroy the consciousness of separateness, delusive as that consciousness may be declared. Of course, if human personality be a veritable fact, you cannot obliterate the fact by repeating to yourself that it is none, any more than you can remove a mountain by asserting that it is not there. That much is beyond dispute. But on the other reading—the reading, adopted by most of the systems under survey, which takes our consciousness of personality to be as delusive as the sight of a mirage—the case is hopeless still. It is idle to illustrate the process of supposed victory over this delusion by instances of the way in which intellectual convictions, adopted against appearances by a sort of *tour de force* or by a self-compulsion difficult at first, do sometimes justify themselves at last. Certainly you may often banish a

mere hallucination—*provided that it is such according to the existing order of the world*—by forcing your mind, reluctant as it may be, to say that the hallucination must go; but this means no more than that your mind has got temporarily out of touch with the world's order and that you are bringing it back into touch therewith again; while the very effort you make to do so implies, moreover, that you accept the world's order as supplying the test whereby the truth or error of the consciousness under treatment is to be judged. There is no analogy here with an attempt at banishing the consciousness of personality by making yourself believe that it is false. Any such attempt involves you in a contradiction which the process of self-correction just alluded to does not carry. *For in any such attempt you are denying and affirming the existing world-order at one and the same time*—denying its reality and yet affirming that reality in the very act of denial. By the existing world-order the consciousness of our own individuality is pressed upon us. Say that this consciousness is misleading, and call upon us so to believe. But then this belief, like any other belief, is *itself* an act of personality; to disbelieve in personality (since disbelief in anything is merely belief that it is *not*) is really to call the consciousness of personality to bestir itself and be up and doing; and so long as you believe that personality is a delusion, the consciousness of personality must persist precisely because you so believe. Your effort at destroying the consciousness of personality by an intellectual conviction destroys, not the consciousness of personality, but itself. In short, a conviction that man and God, human life and the ultimate Life, are really one, is and must remain entirely inoperative upon experience: work it up towards its highest pitch, and you do but render it the more powerless the more nearly the highest pitch is approached; and the proposed cure for the alleged delusion of personality is, in its impossible inconsistency, much like asking a man to say that he is dumb. It may

be granted that an intellectual belief, if intensely held, may produce an emotion—the emotion resulting as the holder of the belief passes on from the first coldness of conviction to the higher temperature of an imagination which conjures up what would take place if the belief were true. But this only means that intensity of belief has the power of throwing us into a sort of trance, of surrounding us with a golden haze wherein strange shapes appear, reacting as they do so upon the mental condition which gave them birth, not that it has any dynamic quality which can give actuality to the shapes our fancy sees. All these systems of thought in the long run meet the needs of the mystical instinct by simply ignoring the facts which tell against them, and by substituting for a recognition of them a mere *affirmation* of oneness between man and God which leaves and must leave actual experience wholly untouched and unchanged. In this method there is no real meeting of the mystical instinct's needs at all. We are merely to believe that the lines which we think we see drawn round our own personality are not there. And because no amount of self-persuasion will cause those lines to fade away, because beliefs cannot alter facts, it is in an inefficacious intellectualism that the whole thing ends.

### 3.

Rather curiously, however, we are now saying of these substitutes for evangelical Christianity precisely what they say of evangelical Christianity itself. We saw earlier that they charge Christianity with being simply a matter of accepting certain beliefs, and themselves offer to provide a life instead of a mere belief. That they cannot make their offer good, we have seen. But what of Christianity and the charge they level against it? Is evangelical Christianity what these substitutes are, and what they accuse evangelical Christianity of being, a mere intellectualism? Or is it something more?

That evangelical Christianity has to a great extent, at any rate for many, perhaps for the majority of its adherents, become a mere intellectualism must be confessed. But that originally it was something more and a great deal more must be asserted with equal emphasis. And the difference between evangelical Christianity and the systems which desire to depose evangelical Christianity and then to occupy its place lies just here—that while these systems are in their very nature (and therefore permanently) incompetent to satisfy that mystical instinct whereto they appeal, evangelical Christianity needs but to recover its old and first outlook and accent in order to satisfy that instinct to the full. How and why evangelical Christianity has dropped from its original great mission of providing a veritable union with the Eternal Life to the smaller mission of providing a body of ideas for the mind's acceptance it is well worth while to enquire.

No one who knows his New Testament will deny that its original mission was as stated just now. It was as Life-Giver that Christ thought of and announced Himself. His claim was that He possessed the eternal life of God in a way altogether unique, and that through a personal relationship with Himself men came to possess that eternal life in their turn. He had it, and could communicate it. He, the Son who knew the Father, was the link by whose interposition between man and God these were linked, as it were at one remove. It was always *Himself* that He offered to man, and by acceptance of *Himself* that man so to say obtained the full benefit of Him—which can have no meaning except on the theory that by union with Christ (Christ being in union with God), man passed into union with that God with whom Christ's own union was complete. God in Christ—so the line drops down as it were from the highest to the middle point of the series. Then man in Christ—so to that same middle point the line runs up from below. Thus at that middle point of the series do the highest and the lowest consummate their

approach. To that middle point the approach of the highest element has already, in the Incarnation, been made: to that middle point the approach of the lowest, by means of faith and surrender, remains to be performed. And it was in this way that the New Testament writers and saints made use of Christ, if the phrase may be employed. To go no further than Paul, his reading of Christianity was to the effect that in Christ dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and that in Him (in Christ), the Christian was made full—that by union with Christ the Christian was filled, up to the measure of his possibilities, with that divine life whereof in perfect measure Christ was full; which is only to reproduce in other words Christ's own conception, "I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be perfected into one." God in Christ—Christ in man—and therefore God in man through Christ—so Paul's reading ran. But indeed the thing needs no laboring. The fact lies so clearly upon the surface that he who runs may read. First and foremost from the beginning, Christianity set itself to satisfy (to waken if it slumbered, and thereafter to satisfy when awake), the mystical instinct which demanded a veritable and vital union between man and God.

How then did Christianity drift so far—drift till it became for so many the mere intellectualism, the mere acceptance of doctrine and belief, which for so many it has indisputably become? \* Precisely because of the thoroughness wherewith its high problem was attacked. For Christianity, in its dealing with the problem, sought to do justice to *all* the facts. It knew that no simple assertion of an already existing oneness between man and God could suffice—the facts were too patent and strong. It

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\*In these paragraphs I speak only of what may be called the **external** reasons for the change—those lying in Christianity's relations with the challenging mind of the world. With some of the tendencies **within** Christianity itself which made for the same result I have tried to deal elsewhere, in the "Review and Expositor" for January, 1913.

saw the divine and human personalities standing over against one another on the field: it recognized that no juggling with the testimony of consciousness could make man disbelieve that testimony for long; and it set itself, not to drug man's sense of circumscribed isolation with opiates, but to change the fundamental conditions whence it sprang. Above all, it gave full weight to the forces which accentuated the existing separateness between man and God and to the necessity of meeting and overcoming them by a counterforce. And, with all these things in view—with human life shut in *within* the existing world-order, separated from and yet needing to be linked with the divine eternal Life *outside* the world-order—it concluded that only by a breaking *into* the world-order on the part of the divine eternal Life, so that human life might break *out* of the world-order in response, could a mutual approach and ultimate union of the two be brought about. So it spoke of an Incarnation wherein at a particular point of historic time the eternal Life made entry upon the stage of the world, of a Son of God who had "life in Himself" and could communicate that life to men, of a death and resurrection whereby the life-giving power which had shown itself (as it had of necessity first of all to do) within circumscribed local limits and within narrow bounds of time proved to be abiding and operative for the world's future ages and for all the nations and peoples of the earth. To these great assertions Christianity was driven because it bent itself to a truly adequate treatment of the problem, and would be content with nothing less. Its aim was that men might have life in the sense of truly uniting themselves with the eternal Life of God; and it rose with sublimest daring to the height of *all* that was necessary in order that the great aim might be fulfilled.

But then it is precisely round these tremendous declarations, made by Christianity concerning itself, that controversy has raged—with the result that in the defense

of their *truth*, in the intellectual sense, even the devotees of Christianity have to a great extent forgotten how Christianity's real purpose is to provide, not a catena of beliefs, but a life-giving dynamic, at any rate to provide the first only in order that the energizing of the second may be experimentally known. Attention has become too exclusively fixed upon the truth or falsehood of the Christian *facts*, upon the tenability or untenability of the creeds and doctrines wherein these facts are formulated and explained; and as the forces of adverse criticism have rolled up over and over again to the assault, those ranked on the Christian side have come to imagine through the very frequency and fierceness of the battle that, when the forces of intellectual attack have been met by forces of intellectual defense, and when these last remain masters of the field, Christianity has achieved its end. It has established itself (in the estimation of its defenders) in secure occupation of the intellectual ground by the beating back of its foes; and the very greatness of that success has blinded those who have fought Christianity's intellectual battle to the fact that an intellectual vindication of Christianity is but a preliminary whereby Christianity should be helped to a new assertion and a new setting into operation of its veritable life-giving power. The tragedy and the pathos of the thing are here—that just because Christianity essays the great task of veritably making man and God one, it must, first of all, make great assertions which are sharply challenged by the doubts and denials of many a human mind; that the great assertions have in consequence to accept the challenge and enter full-armed for conflict into the intellectual lists; and that on this conflict and its issue the attention of both friends and foes becomes exclusively set; so that, as was said, the very thoroughness with which Christianity attacks its high problem has helped to depress it for many into a mere intellectualism from the life-communicating dynamic it meant to be. The pressure of the question “Is

Christianity true?" has been so insistent and ever-recurring as to make men forget that, *if* Christianity is true, it brings *more* than truth, and that the settlement of the question in Christianity's favor is accordingly no more than a preliminary clearing of the ground. From the charge that Christianity has for many become a mere system of beliefs—that to be a Christian has for many come to mean merely assenting to a body of doctrines and recognizing as established a definite list of facts—and that Christianity thus fails to minister to the mystical instinct which aspires after a veritable union between the life of man and the eternal Life of God—from that charge the current Christianity of our time (and this in nearly all schools of it, orthodox and heterodox alike), certainly cannot hold itself clear.

#### 4.

The present position, therefore, may be thus summed up—and with the summary of it the true treatment of it also becomes clear. As between evangelical Christianity and the systems proposing themselves as substitutes for it, it is really between two contending intellectualisms that the issue lies; and this none the less that the proposing systems confidently claim to satisfy the mystical instinct which calls not so much for knowledge as for life. For, as we have seen, the claim cannot be made good. That the suggested substitutes for Christianity obtain a temporary advantage inasmuch as they do *profess* to address themselves to the mystical instinct, admit its importance and the necessity of ministering to its desires, while Christianity as currently expounded too often passes that instinct by, is true enough. They appear for a moment, by virtue of the mystical language always upon their lips, to be more in touch with the requirements of a nature which yearns to be delivered from itself and brought out into a large place. But in the end, and on closer scrutiny, the glow of promise fades. It is, after all,



by the acceptance of an *idea*, that the hunger for actual union with the Eternal is to be made content; and since this cannot be, the mystical instinct finds itself mocked with a stone for bread. And so, it is between contending intellectualisms that the issue lies.

But, just because the substitutes for Christianity can never, by their very nature, be anything else than intellectualisms, while Christianity was in its glorious beginning much more than an intellectualism and may be much more than an intellectualism again, *it is by Christianity that the situation can and must be saved, and it is with Christianity that the real secret rests.* To deprive of their delusive charm all the systems which are just now drawing so many away from the Christian faith, that faith must be realized and preached as the veritable "vitalism" which it was at first and which it intended through all the ages to be.\* It may be affirmed, indeed, that one of the greatest tasks given into the hands of the Christian preacher and the Christian apologist today is to show how Christianity, rightly read and interpreted in its fulness, satisfies that instinct which yearns, not only to know *about* God, but to be one *with* God. How in Jesus Christ there was not only a revelation of God for the mind, but an actual descent of God's creative Life strong to take into *itself* every man who will take *it* into *himself* and plunge *himself* into *it*—how redemption is a continued process of divine-human unification (not merely in the sense of harmony, but in the sense of real oneness), whereof Christ's life and death were the beginning—how

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\*"Vitalism" is the word which has of recent years come so much into vogue in connection with Eucken's teaching. I have said nothing specifically of Eucken in this paper, for the reason that his system is a philosophy rather than a popular substitute for evangelical Christianity, and can hardly be said to be drawing disciples away from the latter as certain systems do. But *mutatis mutandis*, much the same things may be said of Eucken's system as of these. I have dealt with it in part in the "Methodist Review" (Nashville) for October, 1914.

that life and death manifested and certified the entrance among the operative forces of the world of a new activity of the Life which had from eternity lain behind the world and now began from a fresh point (in the personality of Christ), to link the world at a fresh point (in the surrendered personalities of men as these surrendered themselves to the personality of Christ), with itself—how all Christ's earthly ministry of word and deed and suffering even unto death is related to His subsequent and continuous and *now energizing* ministry of uniting God with man by uniting man with Himself as He in His creative and re-creative power pervades the world, this present ministry lying back upon the earthly ministry as upon its *prius* and antecedent condition and that earthly ministry being the preface and indispensable forerunner of the ministry still and forever carried on—these are the things which the Christian preacher must proclaim (of course in language and fashion suited to the audience before which he stands) if he would show how evangelical Christianity accomplishes what suggested substitutes for it vainly profess to do. Christianity as “vitalism” must be his theme. Years ago Dr. Maclaren of Manchester called for a return to “evangelical mysticism.” It is a re-conception of itself as “evangelical mysticism” that the Christianity of today must make, if it would drive these competitors, who secure such advantage as they possess only because our Christianity does not know itself and the richness of its gospel aright, from the field. “Mysticism”—for it must tell how it stands, not for knowledge *about* God alone, but for such a union *with* God, achieved by means of a union with Jesus Christ,—the Son who, like the Father, has “life in Himself”—as shall make the Christian's life, in the thought and feeling and moral substance of it, to be born again at every moment out of the eternal Life that is God's own. “Evangelical”—for it must tell how at a given point of historic time the eternal Life of God appeared upon the stage of the world, revealing itself for

what it was in all the wonder of life and death and resurrection whereof the New Testament speaks, and how, just because the Christ whose story is recorded there was *what* He was, He is the same yesterday and today and forever, and so can still declare to the whole world, as He declared to a narrower circle once, that no man cometh unto the Father (at any rate with full and completed access, whatever partial and slow-footed approaches may otherwise be made), save by Himself. It is as "evangelical mysticism," as "vitalism," that Christianity needs to be re-conceived today. So to re-conceive it is to return to the Christianity of the New Testament and to the thought and experience of those who wrote it, and withal to satisfy that mystical instinct whose imperious craving actually impels so many *away* from the Christianity wherein that instinct's true satisfaction lies.

Of course the thing is mysterious. But no reproach to that effect can come from the lips of those competing systems which we have had in view. For these are more mysterious still—and not, as the Christianity which speaks of a veritable life-dynamic in Christ is mysterious, with the mystery of unique greatness, but with the mystery of a landscape wreathed in fog. An infinite Life with the limited life of man lying alongside of it—the second having somehow made an unexplainable and unexplained appearance upon the field and, in spite of its seeming reality and its undeniable persistence, being a delusion after all—no real approach of the first to the second being possible inasmuch as the first remains a vague and impalpable something from which all definite activities and qualities (since these imply personality), have been emptied away—the fulfillment of human destiny consisting in a similar stripping off of all definite activity and quality from human life and in such a sinking of it into the tideless sea of the Eternal that in the very consummation of its fate all consciousness of the consummation would be lost—the contradiction involved in looking upon the sui-

cide of personality as personality's supreme achievement—these are the mysteries which the competing systems require us to accept. And they are mysteries indeed. No answer is here to the question "Why are things as they are?"; or to the other question "From what source did the existing order of things, or the appearance of it, emerge?"; or to the other question "How reconcile your acceptance as valid of the instinct which declares that personality must in some sense deny itself with your rejection of the equally pressing instinct which calls upon personality in some sense to affirm and perpetuate itself?"; or indeed to any of the questions which must be answered in any rational scheme. The whole method, and for that matter the life it recommends as ideal, is a blur and a smudge, a mystery *in excelsis* through whose piled and interwoven and whirling cloud-drifts no single straight line suggesting shape or form can be discerned. The mysteriousness of Christianity is of a different kind. Out of the Infinite and Eternal Life the limited life of man was projected at the first. To that Infinite and Eternal Life the life of man is to return in communion and fellowship and self-identification. In order that this return may be made, its movement be delivered from all the disabilities which hamper it, and its perception of its own goal be cleared from uncertainty, the Eternal Life broke at a set point of history into the evolution of the world with fresh magnetisms and fresh power of self-communication out of a thenceforward ever-present divine Personality to the personality of man, so that the approach of human life to the Eternal Life was thereafter transformed into a response of human life to the Eternal Life's new appeal. These are the mysteries which Christianity proclaims. But mysteries though they be, they at any rate make of the entire existing order of things a great and symmetrical whole: it is not by their vagueness, but only by their majesty and their uniqueness, that their mystery comes; and although the entire

building, so to say, is built to an architecture whereof no other sample is known (as indeed the nature of the case requires, since the happenings whereof these mysteries speak cover the *total cosmic process*, leaving no possibility of anything beyond, and of course no possibility of anything within, wherewith they can be compared), its outline is clear, and all its parts are fitly framed together. So far as mystery is concerned, Christianity need have no fear of being brought into judgment side by side with the systems which desire to occupy its throne. For if Christianity has the mysteriousness which belongs to something unparalleled and unique, it nevertheless shoots lines of clear light through the universal scheme and process of things, from top to bottom, from beginning to end, and certainly has not, as the competing systems have, the mysteriousness of loose ends and ragged edges and confusedly contradictory voices which affirm and deny one and the same thing with one and the same breath. Mystery is not necessarily confusion; and if Christianity has the first, it is the second that the proposed substitutes for it must have laid to their charge.

On the other hand, the advantage of Christianity (read as previously suggested), is clear. It recognizes the facts, it corrects them so far as is necessary, it preserves them so far as is necessary, and throughout makes dynamic provision for that union with God which the mystical instinct craves. "Preserves them so far as necessary"—it may be well to linger for a moment on the phrase. For it has been suggested more than once that the systems which offer themselves in Christianity's place would, even if they fulfilled their promise, do so at too great a cost. Man wants to link himself with the Eternal—yes, but he wants also to *persist as man*. The mystical instinct clamors—yes, but the instinct of personality clamors too. And if the theory which these other systems require us to accept—the theory that our consciousness of personality is a delusion and a lie—if that

theory could, under the pressure of faith, become operative for experience, it would mean that the one instinct had triumphed by means of slaying another instinct just as strong. Christianity, on the contrary, preserves human personality while linking it with God's. Indeed, it is true—as other systems are not—to the idea of *uniting* man and God; for the very idea of union implies *two* things between which the union is formed: all the “mystical” gospels to which reference has been made slip in the idea of *singleness* under cover of a professed enthusiasm for the idea of *unity*: they leave us, if one may put it so, with God and man *mixed* rather than *united*, proposing to manufacture a sort of Absolute Being whereof man, though he would certainly be drowned in it, could in no wise know himself to be a part; so that anything worthy to be called union is destroyed in the very attempt to bring it about. But Christianity—read as implying the real communication of God's life to man through a life-giving Christ and through man's surrender to Him—provides both for the up-lifting of human personality into another and for the perpetuation of human personality none the less; for the very uplifting wherein man finds his redemption is founded upon an exercise of surrender which is man's own, and is maintained by a continuance of that same exercise as the days go on; so that the more fully man knows God in Christ, so much the more does he *know himself* in the very act of knowing God; and to all eternity man's instinct of selfhood will be satisfied as man brings the vessel of his selfhood to be held under and filled from the streams of life which flow out of the Eternal Self. A union which is a *continuous* act *consciously* performed from *both* sides—by speaking of this and making this possible Christianity satisfies, not one instinct alone, but two. Thus it preserves personality while delivering personality from its limitations and making dynamic provision for that union with God which the mystical instinct craves. Thus, in fine, it accomplishes what

the proposed substitutes only profess to do, and accomplishes it at no such price as the proposed substitutes would exact if they could make their promise good.

Christianity holds the field before the up-rising of the mystical instinct in the heart of man—if Christianity be rightly read. Perhaps, indeed, the great advantage of having so many mystical systems lifting their heads among us today may lie in this—that their presence may serve to make us realize afresh how “mystical,” in the best sense, our Christianity is, and so may recall us to a Christianity which is both “mystical” and “evangelical” once again. Certainly Christianity holds the field. For in the end it comes to this—that while other systems may speak of man seeking union with the Eternal Life, Christianity speaks of Eternal Life seeking union with man. And it is thus our hope begins.