

THE SUBLIMINAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THEOLOGY.

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Within recent years a persistent tendency has appeared, sometimes in rather unexpected quarters, to elucidate various obscure points in theology by reference to the subconscious region of mental life. The nature of God, the Deity of Christ, such human experiences as conversion and regeneration, intercessory prayer, the prospects of life beyond the grave—the key has been tried on all these locks. Now we have no cause to deny that the term “subconscious” or “subliminal” does indicate, whether helpfully or not, an element which plays some real part in mental life, though a minor part; but for twenty years past this same word “subliminal” has acquired a rather alarming sound in the ears of people who care for clear thinking.¹ The late Professor William James may have changed his mind, but to begin with he was as keenly aware of its disadvantages as any man. In his “Principles of Psychology”, published in 1890, alluding to the distinction between the unconscious and the conscious, he says: “It is the sovereign means for believing what one likes in psychology, and of turning what might become a science into a tumbling-ground for whimsies.”²

Still, there is a side of experience where the distinction is at any rate of negative value. Our faculty of at-

¹Coriat, in his *Meaning of Dreams* (p. 6), writes that “when rightly interpreted, dreams are the real key to the meaning of human life, because through them the door is unlocked to our conscious and our real selves. The unconscious in our true self, not our conscious thinking, with its rationalization of all our mental processes.” And this though the author later says that unconscious-infantile. ²Vol. I, p. 163.

attention flickers like a searchlight on the clouds. Its degree of concentration is shifting constantly; its power of apprehension wanes and waxes from one moment to the next. We are dimly conscious of much that never moves into the mental focus. Undercurrents of thought, motive, feeling cross and mingle in bewildering patterns while to all appearance we are engrossed with other things. If I sit reading in a garden, decently absorbed in my book, I am all the while partially aware of the greenness of the turf, the scent of flowers, the song of birds; also in an undertone of expectation I may feel that presently a friend will join me. Or again, we can recapture an experience just over; indeed, by turning upon it the full glare of retrospection, we can lift features of it which at the moment failed to excite our attention into prominence, like secret ink brought near fire. Thus we can turn back, and decide how often the time-piece has just struck though while it was striking the number of strokes escaped us. On more general grounds it may be held that the law of continuity has here something to say; that mental processes do not absolutely cease to be at the point where they cease to be conscious. Theories apart, these phenomena of subconsciousness have naturally caught the interest of many present-day psychologists; and whatever view we take of them, they at least "form the clearest and fullest proof that the whole of experience is not included in that succession of distinct apprehensions which we gain by the effort of concentrated attention".³ Much more exists in the mind than shows on the surface. It is a reasonable contention that the unconscious and the subconscious are storehouses of products manufactured by consciousness and kept in latency till they are required. But later we shall see with what caution the idea must be used.

The tendency to hold that this subterranean region yields the key to various problems of religion has prob-

³Mellone and Drummond. *Elements of Psychology.*

ably been increased by the popularity of phrases like "unconscious faith" or "unconscious Christianity". These phrases are supposed to bear a quite lucid sense, but in fact they are most obscure. When, by a shorthand expression, we describe a man as an unconscious believer, the fact we are pointing at is not that deep in his mental underworld there has formed a psychological disposition, of which he feels nothing but which is none the less is faith in God. We mean that he has had an experience which he had not noticed or neglected, or, as when we speak of a man being unwittingly in love, what really happens I should say is that the man believes quite consciously in something, in righteousness, in love, in good men and women; and people who want to say that *implicitly* or constructively this is trust in God speak of him, in natural but unprecise terms, as an "unconscious Christian". The fact in his mind is really a quite definitely conscious and morally qualified experience; but so far the consciously realized object of his interest and faith is something other than God. This may serve as an example of the perils of vague diction, as well as a warning against premature conclusions.

So painfully have some writers felt this vagueness and inaccuracy that they have refused even to consider the problem. Not unnaturally; for as one writer observes, "the study of the unconscious or subconscious mind was begun in conditions of great difficulty. For one thing, the subject was in ill-favor because of the activity of charlatans; for another, it was immensely obscure. Within the limits of consideration were such states as . . . neurasthenia, hysteria, catalepsy, and mediumistic phenomena. Religion and superstition divided the ground between them. Was it possible to form a conception of an ordered sequence in connection with this maelstrom of emotion and sensation? Psychologists had gazed upon the maelstrom and passed by. Charlatans stirred it up daily: every vendor of a nostrum blew upon it. The phy-

sician shunned contact with it”⁴. Many feared that even to glance at it might involve them in the worst excesses of spiritualism. And when they thought of that, they perhaps remembered Huxley’s answer to a friend who invited him to a seance: “It may be all true for anything I know to the contrary, but really I cannot get up any interest in the subject. I never cared for gossip in my life, and disembodied gossip, such as these worthy ghosts supply their friends with, is not more interesting to me than any other”. We need not undervalue these unpropitious circumstances, even if for the most part we share the implied aversion: but for all that, the question of the subconscious in theology has to be examined seriously. We cannot dismiss it with a verbal quibble. It will not do to define the “psychic” as “the content of consciousness”, and ride off upon the plea that “the unconscious psychic” is a contradiction in terms. The plain fact is we cannot say where consciousness leaves off. There seem to be mental processes out beyond the margin of consciousness, too weak to command attention. Change may take place over the line in either direction. Transmarginal processes may cross the boundary, and move close up to the focus of attention; impressions that were just above the line may sink to the subconscious sphere. When we ask in what form our acquired ideas, our knowledges and memories, our settled principles of conduct or our deepest affections possess existence when we are not using them, it seems that they must be stored up somehow. They persist in some shape, for many of them, if not all, can be resuscitated, either by volition or through strong external impressions.⁵

Two views of this unconscious region have been held. By many psychologists it has been regarded as consisting of mental states, by many others as consisting simply of brain states. And it is interesting to notice that often

⁴*Times Literary Supplement*, 4th May, 1916.

⁵See a luminous article by Professor Coe in the *American Journal of Theology* for 1907.

neither the psychologist nor the physiologist wishes to be troubled with the subliminal. On the one hand the psychologist frequently protests: These unconscious processes or dispositions are cerebral in character, and hence no business of mine: let the neurologist look to them. Whereas the neurologist rejoins: They in no sense belong to my department; obviously they are mental in type, and psychology must not shuffle off its responsibilities on me. A psychologist so eminent as Professor Stout urges that the endeavor to recall a name, for example, sets going "an unconscious process which continues after the conscious effort has ceased"⁶ thus leaning to the mental hypothesis. Other writers have suggested "unconscious cerebration", to use Carpenter's phrase. As to these two rival constructions I think we may say this. In the first place, they are not wholly antagonistic; for, as Mellone puts it, "there is no reason to doubt that the formation of psychological dispositions is accompanied by the formation of . . . physiological modifications; therefore, for convenience and as a matter of method, they may be regarded as if they were physiological dispositions".⁷ Materialism is not to be charged on the researcher who puts the whole matter in purely cerebral terms, and decides that unconscious mental states do not exist. Secondly, when we are inquiring about the value of the subconscious in theology, which theory we follow scarcely matters. Thus we can reject the subconscious interpretation of conversion without committing ourselves to either view, if we find reason to say that the explanation of all the greatest facts of religion is to be found inside the circle of clear consciousness, not outside. I am the more free to urge this that I incline myself very strongly to believe that subconscious processes are mental.

At this point we ought to dispose of the motion of a subliminal self, put forward by the late F. W. M. Myers

⁶Hibbert Journal, October 1903, p. 47f.

⁷Elements, p. 48.

in his book "Human Personality". It cannot be said too emphatically that this is a quite different idea from sub-consciousness, and that for us at present it has no importance. Mr. Myers distinctly avows that his theory is brought forward to explain such phenomena as "double personality". "I suggest", he writes, "that the stream of consciousness in which we habitually live is not the only consciousness which exists in connection with our organism". For him there are different subliminal strata, and these strata are all conscious, completely conscious, though we cannot be sure they are all conscious of each other. Each of us, in fact, contains various selves. Nothing could be more unlike the subconscious theory proper, though by Myers himself, as well as by certain writers who have professed to follow him, the two things have been confused. By very definition the subconscious is not conscious; the assumption is that phenomena exist which are mental, yet we have no awareness of them. What Myers argues for, on the other hand, is not a non-conscious background to the one mind, but two or more distinct consciousnesses. As explaining facts of mental pathology, disintegration of personality for example, this may be plausible; but clearly it has little bearing on ordinary religious experience. This distinction, as between the subliminal self or selves and subconscious process, to which Prof. John Baillie, of Auburn, has called attention in a luminous article,⁸ is of capital importance; and it justifies us in putting aside Mr. Myers' theory of different minds in connection with the same brain, and confining our interest to the theory of the subconscious. Once this is understood, there is no harm in our using the term "subliminal" freely as a variant. It has no necessary connection with Mr. Myers' argument.

Let us now ask at what specific points in the circle of Christian thought the subconscious (including the un-

⁸Expository Times, Vol. XXIV., p. 353ff.

conscious), has been employed as a key to open fast-closed doors. Broadly speaking the problems are three.

1. The Nature of God. Writers of very different schools have inclined to predicate an unconscious essence in God. To take an instance from the nineteenth century, the philosopher von Hartmann, endeavoring to combine the metaphysic of Hegel with that of Schopenhauer, defines the Absolute as the Unconscious—as the unconscious unity, that is, of Will and Idea. Idea here stands for the logical structure of thought and being. The supreme aspect of the Unconscious Absolute, however, is not Reason but Will, a will void of reason when it passes from potentiality to actual willing. This is not the place to speak of Hartmann's metaphysical but not wholly unqualified pessimism, though I should certainly hold it is no accident that pessimism is thus combined with the effort to place unconsciousness at the very heart of Deity.

Again, we may point to the speculative mystics of the Middle Ages, such as Meister Eckhart. Eckhart distinguishes between God and the godhead. The godhead, or absolute Essence, is intrinsically unknowable, even to itself; all things lie hid in the darkness of its potentiality. Timelessly it somehow rises to consciousness, but it is not conscious of itself. In order to unite ourselves with the godhead we must perform a complete renunciation of personality; and by doing so we pierce inwards, beyond God, into the abyss of the godhead. On these terms the highest truth concerning God is that He is beyond consciousness, the nameless and supra-essential One, devoid of every quality, even goodness. He is not interpretable in terms of our own loftiest experience, Reason and Love; in so far as He is apprehensible by us at all, it is through the ecstatic rapture supervening when clear moral consciousness has vanished and the soul swoons in the mists of feeling. Such is the Divine essence that other way of approach there is none.

In Professor James' captivating lectures on "The

Varieties of Religious Experience", there is one sentence which, taken at its face value, points in the same direction. Promising that man identifies his real being with the higher part of himself, and that he becomes aware that this higher part of him is conterminous and continuous with a "more" of the same quality, which is operative in the universe at large, he proceeds: "Let me propose, as a hypothesis, that whatever it may be on its farther side, the "more" with which in religious experience we feel ourselves connected is on its hither side the subconscious continuation of our conscious life".⁹ On the surface this means that Deity, as we have contact with it, is identical in quality with our subconsciousness—our subconsciousness being, as it were, a tiny inlet of the Divine ocean. Whether James actually means to teach this may of course be questioned, but it is a position into which a thinker may easily slip who makes the subconscious more important for religion than the conscious.

2. The Person of Christ. Here we are concerned chiefly with the hypothesis set forth, 1910, by the late Dr. Sanday of Oxford, in his *Christologies Ancient and Modern*. Dr. Sanday has gained not a few adherents for his novel construction, the most important perhaps being Professor Henri Bois of Montauban.

In order to explain the special presence of God in Christ, Dr. Sanday starts with the Divine presence within the human soul, and in this reference he takes up a position which, if sound, is of great importance. "The proper seat or *locus* of all divine indwelling", he writes, "or divine action upon the human soul, is the subliminal consciousness". Here I ought to interject that although Dr. Sanday professes to follow Myers, he scarcely does so; the subliminal is not with him, as with Myers, a quasi-independent stream of consciousness; on the contrary, he freely describes it as "subconscious", or even "unconscious". But this by the way. In comparison with con-

⁹Pp. 508, 511.

scious states, he further holds, the subconscious are "subtler, intenser, further-reaching, more penetrating. It is something more than a mere metaphor when we describe the subconscious and unconscious states as more profound". For support he turns to mysticism, finding the characteristic experience of the mystic located not in the upper sphere of waking mind, but in the lower deeps.

What specially interests us now is his special application of this to the Incarnation. As he puts it explicitly: "The same, or the corresponding subliminal consciousness is the proper seat or *locus* of the Deity of the incarnate Christ". We ought, he continues, to draw "a horizontal line between the upper human medium, which is the proper and natural field of all active expression, and those lower deeps which are no less the proper and natural home of whatever is divine. This line is inevitably drawn in the region of the subconscious. That which was divine in Christ was not nakedly exposed to the public gaze; neither was it so entirely withdrawn from outward view as to be wholly sunk and submerged in the darkness of the unconscious; but there was a sort of Jacob's ladder by which the divine forces stored up below found an outlet, as it were, to the upper air and the common theatre in which the life of mankind is enacted". One would hardly guess from this paragraph that elsewhere Dr. Sanday refers to the subliminal as "that part of the living self which is most beyond our ken". He indeed speaks with much precision about its qualities and modes of action.

At present I will only say that it is disconcerting to have Dr. Sanday think so spatially about the soul. He insists, we must note, upon a *locus* or point in human nature at which the indwelling of God can be actually localized, definitely situated. Of course if there must be such a point, then if that point cannot be discovered within the limits of full waking consciousness, the temp-

tation to seek it elsewhere, preferably in the underground chambers of the soul, may become overpowering. But why should we imagine that God's presence invades the soul at some one ascertainable point of contact? That too much resembles the old exploded psychological theory according to which the soul exerted its influence on the body, also at a point—namely, the pineal gland. It is surely better to think of the divine indwelling as claiming the whole spirit of man, not entering at some particular orifice or cranny, but taking direct possession of, because appealing to, conscience, thought and feeling. Dr. Sanday believes that in the end the divine does pervade the entire soul: why should it not do so immediately? Our whole being lies open to His Spirit; we are near of kin to God; and when theology has spoken of the imperishable divine image of man, which renders him susceptible of salvation, it has meant not any subconscious department of our nature but such things as reason, feeling, volition. Some one has said that questions in philosophy which cannot be answered are many of them questions which should not have been asked. And the plea for a suitable opening in the soul, at which and nowhere else God enters, must I fear be repelled on the ground that the problem has been stated in an impossible form.

3. The subconscious has repeatedly been utilized in recent years to elucidate certain aspects of personal religious life. Here it has played a part in more than one context.

The most important instance is that rendered famous by Professor James in the ninth and tenth of his Gifford Lectures. He maintains, you remember, that conversion and regeneration, especially where the religious change is abrupt, occur down in the unconscious depths. Processes mature subliminally, then eventuate in results which suddenly pour into our waking mind. James speaks curiously of the discovery of the subliminal in 1886 as the "most important step forward that had oc-

curred in psychology", subsequently to his becoming a student of that science, because it has revealed to us an entirely unsuspected peculiarity in the constitution of human nature. As he puts it in a characteristic passage: "A man's conscious wit and will, so far as they strain towards the ideal, are aiming at something only dimly and inaccurately imagined. Yet all the while the forces of mere organic ripening within him are going on towards their own prefigured result, and his conscious strainings are letting loose subconscious allies behind the scenes, which in their way work towards rearrangements". Thus the shifting of a man's conscious energy comes about, and the lighting up of new crises of emotion is "partly due to explicitly conscious processes of thought and will, but partly also to the subconscious incubation and maturing of motives deposited by the experiences of life. When ripe, the results hatch out, or burst into flower". The normal consciousness is liable to incursion from a strongly developed ultra-marginal life, incursions whose origin the subject cannot trace, and which therefore "take for him the form of unaccountable impulses to act or inhibitions of action, of obsessive ideas, or even of hallucinations of sight or hearing". They may even break out in automatic speaking or writing, unintelligible to the man himself. In cases of conversion, in providential leadings, sudden mental healings, mystic experience, inspiration and the like regarded strictly from a psychological point of view, we have phenomena of the same kind with these sensory and motor automatism: the psychical dynamic resides always in the region of the subconscious. Indeed, the difference between sudden and gradual conversion is traceable to the fact that "in the recipient of the more instantaneous grace we have one of these subjects who are in possession of a large region in which mental work can go on subliminally, and from which invasive experiences, abruptly upsetting the equilibrium of the primary consciousness, may come".

Professor James does not proffer this as an explanation enabling us to dispense with the regenerating activity of God. He is satisfied if we take it as showing where the regenerating action of God upon the soul takes place. "If there be" he says, "higher spiritual agencies that can directly touch us, the psychological condition of their doing so *might be* our possession of a subconscious region which alone could yield access to them". But just as it is scientific "to interpret all otherwise unaccountable invasive alterations of consciousness as results of the tension of subliminal memories reaching the bursting-point", it is legitimate to explain striking religious changes by the unseen incubation of motives. It is there that God can best reach us. "The hubbub of the waking life might close a door which in the dreamy subliminal might remain ajar".

Here then is a perfectly distinct theory of how saving experiences come. They come peculiarly and primarily through the trans-marginal section of our mental constitution. It is not too much to say that thereby the centre of gravity in soul-life is definitely transferred to the subconscious, the relation of which in magnitude, to the upper waking consciousness has often been illustrated by the figure of an iceberg, the much larger submerged part of which bears to its projecting part the ratio possibly of eight to one.

Before examining this general hypothesis, let me mention two minor applications of it in recent religious thought. In the first place, it has been used to explain the efficacy of intercessory prayer. Intercession, it is held, is analogous in working to telepathy or transference of thought. When I pray for a friend, I direct a current from my mind to his, I mobilize force, like a stream of electricity. I resemble a wireless operator tapping my transmitter and sending out unseen messages. When I ask God to give my neighbor courage, it is through me the courage comes; my will reinforces the

secret stores of his life, pouring into him manhood and endurance. Secondly the theory has been brought into the sacramental controversy. Not unnaturally, advocates of a quasi-physical view of sacramental influence, operating irrespectively of faith, have been led to argue that the Eucharist affects our deeper subconscious life. It is thus that we may conceive the Eucharist as adding invisibly to the spiritual stores of the receiver. Something of the same kind may also be held as to the baptismal regeneration of infants, or the benefit of extreme unction administered to the dying sunk in unconsciousness. Grace finds access to personality through the subliminal door.

My first objection to this whole line of interpretation is that it is really superfluous. It makes nothing clear. We are all agreed that ordinarily what is meant by a religious man is a man who is consciously reverent, devout, spiritually-minded. He is in fellowship with the Unseen. But if we ask how he comes to be so, what light is given by saying that the religious impulse first operated subconsciously? That states a problem possibly, but it solves none. It is the presence of religion in a man's definitely conscious feeling, cognition and will that we are trying to understand; to say that it broke upwards from the subterranean depths is a no more helpful suggestion than it would be to explain my understanding of a spoken sentence by urging that I first heard and understood it subliminally. And suppose a sceptic to arise, like Hume, arguing that all my religious beliefs are illusory, if I were to refer him to the subconscious, would he not retort most cogently. If you want to prove their truth, you must show me the conscious mental processes that co-operate to produce faith, and you must further prove that these processes are different from those which ordinarily produce error. In other words, no defender of Christianity can gain anything by taking refuge in the subliminal hypothesis. Validity of belief is a matter with

which it has no concern. How can we differentiate trans-marginal motives that lead rightly from those that mis-lead, except by conducting the whole inquiry in the light of data derived from consciousness in its wide-awake condition? I cannot see it to be a justification of religion that its roots are underground any more than I can find a defense of morality in the contention that it springs from dim elemental feelings wholly unrelated to the ideas of right and good.

Again, from the standpoint both of psychology and ethics, we must protest against the conception that the subconscious is somehow higher than, or superior to, the conscious. On all true principles of philosophic interpretation, it is conscious mental activity which is higher, as being the more complete and developed function in which the subconscious movements are transformed and charged with new significance and value. Is not the opposite view of a case of what the New Testament calls a perverse humility? We cheapen wilfully the noblest powers of the soul when we represent them as comparatively unworthy to receive God, and turn away to the more occult and pathological aspects of human experience. To find the secret of conversion in the obscurest part of a man's mental organization rather than in the conscious and decisive act of will, evoked by the data presented in the Gospel and commended by the Holy Spirit, is at bottom to make religion a thing of blind instinct, not of clear and upward-gazing thought. Nothing could be better calculated to rob it of all credit with serious men.

Further, we have no ground for attributing to the subconscious either moral quality or moral activity. As Professor Baillie puts it unanswerably: "According to the most enthusiastic supporters of the subconscious, the act of judgment is not possible at this level, and a moral act which does not imply a judgment is something we cannot understand"! In short, the affinities of the subconscious are rather with sleep, animal instinct, infant life.

Observe how James speaks of "the dreamy subliminal". Would any one seriously maintain that the subconscious had had the biggest share of producing literature, science or philosophy; if not, what can be meant by describing it as higher? Even if for the moment we grant (what is very doubtful) that it is the gathering ground for the reservoirs of heroism and genius: yet at this level there is no capacity for distinguishing moral objects, with the result that in magnificent impartiality the subconscious turns out diabolical products equally with divine—the disordered and repulsive medleys of dream-life as readily as the fairest and noblest impulses of self-sacrifice. It lies as close to insanity as to greatness. No *purpose* runs through it, no appreciation or discrimination of values. I wholly fail to see why an entity so chaotic should be greeted as the appropriate home of Deity.

That it should be so greeted is but another illustration of the proverb: *Omne ignotum pro magnifico*. He who resorts to the subconscious takes a leap in the dark. He breaks off inquiry, to launch himself into the void. Conscious process we know, and physical process we know; but what is this? It is a third kind of process, of which, from the nature of the case, we can never have any experience, whether direct or indirect. Or if I go too far in contending that even indirect knowledge is impossible, still our inferences regarding it are so hypothetical and precarious that to abandon for its sake the safe soil of conscious mind is in the highest degree imprudent. We cannot even get a good look at it; why then should we make it the object of foolish admiration.

It is also to be remembered that to say God dwells specially in the unconscious is implicity to fix our thought of Deity. As I have ventured to put the matter elsewhere: "God (on this view) is not conscious mind known to or in conscience and reason, but touches us rather beneath the line of clear thought and moral volition".¹⁰

¹⁰Person of Jesus Christ, p. 489.

If Christians define Him as Holy Love in the form of Absolute personality—how can such a conception be expressed in unconscious terms? How shall we speak of a Holy Love whose dwelling place is the subliminal? It is to make God indescribable and unapproachable. We are all intent nowadays on bringing out the perfectly ethical nature of the Christian religion: is there not a strange thanklessness in thus relapsing to more primitive ideas and casting away the gains of the vast upward march of centuries? For that is what the interpretation of religious change by reference to the subconscious amounts to—a reversion, a declension, to the level of primitive religion. When I read about unseen incubation, of ripe results hatching out, of impulses fermenting within the deeper soul as pernicious germs might propagate unwittingly in a man's blood, I recall vividly descriptions of religious experience among the animistic races, and the ecstatic proceedings of the medicine-man; but I am not in the very least reminded of what I read in the Gospels. It is unpromising that the word "hypnotism" should occur so often. I should have thought that the history of religions, up to its climax in Christianity, might broadly be regarded as the gradual *expulsion* of the idea that religious experience is a nature-process, and the elevation of the soul-life that counts into the full light of conscience and reason. In the New Testament a believer is one who responds to God in Christ with a trust moral to the core: what he sees in Christ appeals to his sense of right, his yearning for fuller life in God, his intelligent conviction. His faith is evoked by the ethical and spiritual content of the Gospel; the object held forth creates trust, not by initiating subterranean fermentations, but by its intrinsic meaning. And this remains the normal Christian Experience. We do not catch religion as we might measles; we are changed by what we see, by what we value; oftenest, perhaps, by the spectacle of the Saviour's presence in worthy Christian lives.

It is no refutation of this to urge, what is indeed true, that plenty of people in our churches are unable to give reasons for their faith. For they may simply be lacking in introspective power; they may have no gift for analysing motives. But the motives are there after all, they *have* reasons for being Christians rather than Shintoists or Jainists, the incentives, promises, inhibitions and consolations of our religion have been at work. Put the seat or secret of religion in the subconscious, and you turn it into an unethical mystery devoid of attraction for the highest types of manhood. True, Professor James pleads that what he is discussing is not the validity of religious belief, but only its psychological origin. In reality much more is involved than that. If the primary and proper home of religion is subconsciousness—if it is there supremely that God touches us—then an enormously important question has been decided as to the *nature* of religion; and few will venture to maintain that the nature of religion is a consideration wholly irrelevant to its truth.

The unethical character of the subconscious life is still more clearly emphasized by the contention of many writers that the subliminal consciousness makes headway on its own account, independently of the wide-awake mind; it is actually something that goes along by itself. It is not merely “an organized system of condition which have been formed in and through bygone conscious experience”; it is live, active, in separately receptive contact with the environment. Myers actually goes so far as to hold that the subliminal is not derived, in either quality or content, from the ordinary consciousness—the fact is exactly the other way round. This means that if we may draw random benefits from the unconscious, we are also at its mercy. No man can ever tell what may suddenly leap upon him from the dark. In that case the new hypothesis brings at least as much terror as hope.

The theory of the subliminal, I am convinced, has

gained a wholly illegitimate advantage from the impression that it alone does justice to the mystery of Regeneration. Were this the case no other theory would have a chance against it. But it is not the case. It is the subconscious theory that would dissipate the mystery. According to James, Regeneration is a process that can be traced and analyzed by investigation. It is possible, by means of circumstantial research, coupled with inference, to describe precisely how a Christian comes into being. But true faith repudiates any such enterprise. It knows that creation, whether of the world or of the Christian's new life, is always a transcendent Divine work, which we can only believe in, or experience, but never explain. Unquestionably regeneration is a mystery, but the mystery lies in a man's thought and will; and to refer it to an inscrutable non-moral underworld is to obscure, indeed to dissolve, the very problem in our hands.

Accordingly, we must affirm the great truth for which the New Testament and the Reformers stand. Just because Christianity is the highest of all ethical religions, regeneration has its home in our clearest consciousness; it is but faith viewed in a certain aspect. Whatever happens, it must never be turned into a nature process, in which the mind is purely passive. People who take the subconscious line really "want" as the proverb says, "better bread than can be made with wheat". They want something richer, greater, deeper than a conscious change. It is not enough that through the vision of Jesus a man is led to believe, to pray, to will and love the good. We must get behind that and put our finger on its conditions. But to get behind experience is impossible. As Lotze has said, it is useless to ask how being is made. Beyond all doubt there is *more* involved in a man's becoming a Christian than his own conscious thoughts and feelings; but that "more", so often appealed to, is not the subliminal consciousness; it is the personal love of God. It is, in the language of faith, the Holy Spirit—

not a thing, but the conscious influence of the Father revealed in Christ. Your life, the apostle writes, is hid not in the abysmal depths of your own nature, but with Christ in God. God, says St. John, not our subliminal self, is greater than our heart. The Christian is aware that the new life stands for far more than his actually present fleeting consciousness, and that the full reality of what he has become overflows the thoughts and volitions with which at any given moment his mind is filled; but that full reality is rooted or based in the subliminal, the character of which by very definition never can be ascertained, but in the new relationship towards himself in which God has set him by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Our assurance of being born again is that we now know God as our Saviour; in a word, it is a conviction not of sight but faith. As Luther puts it: "This birth is neither seen nor understood: we only believe in it".