

*THE SUBCONSCIOUS, THE SUPERCONSCIOUS,  
AND THE PERSON OF CHRIST.*

RECENT psychology has given much prominence to the Unconscious and "Subconscious" elements in our constitution, and some have thought that the study of these may throw light on certain important Christian facts. Quite recently, in his *Christology and Personality*, now completed by the addition of subsequent Lectures on *Personality in Christ and in Ourselves*, Dr Sanday has put forth tentatively, with great ability and in the finest spirit, the theory that the subconscious region was the proper seat or *locus* of the Deity of the incarnate Christ. It is in this view, he thinks, that we can best conceive the incarnation and realise how Jesus Christ could be at one and the same time perfectly human and truly Divine—the Divine being located in the subconscious realm and only occasionally rising up into that of the normal consciousness. He finds support for this conception in what he takes to be the facts of religious experience, of Divine communications in general, of the indwelling Spirit, recognisable only by its fruits, and of answers to prayer, which do not, he thinks, reach us through the normal consciousness. Everything from Dr. Sanday carries much weight, and this particular subject is vital to Christianity. This must be the excuse for venturing to accept the invitation to criticism which he gives. As he remarks, "Theology, perhaps more than any other science, needs to receive contributions from all sides." We are at one with him in seeking such a conception of the Person of Christ as shall make Him real to us without losing anything of either the human or the Divine, and, no doubt,

the subconscious played an important part in the incarnate Life of Christ, as it does in every truly human life.

## I.

As for this "subconscious," however, notwithstanding all that has been written, the subject is still in great measure in obscurity. Does the term mean a state entirely *beneath* consciousness, as some hold; or is it to be understood as being a subordinate form of consciousness, as is held by others? If it be quite beneath consciousness it would seem that we may at once dismiss the idea that it could be either the medium of Divine communications or the *locus* of the Deity of Christ. No communication can be made to that which is entirely unconscious. The Deity of Christ could not be located in relation to what would be in itself purely physical, already in the individual definitely organised, and automatic in its action. Dr. Sanday does not make the matter clear. He speaks sometimes simply of the "unconscious," more often of "the unconscious and the subconscious," which latter phrase seems to imply that there is a difference between them. He speaks also of "the subliminal self," but he accepts the correction made by a reviewer that to speak of subliminal consciousness is self-contradictory; so far as the state is subliminal it is not conscious; "the subliminal self is," he says, "I should say, all right, but subliminal consciousness is a contradiction." But is it not just his contention that the "subconscious" is subliminal? If it be not subliminal it is one with the conscious; if it is subliminal it is unconscious. If it were thought of as a separate personality with a consciousness of its own, there would be two separate persons in the human being. "Unconscious cerebration" is a fact, as Dr. Carpenter showed long ago, but it is simply brain-action pro-

ceeding unconsciously to ourselves. This has evidently no bearing on the subject. Is the so-called "subconscious" in its normal procedure, anything else than a form of cerebral action which does not rise to the height of consciousness? Certain it is, in any case, that the whole contents of the subconscious realm have been matter of experience, whether of the individual or of his ancestors; they have all first passed through the consciousness, whether *attended* to or not. It is certain also that the whole, while truly alive and "mental" in its action, has a definite physical side to it in each individual. How Divine communications could be made, or a Divine Being impart so much of Himself to this *organised* subconsciousness, is a problem on which no light has been shed.

In any case, the subconscious is *lower* than consciousness, and one would naturally think that the Divine would be in touch with what is *highest* in man. It is also largely representative of what is *prior* to the fully developed human; much that it contains belongs to the earlier stages of life—faculties and functions that have been left behind as the race has made progress, matters of every-day experience which are of no present use are relegated to it. In one aspect it is a storehouse; in another it is a workshop where the materials that have entered it are being rearranged, coming into varying combinations, and often returning to consciousness in an altered, sometimes a surprising form. But all this work goes on automatically, beneath consciousness. The fact that some of the highest inspirations of genius come from thence is quite in keeping with this. Because the brain in its unconscious working, undisturbed by emotion, uninfluenced by error, or by conscious interference, is often truer than when we try to "use" it, and elements that have sunk into this region unheeded at the time, get therein into such arrangement as flashes up into

the consciousness as a new discovery or a luminous idea. As Dr. Stout remarks, "The ordinary man, no less than the man of Genius, may find what, relatively to him, are original ideas, develop while his thoughts are occupied with disconnected topics, or even while he is asleep." The truest thinking is done by the brain as the organ of Thought, when it has been properly trained, adequately stimulated, and left to act freely.

It is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible, to say where consciousness begins. There is much to support the belief that in some dim form it begins very low down in the scale of being. But even were it the case that, as some hold, a kind of consciousness belongs to each nervous centre, or even, as some maintain, to each living cell, it would not help the theory. For such forms of consciousness cannot be capable of receiving such Divine communications as are here in question.

It is true, indeed, that, while the workings of the lower region of the subconscious are in general entirely unconscious, there are, under certain conditions, states of partial consciousness, such as exist in reverie, dreaming, hypnotic and various abnormal conditions, and that in some of these states influences from without (as in hypnotism) can impress themselves. In these states the highest normal consciousness is in part asleep; while a portion of it remains awake; or the action of the lower centres is such that there is a measure of consciousness of it. There are many grades of consciousness. But, whatever the true explanation may be, it must be noted that here we are no longer in the realm of the *subconscious*, but, so far at least, in that of the *conscious*. In some of these states, and also in our normal condition, suggestions come to us from sources which we cannot with confidence identify. They may arise from elements in our subconsciousness for which we are respon-

sible, or which have come to us as an inheritance. They are perhaps as often evil as good, and they are sometimes such as would lead us to relate them to that lower spiritual region in which St. Paul says the spiritual conflict is carried on as well as in the world of flesh and blood. At other times they are such that we naturally ascribe to them a Divine origin, for, of course, the action of the all-pervading Spirit of God is not to be *excluded* from any part of our being. But this is a very different thing from making the subconscious the special abode of the Divine. Such a belief would lay us open to many forms of delusion, and there can be no reason why God should visit men only, or even chiefly, in these lower imperfect states instead of in their highest conscious state. The Divine operation on man is neither magical nor physical, but ethical and spiritual. Divine influences are such as can and must be intelligently received.

Under certain abnormal conditions there may also be developed a kind of "secondary self" which seems to have, for the time, a centre of its own. But this secondary consciousness is always incomplete as well as abnormal; it is psychologically explained by temporary "disaggregations" or "detachments" of the primary consciousness, and gives no ground whatever for belief in a permanent "subliminal self." The entire subconscious, in fact, belongs to the normal self as truly as do the hands and the feet; it is part of the organ of its psychical life; the whole of our conscious life indeed has its foundation in the unconscious and subconscious. But it is the *use* which the conscious personality makes of the material received from that source that gives it ultimate value. It is this *use* that forms the man as he is in relation to the Divine. We take or we refuse elements from the subconscious: the responsible self is not something subliminal, but something which we freely and consciously build up for ourselves. One would be sorry to think that

this strangely mixed "subconscious" was one's true self.

Deepest of all there is no doubt in each one of us something of God. But this must be *spiritual* as God Himself is. It makes itself felt in the conscious spiritual self as that true, ideal self which it is for us to realise or be conformed to. Christ is one with that true self: He is the revelation and the power of the true self in every man, and of Him the Apostle says, "we all with open (or unveiled) face beholding as in a mirror (or reflecting as in a mirror) the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit"—with *open* face, not as obscured by an intervening subconscious.

## II.

It is strange that so much stress should be laid on the *Subconscious* and so little on the *Superconscious* which is surely at least equally real. Mr. Myers aptly compared our consciousness to the solar spectrum as we have it reported to us. Just as beyond the range which gives us light there are at one end waves beyond the red which we recognise as heat and not light, and at the other end, beyond the violet, there are waves for long unknown and still little understood, so "beyond each end of our conscious spectrum extends a range of faculty and perception exceeding the known range, but as yet indistinctly guessed." But he forgot that there is a long distance between the two ends with all that lies beyond each. He applies *the whole* to the *subconscious* realm: "The range of our subliminal mentation is more extended than the range of our supraliminal. At one end of the scale we find *dreams*, a normal subliminal product, but of less practical value than any form of sane supraliminal thought. At the other end of

the scale, we find that the rarest, most precious knowledge comes to us from outside the ordinary field, through eminently subliminal processes." But the spectrum illustration rather suggests the subconscious at the one end and the superconscious at the other, with the normal consciousness between the two. It is losing sight of this superconscious realm (which the waves beyond the violet suggest) and with which the consciousness is as truly in touch as it is with the subconscious, that is the source of mistaken theories.

But this superconscious realm is not merely thus suggested, it is one of the surest facts in religious experience ; it is at the very foundation of religion itself. There can be no religious experience if we are not open on one side of our being to God. Of course, this is not questioned by those who support the theory now criticised ; it is the *directness* of the communication that is questioned ; they hold that Divine communications are made through the subconscious instead of directly to the consciousness. That is, Dr. Sanday explains, as the rule ; he says, in a note (p. 159), that he does not " mean to deny that the divine element makes itself felt, and at times directly felt, in consciousness. But it seems *to come up* (as it were) unto consciousness, as if from some lower and deeper sphere." But that which comes to us through the subconscious is of such a mixed nature that we can have no sure confidence in its Divine origin. We can only know *God* if He can manifest Himself to our consciousness : " Be not deceived, my beloved brethren," says St. James, " every good gift and every perfect gift is *from above, coming down* from the Father of lights." Professor James affirmed that " the fact that the conscious person is continuous with a wider self, through which saving experiences come, . . . is literally and objectively true as far as it goes." But, although he

uses the term "God" to denote the something *more* with which we are thus continuous, he made the *hither* side of it the subconscious, and hence, before he has finished, he has to confess that he cannot say with certainty what God is or what is the nature of the something *more* on its farther side. Here lurks the danger of making this obscure and mixed realm the *locus* of the Divine. Dr. Sanday quotes Professor James in support of his theory, but he has surely overlooked the fact that in the passage he quotes (*Christology and Personality*, p, 147), James says that that which is controlling is—not the Divine in the sense in which Dr. Sanday would affirm the Divine—but that "it is primarily the higher faculties of *our own hidden mind* (Italics mine) which are controlling." It is this, he says, that gives "the sense of union with the power beyond us"; it is in *this* way that continuity with a wider self is "not merely apparently, but literally true." *God*, as Dr. Sanday would affirm Him, is not here at all; only "a wider self." Here again we see the possible outcome of a theology based on the subconscious.

But is not the whole Bible, and not the Bible only but every religion, a witness to the fact that man as a conscious being stands in a superconscious, spiritual environment, from whence Divine calls, inspirations, etc., come to him? Is it not true that "in Him we live and move and have our being," which does not mean, as some take it, an "immanent God," but an all-environing, all-sustaining Presence, from which, as the Psalmist said long before, we can by no means remove ourselves. How else could we *pray* if we were not in immediate contact with One in whose presence prayer is—

"—the burden of a sigh,  
The falling of a tear,  
The upward glancing of an eye  
When none but God is near" ?

Of course, God is *Spirit*, and there can be no sense-mediated consciousness of His presence and action. But the communion of spirit with spirit is none the less real, and our prayers are answered, not through the subconscious, but through the conscious. There is some conscious thought suggested, some increase of faith effected, some strength to face our trial or temptation, or to cast our burden on the Lord, imparted; what was dark is made clear, within the soul a light shineth, and "the peace of God which passeth all understanding" comes "to guard our hearts and minds." Or, if we think of the indwelling of the Spirit (in which we have the true immanence of *God* in man), we can have no sensuous consciousness of the Spirit's presence, and the surest proofs of that presence are doubtless "the fruits of the Spirit." But it by no means follows that these are all wrought in the subconscious realm. The Power is *spiritual*, not physical, therefore not allied to the physically expressed subconscious region, but to the spiritual consciousness.

And, although the Divine indwelling is real and influential, we know that Divine spiritual influences are *mediated* through "the word of truth," and in many other ways adapted to reach the personal consciousness. The very earliest movements in religion are made in response to thoughts and experiences which come to the conscious self. Through these man is made to feel that there is a greater, a higher, and, ultimately, a better than himself. With the prophet (in prophetic as distinguished from mantic inspiration), it was a consciously realised conviction of what was true, according to the mind of God, or right according to His will, and for the good of man, that was his inspiration, not something obscurely wrought in the subconscious region: the Divine communication was direct to his consciousness. Divine communications are

not intellectual merely ; they are essentially *ethical*. God is a Holy Love, and it is in the entrance of what pertains to *this* into the human that the supreme Divine communications are made. It is difficult to conceive how these could come to man in any other way than by an appeal to his personal consciousness. As Dr. Garvie has said, "it is as man becomes not less but more fully conscious personality that he enters into closer contact and fuller communication with the Divine Personality."

The way in which Divine communications come may be to some extent illustrated by the facts of *conversion*, including those most marvellous examples of it in which we seem to see most clearly the operation of a superhuman Power. General Booth is quoted by Mr. Harold Begbie, in his striking book, *Broken Earthenware*, as saying that he "considers that the first vital step in saving outcasts consists in making them feel that some decent human being cares enough for them to take an interest in the question whether they rise or sink." This is how the saving Love that God *is* is mediated to their consciousness, may we not say, directly reaches them ? The wonderful instances of conversion narrated in Mr. Begbie's book bear out the assertion that the first step towards conversion is something that enters the normal consciousness from without. It may be through one converted man speaking seriously to an unconverted person ; through appeals at Salvation Army meetings ; often through the sight of others saved and happy ; in several instances through the knowledge of the change in one man in particular ; through thoughts of death and judgment, and of the kindness of the Salvation Army to the very worst. Sometimes the impression made at first may be slight and little heeded, but it has entered the consciousness, sunk into the subconscious, and combining there with other elements, or with fresh impressions,

comes up again into the consciousness with vital power.<sup>1</sup> It was so in the great outstanding example of St. Paul. In whatever way the vision on the road to Damascus may be explained, it cannot be doubted that there were elements working in his mind—in his subconsciousness perhaps—derived originally from what he had *seen* of the character and bearing of the Christians whom he was persecuting and from his *consciousness* of failure to find what he had been seeking towards God.

We may go farther and ask, What of the other side, the human side? If Divine communications are made through the subconscious, What of *our* communion with God? Must this also go through the subconscious? Is not the conscious spirit in man in direct relation with the Father of spirits? The highest religious experience realises this relationship. Mysticism has been appealed to, but a close student of the Mystics tells us that “they declare one and all that the source of their supernal vitality was a transcendent life, a union with a Divine Reality of which they were clearly conscious,” not with something in the obscure subconscious. (Evelyn Underhill, in the *Hibbert Journal* for April 1911, pp. 664–666.) Professor Rufus Jones also, in his *Studies in Mystical Religion*, describes Mysticism as “that type of religion which puts emphasis on the immediate awareness of relation with God, on direct and intimate consciousness of the Divine presence.”

<sup>1</sup> In Dr. Starbuck's *The Psychology of Religion*, we find that while “there are evidences of both conscious self-direction and automatism in religion,” and while a large proportion of cases are classed as “equal to unconscious,” it is at the same time said that “without exception, the cases studied, no matter how suddenly the new life bursts forth, have antecedents in thought and action that appear to lead up directly to the phenomenon of conversion”; that “there is not a single instance in which there have not been some antecedents in thought or action which may be regarded as the ‘causes’ leading toward the awakening” (pp. 105, 106).

The subconscious is real and ministers to the conscious life ; but as far as the *person* is concerned it is, normally, the unconscious. It is not with the unconscious (or subconscious) in us that the Divine superconscious is related, but with that conscious (and self-conscious) element in man which makes him personal and is most distinctive of him. It is still true that "spirit with spirit can meet." Whether directly or through such *spiritual* mediation as can reach the consciousness—such as truth, right, love, Christ—God can communicate Himself to man according to his capacity and receptivity.

### III.

On Dr. Sanday's theory the difference between Christ and ourselves is that He was wholly possessed by the Divine, while we are only partially so. This is very carefully stated and must be quoted. "The difference was not in the essence, nor yet in the mode or sphere, of the indwelling, but *in the relation of the indwelling to the Person*. And when I say the Person, I mean the whole Person—each several organ and faculty—but especially the central core of Personality, the inner, controlling and commanding Person. There are Divine influences at work within ourselves ; and these influences touch more lightly or less lightly upon the Person, but they do not *hold and possess* it as the Deity within Him *held and possessed* the Person of the incarnate Christ." (*Personality in Christ and in Ourselves*, p. 48.) This is most true as far as it goes. But the theory fails even to attempt to account for the *Person* who *could* be thus in the central core of His Personality, or, may we not say ? in the deepest and dominating principle of His being, wholly possessed by God, especially if we remember *what* God essentially is. We have no intelligible account

of "the Person of Christ"; neither of the human with its capacity for such a full possession by God, nor of that pre-existent Divine element which led to the affirmation "the Word became flesh." We have certainly the assertion that a Divine Being located His Deity in the subconscious region of the humanity of Jesus, but (waving the objections which may be taken to this from the use of spatial language) this Divine Being stands to all appearance apart from the human Personality save by certain uprushes into it. These are seemingly equivalent to other Divine communications to human persons; we do not seem to have *God* here, really incarnate. When in one of the finest portions of his book Dr. Sanday speaks of the subliminal consciousness of Jesus coming into play (*Christology and Personality*, p. 183), we can easily believe that it did so; but we cannot avoid asking *what* it was that could thus come into play. Dr. Sanday refers in illustration to a "reserve of power" in ordinary men, to "*latent powers*" that on great occasions assert themselves in them. "With Jesus these latent powers had throughout His life been more abundant and nearer at hand than with others"; they had given an extraordinary character to His ministry and had fed His consciousness as Messiah and as Son. He had made no parade of them; they were rather hidden away out of sight. "But now that the end was nigh—the Lord felt these latent powers, so steadily restrained and so sparingly used, surging up within Him, gathering all their forces for an outbreak, crowding, as it were, towards the exit and ready to burst out upon the world." But if these latent powers were impersonal, not to say subconscious, it is merely figurative language to speak of them, when the end was near, surging up like this. According to the theory, they were His own Divine powers which He, the human Jesus, had hitherto steadily restrained, but which were now allowed to burst

out on the world. But, according to the theory, it was precisely in these that the Deity, the Divine in Christ, resided. Yet it was the conscious Person, Jesus, who had restrained these Divine powers and now suffered them to burst forth. But, if so, His Deity could not have resided in the subconscious merely, but in His personal consciousness as well. The Divine in Him could not have been restrained by the human, the higher by the lower; there must have been all along in the Personality of Jesus the actually Divine. And the Divine in Him, in its highest, ethical form at least, was far from being "hidden away out of sight." It informed and inspired His whole conscious personal life, and shone on the world so that men saw "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." If, as the theory asserts, the subconscious was the *locus* of the Deity in Christ, which could be in general "restrained and sparingly used" by Him, and then at a particular time, of its own motion it would seem, burst into consciousness, it looks very like as if there were *two* Divine Persons, one acting in the personal Christ, and one located in the subconscious. This seems to follow indeed from the statement that, "just as in one of us the conscious self is but a small part of the true self," so was it with Jesus. Certainly, there are not two persons in us; but that which is said to have been located in the subconsciousness of Christ was the *Deity*, the Divine in Him. If the Deity in Him was not conscious, we seem to have simply a familiar, but an extreme, form of the *Kenosis* doctrine. And, if this "bursting forth" of the Divine was not conscious Divine action, wherein did it differ from the normal action of the subconscious rising up into the conscious? But it seems to be forgotten throughout that this normal subconscious belongs to every human person. It would belong to Jesus as human simply, and be definitely

organised and physically expressed. How, then, could it become the *locus* of a Divine Being coming from without ? If the Divine Being merely wrought through or by means of it, then we have simply God in this way influencing a human person, and we lose touch with the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation of the Eternal Son in Christ. If we suppose that the Divine took the place that the subconscious holds in ordinary human persons, we should have in this a new form of the Apollinarian doctrine. Perhaps I have misunderstood, and I should be extremely sorry to misrepresent ; but these considerations lead one to feel that we do not have on this theory any consistent or intelligible account of the Person of Christ, or of the real incarnation of God in Him. Perhaps the chief practical error is the making the distinction between Christ and ourselves consist only in the difference of degree of possession by God, without the recognition that there was something prior to this to be accounted for, something Divine which constituted the Person who was so possessed. "If," says Dr. Sanday, "if, or in so far as, the Holy Spirit may be said to dwell in our hearts, it was the same Holy Spirit who dwelt in Christ." This is undoubtedly true if we think of the human Christ or of the incarnate Person. But the Divine Person who *became* incarnate seems here to be lost sight of. We have no intelligible statement of that which the Church intended when it spoke of "the Incarnation of the Eternal Son," which, of course, Dr. Sanday holds in his own way. We seem here to get out of "the continuity of Christian thought." How real the departure from Christian doctrine may (unintentionally) become, appears from the statement on p. 48 of *Personality in Christ and Ourselves*, that, if the ideal which shone in Paul when he said "Christ liveth in me" could have been realised, as it never has been and never will be completely

realised, "we should say, not that there were two Gods, but that there were two Incarnations." Was there not a very real distinction between the Incarnation of God in Christ and the Incarnation of Christ in Paul, beyond and prior to that of difference of degree? Was there not something organically present in the Person of Christ—in the depths of His Personality, or conscious Being—which made Him such an Incarnation of God as rendered the spiritual incarnation of Christ in Paul possible? I think that Paul would have said there was.

#### IV.

I do not intend to repeat in this place that theory of the Incarnation of God in Christ which after long seeking brought satisfaction to my own mind and which I have advocated in various publications. I will only say that, when thinking on this subject, we need to remember that God is *Spirit* and that He is essentially *ethical Spirit*—a Being with an ethical character and content. The real incarnation of God must be (for one thing) the incarnation of the spirit and character that God is. God, above all, is *Life*, and His Life is Holy Love. We need to seek some intelligible conception of how this Eternal ethical Being can become clothed in human flesh—He Himself and not another. I can see no way by which such an *ethical* Being can express Himself in personal form in human flesh save through a process of spiritual self-impartation to humanity, which becomes summed up, "recapitulated," in a Person who enters the world as the ripened fruit of this Divine spiritual working; *which is at the same time* the full manifestation in human form, the Incarnation, of the Divine creative Thought and Word—the Eternal Son in God.

It is the *humanity* that must express the Divine; it

must be a *Divine humanity*. That which God *is* must be so wrought into it that it shall be such a real incarnation of God as shall manifest *God* to man, in so far, of course, as God can be manifested in human form. It cannot be the work of a moment, but the result of long-continued Divine working through the Spirit, handed on as an inheritance along one specially prepared line. Much of that inheritance may have lain in the realm of the subconscious, and there may have been quite normal "uprushes" therefrom into the consciousness. It is here that the doctrine of the subconscious may aid us. It may help us to understand how so much could be stored up in Jesus Christ and why such marvellous powers manifested themselves in one who was truly human. But the essentially *Divine* is the ethical, and this had been working itself into the line which culminated in the organism that was the basis of the Divine-human Personality of Christ. In that Personality He stood in the same direct relation to the transcendent God and Father as we all stand in; but the Divine was in Him (God was in Him), wholly possessing Him, from the first, as it is not in us, at least in anything like the same measure. In the very principle of His incarnate Being, and in His conscious truly human life, He was so completely one with God, and God was continuously so incarnated in Him, that we behold in Him, not a God *and* a man, a Divine *and* a human Person, but a *Divine-human Person*, the God-man, or God as man. His *humanity* is Divine and *God is* in Him in human form. It was, I believe, in the entrance of this Divine-human Person into the world that that working of God in the Spirit—for us the Divine Super-conscious—on and in man, to which the Old Testament bears witness (and in which its very meaning is contained) found its culmination and that the Eternal God as Son was incarnate on the earth. And it is therefore that from

Jesus Christ the Spirit of God (with which He is for ever one) goes forth to raise all men into that Divinely intended life of man as conceived in the highest sense in the image of God, destined to the inheritance of "the sons and heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ," among whom He stands forth, wholly human and wholly Divine, "the firstborn among many brethren."

W. L. WALKER.