

# THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT IN GEORGE SANTAYANA AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE IDEA OF CHRIST\*

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE IDEA OF CHRIST AS THE SUPREME GOOD OR THE IDEAL OF SPIRIT

*The idea of Christ represents the intrinsic ideal of spirit; that is to say, the acme of disinterested intelligence and disinterested love (ICC, 253).*

#### 41. Holiness or the Complete Triumph of Spirit

As we explained in the previous chapter, the salvation, which the Passion and the Resurrection of Christ symbolizes, is not from but through suffering; for it is this suffering as a regenerative power that purifies and changes the heart. Salvation, therefore, comes by change of heart through suffering and not by change in circumstances which on the natural plane can never be exempted from suffering. As we have also quoted elsewhere from Santayana, «salvation could never come by a change in circumstances. It could come only by a profound transformation of the will and the affections, a new understanding and self-transcending love such as may fill the soul in its supreme moments» (ICG, 50-51).

Thus, salvation as a change of heart or new life is a new understanding and love. This understanding and love constitute the real content of the good life of the spirit of which we talked in the last chapter of the first part. There is, then, a correspondence of that chapter to this chapter of the second part, intending to treat the same content in its application to the idea of Christ. But, before we begin this treat-

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\* Continuation from *Theologia*, No 48, October-December 1977, p. 924.

ment in justifying this correspondence, let us see in general about the relation of this chapter on the supreme good to the previous chapter on salvation.

Speaking of salvation, as symbolized by the Resurrection of Christ, we said that the risen Christ «appeared in his double perfection» (ICG, 156) by the purification of the life of body and of the life of spirit. This salvation as a double perfection came through the «terrible struggle» during the vigil of Gethsemane, the «moral struggle» that Christ felt within him, the struggle between the will in the psyche and the will in the spirit (ICG, 131); it came through the same struggle he felt also during his Passion when the animal will in Christ uttered upon the cross that cry of anguish: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* (ICG, 133). Salvation, therefore, comes not by avoiding suffering or by changing circumstances but «by a profound transformation of the will» (ICG, 51), a transformation attainable through the struggle between the will in the psyche and the will in the spirit, through the contrast between the human psyche and the divine spirit.

This is the case with Christ who, «leading a divine life in the midst of his humble surroundings», felt «the contrast between his adopted earth and his native heaven» to be «too violent in his eyes» (ICG, 125). In this contrast, in the case of Christ, spirit does not triumph by destroying or mutilating the other elements of human nature. «His humanity was in no way mutilated, but in all ways exalted, consecrated, and controlled by the spirit» (ICG, 124). In other words, this triumph of the spirit over the psyche is in reality a harmony between spirit and psyche; it is a peace and calm such as Christ found it when, after the passing of the terrible struggle he had felt within him, he uttered: *It is finished* (*τετέλεσται*). For it is by this word that in the case of Christ «the divine spirit gives the blessed signal; the human soul obediently hears it, and the head drops upon the breast» (ICG, 139).

The Passion and the death of Christ led to the triumph of his Resurrection as a result of the obedience of matter to the spirit (ICG, 229). As in the case of Christ, so in our case resurrection is also a triumph of the spirit over the flesh. «When it [the spirit] conquers in us, it allows us to become really his [God's] children by a regeneration and readoption, like that of the Prodigal» (ICG, 198) who «was dead, and is alive again» (Luke 15:24,32). And, as in the case of Christ the Resurrection came through his Passion and through the struggle within him, so in our case resurrection comes through suffering and the conflicting movements which divide the psyche, for this spiritual resurrection is a triumph

by the harmony of these conflicting movements, a «harmony [which] involves sacrifice». «When conflicting movements», Santayana says, «divide the psyche and would destroy each other, the spirit, being hostile to nothing, feels the suasion of both and triumphs if they manage to unite in a relative euphoria and harmony» (ICG, 253).

This triumph of the spirit by the harmony of the conflicting movements is what Santayana calls «holiness», which the idea of Christ or the presence of God in man signifies. He says:

The enigmatic presence of God in man signifies the same thing as holiness, or the complete triumph of spirit over the other elements of human nature. And this presence of God, far from destroying those other elements, presupposes them, as it does in Christ, and merely coordinates and purifies them, so that they may be perfect instruments and not impediments for the spirit. This is strongly expressed in the inspired notion that Christ, being God, positively chose to assume a human body and a human psyche. Spirit could not otherwise have had a history. The idea of Christ thus represents the intrinsic ideal of spirit; that is to say, the acme of disinterested intelligence and disinterested love (ICG, 253).

The above words, placed by Santayana in the next to the last page of his book, express all the symbolic meaning of the idea of Christ as a presence of God in man, which is the subject of Santayana in this book. From this point of view, therefore, this quotation is very important for the following ideas which include:

1. The idea of Christ or the presence of God in man as the complete triumph of spirit over the other elements of human nature is a triumph which the divine spirit, that is, God in man, attains not by *destroying* but by *purifying* those other elements, «so that they may be perfect instruments and not impediments for the spirit». In other words, the double perfection, that is, the perfection of the spirit, besides that of the other elements of human nature, is a perfection attainable by the purification of the life of spirit and of the life of body. This perfection or triumph of spirit is what Santayana calls holiness, which is the real good for him.

2. Holiness as the real good is a virtuous life, including all virtues, and therefore the virtue of love or «charity which is the crown of them» (ICG, 160). Such «charity itself [is]: the pursuit of all Good, guided by all knowledge» (RS, 242). Thus, charity or love, besides knowledge or intelligence, constitutes the real content of the good or holiness.

3. This content of the good or holiness, that is, intelligence and love, which are characterized by Santayana as «disinterested intelligence and disinterested love», is in its *acme* «the intrinsic ideal of spirit», represented by the idea of Christ.

4. The idea of Christ, therefore, as the ideal of spirit expresses the supreme good, that is, the good in Christ in his perfection and absoluteness. But, considering that the good in the case of spirit is, according to Santayana, relative, then a question arises: Is the ideal of spirit, as it is represented by the idea of Christ, attainable by man?

5. Thus, what remains for us to see after all is the real attitude of Santayana to the idea of Christ, that is, how far this ideal of spirit can be realized «in the natural life of that very spirit» (ICG, 252).

Now, having seen in detail the first of the above ideas in the previous chapter and also in this first section of this chapter in its connection to that chapter, let us explain in more detail, in the following sections of this chapter, the other ideas, too.

#### 42. The Content of the True Good of Man (Understanding and Love)

As we have said in the corresponding chapter to this one, in the last chapter of the first part on the good life of the spirit, Good is characterized by Santayana as Union. To this Union he dedicates the ninth and last chapter of *The Realm of Spirit*, speaking there in detail about this subject. Now, in *The Idea of Christ or God in Man*, touching again the same subject, he says that the «true good would be union with God. But what is God, and what are we, and how is union possible between him and us, and what sort of union? The idea of Christ in the Gospels is an answer to these questions, and a most eloquent answer» (ICG, 167).

In our treatment of the idea of Christ we have seen how Santayana understands God and our union with him. Considering that God for him is a symbolic name for matter or nature, we can understand that our union with God is a union with «the Will visible in matter and in the laws of nature» (RS, 72); it is a harmony of the Will in the spirit with the Will in matter in which «spirit may adopt the Will in nature as the Will of God» (RS, 80; also 66). This union or harmony is also what Santayana calls in a symbolic sense «sympathy with the will of God» which

includes «sympathy with the will of men also» as «God's creatures», with «created things» and «natural beings» (ICG, 103). This union which is expressed as sympathy of spirit «towards all other beings» is expressed towards spirit itself as a «complete peace within oneself» (ICG, 119). It is a «inner integrity» which is «the first condition of unity with anything else» (RS, 224).

In other words, the spiritual union with God, with man, and within spirit itself is love for God, for our neighbour, and for ourselves, since «the great bond of union is love» (ICG, 141). And, as the basis of unity with anything else is inner integrity or complete peace towards oneself, so the basis of love for anything else is the love for ourselves, as we can see in the second commandment of love: «Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself» (Luke 10:27). In this sense, «if to pursue the Good be pronounced selfish, the most unselfish charity would be openly serving the selfishness of our neighbours, and secretly serving our own» (RS, 238).

Considering this relation of union, which is «the true good», to love as «the great bond of union», we can understand how charity itself is «the pursuit of all God» (RS, 242). For «we should never forget that the object of love is always a good, since love shines upon it; and that love itself, though it may be agitated and tremulous, is a forestate of happiness» (ICG, 220). «There is therefore no love not directed upon the Good» (RS, 238). So, «that which kindles charity is not the evil in the world, but the hidden good that might take its place. For the goal of love is love itself» (ICG, 215).

This love as the goal of love, that is, love as the good itself, for the object of love is always a good, must be not sentimental or theoretical love but practical love. In *The Realm of Spirit* Santayana talks of the «folly of love for love's sake» in the case of «diffusing love, without any other benefit». But, as he remarks, «if it were impossible to benefit anybody, the whole world would be tormented by a perpetual desire to do good and a hopeless inability to do it» (RS, 238). This kind of love, according to Santayana, is sentimental love which is distinguished from practical love. «Love», he says, «may mean loving actions or it may mean the emotion of love»<sup>1</sup>. Concerning this latter, «the *emotion* of love», Santayana remarks that it is «a vapid sentiment» of those «sentimental saviours of the world» who «thinking themselves disciples of St. Paul,

1. RS, 238-239. This distinction of love in Santayana is similar to Kant's distinction of *pathological* love from *practical* love. We find also the same distinction in Kierkegaard (See about it in this essay, Pt. Two, Ch. V, § 33, Notes 2, 3).

or even of Christ, have removed all disillusion and asceticism from their notion of charity, all austerity from their love, and have become in reality disciples of Rousseau» (RS, 239).

Such sentimental love, for example, is for Santayana the love of «erotic mysticism» with its «false erotic symbols». One of the defects that Santayana finds in «the erotic symbolism» is that «lovers asleep in each other's arms on a bed of roses represent a pleasant rather than a sublime life». But, as Santayana remarks, «the true spiritual sublimation of love is charity, not inebriation, or blind transports, or happy sleep» (RS, 202).

Mystic love as a bond of union with God is a fusion of the substance of spirit with the Absolute (RS, 219, 220), and not «a moral unanimity or fellowship with the life of all substances in so far as they support or enlarge its own life» (RS, 220). In other words, love as a good in mysticism is a non-existent good in opposition to the good, as Santayana understands it, that is, as a moral unanimity with the life of all substances, which is a real and existent good for, according to his definition, «substance is the manifestation of essence into existence»<sup>2</sup>. Like good itself, «the object of love [which] is always a good» (ICG, 220), must also be existent, for «it is not quite possible to *love* anything not yet existent» (ICG, 214; cp. RS, 238). Love, therefore, in order to be a real good must be not the *emotion* of love but the love of *actions*, that is, a practical love directed upon a real object; for «nothing can be good unless something real aspires after it» (ICG, 231). And such is «Christian charity [which] is centrifugal; it must have real, not merely ideal, objects» (ICG, 216).

Now, when Santayana says «the evangelical Kingdom of Heaven or reign of God is a much better symbol for the true good of man» (ICG, 167), what he means is that «earthly wisdom and virtue will establish our political covenant with God, and will suffice to save us materially» (ICG, 252). So, the reign of God, that is, «the political covenant with God» or the «union with God» which is «the true good of man» (ICG, 167) is something attained by virtue, besides wisdom. This virtue is love it-

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2. RM, 14, 27, 96, 100, 129, 140. Of the existent good in Santayana contrasted to the non-existent good in the Mystics and the Indians we have talked in detail in the last chapter of the first part, the corresponding chapter to this one (See Pt. One, Ch. VII, § 19: «Actuality and Potentiality of the Good»). See also our essay by the title *George Santayana's View of the Highest Good in Mysticism: The Highest Good as a Potential and Not an Actual Good for Santayana in Plato's Ideal state, Dante's Paradise, and James Hilton's Shagri-La, Athens 1975, Reprinted from Theologia*).

self, for love as «the fulfilling of the law» (Rom. 13:8-11) is the crown of all virtues (ICG, 160); it is holiness as a virtuous life which is goodness (ICG, 244, 253). In this sense, therefore, virtue coincides with union, love, and holiness under the name of Good.

But, besides virtue, Santayana puts also wisdom as a necessary condition for the establishment of the political covenant with God, for *Truth*, which we might note Plato says is «akin to wisdom»<sup>3</sup>, is according to Santayana «one of the names of God» (ICG, 243), as another one is love, for «God is love» (RS, 239; 1 John 4: 8,16) too. They are these two, then, love or virtue and wisdom or truth, that are extolled by Santayana in his Sixth Sonnet in *Poems*:

*Love not as do the flesh-imprisoned men  
Whose dreams are of a bitter bought caress,  
Or even of a maiden's tenderness  
Whom they love only that she loves again.  
For it is but thyself thou lovest then,  
Or what thy thoughts would glory to possess;  
But love thou nothing thou wouldst love the less  
If henceforth ever hidden from thy ken.  
Love but the formless and eternal whole  
From whose effulgence one unheeded ray  
Breaks on this prism of dissolving clay  
Into the flickering colours of thy soul.  
These flush and vanish; bid them not to stay,  
For wisdom brightens as thy fade away* (SOV, vi, 8).

Like Santayana, St. Augustine, too, puts these two, virtue (the highest form of which is love), and wisdom, together, for according to W. P. Tolley for St. Augustine «progress in wisdom and progress in virtue coincide»<sup>4</sup>. Considering the relation of virtue to love as the crown of all virtues and of wisdom to knowledge as the end all knowledge, we can see that progress in wisdom and progress in virtue coincide also in Santayana's «intellectual union, which is no less spiritual than love» (RS, 81). This is also what Spinoza towards the end of his *Ethics* characterizes as «the intellectual love of God» which derives from the third kind of knowledge, that is, intuition<sup>5</sup>, and which is «blessedness», «virtue itself»<sup>6</sup>.

3. Plato, *Republic* VI, 485d.

4. W. P. Tolley, *The Idea of God in the Philosophy of St. Augustine*, New York City, Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1930; p. 143.

5. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Pt. 5, Corol. of Prop. XXXII; also Prop. XXXIII (See *Spinoza Selections*, p. 390).

6. *Ibid.*, Pt. 5, Prop. XLII (*Selections*, p. 399).

This love of God in Spinoza, or what Santayana calls union with God which is the true good of man (ICG, 167), is related therefore to knowledge, for «in man the love of God may be misled by ignorance of the good» (ICG, 116). In this sense, love as charity itself is «the pursuit of all Good, guided by all knowledge» (RS, 242). This pursuit of all Good, as is expressed by Santayana in another book: *Platonism and Spiritual Life*, is «understanding too much to be ever imprisoned, loving too much ever to be in love» (PSL, 304). These understanding and love are the same with the «universal knowledge and universal love» (RS, 68-69) in their relation to intuition and union of which we talked in the fifth and seventh chapters of the first part of this essay. The same thing is also valid in this part as concerns the relation of the fifth chapter on the parables as a teaching of wisdom and the miracles as an expression of love to this chapter, the seventh chapter, in which our treatment concerns wisdom as the object of knowledge and love as the crown of all virtues. So, besides the relation of the fifth to the seventh chapter in each part, there is also the correspondence of these two chapters of the first part to the parallel chapters of the second part.

#### 43. Disinterested Intelligence and Disinterested Love as the Ideal of Spirit Represented by the Idea of Christ

Intelligence and love which as we have seen constitute the content of the good in Santayana are characterized by him in *The Idea of Christ or God in Man* as «disinterested». He says: «In the poet, the artist, or the wit, intelligence and love are disinterested» (ICG, 251; also 253). What does Santayana mean by this characterization? The regular meaning of the adjective «disinterested» as synonymous with «uninterested» is lacking of interest, that is, indifferent. Santayana, however, uses this epithet here to characterize intelligence and love as not influenced by personal interests or personal advantage, that is, free from selfish reasons. In other words, this characterization of disinterested intelligence and love which we find in *The Idea of Christ* is the same with what Santayana says in *The Realm of Spirit*: «Understanding and love must make no claims for themselves» (RS, 268). So, the spirit which is characterized by such understanding and love is unselfish, not egotistical. «Its Will is not to will, but to understand all Will» (RS, 268).

Considering that the worst enemy of the spirit in its distraction is the *devil* which is a symbolic figure for pride of power and knowledge,

we can understand why the spirit liberated from distraction must be characterized by the opposite of pride, that is, by humility and love; by the opposite of the «proud intelligence» (RS, 166) and «the pride of knowledge» which «proclaims itself absolute» (RS, 175), that is, by unselfish and disinterested knowledge. In this kind of knowledge «the value of knowledge is moral»; it is the «free intuition» which «persists to enlighten the spirit morally about the truth that may have enlightened it intellectually».

Now, this knowledge or intelligence together with love, which are characterized by Santayana as «disinterested» constitute in their acme, according to him, the ideal of spirit, represented by the idea of Christ. He says: «The idea of Christ represents the intrinsic ideal of spirit; that is to say, the acme of disinterested intelligence and disinterested love» (ICG, 253). We find this intelligence and love in Christ in the sense that «Christ knows and loves God» (ICG, 250) and man, too, «for this Son of God is the son of man also» (ICG, 124). Christ as a supreme spirit incarnate in a human creature is mainly characterized by this love and understanding of human nature. For «what is the Holy Ghost? Is it not, perhaps, the very spirit of love and understanding that forgives every sin, every offense, every contrariety in the movement of things against our own movement?» (ICG, 124). Such is the Holy Spirit in Christ who, to the corporal works of mercy and love, adds spiritual charities: patience, forgiveness, understanding (RS, 206). «His love is not craving but sympathy, not admiration but pity. And this pity and sympathy are the more profound in that he understands our nature and possibilities far better than we do» (ICG, 100).

This understanding and love are found in Christ in their *acme* (ICG, 253), for «Christ, being God, reflects God's whole glory» by «his absolute holiness» (ICG, 251). «Ultimately and essentially Christ himself is the whole life of the world» (ICG, 164). For this reason, he is characterized by severity and absoluteness (ICG, 111). In this sense, the good in him is in its absolute form, for the union with God which is the true good of man is in the case of Christ «congenital and perfect» (ICG, 167; also 251). This «ideal union with God» is in his case the realization of «all that spirit in us looks to as its supreme good» (ICG, 252). In other words, the *idea* of Christ is the *ideal* of spirit, «as we find it so perfectly exemplified in Christ» (ICG, 86).

In view of this we can see why the idea of Christ which «is much older than Christianity» (ICG, 42) «became a dominating feature in the life of Christendom. For some it still remains the living centre of all

religion» (ICG, 18). Christ «had given in his life and maxims a perfect example» (ICG, 52) by his absolute holiness so that the idea of Christ came «to be the model for all the saints» (ICG, 26), «the pattern and model of all endurance» (ICG, 149), the model of «the imitation of Christ [which] has become the path to paradise for thousands of souls» (ICG, 167).

44. Is the Ideal of Spirit in the Representation by the Idea of Christ Attainable on the Part of Man?

The intrinsic ideal of spirit as represented by the idea of Christ is the *acme* of disinterested intelligence and disinterested love (ICG, 253), that is, the good in its *supreme* and *absolute* form (ICG, 252), placed directly in the ideal (ICG, 231). But, since «in reality», according to Santayana, «nothing can be good absolutely but only in relation to some living being who needs or loves it» (ICG, 193; also RS, 287), for «the good attainable by each creature seems different at each moment» (ICG, 217), then a question arises as concerns the realization of this ideal on the part of man: Is this ideal, as it is represented by the idea of Christ, attainable? Or, as Santayana puts the question of the attainability of the idea of Christ: «Is the Word made flesh in all flesh, and is it uttered by the whole existing and phenomenal universe? Or is that Word rather a divine inward summons to quit existence altogether, and to be reunited with the Eternal?» (ICG, 73).

As Santayana remarks, an *ideal* as a «static being» is «a term defined by intuition, attention and logic, but only an essence and essentially non-existent», for an «arrested being contradicts the very essence of existence», since «to exist means to take form, to undergo evolutions, to run through rhythms, and to figure in a realm of accidental and varying relations» (ICC, 230). Thus, on the moral side, «when we place the good directly in the ideal we are for the first time completely freed from the predicaments of existence» (ICC, 231). Of this ideal good, then, in relation to the idea of Christ Santayana says:

Such an ideal good, like a visual or musical harmony, though it is a pure essence and static in itself, appears to the spirit by virtue of a myriad material vibrations, approaches, and conjunctions. These the spirit overleaps, and rests ectstatically in suspended animation before the transfiguring apparition. I say advisedly *transfiguring*, because to *figure*, to paint, define or pos-

ness mentally is to transfigure what we have before us materially. A living wave has mounted, trembled, and receded beneath; but only the idea formed by the mind remains for the mind, a milestone by which to measure its journey, and a treasure laid up in its private heaven. Facts thus culminate for the spirit in ideal revelations, in attainments or perfections of form: that is the only ultimate function that passing existence can have. The theme of such a revelation is not a further coming and vanishing fact, but simply that idea in its eternal essence, like the idea of Christ on which this book is a meditation (ICG, 231).

So, as we can understand, this idea of Christ, «realising in himself all that spirit in us looks to as its supreme good, is evidently *prophetic*; that is, it sees in a vision an accomplished fact, though hidden from vulgar apprehension, a secret ideal of the heart, and helps to render that ideal clearer and more communicable» (ICG, 252). In other words, spirit in its outlook to the idea of Christ, as representing its ideal or supreme good, rests in this idea in its eternal essence.

Santayana distinguishes two aspects in the spirit. He says:

Spirit may be taken in two ways, in its essence or its instances. In its essence, the vocation of spirit is that of Christ: to be incarnate, and do what is appointed, and to return, at every recollected moment, to perfect union with God. In its instances, however, the vocation of spirit is different in each soul. In the poet, the artist, or the wit, intelligence and love are disinterested: in so far as they deserve those names, that which lives in them is the liberated spirit... To impose one form, one method, one type of virtue upon every creature would be sheer blindness to the essence of the good. Spirit, then, I reply, has its essence in a single vocation, to reflect the glory of God; but this vocation can be realized only in special and diverse forms. Christ, being God, reflects God's whole glory. For us, also, there is no difference between God entering into us and our attaining special perfections and reflecting our appointed part of the good (ICG, 251).

The idea of Christ, then, or God in man as identical «with that of spirit incarnate everywhere... is all that 'any soul' can reasonably care about» (ICG, 18; also RS, 203). In this sense, «this *idea* may be exemplified in some degree in anybody, as we find it so perfectly exemplified in Christ» (ICG, 86). For «the union of God in his [Christ's] case was congenital and perfect; while for us union with God can only be ideal, partial, and attained by an imperfect assimilation of our will and our vision to those of God» (ICG, 167-168).

The union of God in the case of Christ is «congenital and perfect»

because Christ *is* God, but in our case as men who are simply human beings and not gods this union with God is partial and imperfect. And, since this union with God is «the true good of man» (ICG, 167), we can understand that this good in Christ is realized in its perfect and absolute form while in us it is realized in its imperfect and relative form, for «perfection itself is relative to a definite existing nature and its spontaneous functions» (RS, 287). In this sense, spirit looks to the idea of Christ as its ideal and supreme good (ICG, 252). However, this ideal good realized in Christ interests Santayana not in a real sense but in a symbolic sense; for, as he explains in the introduction to *The Idea of Christ*. «his object is not to pass judgment on the validity of Gospel truth, either historical or metaphysical» (ICG, 10). For this reason, he considers «the person of Christ as conceived by the Church» (RS, 202) and he treats «the *idea of Christ*, as the Church transmitted it and as the Evangelists» (ICG, 58), that is, Christ as God without discussing, of course, his divinity in a real sense.

But, though he does not discuss in his book the truth of the divinity of Christ, it is not difficult to understand from his materialistic views in general that he does not believe in Christ as real God. For this reason, he is interested in the idea of Christ or God in man in the Gospels as poetry, that is, in a symbolic sense. Considering this, we can see that in reality an ideal or absolute good, even in the case of Christ is not realized. It could be realized in him, only if he were really God. But, since, according to Santayana, Christ is not God in a real sense, this absolute good remains an *ideal*, «only an essence and essentially non-existent» (ICG, 230), for Christ's divinity itself from Santayana's point of view is also an ideal and therefore an essence which simply *is* but does not *exist*. So, the idea of Christ represents only the ideal to which spirit looks without expecting to realize it perfectly and absolutely, but only relatively and in a partial sense, for «man is irremediably a human person assuming and adopting a divine nature, and not, like Christ of theology, a divine person assuming a human nature added to and subordinate to his native divinity. This religious image is formed in worship, it expresses an unattainable limit of aspiration, it is hyperbolic» (RS, 208).

However, as we said, this religious image of Christ as God in a real sense, which is the object of the Christian faith, is not important from Santayana's point of view. The important thing for him is the spiritual value of the idea of Christ as a symbol for moral truths; because

one, like Lucifer, may admit the divinity of Christ without any interest to imitate him; while, on the contrary, a philosopher like Santayana, may aspire to imitate him without believing in his existence as God. He says:

Whether the Christian faith is true is a momentous question for science and history, because it affects the conditions under which men must live and their destiny; but the spiritual value of the idea of Christ does not depend on its having been already realized in fact but on the depth to which it sounds the ultimate covation of every living being. Lucifer might admit that a divine Christ had existed, yet might disdain to imitate him; and a disillusioned philosopher might aspire to imitate him without believing in his existence (ICG, 174).

In this sense, therefore, Santayana as «an independent critic may interpret their [the Evangelists'] idea of Christ as an inspired symbol for universal moral truths» (ICG, 171-172). Such a universal moral truth of the idea of Christ is «the ideal of some natural demand» (ICG, 231), «a demand of the psyche». Santayana says:

When ideals are ideals, when they express and satisfy a demand of the psyche, their essential identity change, as does that of a poem, on fulfilling that precise moral function. Whether such an idea shall ever recur, or how often, or in how many different persons, or for how long in each case, all depends on the physical conditions that arouse it (ICG, 231-232).

Considering this dependence of the ideal on the physical conditions, we can understand that «the vital problem is so to remodel our endeavours that their [mankind's] ideal end may become attainable, in conformity with the nature of things» ICG, 122).

So, the conclusion of this section, treating the question of the attainability of the ideal of spirit as it is represented by the idea of Christ, is that this idea is attainable on the part of man not in a perfect and absolute sense as in the case of Christ himself, but in an imperfect and relative sense: in dependence on the physical conditions and in conformity with the nature of things. In other words, this attainability of the ideal of spirit concerns the realization of the idea of Christ in the natural life of spirit of which we come now to talk more of in the following section.

#### 45. The Possible Realization of the Ideal Good in the Natural Life of Spirit

According to the theme of Santayana's *Interpretation of Poetry and Religion*, as R. Butler puts it, «religion, presumed to have its source in divine revelation, is merely a symbolic expression of naturalistic ideas»<sup>7</sup>. And, since, as Butler remarks, this is the theme that Santayana «tenaciously clung to through every other work»<sup>8</sup>, we might add he clung to it especially in *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels*. This idea of Christ, as any other supposed divine revelation, is conceived to be a symbolic expression of a naturalistic ideal. In this sense, therefore, the Person of Jesus Christ, as Butler remarks, is for Santayana a Person «poetically inspired and expressing in myth the naturalism that Santayana himself proposes»<sup>9</sup>.

Santayana in his conclusion of his book on Christ, speaking of his own interpretation of the idea of Christ as the «ideal union with God», says the following: «The prerogative of the idea of Christ to be in this way the light of the spirit, will be justified rationally if we can trace the idea of God itself to its roots in the natural life of that very spirit» (ICG, 252). What Santayana means, by union with God in the natural life, is that in this union «as Christ remains the same person, the Son of God, when he becomes man, so each human soul remains the same soul, no matter what new affections it may develop» (ICG, 247). In other words, in this union as a «salvation [which] comes by shifting the centre of appreciation from the human psyche to the divine spirit» (RS, 207-208), «the soul redeemed by grace remains human» (RS, 208), that is, the psyche becomes for appreciation only «peripheral», but not «genetically and substantially», for in this sense she is «not peripheral but primary» (RS, 208). So, the shift of the centre of appreciation from the human psyche to the divine spirit is «a shift within the psyche», for «man is irremediably a human person assuming and adopting a divine nature» (RS, 208). In man, therefore, the spirit in a genetical and substantial sense is secondary, dependent on the human psyche (RS, 211), which is «original and persistent» in him (ICG, 227).

In view of this we can understand that the union with God is a natural and not an unnatural union. It is a union symbolized by the

7. R. Butler, *The Mind of Santayana*, p. 127.

8. *Ibid.*,

9. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

«reign of God» (ICG, 167) which «will suffice to save us materially»; a «political covenant with God» established by «earthly wisdom and virtue» (ICG, 252). So, since this natural union with God requires, besides earthly wisdom, natural virtue, too, why then, as Santayana asks, «could he [God] not leave mankind to their natural virtues, which they could practice gladly and nobly? Why demand other virtues from them, in which they must always fall short?» (RS, 205). «Why force anybody to be greater than he naturally is?» (RS, 205). «The life of spirit, being natural, is contingent; it cannot be anything obligatory» (ICG, 253).

As we can understand, then, in the union with God man does not become greater than he naturally is, that is, a divine person, but he remains the same person as he is, that is, a human being (ICG, 247, 254). So, this union with God which is the true good of man (ICG, 167) is a natural good, a good in a primary [and vital] sense. «Vitally and intrinsically», Santayana says, «good is whatsoever life aspires to in any direction». In this primary and vital sense, therefore, goodness is a «perfection realized by anything according to its own nature and standard» (ICG, 207; also UR, 253, 257), for «in every form life has its appointed perfection, its innocent health and natural joy» (ICG, 164). For this reason, «*Blessed are the poor in spirit*, that is, those... who accept all and rejoice in all that God has given, no matter to whom» (ICG, 113). But, «few are courageous enough to accept nature as it is» (ICG, 237) and things as they have been ordered by God (ICG, 4), without «correcting the divine economy» (RS, 205), «the moral economy of the universe» (RS, 206). Christ in the Gospels «accepts as natural the hard economy of nature» (ICG, 205). He is «humble towards universal power, wisely respectful towards the realm of matter», for salvation does not consist «in pretending to be independent» and «in correcting the divine economy» (RS, 205).

This proposed correction of the divine economy Santayana does not sympathize with and calls *moralism*. «The effort to moralise God or nature, and to see in God or nature the model for human virtue—an effort which I call *moralism*—ends by justifying all evils and dissolving any definite human morality in theory if not in practice—Christ in the Gospels is not in the least moralistic» (ICG, 205). So, Santayana rejects moralism because «two mistakes» seem to him to inhere in it: «one, that God cannot be good or worthy of worship unless he obeys the precepts of human morality; the other, that if God is not good after our fashion, our own morality is undermined» (ICG, 205).

His natural morality is also in opposition to the morality founded

on religion (ICG, 118-119), For «theology offers us nature interrupted and completed by the supernatural» (ICG, 191). The strange picture, which this theology forms, «shows us the supernatural, as it culminates and triumphs over the natural, triumphing also over itself, and culminating in the ideal» (ICG, 230). In the theologians there is «not love of life but respect for the ideal» (ICG, 230) According to them, «the life we call natural is diseased » (ICG, 229) «so that only a sacrificial human life and a sacrificial human body should be truly natural to man and compatible with his perfect happiness. This implies the sacrifice of almost everything that a man ordinarily cares for, including his animal will and his animal self» (ICG, 250).

To this doctrine of a supernatural human soul Santayana contrasts his own doctrine of a human psyche (ICG, pt. I, ch vii), according to which, this psyche is not sacrificed or destroyed by the spirit in its triumph over the other elements of human nature. On the contrary, spirit, «far from destroying those other elements, presupposes them, as it does in Christ, and merely coordinates and purifies them, so that they may be perfect instruments and not impediments for the spirit» (ICG, 253). So, the main controversy between Santayana with his doctrine of a human psyche and those theologians with their doctrine of a supernatural human soul is that, in opposition to those who accept purification of the spirit by the sacrifice of animal will and animal self. Santayana accepts, besides the purification of the spirit, the purification of the other elements of human nature, too. This is the «double perfection» (ICG, 156) of the life of spirit and of the life of body, symbolized by Christ after his Resurrection.

So, the Christ of Santayana is the Christ of the Resurrection, the risen Christ who appeared on earth; while the Christ of theology is rather the Christ of the Ascension, the Christ who «retired to heaven» and who «remains with us only ideally or in the sacraments, or in the laboured controversial pronouncements of the Church» (ICG, 159). In this sense, therefore, «Ascension», according to Santayana, «is tragic: a second farewell, almost a second death, rather than a second Resurrection and triumph; as if only after the end of the world could God and man live together happily, each in his perfection and both in their union» (ICG, 165).

Such a union «in another region into which we might walk, and where, as in the palace of the Sleeping Beauty, we should find all life paralysed, and the sun and moon preternaturally brilliant, both standing

still in the sky» (ICG, 232) is a supernatural and non-existent good for Santayana in opposition to the good as he himself understands it—the good as a union of spirit «with the life of all substances in so far as they support or enlarge its own life» (RS, 220), which is a natural and existent good.

So, the mistake of positing the supernatural, according to Santayana,

arises in the effort to do justice at once to nature and to the ideal, and to vindicate the superiority, or rather the exclusive ultimate value, of the latter. For the good is itself ideal, being good only because something existent and natural culminates and is perfected when it reaches that form. Illusion comes in, however, when the ingrained habit of speaking metaphorically congeals into an incapacity not to think mythically (ICG, 233).

(To be continued)