

## Christ the Wisdom of God.<sup>1</sup>

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'We preach Christ . . . the Wisdom of God.'—  
1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

'That they may know the Mystery of God, even  
Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and  
knowledge hidden.'—Col. ii. 2, 3.

THERE is a subtle difference between these texts, due to a difference in the local conditions of the Churches addressed.

Corinth, in St. Paul's time, was chiefly remarkable as a great centre of commerce. The bulk of its population was immersed in business or in the pleasures which attend upon wealth. Yet as a Greek city and a near neighbour of Athens, Corinth could not be indifferent to the claims of philosophy. 'The Greeks seek after wisdom,' and here, as elsewhere throughout Hellas, the cultured and thoughtful class devoted its leisure to the studies of the schools. Thus, as soon as Christianity at Corinth had outgrown the synagogue, it was confronted with philosophy; and philosophy, regarding the new faith as the cult of a crucified Jew, turned from it as folly. But St. Paul was neither discouraged nor abashed. The foolishness of God, he is bold to answer, is wiser than men, and Christ crucified is not the foolishness of God but His Wisdom. The Gospel is the Divine philosophy.

At Colossæ, also, Christianity encountered philosophy, but in another form. This Phrygian town was inhabited by a mixed population of Greek settlers and the native race, a race whose blood was hot with the temper of religious fanaticism. Moreover, it lay on the great trade route which brought the treasures and the ideas of the East from the Euphrates to the coast of the Ægean. At Colossæ, as in other Greek towns, men spent their time in intellectual speculation, but their inquiries were not limited to physics and metaphysics, politics and ethics; they ventured into the secrets of the spiritual world, boasted of visions and revelations, filled the distance between God and the creature with hosts of imaginary existences in whose agency they sought a key to the mysteries of creation. This Colossian theosophy would

have made terms with Christianity. But St. Paul met it, as he met the Greek wisdom, by preaching Christ in His relation to the intellectual problems of life. Did they desire to probe the secrets of nature? Christ is the Mystery, the Secret, of God, laid open to those who believe. Were they in search of new treasures of wisdom and knowledge, of speculative thought and intuitive apprehension? All were in Christ, hidden from the world, but to be found by those who would seek them in Him.

Thus, for theosophy at Colossæ, as for philosophy at Corinth, the apostle found a sufficient answer. And his answer to both was CHRIST. In Christ, he would say, there is satisfaction for all the intellectual and spiritual needs of men. He is not only the Redeemer and the Saviour, but the Teacher and Guide of men. He is made unto us not only Righteousness and Sanctification and Redemption, but Wisdom also; He is the Wisdom, the Mystery of God. Thus at its very outset, by the pen of St. Paul, the gospel claimed to contain within itself latent powers by which, as the world went on, it would fulfil all the legitimate expectations of those who came to it for light and truth, as well as for healing and strength.

Our own age presents to the preachers of the faith problems far removed from those which met St. Paul either at Corinth or at Colossæ. Philosophy does not to-day scoff at the Cross, nor if theosophy still finds votaries amongst us, does it seriously threaten our common Christianity. But the time is one of manifold intellectual activity, and it is not at all disposed to let the truth go unchallenged. Scientific discovery on the one hand and historical research upon the other are raising questions which demand an answer, and which cannot be answered by mere assertion. Men are waiting to see whether the Christianity of the Creeds and of the Church will succeed in making good its claim, or whether it will go under, as other systems have gone, and dwindle into a

<sup>1</sup> A sermon preached in the chapel of Selwyn College, at the opening service of the Clergy Summer Meeting (13th July 1903).

popular superstition. It is natural that they should look to us of the clergy in the first instance. We are the appointed interpreters of the gospel to our own age, and our interpretation will be the criterion by which Christianity will commonly be judged. In what I have to say now I am anxious to consider two or three points which come into sight when we ask ourselves how, as Christian teachers, we ought to deal with the situation created by the intellectual progress of the time.

In the first place there can be no question amongst us of any surrender of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. It would be easy to purchase immunity from hostile criticism by sacrificing one after another of the articles of the Christian Creed. It would have been easy for St. Paul to gain the wise by ceasing to preach the Cross. The Cross alienated both Jews and Greeks; to the one it was a stumbling-block, to the other an absurdity. But he preached it nevertheless, and the Cross triumphed. The Cross is not now an offence to thoughtful men; the suffering Christ appeals to a world which has learned by centuries of Christian teaching and experience the sacredness of sorrow and the mystery of pain. But there are other Christian doctrines to which the age demurs: the Virgin-birth of our Lord, His literal Resurrection from the dead, His essential Oneness with the Father. Here our stand must be made to-day; as St. Paul preached Christ crucified in the face of Greek philosophy, so it is for us to preach the Incarnation and Resurrection, whether educated opinion is with us or against us, never doubting that the future is with us in any case: *magna est veritas, et prævalet*.

In matters of faith there can be no compromise. We have been entrusted with a precious deposit of truth, which it is ours to hand on undiminished to generations to come. Yet our trust is not to be kept after the manner of the slothful servant who laid his lord's pound up in a napkin. It is to be traded with that it may be increased, and the Lord may at His coming receive His own with interest. The parable has many applications, and I venture to think that not the least important is that which touches us as Christian teachers. Wrapt up in set words and phrases, true and precise, but carrying little light or help to the mind, the doctrines of Christianity are as buried treasure which yields no increase. To reiterate truths in soulless

platitudes, to rehearse forms of belief which arose out of the needs of a long buried age, to preach the Creed of the fourth century without reference to the thought and life of the twentieth, this is not to be faithful to our trust, as our Master counts faithfulness. We have to convert our deposit into the words and ideas of the time, that we may make it more. We have to show the relation of the truths we teach to the life of man and to the scheme of things as we find them in the world. We have to demonstrate that Christ, as He is depicted in the Creeds, is the Wisdom of God.

Let me take by way of example the great doctrine of the Incarnation. It is the fashion to represent the Nicene settlement as an interpretation of the gospel which the world has outlived and will never again accept. In the few precise words of the Creed it sounds to many modern ears like an echo of an exploded philosophy. How deeply it enters into the experience of life, how great a need of humanity it alone can fill, to how many intellectual problems it supplies the only key, is far from the thoughts of those who offer this cheap criticism. Yet all this was clearly seen from the first by the chief actor in the drama of the Nicene age. *Athanasius contra mundum* is a commonplace, but few of those who use it know why Athanasius made that lifelong stand for the Homoousion. It was not dogged obstinacy that impelled him, but the deepest sense of the vital issues involved. We have but to read his youthful treatise on the Incarnation to convince us of this. He saw from the very first that the Incarnation as the Church taught it was the true basis for any real philosophy of life. He realized that life is healthy, strong, fruitful, hopeful, in proportion as men believe that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and that this Incarnate Word is God of God, the Eternal Son. It was not for words or names that he fought his lifelong battle, but for truth, and a truth which he knew to be the very keystone of the arch. There is in his early work, written before the great controversy had begun, a sweet reasonableness, a large outlook on life, a sense of the proportion of things, which wins the reader's general assent, even when the arguments are foreign to his own point of view. The book is, to my mind, the key to Athanasius' whole course; and it is by such methods and in the strength of such a conviction that I look to see the truth of the Incarnation asserted against the

doubts of our own time. It is a happy augury that we have in this Church of England men who have taken up the defence of the faith in the true spirit of Alexandrian Christianity, meeting the wisdom of men with the Wisdom of God. I need but refer to the writings of Bishop Gore and Mr. Illingworth to explain what I mean.

Let me refer for a few moments to another question of much importance to Christian teachers upon which our age has much to say. Beyond a doubt the vantage ground long occupied in the public estimation by the Bible as an inspired book has been seriously menaced. The attack has come from several quarters; from physical science, from archæology, from literary criticism. There have been and there are great searchings of heart amongst ourselves as to the literary problems raised by a critical examination of the Old Testament, whilst quite recently Germany has been thrown into a ferment by the popular lecture of an Assyriologist. The New Testament seemed to have passed out of the stormy waters of the nineteenth century, but we are beginning to discover that the storm was only turned aside and not stilled by the work of the great Christian scholars of the last generation. There has been, no doubt, in some recent publications a great deal of crude, rash criticism with which the Church need not seriously reckon; but we cannot ignore the tendency of all this to weaken the hold of educated men with no special theological knowledge upon the primary documents of our faith.

Now, this question of the Inspiration of Scripture stands, if we consider, upon a somewhat different plane from that of a great doctrine such as the Incarnation. For while Scripture does undoubtedly claim inspiration, and it is an article of the Catholic Faith that the Holy Ghost spake by the prophets, the nature and extent of this action is not defined. It is therefore conceivable that with increasing knowledge fresh light may be thrown, not only on the purpose of inspiration, but on its character. Provided that the fact of Revelation is not denied, provided that the Bible is admitted to contain, above all other writings, a progressive teaching of spiritual truth, given by inspiration of God, we can listen with respect to all that science, archæology, or literary criticism may have to say upon the question. If the early narration of Genesis are found to be echoes of old Semitic folklore, of which there are earlier versions in the newly recovered libraries

of Babylonia, if even the religion of Israel strikes its roots into Babylonian ground, the discovery does not abate the force of *one* of the spiritual teachings of the Hebrew book, or lessen our conviction that the God of all the nations of the earth specially revealed Himself to the forefathers of the Jew. Nor will our faith in the Incarnation be weakened by any conceivable solution of the Synoptic problem, or any view of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel; or our belief in the doctrine of Justification by Faith be endangered by a negative answer to the question, 'Did Paul write Romans?'

Many of us have doubtless arrived at this conclusion, and some have felt profoundly thankful that they have been able to part with that too rigid conception of inspiration which has long hindered the intelligent use of God's great gift of the Bible. But we have still to face the serious question how popular opinion on the subject may be so guided, that with the entrance of the new view there may not come a loss of the old spirit of reverence and trust. The public mind is apt to pass from one extreme to another, and will need much wise and tactful guidance during the period of transition. There are clearly two things to be feared. There is, on the one hand, the danger that if the clergy do not take the lead, many upon whom the truth breaks suddenly will, in the first impulse of surprise, cast away their belief in the Bible as a true Revelation; and, on the other hand, there is the risk that by introducing questions of this kind into their public teaching, preachers may perplex and distress simple souls to whom the possession of an infallible Book is a necessary condition of Christian faith. I rejoice that this difficult problem is to be made the subject of a conference during the present meeting, and trust that some wise course may be suggested as the result of our deliberations upon it.

There is a larger question which cannot be discussed, but may just be touched upon. What is the right attitude of the clergy towards that great growth of physical science which, within the memories of many among us, has revolutionized modern life? Although we are sometimes told that the conflict between Science and Religion has ceased or is ceasing, I fear we must not hide from ourselves that, on the whole, scientific opinion is hostile still; of open hostility there may be little, but this means that the subject is avoided as one

on which there is no use in saying more at present, and not that any real concordat has been established. But I am not sure that the blame of any soreness that may be felt on the side of science lies wholly at the door of scientific men; there has been in the past at least a disposition on our side to misunderstand and perhaps quite unconsciously to misrepresent their position, or at any rate an absence of any serious endeavour to sympathize with what may be good and true in it. I cannot but notice that St. Paul went as far as he could to put himself in line with the philosophers of Corinth and the theosophists at Colossæ, representing Christ to the one as the Wisdom, and to the other as the Mystery of God. To seek for wisdom, to be attracted by mystery, was in itself no bad thing; only there was a higher, diviner wisdom, a greater, truer mystery than they knew. And if the apostle felt this measure of sympathy with the speculative wisdom of Greek philosophy and the 'vain deceit' of Colossian angelology, how much nearer would he have been drawn to studies which have for their object the interrogation of God's handiwork in Nature with the view of eliciting results serviceable to mankind? He would have seen in them, I do not doubt, an ultimate ally of the gospel; he would have said to himself in effect, 'This great advance in physical knowledge which is going forward is part of the large movement by which the treasures of Christ are being revealed. The secrets which Nature is yielding up to Science are fragments of His Secret; the natural laws which are being disclosed are among the conditions upon which all things consist in Him or are by Him carried to their goal; the mysterious powers which, latent in matter from the first, are now at length being educed from it for the service of man, were implanted in it at the beginning by that Eternal Word without Whom nothing was made.' So, I do not doubt, St. Paul would have said, had he been in our position; indeed, he has in no small manner anticipated what the present situation demands in the opening sentences of his Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians. And St. John, the other great theologian of the New Testament, would have concurred with St. Paul, and does in fact, in his prologue, practically dictate the attitude of the Church towards all honest work done in the domain of physical research. The theologian is the last man in the world who should lift a finger

to check the progress of knowledge such as this. Believing as he does that all Nature is Christ's handiwork, and that He by whom all things were made is immanent in the creation, so that every new discovery is but a fresh light thrown upon the hidden treasures of His creative wisdom, the Christian teacher knows that true science is the friend and not the foe of his faith, and will some day cast its crown at the feet of his King. It may be difficult to realize this when for the moment miracles are denounced as unhistorical, and young men come to us with the sad tale of faith shattered and hope destroyed by their first year's work in our laboratories and museums. But as for the miracles, there are already symptoms of a recovery of faith in that direction: it is conceded that the power of personality and will over certain forms of disease is apparently unlimited, and that in the present state of our knowledge it would be rash to fix any limits to the possible. And as for the wave of unbelief which seems at intervals to pass over our younger men, it is not limited to students of natural science; nor if it were, would this in itself condemn the study. Time was when the Church committed the mistake of warning her youth off the ground of Latin and Greek classical literature, because of its pagan associations. Yet the classics have long been the chief stay of secondary education, and have been found invaluable in the training of the Christian clergy. All intellectual pursuits have their perils, and it is not a matter for surprise if an absorbing subject, which is wholly occupied with phenomena, should blind the eyes of many to the things of the Spirit. But if this is so, it is all the more necessary that Christian teachers should remain in touch with the teachers and students of science, and supply what science cannot give, the sense of that great Indwelling Presence, the Wisdom of God, the Mystery of God, which Christians know to have been made flesh of our flesh in the blessed person of Jesus Christ.

I plead, then, for an attitude on the part of the clergy toward the culture and knowledge of our time which shall be neither indifferent or hostile on the one hand, nor weakly concessive on the other. We are bound to resist all demands for the practical abandonment of any article of the faith. Our faces must be set as a flint against outcries of this kind, even when they come, as sometimes they do come, from persons of competent knowledge

and honoured names. We preach Christ incarnate, crucified, risen, coming again; and please God, the Church will preach Him to the end. But we are also bound, as disciples of the Word, as ministers of the Light of men, to welcome all fresh truth, physical, historical, or of whatever kind, not only as truth, but as making in the end for the victory of the Truth itself. All truth is welcome, all is helpful to the servants of the Truth.

It is in this spirit, I trust, that we enter upon the studies of the present meeting. Doubtless we

shall hear things with which we shall not at once agree. But we shall listen with an open mind, as each lecturer gives us of his best from his own peculiar store. It may not be evident at the moment how the information we receive can help us in our great work. But a calmer, wider view of our work will show us that it may. There is no good knowledge, no wisdom, human or divine, that may not contribute in its own measure to that which is the aim and end of our ministry, the fuller, larger, more hopeful, more adequate, and successful preaching of Christ.

## Recent Foreign Theology.

### Predestination in Islām.<sup>1</sup>

THIS little book has several sides of interest. On one it consists strictly of *matériaux pour servir*, a collection of important texts and translations, published here for the first time, and also a translation of the chapter on predestination in al-Bukhārī's great collection of traditions called the *Ṣaḥīḥ*, accompanied by al-Qastalānī's commentary on the same; the last, of course, being generally accessible to Arabists. All these texts thus reproduced belong to what may be called the orthodox development in Islām; they emanate from writers to whom present-day theologians look back with respect as Fathers of the Church. The teachings of those who diverged from the main stream—unbelievers, heretics, simple eccentrics—are not supposed to be represented here.

Further, and this is another side of very great interest, Dr. de Vlieger has had the advantage of actual contact with orthodox Muslim theologians, and has learned to know the theology of Islām as a living phenomenon. He has sat at their feet, studied their systems and has been able to draw through them on that oral tradition which makes so great a part of all Oriental science. That this should have been possible marks a revolution of the most astonishing kind in the world of Islām. It is evident that the gulf of superstition and prejudice is being somewhat bridged, and that

there are at least movements in the great Azhar University of Cairo towards the broad liberty of academic comity. That the English control in Egypt has had some part in this can hardly be doubted.

But the execution of Dr. Vlieger's undertaking is open to some criticism. His plan really called for a statement of the present position of the Muslim Church on predestination, illustrated by extracts from orthodox writers. For such a plan he had an admirable equipment and copious sources, written and oral. Unfortunately he has gone beyond that plan and mixed in other material and remarks which confuse the issue. Thus he has dealt with writers who in no sense could be called orthodox, and has left in obscurity their relationship to the orthodox development. It is always possible to state a single position dogmatically; but when different positions are stated, it becomes necessary to show their genetic relationship, that is, to write a history of Muslim dogmatics. But there Dr. de Vlieger's knowledge evidently failed, and we have mention of, for example, 'Abd ar-Razzāq, the Plotinian Ṣūfī, and Ibn Rushd, the Plotinian Aristotelian, without any suggestion of the distance which separated them from orthodox Islām, or of the paths on which they had diverged. Coming closer to normal Islām, the question might be worth raising what Ibn Jawzī, Ibn Ḥazm, and al-Ghazzālī would have thought of one another. Dr. de Vlieger's Cairene teachers could probably have told him; apparently they did not.

Another criticism which must be made is that

<sup>1</sup> *Kitāb al Qadr. Matériaux pour servir à l'étude de la doctrine de la prédestination dans la théologie musulmane*, par A. de Vlieger, Docteur des Lettres. Leyde: E. J. Brillé. 1903. Pp. xvi, 214.