

have traced the growth of Apostolic Christianity in its successive stages. In the next we shall have to consider it as a whole, and to see what it admits and what it excludes in that medley of vague and various opinions which is called the Christianity of to-day.



Conversion and Modern Thought.

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THE summary dismissal of old and tried beliefs, still firmly held by many leaders of thought, as "obsolete dogmas," is one of those minor irritants with which students of recent thought must bear with as best they may. But those who adopt this attitude hastily and thoughtlessly against their brethren in the faith have less cause to complain against such treatment from without. To just such supercilious evasion has the doctrine of "conversion" been peculiarly subjected.

And yet surely it is, and has been, an immense spiritual dynamic. By virtue both of its attractive power and of its widespread fruitfulness it has a *primâ facie* case. And it is only in accordance with the spirit of modern thought at its soundest and best that the doctrine and phenomenon of conversion should receive a sympathetic and reverent consideration. Has it received such a consideration? To a great extent it has. So much so, indeed, that the glib contempt of persons who know just enough of modern thought to be unsettled may be said to have received a rebuke. Psychologists like Professors Starbuck and James, writing simply as such, have at least vindicated the right of the evangelist to respectful attention.

Certainly we cannot rest satisfied—nor do they ask us to rest satisfied—with an explanation of conversion by reference to brain processes, and to its affinity with religious experience outside the Christian pale. But to those who fear that this line of treatment explains away its supernatural character, I would say

that I see no reason for such anxiety. Let us not be too sure that we have always drawn the line between the natural and the supernatural in the right place. Not that I would agree with those who obliterate this line altogether, even though from the side of the supernatural. But the only point at which the anti-thesis seems to me to come in sharply is where God appears, not as "immanent," but directly as personal. Now, the experience of conversion involves a sense of direct contact with the unseen. God there appears as "transcendent"—that is to say, there is a point over and above the human means used, and all natural antecedents and the natural effects that follow, where God is felt as not merely *in* natural forces, but above them; not merely in the glory of His operations, but "face to face, as a man speaketh with his friend." Now, psychology only deals with our experiences as facts in the soul-life, not with their objects as realities outside ourselves. We perceive the sun, the trees, the houses, and psychology can expound the laws of these perceptions as phases of mental activity; but we do not say, therefore, that there are no sun, trees, and houses. And so with regard to that sense of the presence of God which is the core of all religious life. However dependent it may be shown to be at any given time on physical conditions, it has still an inner reality which is its own explanation.

We cannot in the nature of the case explain the higher by the lower. Just as the evolutionist, if he attempts as such to explain the *origin* of the universe, deserts good science for bad philosophy, so all commit the same fallacy who seek to explain away the idea of God by tracing its evolution from early animistic beliefs. The fallacy is that of explaining the oak by the acorn. If we regard the acorn as simpler than the oak, then it cannot account for the oak's greater complexity. If, on the other hand, we regard it as potentially containing the oak, then the acorn itself needs equally to be explained. The spiritual knowledge of God is what it is, under what conditions soever it has come to us. I do not say that the study of these conditions is not very important. But it no more dis-

credits our belief than our ordinary thoughts and experiences are discredited because from one point of view they can be shown to be affected by physical conditions, and to run parallel with brain processes.

Only let us hold fast to our personal knowledge of God, which rests on grounds just as final—not to say more than that—as all other knowledge; and if psychologists, or scientists of any description, attempt to get behind it, they have no defence against a universal scepticism which will not spare science itself.

Now, to show in how off-hand a manner the fact of conversion may be treated by those whom one would expect to know better, let us glance at Dr. Inge's recent volume. Dr. Inge is one of those, referred to already, who would weld the natural and the supernatural into a solid whole; not, of course, from the side of Materialism, but, on the contrary, in the interest of a truly spiritual and theistic view of everything. I have already suggested that this is not quite the truest way of stating the case for the spiritual view. But at least it should have kept Dr. Inge from making such a remark as this: "Even the sudden conversions, which in some Protestant sects the young are taught to expect, occur with suspicious regularity about the age of puberty, when the nervous system in both sexes is often temporarily disturbed."¹ Is it not strange that Dr. Inge, of all men, should have borrowed this familiar weapon from the armoury of Materialism? After this it may seem hardly worth while to deprecate the use of the accepted phrase "sudden conversions." But it is an invidious phrase, and has a suggestion of involuntary lack of candour. We do not generally speak of a sudden reconciliation, or the sudden acceptance of a gift. But so little care seems to be taken by opponents of this doctrine, to judge of it as it is really held by thoughtful people, that one feels little surprise at an unmeaning antithesis which Dr. Inge lets slip in another place: "Gradual growth in grace by means of the Sacraments is both more

¹ "Faith and Knowledge," p. 167.

common and more healthy.”¹ Further direct comment is hardly necessary.

But now, to leave the defensive line for one more positive, let me try to suggest, as far as is possible in a short space, how this despised tenet is a true and solid contribution, not, indeed, to this or that one-sided theory, but to the general and admitted advance of intellectual insight and spiritual discernment. There is one vital element at the heart and centre of philosophy which has tended to develop with the advance of time, and that is self-consciousness, or the realization by the individual of the meaning of his own “selfhood” or individual personality. There is no space to dwell upon the circumstances which retarded or promoted this development before the coming of Christ. But let it be noted how in this, as in other respects, the Gospel came in the fulness of time. It came as the proclamation of individual blessing, the call for personal surrender. It set each individual in the light of God and eternity. It proclaimed the eternal meaning of each life, however insignificant in the world’s eyes. And this message it addressed to a world which, Jewish and Gentile, had learnt a little of the meaning of individuality. The trend of thought was to seek a foothold in the eternal scheme of things, not for the nation or for the city, but for men as men. The four schools of philosophy prevailing in these later days—Stoicism, Epicureanism, Scepticism, and neo-Platonism—were all in their different ways individualistic. Plato’s ideal civic community no longer appealed to men who knew the actual cities, once free, as now mere items in an all-engulfing empire.

But the knowledge to which it appealed was nothing to the knowledge that it brought. The early Christian, however ill-instructed, realized the *γνώθι σεαυτόν* of the old oracular inscription as the teachers of Athens had never done. He had learnt, as we say, that he “had a soul”; not by acute disquisitions about the nature of the soul, but because his own self, all he had and all he might become, was held up before him as an

¹ “Faith and Knowledge,” p. 183.

object of which he could dispose of his own free-will. The consciousness of personal life, called forth by a claim for self-surrender ; the consciousness of infinite worth, called forth by finding one's self an object of infinite love and eternal purpose—this was a lesson in philosophy greater than any that Socrates or his successors had taught. We never know ourselves till we see ourselves reflected in the mind and heart of God.

But wait awhile, and what do we find ? This assurance of a personal relationship with God, deliberately accepted as the basis of a holy life—has it taken that hold of the Church that we might have expected ? Indeed, must we not say that a tenet with so little catholic authority cannot be of fundamental importance ? Now, it does not follow that the doctrines which, when once clearly grasped, are the most vital, are necessarily those that are crystallized earliest in the mind of the Church. It was so, of course, in the case of the great objective doctrines of the creeds ; and necessarily, for without a solid framework the common creed of Christendom would have fallen to pieces. But the doctrines of the spiritual life cannot be so crystallized from the beginning. The belief in conversion, in that definite form in which it has energized through the great evangelistic movements of the last two centuries, was probably impossible in the earlier stages of the development of self-consciousness. And so the great lesson of self-surrender, as taught by St. Paul, and grasped by the fresh spiritual instinct of the early Church, could not at first gain a foothold in its reflective consciousness. Even the sub-Apostolic teachers understood and taught simple Christian ethics better than they could reproduce the mysticism and the logic of the great Apostle.

Not till Augustine do we find a definite theoretical treatment of personality ; and then it was still too early for a conception so profound to take hold of the general mind of the Church. For there had arisen the stern and solid hierarchy, the legal Church of Cyprian, the community which, like the empire which Cyprian himself had served, held its members together by a bond of strong and definite law. Then monasticism became a

powerful force: the monk fled—says Dr. Allen—not so much from the world, as from the Church. He fled to save his individuality. He desired to get face to face with God in his own right. Monasticism failed, of course, of its original purpose; but what was truest and best survived in the mystics of the Middle Ages. And in them, surely, the personality of the individual is secured? Here shall we not find a bridge over the chasm of legalism, uniting the early Church with the Reformation? To a great extent this is so, yet with a large qualification. These mystical writers of the later Middle Ages, and the whole system of cloistered piety that they represent, saved the individual soul from absorption in the Church, but too much encouraged it to feel itself lost in God. If, instead of a purely mystical union between the human and the Divine essence, there had been still more emphasis laid upon a relationship between the Divine and the created *person*, they would have been on a track leading more directly to spiritual freedom. Personal communion, if I understand them rightly, is made not so much the basis as, at most, the goal of spiritual self-culture. Now, it is just this very idea of personal union, as reached, on man's side, not by a process of discipline, but by faith and free surrender, and as the presupposition of all Christian experiences, that underlies the doctrine of conversion.

Now, it is unnecessary to point out how the Reformation sowed the seed of a revived individualism, in the best sense; and how the same great principle was taken up by philosophy in Descartes' celebrated "Cogito, ergo sum," which made self-consciousness the starting-point of all belief in God and the universe.

Coming at once to the present time, we find influences tending to retard the progress of self-consciousness. The great principle of evolution, which explains continuity and solidarity rather than variety and freedom, now controls our thoughts. Whether in the form of naturalistic Monism, which explains everything in terms of matter or energy, or in the form of idealistic Monism, which makes Absolute Spirit the all-in-all

of reality, personality fails to receive its due. In the latter case some writers attempt to save it ; though, as I think, unsuccessfully ; but a Naturalism which makes the individual the mere sum of inherited tendencies, presents a definite challenge. And against all this the spirit of man will always assert itself, and say in answer to the challenge : " No, I am not a mere cog-wheel in a machine, or the limb of a body ; nor even a mere thought in one all-thinking all-inclusive mind. I am free to choose or refuse the good or the evil. I am not only what I was made, but what I make myself." There is no need for anxiety. If our consciousness of freedom and personality is really rooted in the depths of our being, surely any prevailing line of thought which obscures it from time to time only strengthens it in the end. When that which is deepest in man asserts—as it must assert—its rights, then the truth which has been obscured by the new teaching will win double strength at once by assimilating what is true in that teaching, and by overcoming what is false. It can be shown—and has been shown by able writers—that evolution has its strict and necessary limits. It may explain process, but not origin ; the conditions of survival, but not the final *raison d'être* of what survives ; and certainly not personality, as surely as it cannot bridge the antithesis between the thinker and the object of thought. Self-consciousness, then, must rise above the levelling flood. And it will get its due all the more because it has had to struggle for it ; all the more because, perhaps, it will have to dispense with provisional support and seek its foothold deep in the very necessities of thought.

Then there is another line of study which has, at first sight, an antipersonal tendency, and in a different direction. It compels us, not to abandon, but to readjust, our old conviction of the unity and integrity of the soul. We have been accustomed to say, and, on the whole, rightly, that though our thoughts, feelings, and acts are various, yet personality is not divided up among them, but remains the centre from which they all spring, and the bond that unites them into a living whole. But we are

now confronted by various extraordinary phenomena which at first sight shake this confidence. There have been persons in such an abnormal condition that two distinct personalities appear to have enjoyed alternate supremacy over the same body ; and other similar cases have combined to raise anew the question of the essential integrity of the very personality itself. Now, without going fully into this subtle problem, let me point out that it does not interfere with any theory of the unity of the soul to which the New Testament is committed. For this unity is, after all, ideal rather than actual—that is to say, is actual in so far as the ideal is realized. Just as in the life of the Church “the whole body, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord,” so the true unity in the heart and life of every separate man is only to be found by his fulfilling his eternal destiny, and abiding in the living presence of that Divine love which holds together its object in an eternal embrace. That strange dualism which we find in ourselves, so clearly recognised by St. Paul—the flesh divided against the spirit, nay, even distracted within itself—is, as a simple matter of fact, reduced to unity in so far as we live from our true centre, as persons chosen in eternity each for his own mission, each for his own place in the kingdom of heaven. The centre, or nerve, of personality can only be really understood in the light of the Divine purpose and love. A person, at the last resort, is simply a unit, or potential unit, in the kingdom of heaven—an object upon which the interest of God is concentrated as though there were no other. At any point short of the realization of this destiny, who shall say what disintegration, moral or pathological, he may suffer ?

But leaving this difficult question, let us now bring our subject to a definite issue. Conversion, of course, is not always a clearly-marked event occurring as the result of a felt spiritual crisis. But the reason of this—it is important to urge—must lie in our inadequate understanding of the real nature of the claims and promises of the Gospel. In the case of childhood, this gradual dawning of religious life may run almost parallel with

the awakening of the understanding. In such a case the gradual, rather than sudden, emergence of religious life is simply due to the happy circumstance of its early appearance. But to regard gradual conversion in the case of an instructed adult as *per se* the more desirable and normal event, is to misunderstand the very meaning of conversion. Here let me hasten to add that it is only the event in itself which is referred to. The preparatory process, conscious or sub-conscious, may be very long. A hasty, superficial, and ecstatic conversion (if the word may be applied to it at all) is greatly to be deprecated. Sensational methods, long ago avoided by thoughtful evangelists, are more than ever discredited by recent investigations. But the religious teacher who does not hold forth salvation as resting on a definite status obtained by definite self-surrender, not only fails in his method, but compromises the very substance of his message.

It was my first intention to deal with conversion in another vital aspect—its direct relation to sin. I believe it could be shown that in this aspect it solves a deadlock in ethical science. But rather than over-compress a great subject, let us be satisfied with the line of thought which we have now traced. It is, in brief, an assertion of the principle of personality as the key to our relationship with God. On man's side it means that, underlying the special good or bad impulses and other complexities of character, there is, or tends to be, a main direction in which the soul-life as a whole is set, a choice, implicit at least, of good or evil. This much is decisively maintained even by the Unitarian Martineau, and, as he points out, has been prominent in the history of religious thought, even outside Christianity. Now, this choice has reference to the disposal not merely of this or that possession or faculty, but of self, of the person as such. But it is only Christianity that makes such a disposal definitely and explicitly possible, because it shows us God in the most direct and comprehensive personal relation to ourselves; and so the surrender is made, not to any institution or law, not to any abstract ideal, but to a personal and responsive Object. The

act of offering is met by a corresponding act of acceptance. Self dies to live again on the higher plane of personal fellowship with its Creator ; and so, knowing the love of God towards ourselves, we know ourselves in our deepest relation—as beloved of God : and this is the true self-knowledge.

Now, if our relation to God were nothing more than legal and institutional, or a mystical merging of essence with essence, the significance of conversion would hardly appear. But if we keep closely to the thought of personal communion, then it logically follows. For self-surrender, when the issue is clearly recognised, is an explicit act, containing in germ the whole life of service which it initiates—“ How shall we who died (*ἀπεθάνομεν*) unto sin, live any longer therein ?”

Here we close a discussion of conversion, not in its aspect as repentance, but in its aspect as self-surrender. Let me add as a final word that the doctrine of conversion, if theoretically accepted, cannot be consistently shirked in the pulpit, as it is by so many who ought to know better. This is not a mere matter of method or tactics, but of loyalty to the claims of the Gospel.



The Supposed Discrepancies in the Pentateuchal Legislation.

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PART I.

THE alleged discrepancies between the laws of Deuteronomy and those of other parts of the Pentateuch are set out by Dr. Driver on pp. xxxvii-xxxix of his “ Deuteronomy ” in numbered paragraphs—twelve in all. I have elsewhere¹ dealt with the contents of nine of those paragraphs, and need not here repeat myself to any great extent ; but as the

¹ “ Studies in Biblical Law,” pp. 5-31, 39-41.