

purpose. The highest, the best and the most satisfying thing that we can do is to ask to be allowed to co-operate with God's infinite patience in making men whole".⁵

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past tracing out ! For who hath known the mind of the Lord ? or who hath been his counsellor ? or who hath first given to him and it shall be recompensed unto him again ? For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen (Romans xi. 33-36).

⁵ *Making Men Whole*, p. 71.

The Eschatological Aspect of Justification

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I

JUSTIFICATION really has two eschatological aspects, of which the second is a development from the first. There is a sense in which the Age to Come is present now—it has been brought into existence by the Death and Resurrection of Christ. God has entered world history as Redeemer, and the 'kairos' of this event divides time decisively into two parts and opens up a completely new range of possibilities in respect of man's standing with God.¹ Within the faith-relationship the believer enters 'newness of life', and the powers of the Resurrection Age are imparted to him through the gift of the Holy Spirit. In this experience the eschatological aspect of Justification is already a reality, for Christ's victory over sin and death and the evil powers which is the mark of the New Age becomes the possession of him who responds in faith to the free gift of God. But it is the nature of the new life to be, at the same time, both present and coming, something that is available here and now and yet also awaits fulfilment in the future. The believer has not yet attained. There remains a judgment and a consummation before eternal life can be a complete reality, though on the basis of his present experience of forgiveness in Christ the believer is as certain of being acquitted at the one as he is of being included in the other. "It is the combination of the *now* and the *not yet* that characterizes the Christian Weltanschauung."²

Before attempting to look at this combination of the *now* and the *not yet*, something must first be said about the situation from which deliverance is needed. Redemption is unintelligible apart from the

¹ See Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, part 2.

² Baillie, *And the Life Everlasting*.

presupposition of sin. The New Testament distinguishes two different centres of evil, one extrinsic to man and the other intrinsic. The former is represented under such terms as 'The Evil One', 'Satan', 'The Powers of this Age', 'The Elements', and so on. This centre of evil is older than man and has an objective reality. As Brunner remarks,¹ the sin of Satan 'is not the sin of the tempted but of the Tempter'. It is 'the sin that is self-suggested, not due to suggestion from without. But man has too little ability to invent sin. He has too little genius to be the first to conceive this possibility'. Judaism had recognized the existence of extrinsic evil and had accepted a modified dualism: Yahweh had allowed Satan a certain degree of power in the world, and the kingdom of Satan was thought of as standing in opposition to the kingdom of God. But this dualism was conditional and temporary, for God would intervene and the evil powers would be destroyed. Jesus Himself, of course, accepted this account of the world, and in His power over the unclean spirits He saw the strong man bound and his goods being despoiled—a sign of the Messianic Age. St. Paul also conceived of evil forces lying outside the purely human domain but having a malign influence upon the souls and lives of men.

The second centre of evil which the New Testament distinguishes is human sin, and it is along the route of sin that the powers of darkness invade the human situation. Sin is man's self-assertion against God to which he is tempted by the devil—his refusal to acknowledge his creaturely dependence on his Creator. The fracture of man's relationship to God removes him from the source of all goodness and life, and renders him vulnerable to the devil, in whose hand is the power of death. Redemption consists in the removal of man from the power of Satan and the reconciliation of man to God. Reconciliation restores contact with the source of goodness and life and thus denies Satan his access into the human domain.

Biblical Judaism thought of redemption as lying on the other side of a decisive moment in history when God would intervene to establish His Kingdom and rout the evil powers. When Jesus began to preach he proclaimed that the time was fulfilled. This could only mean that the long-awaited event had now taken place; the decisive moment of redemption had come, and the New Age was about to dawn. The finalising battle, however, was still to be fought on the Cross, and that would be followed by the supreme sign of victory, the Resurrection. Jesus would ascend to the Father but would return again with power and great glory, and then the redemptive line would reach its end. In the meantime, between the Resurrection and the Parousia, the Christian community is given the task of preaching the Gospel to every creature. The discharge of this task became possible only after the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost, which is regarded by Peter as the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy of the last days. The Church therefore exists in an eschatological order in which the powers of the Age to Come are available to it through the indwelling Spirit. Christ's power over evil and death, which was to Him the sign of victory over Satan, has become that of the Church and still bears the same significance.

¹ *Dogmatic*, Vol. II, p. 140.

II

In the writings of St. Paul, the eschatological aspect of Justification is pin-pointed in Romans iii. 21 by the words "But now". It is here that Paul effects the transition in his scheme of thought from the one Age to the other. He has been describing the general condition of man and has shown that sin is universal: Jews and Gentiles alike have failed to keep the divinely revealed moral law, and wherever the eye turns there is nothing but sin and its inevitable consequence of retribution. The whole world lies under the wrath of God. So far from being the means by which a man attains his standing with God, the law actually imparts knowledge of sin and has the effect of driving man more deeply into it. This indeed is the heart of the human dilemma: the mere knowledge of God's requirements is useless as a means for obtaining a verdict of acquittal before the bar of divine judgment. On the contrary, as Paul will show later, the law acts as an incitement to sin because it defines its nature and so stimulates the sinful impulse (Rom. vii).

In the setting of this dilemma Paul places the Gospel. "But now," he says, and by the word *now* he means 'now that Christ has come'. What he has described as the general state of man in his opening survey is actually no longer true. With the coming of Christ a new factor has entered human and mundane affairs and the dilemma of sin has been resolved "apart from the law". "God has established an entirely new relationship with man; and this relationship is characterized, not by God's wrath, but by his righteousness. The old age under the wrath of God is succeeded by a new age ruled by the righteousness of God."¹

This notion of a transition from the old order to the new is the fundamental premise of the Gospel and is to be found in every stratum of the New Testament proclamation. This is the 'Good News' which Jesus Himself announced. The crisis of history, the decisive redeeming action of God to which the law and the prophets looked forward, has taken place and has opened up to man a wholly fresh range of possibilities in respect of his standing with God. Paul gives a careful analysis of this new situation. God's 'righteousness', His willingness to acquit man without being false, as it were, to His own nature as the author of the moral law, has been revealed in Christ, and man's standing with God is shown not to depend upon the degree to which he observes the law but upon belief in the redeeming work of Christ and appropriation of its victorious fruits by an act of self-surrender in faith. No man can claim that Christ is superfluous to him: "all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God". All are on trial before the divine tribunal. Man must expect the verdict to go against him. But in fact God actually acquits him; he is "justified freely" and is able to leave the court with his guilt removed and with a fresh start. "Paul's justification is the effectual pronouncement of absolution now by the judge as saviour."² The wicked is acquitted, when he becomes a believer, on the ground of God's justifying action in the death and resurrection of Christ.

¹ Nygren, *Romans*, pp. 145-6.

² Kittel's *Word Book* on 'Righteousness', p. 61.

It is clear that the supervention of the New Age is not to be regarded in any sense as a stage in man's self-development. There is nothing here which supports Utopianism. The whole essence of Paul's argument is that God has taken the initiative and has "set forth" His Son "to be a propitiation, through faith, by His blood". The Christ-event changes the orientation of the entire created order by bringing it under the purposive dynamic of the Resurrection Age: whereas the world has been stamped by frustration, decay and death, now it is taken up into the new life of the risen Christ and is moving towards its *telos* in God. For Jesus has conquered the devil, whom Paul describes as "the god of this age" (2 Cor. iv. 4). The great event of Good Friday and Easter has unseated Satan from his throne and despoiled him of his powers (Col. ii. 15). "Jesus Christ is described as the only one who was able to resist the power of temptation. . . . This power proves that Jesus is more than Man, that he was not, like other men, held captive by this spell, which no human being can overcome. As the God-Man he conquers this evil enchantment, which emanates from the being who weaves the spell, that is, the Satanic power itself. Hence he came to 'destroy the works of the devil'. It was he who 'delivered us from the power of darkness, and placed us in the realm of the Son of His Love'."¹

III

But what is the effect of Justification? In what respects does the presence of the New Age alter human character and life? Paul answers these questions in Romans v-viii. "Being therefore justified by faith," he begins, "we have (reading *ἔχομεν*, R.V.m.) peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand; and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God". Now that we have our new standing with God in Christ we are no longer afraid of His wrath—a fear which has had such a disabling effect upon us in the past. We can face the future with confidence, for we know that that glory of God of which we all fall short is now attainable. The enervating sense of defeatism and hopelessness which assailed us so long as we tried to earn our acquittal by obeying the law has gone, and we can press on with hope and courage. Of course, Paul adds, we cannot expect our path in the world to be easy: there is still pain and disappointment. But the awareness of our new status with God also alters our attitude to life with all its attendant ills. Because we have this hope of the glory of God, the whole of our existence acquires a meaning which it did not have for us before. Our suffering can be assimilated to our general aim in life, for we know that the world is not just a meaningless succession of blind events; it is moving towards a definite goal in accordance with the divine scheme. And we know, therefore, that suffering is not the final word: indeed, it can even be turned to advantage as a means of building up character. So far from proving hope illusory and void, suffering is precisely the point where the power of hope most clearly proves itself, for 'it becomes a means in God's hand to carry us on toward the consummation'.

¹ Brunner, *Dogmatic II*, p. 141.

The double eschatological aspect of Justification is here coming into view; the characteristic dialectic of the 'now' and the 'not yet' is beginning to show through Paul's exposition. It is true, as he has shown, that the New Age with its means of access to God in Christ has in fact come; but the believer has not yet reached the end of his pilgrimage, nor indeed has he any clear conception of what that end will be. He lives in hope, and "hope that is seen is not hope" (Rom. viii. 24). What he does know is that he will be saved from the wrath of God at the final judgment through Christ (v. 9). The ground of this assurance is the Cross, which is the supreme manifestation of the divine Love: "God commendeth his own love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". The emphasis falls on the words "while we were yet sinners": it was precisely when we were at enmity with God, when we were least deserving of His love, it was then that Christ died for us. And this is the ground of our hope for the future. If the love of God is such that He did this for us while we were His enemies, how much more is He likely to bring us to full salvation now that we have become His friends through the death of His Son! "The divine absolution of sins, made effectual in the Cross and accepted by faith here and now, is expected to reach its final consummation in acquittal at the Last Judgment."¹

The combination of 'now' and 'not yet' appears in striking form in Romans vi. Here Paul is describing baptism, and he does so in terms of the death and resurrection of Christ. Baptism admits the believer into the redemptive events of Good Friday and Easter, not merely in an external symbolic way but as an actual inward experience. Entrance into the water of baptism means being implicated in the death of Christ and involves the death of the sinful impulse—what Paul calls the "old man". It is not, however, merely a part of the believer's being that dies: sin pervades his whole make-up, and the whole man must die if it is to be extirpated. Thus Paul can say quite unconditionally, "Ye are dead" (Col. iii. 3). He thinks of death as the ultimate consequence of sin: it is, as it were, the goal at which sin has been aiming, and is nothing less than the complete severance of man from God. Once a man reaches this stage there is nothing left for sin to do, and so it follows that "he that hath died is justified from sin" (Rom. vi. 7). Sin has no more claims upon him. But Baptism is not only a sharing in Christ's death: it is also a sharing in His resurrection—the believer rises from the dead and "walks in newness of life". He enters into the Resurrection Age which is the sphere of life, having been liberated from the dominion of sin which is the sphere of death. The believer shares in the victory of Christ.

After this statement of the 'divine indicative', the verses which follow seem to be a paradoxical anti-climax. The mood changes to the imperative: "reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin. . . . Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey the lusts thereof". This seems to take the edge off Paul's former analysis, because it implies that sin has not, after all, lost its hold. But the man who had wrestled with the problems of the Church at Corinth was no airy theorist. He knew better than anyone that a

¹ Kittel, p. 64.

state of sinlessness was not reached when the justified believer rose from the water of baptism, and yet he could say that the old man was crucified with Christ. "The fact of the matter is," says Nygren, "that 'free from sin' and 'sinless' are two very different things. . . . That the Christian is free from sin means to Paul that by Christ sin is cast down from its throne. His thought is not at all that we in ourselves come to mastery over sin, so that it is less and less evident in us as we gradually grow towards sinlessness. Freedom from sin is rather a fruit of the work of Christ; it is by Him that sin is cast down and vanquished. He who believes in Christ no longer lives under the dominion of sin. He has found another Lord, to whom he stands in obedience".¹ 'Obedience' is the keyword. There is still room in the Christian scheme of salvation for the will of man himself, and Justification does not exempt a man from a Last Judgment according to works. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"—it is this "fear and trembling" that gives point and urgency to the life of the Resurrection Age and prevents the doctrine of Justification from degenerating into antinomianism. The life in the New Age is still under the judgment of God, and Justification involves obedience to the law of love. Yet in the same breath Paul can add, "for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure". The pattern of salvation is always dominated by the gracious initiative of God in Christ, and this is the ground of the assurance that "he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i. 6).

IV

The double eschatological aspect of Justification is seen again in Paul's doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Possession of the Spirit by the Church marks it as the Messianic community, and it is through the Spirit that the powers of the New Age become a present reality. To this 'now', however, there is added a 'not yet'. The Spirit has been given but the gift is described by Paul as an ἀρραβών or first instalment,² which, while being a pledge of full payment at some future time, is nevertheless only a part-payment now. Though the Christian has received the Spirit and already lives in the security of sonship (Rom. viii. 14), he must still wait for fulfilment, straining forward towards the goal. Thus in relation to the New Age the Church is an imperfect society of forgiven sinners whose existence is grounded in the Christ-event. In relation to the 'world', however, the Church is the sphere in which the New Age permeates the Present Age and where redemption is worked out. God's redemptive acts include not only the death and resurrection of Christ, but also the gift of the Spirit and the consequent life and work of the Church. The Church is itself part of the Gospel, in respect both of what it is and what it does. The quality of its life is a reflection of the character of Jesus: it has the same magnetism, the same power to draw men into its fellowship

¹ Romans, p. 242-3.

² 2 Cor. i. 22, v. 5; Eph. 1. 14. Cf. ἀπαρχή, Rom. viii. 23. In Modern Gk. ἀρραβῶνα means an engagement ring.

as Jesus Himself had. The basis of that life is the victory over sin and the evil powers won by Christ and made available to the Church by the Holy Spirit. What the Church does is to continue the work of redemption by being the instrument of redemption, by mediating Christ's victory to the world and drawing men into the Resurrection Age. If it fails to do this it is not merely failing in its duty but failing to be the Church, for the Holy Spirit is not only the Spirit of Love, He is also the Spirit of Power, and this means that the Church can never be a 'paradise for a sect'. The Spirit drives the Church onward towards the fulness of Christ and outward to proclaim the Gospel message and to witness to its truth by its life. It is the redeemed community and also the redemptive community, and its habitation is not the static temple but the moving tabernacle. It is also an expectant community, and its life is "organized with reference to the future, always preparing for the 'end' which it exists to serve".¹ The preaching of the Gospel is itself a sign of the approaching end: "And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. xxiv. 14).

By the very nature of things it is impossible to know in advance what the details of that 'end' will be, and the New Testament writers have to employ the language of metaphor in order to describe it. The difficulty for us to-day is that much of the biblical imagery has lost its evocative power: we can no longer think of heaven, for example, in terms of musical instruments and precious stones and metals. Yet it is doubtful whether we can think of it at all except in some more or less 'mythological' dress, and to dissolve away all the poetic element and leave only some abstract idea like 'Absolute Value' does not really seem to advance our comprehension very far. The very concreteness of the biblical imagery serves to remind us that the future life is continuous with the 'resurrection' life of the present, that the difference is not one of kind but of degree and that it includes a 'spiritual body' as a means of self-communication and self-expression. Whatever else salvation may include, St. Paul is certain that it will involve our being conformed to the likeness of Christ, and he thinks of this as the completion of something already begun in those who have come into the new Age of the Resurrection and have experienced its power. Romans viii closes with what is really a poem about the certainty of salvation, and its note of triumphant assurance should be contrasted with the account of man apart from God in ch. i and the analysis of human nature in ch. vii. The list of ills and misfortunes is not an imaginary one: Paul himself had suffered most if not all of them, and the time was not far distant when his Roman readers would also have their full share. Yet amid the affliction shines the Christian certitude of God's infinite love in Christ, the belief that goodness is stronger than evil and that life is not merely a succession of frustrated purposes and disappointed hopes to those who have found release from sin in Christ, the conviction that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

¹ Warren, *The Truth of Vision*, p. 150.

V

'The Need for Transcendence.' This is the title of a chapter in the first volume of Marcel's Gifford Lectures, and it expresses something of which many to-day are acutely aware. We appear to have reached a point where 'otherness' is no longer merely a term in some abstract Idealism, but has become an urgent inner need for men who feel themselves to be living in a 'broken world'. In spite of its varied manifestations, 'existential thinking' has at its root the urge to frame a world-view which will take full account of the character and experience of the individual (as distinct from the universal), and will refuse to lose itself in the 'illimitable inane' of timeless abstractions. There is a sense of need for a reality which can be felt 'on the pulses'—something which breaks into our experience and routine ways of thinking and refuses to be mastered by them. Perhaps it is significant that the German Occupation of France was the period in which French thinking really took its present turn—a period, that is, in which the fact of 'being in the world' with all that that meant in terms of human impotence and solitariness was felt as a kind of exigence with which thought had to come to terms. Again it may be that the possibility of atomic warfare has brought a new awareness of 'apocalyptic', no longer merely entertained as an idea (or an illusion) but brought home to the imagination with a force hitherto unknown and resulting in a sense of urgency and doom.¹ But this is by no means the whole truth. These are the symptoms of conditions that lie deeper than the pressure of physical circumstances. The crisis of our time is the crisis of human history which confronts all men of every age, and it points to that exigence in the being of man which is summed up in Marcel's phrase 'the need for transcendence'. It so happens that we live in times in which this need is forced upon our consciousness through its symptoms in the political, social, and economic disorders of the world, and the rapid advance in scientific knowledge and techniques.² But it would be a mistake to suppose that the urgent inner need is a discovery of our own day: what is new is not the thing itself but the intensity with which we are now aware of it.

In view of this it is not surprising that the 'eschatological' standpoint of the New Testament should have assumed a fresh importance and received careful study among present-day theologians. The biblical emphasis upon the 'new age' and the 'last days' is no longer viewed as an embarrassing relic of the pre-scientific age to be explained away or rendered harmless: it is seen to be central to the whole record of redemption, and this re-discovery has had an electrifying effect upon our theological thinking. It has acted like a detonator setting off the whole explosive force of the Gospel.

The word 'transcendence' might mean many things, and some attempt has been made in this article to define the Christian conception of it. We have seen that the 'going beyond' of the New Testament is thought of in terms of a New Age inaugurated by Christ and apprehended by faith—an Age in which the power of Good Friday and

¹ Cf. *The Shaking of The Foundations*, Tillich.

² Cf. Article "On Poetic Truth" by H. D. Lewis, in *Philosophy*, July, 1946.

Easter enters human experience as the 'Good News' of forgiveness and reconciliation. St. Paul's most characteristic word for this is 'Justification' because his thought starts with the idea of law and of man's impotence to obey it. This is the human dilemma, and it is resolved by free acquittal at the bar of divine judgment, an acquittal made possible by the Cross where Christ faced the sentence of death which the law pronounces against sinful humanity and yet survived it. Thus the law has done its worst and has no further condemnation to pronounce—God is able to "justify the ungodly". But of course this legal metaphor is really too small: the believer does not only enter into Christ's death, he also enters into His resurrection and receives the *arrabon* of the Spirit which enables him to share in the risen life of his Saviour. Thus he is brought into a complex of new relationships whose law is love and whose ground is communion with God 'in Christ'. Within these relationships the Christian life is lived: it is a life stamped with the pattern of crucifixion and resurrection and it points beyond the present time to a future of fulfilment in which God will be 'all in all'.

Clearly, this New Testament understanding of 'transcendence' must be sharply distinguished from scientific Utopianism which seeks transcendence in the amelioration of the physical conditions of life,¹ and from romantic aestheticism which seeks it in the private cultivation of valuable states of mind and the flight of the alone to the alone. The Bible is the record of events in which men were conscious of an encounter with the 'wholly other' to a degree without parallel elsewhere. God did not disclose Himself in the private visions of mystics but in the public events of the redemptive history and in the person of His Son. What we have in the Bible, therefore, is the revelation of a God who implicates Himself in the real world, the actual human situation in all its 'thickness and density'. The transcendence of the Bible is a moral transcendence because in it the 'wholly other' enters history to save sinners and to bestow salvation as a free gift. We are not offered a system of timeless truths, nor a blue-print for social betterment, but the living experience of men who encountered God concretely within the order of the temporal and mundane; who encountered Him, moreover, not as an Object for contemplation, but as Saviour and Judge.

¹ See, for example, J. D. Bernal, *The Freedom of Necessity*.