

that, whatever may be our attempts to define inspiration, the teaching of the Old and New Testament stands incomparable and alone; and that no other book can be said, like the Bible, to be "vast and wide as the world, rooted in the abysses of creation, and towering up beyond the blue secrets of heaven! Sunrise and sunset, promise and fulfilment, birth and death, the whole drama of humanity are in the Bible, and there alone." "Its eclipse would be the return of chaos, its extinction the epitaph of history."

F. W. FARRAR.

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## THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

### II. CHRIST AND THE PROPHETS (CHAP. I. 1-4.)

THIS long, sonorous sentence forms the introduction to the whole Epistle, is, as it were, the portico of an august temple, its many weighty clauses being as rows of stately ornamental pillars supporting the roof. This temple front has a most imposing aspect! It fills the mind with awe, and disposes one to enter the sacred edifice in religious silence, rather than to indulge in critical remarks. Sensible of this, let us remember the wise counsel, "let thy words be few," and refrain from attempting to express the inexpressible.

In these opening verses the writer announces at once the theme of his discourse, and introduces the leading thoughts on which he intends to expatiate. It has been suggested that the rhetorical style of the writing may be the reason why it does not begin with salutations, but rushes at once *in medias res*. Be this as it may, the writer certainly does at once plunge into the heart of his subject, setting forth Christ as the supreme object of religious regard—superior

to prophets, priests, and angels; the Apostle through whom God made His final revelation to men; the Priest who effectually and for ever made that purification of sins which levitical sacrifices failed to accomplish; the Maker, Heir, and Sustainer of all things; not only above angels, but equal to God, being His eternal Son and perfect image.

The first point to be noticed in the proem is the contrast drawn, in antithetic terms, between the Old and the New Testament revelations. "God, having spoken of old in many parts and in many modes, to the fathers in the prophets, spake at the end of these days to us in (His) Son."

By "the prophets" may be meant those strictly so called, but more probably the phrase is meant to cover the whole Old Testament revelation, including the law-giving; the recognition of the angels as the agents by whom the law was given being rather a concession to Jewish opinion than the expression of the writer's own view. To be noted is the use of the phrase "the fathers" absolutely, as the recipients of the ancient revelation. It implies that the Epistle is meant solely for Jewish readers. Does it further imply that the writer recognises only Jewish Christians, or recognises Gentile Christians only on condition of their consenting first to become Jews by submitting to the rite of circumcision? In that case we should have to say that the writer was not merely not Paul, but not even a Paulinist, a man, that is, sympathising with the position taken up by Paul in the great controversy between him and the Judaists. This however I cannot believe. The Epistle, though apparently identifying Christendom with the Hebrew Church, is manifestly universalistic in spirit. No one who considers the freedom with which the writer speaks of levitical institutions as weak, useless, doomed to pass away, can imagine him having any difficulty about recognising Gentile Christians without their being required

to submit to circumcision, any more than one who understands the spirit of Christ's teaching can think of Him as attaching religious importance to the Jewish national rite, although in the Gospels, as in this Epistle, there is no express indication of opinion on the subject. Then on the principle that a man is known from the company he keeps, Pauline sympathies may be inferred from the writer's acquaintance with Timothy. That acquaintanceship makes it all but certain that he could not be ignorant of the controversy, and therefore cannot be conceived of as one to whom the question between Paul and the Judaists had not occurred, and who was in the same state of mind as if he had written his book before the controversy arose. He must have had an opinion on the subject; and under whatever influences he had been reared, Palestinian or Alexandrian, we may be sure that his sympathies were on the side of universalism. While therefore he is not to be identified with Paul, he may be regarded as a Paulinist; not in the sense that he resembles or follows Paul in the details of his theology, which he certainly does not, but in the sense that for him, as for Paul, the Israel of God means all in every land that believe in Christ, and that in Christ for him, as for Paul, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

Very remarkable are the terms employed to describe the character of the Old Testament revelation. It is characterized as a piecemeal multiform revelation. For what purpose are these epithets employed? Hardly for the purpose of mere literary description, to suggest, for example, the picturesque nature of the Hebrew literature; still less for the purpose of pointing out its spiritual excellences. Rather, to indicate the inferiority of the earlier revelation, that the Hebrew Christians might not cling to it as something final. This end these epithets are well fitted to serve. The first of the two points to a fact with which the first readers of the Epistle were perfectly familiar.

They knew that the Divine communications to Israel came bit by bit: the promise by Abraham; the law by Moses; the songs of the sanctuary by David and other poets; the wisdom of life by Solomon and the other sages of Israel; and by the prophets commonly so called, to relieve the gloom of the present, successive rays of light concerning Messiah and the Messianic kingdom. And of course they understood that no one of these partial, fragmentary revelations could be regarded as complete or final. Each successive piece of revelation proved the incompleteness of all that went before. But might not all the pieces taken together, when the last had been given, and the Hebrew canon was complete, amount to a full, adequate revelation, possessing the character of finality? The presumption was the other way. The likelihood was that the prophets collectively, including under that category all the men by whom the Hebrew books were written, were but luminaries of the night—street lamps set in a row to show travellers their way through the gloom; stars set in the spiritual firmament to mitigate the darkness till the sun should arise, bringing in the day.

This presumption is converted into certainty by the second epithet, which greatly strengthens the argument against finality suggested by the first. It gives us to understand that the ancient revelation 'was communicated, not only in many parts, but in many modes. The meaning is not so clear in this case, but the reference is probably to the various ways in which God held communication with those whom He employed as His agents, as in a vision, a dream, or the like. The general idea intended is plain. It is that the revelation made to each prophet was *relative*—relative to his temperament, circumstances, and historical position. This relativity or subjectivity of the ancient revelation makes it impossible to add together the separate pieces of revelation, and so bring out the whole final revelation. For

the pieces are not homogeneous fragments of one whole. They are heterogeneous wholes, often incapable of combination. This is most clearly seen in the Messianic prophecies uttered by successive prophets, which are not separate fragments of one picture of the future capable of being combined into a harmonious whole, but independent pictures, each exhibiting the future from its own point of view. This is clear enough to us; is it too much to suppose that it was clear to the writer of our Epistle, that he saw that the prophecies were such that no man could tell what the future was to be till Jesus, the last of the prophets and the fulfiller of the prophecies, came and showed the true nature of Messiah and His kingdom? Some such idea as this, I think, he meant to suggest by the word *πολυτρόπως*. If that was his meaning, he certainly stated thereby an unanswerable argument against the finality of the ancient revelation, and in favour of a new, adequate, and therefore final revelation, which should give the key to the riddle of the Old Testament.

Of Him by whom the much needed new revelation was made the writer next proceeds to speak. "God hath, in the end of these days, spoken unto us in (His) Son." The revelation made in the Son is not qualified by descriptive epithets, as in the case of the earlier revelation, the reason being that such epithets in this case are not needed. The one expression, "in a Son," involves in itself a full antithesis to the fragmentary multiform revelation given to the fathers in the prophets. The absence of the article (*ἐν υἱῷ*) gives it this significance, the idea being that a revelation through one standing to God in the relation of Son must be perfect in its mode, and complete and final in its contents. The thought suggested is substantially identical with that expressed in the beginning of the fourth Gospel, in the well known words: "No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He

hath declared Him." A Son dwelling in the bosom of the Divine Being, His Father, and knowing His inmost thoughts, is fit to be the perfect exegete of His mind : such is the implicit argument of Gospel and Epistle. This view implies that the Son must be the last speaker : no more remains to be said ; it implies also that He is the only speaker in the New Testament—apostles and apostolic men sinking into the subordinate position of witnesses, confirmers of what they have seen and heard of the incarnate Word, echoes of His voice, commenders of His teaching to the world.

The finality of the revelation made through the Son is expressly taught by the phrase "in the end of these days." The writer expresses himself in accordance with the Jewish mode of viewing the history of the world as divided into two great periods, the present age, and the age to come. He conceives of Christ as the divider and maker of the ages (as of the worlds), coming at the end of the old time and inaugurating the new. What his conception of the coming age, which we now call the Christian era, was, we shall have other opportunities of considering. Meantime what we have to note is, that in his view the revelation made by the Son winds up the old age. It is the last word, if not absolutely, at least for the old world and all that belongs to it. It is a solemn announcement for unbelieving Jews, and all who are inclined to cling to the past. For the end of the days means the end of the Jewish state. It is the judgment day of Israel. How important then to give heed to the Son !

Having made mention of the Son, the writer proceeds to invest Him with all due honours, Divine and mediatorial, to win for His word fitting attention. The elaborate encomium which follows presents a very high view of the Person of Christ. It ascribes to Him (by implication) pre-existence, an essential and therefore eternal relation to God,

universal heirship, participation in the Divine functions of making and upholding the world. One may speculate on the genesis of this christological creed, and conjecture that it was collected from such texts as those quoted in the sequel, or that the articles contained in it were inferences from the state of exaltation; the pre-existent state and all that goes along with it being, as it were, the projection into the eternal past of the image formed by the mind of the writer of the exalted and glorified Christ as He lives in heaven. But to indulge in such conjectures is to go outside the functions of exegesis. The text gives us no information on the point; it contains simply the creed of the writer, without a hint as to the history of its formation in his mind.

The one point calling for special notice in this statement of belief concerning the Son is, that in which He is declared to be the effulgence of God's glory and the exact image of His essence. In this way does the writer endeavour as exactly as possible to set forth the Son's relation to God. The terms he employs for this purpose are remarkable. They sound like an echo of words current in the Alexandrian Jewish philosophy, as represented by Philo, from whose pages scholars have collected examples of their use. How far the writer of our Epistle was acquainted with that philosophy we do not know; but there is that about his style of thought, expression, and argument which suggests the influence of the Alexandrian atmosphere, and gives plausibility if not probability to the conjecture of Luther, which has since found such wide acceptance, that he is to be identified with the Apollos mentioned in Acts xviii. 24-28, there described as "born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures." While keeping in view however the Alexandrian culture of the writer as a possible factor, we must be careful not to exaggerate the extent of its influence on his thought. We shall do wisely not to

make him a slavish follower of any school, whether Alexandrian, Pauline, or rabbinical, but to recognise frankly the free, independent activity of his mind, and to be on the outlook for originalities.

The two striking phrases in this clause express in different ways the likeness of the Son to God. On the one hand, He is declared to be the *apaugasma* of the Divine glory. The Greek word may signify either the direct radiance of a luminous object, or its reflected image, as of the sun in water. The ancient fathers for the most part preferred the former rendering: hence their phrase, "Light from Light," expressive of the essential relation subsisting between the Son and the Father. Some eminent modern interpreters, such as Erasmus, Calvin, Beza, and Grotius, have favoured the other view. It is impossible to decide authoritatively between the two interpretations, neither is it necessary, as either conveys the general idea intended sufficiently. Some reject both, and maintain that the idea suggested is that of rays of light coming out from the Divine glory, and forming themselves into a similar light-body.<sup>1</sup> This sense provides for the independent subsistence of the Son, but it lacks support in natural analogy.

The Son is next declared to be the *character* of the Divine *hypostasis*. The former of these two Greek words signifies an image produced by a graving tool, or stamped upon a receptive substance by a die, as the head of the reigning sovereign is stamped upon the current coin of the realm. The latter of these interpretations is reflected in the rendering of the Authorized Version, "the express image." The point of importance is the exactness of the likeness so produced. But the likeness of what? Of God's "person" according to our translators, who thus ascribed to the term *hypostasis* the developed technical sense it came to bear in

<sup>1</sup> So B. Weiss, *Lehrbuch der Bib. Theol. des N. T.*, and after him Davidson.



the trinitarian controversy. Essence or essential being probably comes nearest to the writer's thought.

On the dogmatic import of the two figurative expressions, it has been remarked that they do not strictly exclude Sabellianism or Arianism. The Sabellians laid stress on the term *apaugasma* as suggesting the idea of a modal manifestation rather than of a distinct personality. The Arians, on the other hand, emphasised the term *character*, as implying a position of subordination or dependence belonging to the Son in relation to the Father. The orthodox, on their side, maintained that by the combination of the two both errors were excluded; the former phrase implying identity of nature, so excluding Arianism, the latter implying independent personality, so excluding Sabellianism.

We are on surer ground in asserting that the august attributes of the Son serve well the purpose of commending Him to attention as the full and final Revealer of God to men. Who so fit to make God known as one who is related to Him as the sun's rays to the sun, and who resembles Him as the image impressed on wax resembles the seal? His Word must be as the bright light of day, than which nothing can be brighter, and He can say of Himself, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

The closing part of the encomium on the Son remains to be noticed: "Who having made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

What the writer is chiefly concerned to declare is the exaltation of Christ to heavenly glory, his purpose throughout the poem being to state those things which tend to the honour of Him by whom God hath last spoken to men; therefore he refers to Christ's work on earth in a participial clause, as it were by the way. But while he adverts thus parenthetically to His priestly achievement, he has no desire to slur it over as if it were something to be ashamed of,—or something detracting from His glory. On the contrary,

he is careful to allude to it before making mention of the ascension, as if to suggest the thought that the honours conferred on the Son were well earned, while fitting one who bore that name. Another thought is latent in the connexion; *viz.* the effectual nature of Christ's priestly work. He purged sins once for all, and then sat down on His throne. Thus the very slightness of the reference to the priestly function serves to hint its surpassing excellence.

In the *Textus Receptus* the means of purification are specified: "When He had *by Himself* purged our sins." The words *by Himself*, omitted in the best codices, were a natural, almost inevitable addition, slipping from the margin into the text; for that Christ's offering was HIMSELF is one of the great leading ideas of the Epistle, written, so to speak, in large capitals. Yet it was not at all likely to be introduced here. The writer was too skilful a master of the art of persuasion to bring in so distinctive, and for his readers so difficult, a truth before he could make more of it than was possible at the outset. Therefore he contents himself with stating Christ's priestly achievement in the barest terms, reserving developments for a later stage.

At this point the lofty encomium on the Apostle and High Priest of the Christian confession touches the earth. But for this brief reference to the purification of sins, we might almost doubt whether the august personage spoken of in the proem had ever been in this world of time and sense. It is indeed natural to assume that the Son, being placed on a line with the prophets as an agent of revelation, like them appeared as a man among men, and heroically witnessed for truth amidst the contradictions of the world. But when we read on, and observe the lofty, superhuman epithets attached to the name, we half suspect that we have been mistaken, till we come to the words, "when He had purged sins," whereby we are reassured. Some hold that the purification itself took place in heaven; but even in that

case we touch the earth, at least inferentially. For purification implies blood shed, and bloodshedding implies death, and death bears witness to a previous incarnate life. Thus the priestly service, wherever performed, has a human history for its background—a history which when inquired into will doubtless turn out to be full of instruction, pathos, inspiration, and consolation. It might be said, that it was the interest of one writing to tempted Hebrews to make as much use as possible of this history, to bid them look to the Man Jesus, and to show them this Man in His brotherly sympathy, heroic fidelity, and manifold experience of trial, so that they might see Him in a way fitted to nerve them to endurance. We expect therefore and desire to find in this writing not a little relating to the earthly life of the Son. Our bias is not to relegate everything to heaven; it is decidedly the opposite—we avow it at the outset,—to hold on firmly to the earth wherever we can, consistently with honest exegesis. That the priesthood of Christ is placed in the heavenly sanctuary is admitted, but it is a question how far this is due to the apologetic method of the Epistle. We must distinguish between the form and the substance of the writer's thought, between his essential idea and the mode in which he states it in an argument constructed for the benefit of others. But of this more hereafter.

The exaltation is described in terms taken from Psalm cx., amplified by a rhetorical circumlocution for the Divine name. In other places the language employed for the same purpose is simpler, except in chap. viii. 1, where the formula becomes even more solemn: "sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." There the session on the right hand seems to be referred to as the symbol and proof of the completeness, and therefore finality, of Christ's self-sacrifice. Here the aim rather is to make the exalted Christ completely eclipse the angels. For the long introductory sentence winds up with the de-

claration, that in taking His seat on the right hand of the Majesty on high Christ became "by so much better than the angels as He hath inherited a more excellent name than they." Thus, after the manner of the writer, is the new theme woven into the old; for angels are to be the next subject of comparison with Christ. This statement has to our ears the effect of an anticlimax. It seems a small thing to say of One who sitteth at the right hand of God, that He is higher in dignity than angels. So it is in our view, the angels holding a very small place in our thoughts. But there were other thoughts in Jewish minds which rendered it needful to make such a statement.

This statement is not to be taken as implying that Christ attained to a better dignity than that of angels only in the state of exaltation. It does not necessarily mean more than that His superior dignity then became proportional to the intrinsic excellence of His name. It is not implied that He was in all respects beneath angels on earth; it is not even necessarily implied that He was beneath them in any respect, though from the sequel it appears that the writer did regard Jesus on earth as in some respect, not plainly indicated, inferior to angels. The statement before us is somewhat similar in character to one occurring in the opening paragraph of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, where the apostle represents Christ as being constituted the Son of God with power by the resurrection of the dead. This implies that at His resurrection Christ became Son of God to some new effect, but it does not imply that He had not been Son of God before. In like manner the words now under consideration teach that at His ascension, which in this Epistle practically takes the place of the resurrection, Christ became to some new effect, or in an enhanced degree, superior to angels; but they do not imply that previously He had been absolutely inferior to angels, or, as some maintain, subject to their dominion, in common

with the whole old world—under them as He was under the law. Whether such a view is taught anywhere in the Epistle remains to be seen. It certainly cannot be said to be taught here.

A. B. BRUCE.

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NOTES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

(I.—VII.)

THE history of the early Christian Church has been studied of late years with special care, and the unique importance of the record transmitted to us in the Acts of the Apostles has in consequence been more distinctly recognised than before. But its language has not received from scholars and critics the same minute attention that has been bestowed upon the Gospels and the Epistles of St. Paul and St. John. Men persuade themselves perhaps that the study of historians' language has little bearing on the facts which they detail. But this view does not apply at all events to a history which recorded language, sentiments, and actions while they were still fresh in the memory of living men. Even in purely narrative sections graphic touches of truth and rich colouring of facts are often lost to the English reader. I propose then to point out some details, which can only be gathered from study of the Greek text. It is doubtless disappointing, after all the ability and industry recently devoted to the Revised Version, to turn still to the Greek text as a treasure house of knowledge, not to be found in either English Version, valuable as both are. But the position of an independent student is more favourable to minute criticism of language than that of a revision committee; and if I am not mistaken, individual criticism