

“JUSTIFIED IN THE SPIRIT.”

THIS clause is one of the minor difficulties of 1 Timothy iii. 16, and in trying to interpret it we need mention only one of the main questions which the text raises. How are we to explain the grammar of *ὃς ἐφανερώθη*—“who was manifested”? The most satisfying answer seems to be that which makes the verse from the “who” to the end a quotation, and a quotation probably from an early hymn or chorus.

After the introductory sentence then the verse may be treated as a stanza of six lines. It is printed so in Westcott and Hort. They must of course be divided either as triplets or as couplets. If we take them in couplets each division will present the mystery of godliness under two aspects—an outer and an inner, a heavenly and an earthly, a human and a divine. Moreover each of the three divisions turns back from the point at which the preceding couplet pauses, thus making the thought metre of this ancient chant resemble the word metre of Tennyson’s “In Memoriam.”

Who was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen of angels,
Preached among the nations,
Believed on in the world
Received up in glory.

Flesh and spirit, angels and nations, the world of sinners and the glory that cometh from the only God combine to set forth the wealth of this revealed mystery.

Our concern is with the second line of the first couplet, “Justified in the Spirit.” The contrast with “flesh” is reason enough for following the Revised Version and printing “Spirit” with a small s. Though it is the work of the Holy Spirit to glorify the Saviour, the Holy Spirit is not directly meant by the term here. Probably the most rudi-

mentary sense of the contrast between flesh and spirit in the New Testament—the root conception from which the others branch out—is the contrast of inner and outer. The context usually adds some special shade of colour to this, and makes us think sometimes of pure and impure, sometimes of higher and lower, sometimes of real and unreal. The last is probably intended here. The flesh is here the passing show and appearance of things, the outermost ring of human experience. No one would think of restricting the sense to the body. It means the body and its nearest neighbours. It includes those aspects of the mind which are most easily touched by what is external and temporary. The spirit, on the other hand, is the sphere of man at his best, of conscience fully awake, of reason properly enlightened, of emotions kindled from the right sources. Our Lord not only came in the flesh to take His turn in the ordinary fortunes of men, but was justified in the spirit, proved Himself to be what He was in the higher sphere to which man belongs. He won for Himself a welcome in that inner realm and made Himself part of the permanent heritage of man wherever man is at his best. Many things appear in the flesh; they make themselves heard; they fill a considerable space in the gossip of the hour. Many an opinion, many a song, many a book, many a preacher, many an author have a great vogue for a time, and that is as it should be. It is their chance and the world's chance of verifying their right to be heard. But of the many that appear in the flesh only the rare few are justified in the spirit. Only in these do men discover a treasure of lasting worth. To only one here and there do we come back when we have recovered from the shock of a passing sensation. The Master, whether in thought or in art, is distinguished above all in this, that He recalls men over and over again to His standpoint after He has been for a time obscured or almost forgotten; His methods come to be taken so much as a

matter of course that they are used by those who reject His name and His school as freely as by His professed disciples. Now if this be true of human genius and its products how much truer must it be of the Incarnation? That fact was an event in history, but it justified itself in the Spirit as well. It justified itself in the sphere where man is at his best. Jesus Christ was manifested in time, but His appearance had an eternal meaning.

To say nothing of its effect within its own peculiar domain, the Church, where the fact has been personally accepted and appropriated, Christ has been justified to the best thought and conscience of all mankind. A few years ago a learned Jew writing for Jews gave his first impressions of St. John. I have not the article by me for exact quotation, but one criticism was that St. John set up the particularism of creed instead of the particularism of race. The universalism, that is, was, according to Mr. Montefiore, incomplete. But the interesting point for us is that a criticism of St. John from a Jewish standpoint should find the chief defect to be a lack of complete unqualified universalism. Universalism is, as all will admit, one of the great marks of our Lord's teaching and spirit. The fault found then with the writings of St. John was that they are not as completely governed by the Spirit of Christ as they ought to be. Whatever may be thought of the criticism from the Christian point of view—and on the whole it was by no means unappreciative—it shows that even outside the Christian Church Christ is the ultimate standard of appeal. When the human heart rises to its higher levels it instinctively turns to Him. Whenever the judgment sits and the books are opened Christ takes the throne by the vote of every enlightened mind, whether it consciously assigns it to Him or not.

Thou art the Judge. We are bruised thus.

But the judgement over, join sides with us.

Wherever the human spirit is at its best, wherever thought is at its clearest, there Christ is justified. Apart from any belief in His divinity it must henceforth be deemed a lack of intellectual sanity in any one who has heard the Gospel to value the pearl of great price as second to anything. To call Jesus an accursed thing is simply to turn the hands of the clock backward and to give up the choicest conquests of the race.

To be justified in the spirit then means to be justified in the higher sphere to which man belongs. "The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." He proved Himself to be what He was under the limitations of flesh.

The closest parallel perhaps to this meaning of flesh and spirit would be 1 Peter iii. 18—"Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the Spirit." There, as in 1 Timothy iii. 16, the article is absent. As a fact in history our Lord's crucifixion was death; but in its eternal spiritual meaning it was life. His sacrifice so transfigured death as to make it an aspect of His life. He entered more fully into life by dying. What St. Peter says of the death of Christ St. Paul says of His Incarnation. The Incarnation too had its historic aspect; but it had its place in the spiritual sphere as well; and there in the domain of abiding reality Christ vindicated His right to appear.

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