

stantly looked towards this principle, even though for them it lay beyond the horizon; and when the greatest of all the prophets appeared on the earth, He could say no more than that He had come “not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.”

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“THAT FORM OF DOCTRINE”: AN APPEAL.

WHAT does the phrase “form of doctrine” in Romans vi. 17 mean? “Doctrine,” to our ears, suggests speculative theology; but it is incredible that in 58 A.D. there should have existed at the back of the minds of Christian people an ordered system of theology, to which St. Paul could make his appeal. The word *διδασχῆ* means, of course, simply “teaching”: and the *τύπος διδασχῆς* to which St. Paul says the Roman Christians stood committed (*εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε*) must mean the *body of moral teaching*, or, as we should say, the ethical standard in which the religion of Christ expressed itself in actual life. To one system of moral instruction, constituting one attitude to life, one way of living, Christian converts stood committed.

St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles tells us that, very early, Christians began to be spoken of as persons of *The Way*: they evidently were distinguished by being committed to a body of precepts or preferences which made up one recognizable method of life.

And evidently Christian catechumens were instructed in this body of precepts: the “Way of Life,” as contrasted with the “Way of Death.”¹ Happily we possess in the *Didaché* a specimen of this instruction, a textbook coming down to us from nearly the apostolic times. The book begins, “There are two ways—one of life, one of death; and there is much difference between them. The way of

¹ Cf. “The Way of Light and the Way of the Black One.”—*Ep. Barn.*, 19, 20.

Life is this"—and thereupon follows a series of instructions not, as we should say, in the main doctrinal but ethical; moral precepts and prohibitions creating a definite moral atmosphere. It was to this, then—to a body of teaching which outlined a well-defined and consistent manner of living, living which, no doubt, included reverence and piety, but was not less clearly marked by a certain recognizable moral behaviour—to this the early Christian found himself committed.

Now to such a body of moral teaching, outlining a well-known manner of life, we who have been brought up in the atmosphere of Christian civilization still stand committed; and I suggest that this may reasonably be made the basis of an appeal in the interest of personal religion. Observe, it is not a body of dogma that is in our view; we may reject dogma yet be unable to escape from, nay, stand committed to a body of moral teaching, teaching that comes out in us not as opinion so much as in instinct, in moral axiom. Here are typical extracts from the *Didaché*: "Abstain from fleshly lusts. Thou shalt not be double-tongued nor covetous, nor a hypocrite, nor arrogant, nor a liar, nor vainglorious, nor evil-minded." Now these things we also *know*: we are committed to them. But then that fact is sometimes strangely made the reason for declining any connexion with organized religion. "We don't need to go to church, ma'am," said one of the London poor to a Queen's nurse, "we already *know* all we can practise in our dull life." "I do not need religion," says the cultured man of to-day; "for either the man in the pulpit, if he be in metaphysical vein, is talking of what he cannot prove, or, if he be moralizing, is simply labouring the obvious, giving many periphrases for the one refrain, "Be good, be good; and *I know that already*." Precisely: we know it already; to a certain outline of good living we find our-

selves handed over ; it is just that fact that, it seems to me, constitutes a valid appeal for personal religion.

1. For, first of all, ought not men to cultivate a sense of *debt* for this moral equipment ? They find themselves possessed not merely in a vague way of a conscience about wrongdoing, but of an organic body of conceptions regarding life and life's purpose and what ought to be done and what ought to be avoided ; and all this is tremendously and every day valuable. Surely men should realize that they did not create this bundle and treasure of truth about the right way to live ; it is not *theirs*.

The benefits of a complete, inelastic body of dogma may be doubtful in the last degree, but there can be no doubt of the immense benefit of the instinct of the true way of life. It has kept us in many an hour of temptation ; it has made a whole side of life which might have proved our ruin simply uninteresting to us. Whence has it come ? It is weak half-thinking to trace it to the society around and behind us, and to speak vaguely of development. Suppose that it came from God, from some supramundane fount of moral suggestion ? Then to God is gratitude due, and we are already committed to a rudimentary religion. And suppose that it has been specifically mediated through Jesus Christ ? (We are not pronouncing upon non-Christian ethical heritages, but thinking only of our own, which surely did receive a special cast and colour from Jesus Christ.) Then to Him our thought should turn—I do not say as yet in worship, but in grateful remembrance. And out of this root of admission of indebtedness, *and out of this alone*, springs the tree of personal religion.

2. But are we not forced further than this—from gratitude to reflection, from a rudimentary religion to a rudimentary theology ? A man is surely culpably thoughtless who never thinks back from his own moral equipment to

the character of its source. The gift of an ethical standard argues surely some kind of solicitude on the part of the Giver, that men shall make right choices. But if there exist over us such solicitude for us, should we pass it by without acknowledgment? Ought we not to turn over in our mind the great thought that God *may* be Love, until the truth that God *is* Love compels our acceptance and response?

And then does not this moral inheritance drive our thought and interest back on Jesus Christ? We may not be willing to acknowledge that that entire body of impulse proceeded from Him, but it is at least true that He has uniquely illustrated the life to which it moves. The impression of His life is that alone which fits the "mould" at every point. It is because of this unfailing moral accuracy of His that men have stood before Him in stunned amazement, in a wistful wonder that has passed into prayer for some share of His secret of the power rightly to live. We cannot surely, truly appreciate this moral treasure if we are not interested in Christ. It is indeed a marvellous thing that men reared in an even semi-Christianized civilization should not be interested in the one Person in history who successfully illustrates their moral ideals. The best spirits among the Jews and among the heathen put to shame such indifference; every candid and honest soul, *to whom unpaid debt is an abhorrence*, must deplore and be ashamed when a brother man is callously indifferent to the supreme illustration and the source, and the character of the source, of that which is the very best, unearned possession of his life.

3. Further, a due appreciation of our moral inheritance leads to religion when one is confronted with the responsibility of the *propagation* of this "body of teaching." If we find ourselves impelled in saving directions by a body of moral preferences and admirations confessedly not self-originated, and we see other men following different courses

and baser impulses, the very fact that our moral equipment is not self-produced binds upon us the obligation to interfere. Laissez-faire here is simply selfish cowardice. Well, but how long can a man take up seriously, as his concern, the moral condition of his time without the help of “ religion ” ? For let him plunge seriously and earnestly into the great moral conflict around, and confront the multitudinous traffic in evil, and soon he will find himself face to face with two problems that drive directly toward religion. (1) the problem of some continual inspiration from within ; (2) the problem of support and stimulus from without.

(1) Is it possible long to bear the contradiction of evil without falling back for renewed inspiration for the conflict to the Source or sources of good moral impulse ? I venture to think, if we knew all, we should find that there is simply no exception to the law that sustained effort to intrust the highest moral ideals into the lives of our fellows demands some such converse with the Fount of unselfish impulse as can be called prayer.

(2) Besides, a man is bound to find himself flung out upon the sympathy and encouragement of other workers in the field. The forces of evil are so organized that for those on the side of the good the problem of fellowship becomes very soon acute. But now these two drifts—the drift inward to the sources of unselfish impulse, and the drift outward upon the co-operation of others—these are the very winds that drive men most directly to the haven of personal and collective religion.

4. And then, lastly, there is the question of return to God. We find ourselves here with a heaven-born body of moral ideals dwelling in us. Were they realized around us, this world would be a veritable Heaven. The dream of that Heaven is in our hearts. And were the moral ideals realized in us, as they ought to be, we would ourselves be fit denizens

of that Heaven. All this points to the origin and issue of our life as being otherwise than here. And that answers to our instinct, the instinct which is so much earlier than the dogma of judgment. The moral ideals with which we find ourselves endowed will certainly be (if one may thus speak) gathered home; our failure to realize them will be investigated and judged. What then is to be our attitude to our failure to realize them?

In the Hamstead colliery a group of dying men had written around their names upon a wall, "Lord, preserve us; for we are trusting in Christ."

"Trusting in Christ," what does that stand for? Surely this: These men facing the onset of death felt with a shiver their personal unworthiness to stand before the Maker and Giver of their conscience. They felt they had not wholly obeyed the "body of teaching to which they had stood committed." But with comfort their eyes turned to the Christ who *had* fulfilled all righteousness. He at least had done well; perhaps His well-doing would atone for their failure. At least He stood for what they wished that they had been; what now they fain would be. And with that wistful gaze at His wholeness and beauty, they met death.

And the message has been of unspeakable comfort to those left behind; for whatever be our attitude to dogma, this is above all what we crave for our friends as they pass out into the night—that they should return to the Source of their moral life, to the Fount of the ideals that had made themselves known within them—return with contrition and mute appeal.

But this is precisely the evangelic attitude to Jesus. He stands for what we fain would be; and as the light fades from our eyes, we, knowing our failure, put our trust in His overflowing triumph and cast ourselves, in Him, on the mercy of God.

For the inheritor of the Christian moral tradition I cannot see that there is any other alternative than one of these two courses :

(1) Either, to receive and use, in utter ingratitude and selfish pride, this gift of a body of moral teaching, and end in being that most contemptible of human types, the sordidly upright, thankless, godless Pharisee ;

(2) Or, humbly recognizing the Divine origin of his moral equipment, and owning his debt both to God and to his brethren in their need, to seek, with others his fellows in moral aspiration and moral service, the face of that God as revealed in Jesus Christ, in contrition and surrender and the quest of inspiration, and with the homage of a grateful praise.

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OPERA FORIS.

MATERIALS FOR THE PREACHER.

V.

JOHN ii. 1-2. *And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee . . . and both Jesus was called, and his disciples to the marriage.*

Nathanael had been promised the vision of *greater things* in Jesus, and this opening scene of the ministry forms the first revelation of the new order which was being inaugurated. It was to be free from the narrow and arbitrary abstinence of asceticism. Unlike John the Baptist, Jesus took his disciples freely to a country wedding, as if to mark the genial spirit of his religion. The significance of the incident, in this aspect, does not need to be underlined. But it acquires additional and unsuspected emphasis if we connect it with the words immediately preceding it in the first chapter of the Gospel. There, as was suggested in an