

Epistles ; but the majority are the names of things or the statement of acts which do not appear in Paul's older writings. It is absurd to quote such words as grandchild, grandmother, parents or grandparents (one single term), as in any way bolstering up a presumption against the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles. Where could these words occur in the earlier letters ? Every Epistle has its own special terms. Paul had a rich vocabulary, and often varies his way of naming the same ideas or actions or things.

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THE INDISPENSABLENESS OF JESUS.

"Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son."—*John* ii. 9.

ONE knows not whether the more to envy or to pity the rising generation in the matter of the presentation to them of the claims of Jesus Christ. On the one hand, they have the advantage that He is presented to them in modern language, and disentangled from the elaborate theological systems which helped to hide Him from an earlier time. On the other hand, our young people are confronted with the immense responsibility of choosing between two competing interpretations of Jesus—one representing Him as, to all intents and purposes, God—the other, representing Him as an august but not necessarily final religious teacher and personality.

The debate between these two interpretations is not new : and to Christian people the end need not perhaps be too much an anxiety. But meanwhile the debate has brought prominently into view some features of the popular attitude to religion which it is impossible to consider without misgiving. For example, one is anxious about the vague and so largely futile *admiration* of Jesus widely current in our time. Of a great deal of the attention paid to our Lord,

it is to be feared that the precipitate is rather praise than worship, an approval, sometimes no doubt respectful, but sometimes hard to distinguish from patronage, of Him who is our judge. Now mere admiration of any character, however exalted, will not only inevitably pall (and the more distant the character is the sooner will enthusiasm suffer fatigue), but it utterly fails to perform the functions of religion. Religion is not admiration, but moral surrender; and the substitution of even ardent approbation for the bowed will means a weakening of reverence and loss of moral force. Further, the maintenance of a devotion to Jesus which verges on worship while just failing to accord to Him the unreserved surrender due to a God, may be a very real menace to our monotheism. There is widespread to-day a cultus of Jesus, which is rather sentiment than worship—an adoration like the cultus of Mary, beautiful, soothing and elevating, but carrying in it no tremendous moral imperatives, and failing to bear the soul into the sin-scorching presence of the Supreme. No one who has at heart the best interests of religion among our people can fail to be anxious about the issues of this dilution of our monotheism.

One has grave fears, too, in connexion with the growingly popular habit of thinking of personal religion as something for the maintenance of which Jesus is not continuously indispensable—as a relationship to God which we may now sustain without reference to Jesus. This position is defended on the ground of its simplicity, over against more complicated statements of the Christian faith. “Is not religion,” men say, “after all simply a childlike relation to God—the realising of the Divine Fatherhood and the acknowledgment of the bond that makes us brethren? This relation to God Jesus Himself beautifully illustrated, and we are grateful to Him and to all other teachers who have pointed the way to this simple but sublime result. But it

is absurd and mischievous now to complicate religion by reference to some supposed mediatorial position occupied by Jesus. The truth is we see now for ourselves the final terms to which personal religion is meant to be reduced : our interest in Jesus is historical." I think that is a true report of the thoughts behind an attitude to-day extremely common, and, unless I greatly err, extremely perilous. It is the attitude of men who freely acknowledge their debt to Jesus, but now sweep past Him with a deferential bow. They may leave His discipleship behind, they think ; for they have now found for themselves the ultimate God and the ultimate Religion to which He pointed.

Now is not this precisely the pseudo-progressive spirit which St. John had in view when he wrote the words placed at the head of this paper ? May I not freely translate them in modern language thus :

" Whosoever, in the name of progress, affects to leave behind him the discipleship of Christ, *does not retain his hold on God* ; but he who abides within the discipleship retains his hold both on the Father and the Son."

If I understand this saying aright, it warns us that to attempt to leave Christ behind is to imperil our grasp of, and, *à fortiori*, our right thoughts of God : and that without Jesus there cannot be the truly filial note and experience in religion. It may be worth our while to look steadily at each of these warnings.

1. *Jesus and our hold on God.*

One does not wish for a moment to undervalue the knowledge of God secured before Christ's time and beyond where He is known, whether in Hebrew prophecy or in ethnic wisdom. But have we ever asked ourselves how that knowledge of God would by this time have fared, in view of the increased knowledge of nature and of life, *if Christ had not come* ? Even the splendid faith of the Hebrew prophets was held by men who, as compared with the modern man,

had only the very narrowest experience of life and only the most elementary knowledge of nature. Has the study of nature's laws, and the development of nature's resources, has civilisation, with its luxury and its acute and tragic suffering, made belief in God easier? Let the materialism which until yesterday, and the agnosticism which until to-day has prevailed among scientific men, and the saddened ignoring of religion among many serious students of life be the dreary answer. Who believes in God to-day, with a belief likely to stand the shock of advancing discoveries, and of the increasing complications of our modern life? The man who clings to Jesus, he and no other: the man who sees in the character of Jesus the outlines of the character of a credible God: who sees in the career of Jesus a continuous Sacrament of God, confirmation of the truth of man's ancient dream of a God who would carry us as His burden: and who sees especially in the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus that which ministers to a vivid hope that after all there is a reasonable God who reigns. For at the back of everything, what makes it hard to believe in God is death, and all that makes for death: and if Jesus remain to this day dead, no sane man can believe—no sane man ought to believe—in God: for despite all our fancies and hopes and strivings, we are still ringed round by a belt of darkness which even holiness has not availed to break. But if Jesus is risen, the firstfruits of them that slept—if God has really begun to replenish a larger world with the best moral garnerage of this—once more we may begin to believe in a God who cares for the life of men and rules in the interest of goodness.

There are not a few indications in our time that, as thought advances, the question "who and what is God?" will more and more occupy men's minds, that traditional conceptions of God will be closely scrutinised, and even the thoughts of Him which men have found most precious will

be weighed in the balances, and that Jesus will be the one really determining factor on the side of faith in a God righteous, pitiful and the solicitous Father and Saviour of men.

2. *Jesus and the Filial Note in Religion.*

Any man whose eyes are open can see that all other conceptions of God are going down before Jesus' God : in the end the question will be, Jesus' God or none. Now Jesus' name for God is Father ; but His thought is of a Fatherhood defined and safeguarded in a special way. And it is in Jesus' own character and attitude to God that we have the key to that definition and to those safeguards. Forget Jesus, leave Him behind, out of sight, and one by one these safeguards are lost, and with them the true " Fatherhood " in God ; and you have relapsed ere you know it into a kindly but nerveless pre-Christian paganism. Between God the Father and Jupiter Benevolens there stands—just Jesus : the difference lies in what He stands for. And as with the conception of Fatherhood, so with the experience of the filial life. There is nowhere in the world any parallel to the vivid experience of sonship to God to which Jesus has introduced men, nowhere anything like the tender and reverent intimacy with the Supreme, the release of the spirit of prayer, the freedom in obedience and service which He has rendered possible. And yet there is nothing more easily counterfeited than all this ; no region in which presumption may more easily take the place of holy confidence. It has always been so. " Fatherhood " as applied to God has never been a term in stable equilibrium. Even in the first century it had been abused, was being lightly treated, and the need of Jesus as regulator of its interpretation was in part forgotten. Otherwise, St. Peter would not have felt it necessary to issue his memorable warning : " If you call on Him as Father who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in holy awe : knowing that ye were redeemed not with

corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ ; who was foreknown indeed from the foundation of the world, but was manifested at the end of the times, for your sake, who through Him are believers in God, which raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope might be in God.”

Through Him ye are believers in God: it is true still. No man cometh unto the Father but by Christ : that is not simply an account of one religious crisis, it is the law of the Christian’s whole devotional life. No man either enters *or sustains* the life of sonship, except in conscious present debtorship to Jesus as Mediator. We have surely forgotten ourselves when we have allowed ourselves in such familiarities as ‘The Comrade Christ.’ For our life as sons of God, we need the services of an High Priest, who shall be *separate* from sinners, quite as much as we need one made like unto His brethren. For precisely the mystery and the glory of the new relationship to God into which Jesus has introduced men is this : that it blends the tender freedom and accessibility of a human friendship with the educating awe of the worship due to the Supreme. It is this mystery that has made Christian devotion : when the mystery passes, Christian devotion passes too.

We stand, then, to-day as men stood twenty centuries ago, without a rule to direct us in our thoughts of God and attitude to God, unless the Son Himself be with us. God no man at any time has seen : an only-begotten God, He who is ever in the bosom of the Father, He has translated Him. *Who-soever, therefore, in the name of progress affects to leave behind him the discipleship of Christ, does not retain his hold on God ; while he who abides in the school of Jesus retains his hold both on the Father and the Son.*