

The only doubt possible is that raised by the very completeness of the system. May not the theologian, like the scientist, the philosopher, the moralist, be suffering from the quite human desire of the systematiser to make his system complete ? May not this sacrifice of the personality be only a very personal kind of impatience, the sacrifice, in short, of soul to system ? May it not be that the theologian also is tempted by the very human desire to find it easy to get on with his particular business ?

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### *IS PAUL'S GOSPEL OUT OF DATE ?*

(1) THERE is a wide-spread feeling even within the Christian Church that the Christianity of the future, if it survive the present distress, will not be a copy of the Christianity of the past. Science, philosophy, and criticism are supposed to have been so fatal to its present form, that a renovation seems altogether imperative. The study of comparative religion, and the enterprise of foreign missions have brought Christianity and other religions into so close contact, that a transformation of Christianity by the influence of other faiths is confidently anticipated by some ; and it is expected that the future religion for humanity will be not Christianity alone, but an amalgam of what is truest and best in the religions of the world. In this faith for the coming days the dominant if not exclusive influence is assigned to the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. Whatever is dismissed as temporary and local in Christianity, His truth and grace are commonly acknowledged of permanent value and universal significance. Not so is it, however, with His servant Paul ; there seems to be even an indecent haste to rid Christianity of the accretions supposed to be due to him. What in his teachings and writings is of his own age and surroundings

is so emphasised as to make it appear that there is little, if anything, of his Gospel which deserves preservation. The writer desires to give his reasons for holding the contrary opinion.

(2) In a previous contribution it has already been admitted that in Paul's letters we must distinguish the kernel and the husk, the abiding and the fleeting, the Jewish and the human. The circumstances under which Paul taught, the purposes for which he wrote make inevitable that his message should be closely adapted to local conditions and temporary necessities. In his controversy with the Judaisers, or his correction of incipient Gnostic heresy, he had to use the language of the hour, to adopt the mental fashion of the age. Otherwise he could not have served his day and generation, and have secured the emancipation from bondage and the preservation from error of the Church which still lives and labours. We cannot exaggerate the importance of the service rendered by Paul in even what to the superficial observer may appear most ephemeral in his thought and speech. But when we look a little more closely we shall surely discover that his reasoning is not merely an *argumentum ad hominem, ad tempora et loca*; he was so victorious in his conflicts because he did see as his opponents did not, the situation *sub specie aeternitatis*. We can easily penetrate, if we will, into the core of experience and conviction which gives life and force to the integuments of Rabbinic lore or Greek learning. What Paul was contending for was Christ as Saviour and Lord, and so his contention is not superseded unless Christianity has emptied its shrine.

(3) Interesting and profitable as it might be to examine Paul's theology in detail, so as to separate what still belongs to living Christian faith from all that has now only historic interest, in such an enterprise there would be the risk of not seeing the wood for the trees. The purpose will be better

served by singling out the three outstanding features of Paul's Gospel, and concentrating attention on them to discover what meaning and worth they have for us to-day. The first place must be given to Paul's *experience of Christ*. While all religions which have a historical founder assign to Him a unique position, Christ holds a place of sufficiency and supremacy in His religion as no other founder does. This, if the Gospels are substantially correct historical records, is entirely in accord with His own wishes and claims. He called disciples to come to Him, learn of Him, follow Him, take His yoke, to be with Him. That relationship He did not expect, or intend to be ended by death ; and the Apostolic Church lived in the consciousness of the presence of the Saviour and the Lord. For the author of the Fourth Gospel Jesus is not only the Word Incarnate, but as such for men the Bread from Heaven, the Water of Life, the Light of the World, the Door of the Sheep, the Good Shepherd ; and the relation of the disciple to the Master is that of a mutual abiding. Paul is not singular in his experience of the presence of Christ with himself as that was the common conviction of the Christian Church ; but there is a distinctness of consciousness, an intensity of emotion, and a potency of influence in this union with Christ that is exceptional. The author of the Fourth Gospel has also the sense of the presence of Christ ; but it does not seem quite so vivid and vital. He has the remembrance of the earthly life of Jesus, as Paul has not ; and it is meditation on the historical reality which had made so deep an impression on his soul which makes the spiritual presence real to him. For Paul the two facts of the Crucifixion and Resurrection focussed the significance and value of the historical reality of Jesus. While it is probably going too far to say that he was either ignorant of, or indifferent to the details of the earthly ministry, yet it was the Incarnation as a whole, as an act

of self-emptying (Phil. ii. 5-11) or a sign of grace (2 Cor. viii. 9) that his thought dwelt upon. It is true that of the appearance of Jesus to him on the way to Damascus he could say that he had seen Jesus (1 Cor. ix. 1), and yet one would not expect such a transitory vision to make as deep an impression as did the continued and intimate companionship enjoyed by the beloved disciple. To the writer at least it does seem remarkable that one who had not been an eye-witness of the earthly life of Jesus reached so distinct a consciousness of the presence of the risen and living Saviour and Lord, a certainty which, as one reads his letters, becomes contagious.

(4) This consciousness did not, however, displace another common feature of the Christian faith in the Apostolic Age, the eager and almost impatient expectation of Christ's Second Advent. To many Christians to-day this appears an inconsistency. If we here and now possess Christ's spiritual presence to save and bless, why should we desire His manifestation in power and glory? Should not the realisation of the one make us indifferent to the expectation of the other? It is probable that the majority of the Christian believers in the Apostolic Age had no such keen sense of Christ's spiritual presence as Paul had, and it need not excite our surprise, therefore, that, as in *Thessalonians*, there was felt the need of the hope of future salvation as supplementing the faith in present salvation in Christ. But it does at first sight seem strange that Paul should not have felt the sufficiency of his crucifixion with Christ, his resurrection with Christ, in short, his life in Christ. It is true that Paul's expectation of surviving to the Second Advent, for which he longed, wavers; his certainty (1 Thess. iv. 15; 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52) sometimes gives place to doubt whether his own death may not anticipate that event (2 Cor. v. 1-10; Phil. i. 21-24); but even death is welcomed because it will bring

him a clearer vision, and a closer communion, than is possible in this life in fellowship with Christ here and now. How can Paul, crucified and risen with Christ, declare that " whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord " ? Why, if to live for him is Christ, can to die be gain ? Is not this aspiration for the future gain a depreciation of the present good ? We do not solve the problem by asserting that here there is a survival of the lower view, when the higher had been attained. If Paul did not feel full satisfaction in his vivid and intense realisation of the spiritual presence of Christ, should we not ask ourselves rather, whether it be not a defect in so many Christians to-day that faith does not seek its complement in hope ? Do we possess Christ in the present mode of our union with Him so completely that we can regard this relation as final, and so do not need to anticipate a clearer vision and closer communion ? In such an expectation John is at one with Paul. " Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him ; for we shall see him even as he is " (1 John iii. 2). The experience of the spiritual Christ carries in its bosom the expectation of the glorified Christ. Thus Paul, while himself possessing this experience, and by his testimony and influence sustaining it in others, corrects the exaggerations and extravagances into which a mysticism which claims the authority of his name has sometimes been carried. This union is not by sight, but by faith ; it has neither the sensible evidence of the historical reality of the earthly life nor yet that supersensible manifestation which we long and hope for under future conditions.

(5) Nevertheless, though held with the sobriety with which Paul held it this conviction of the presence of the spiritual Christ, appears to many claiming the Christian name a subjective illusion. Jesus is regarded by them as a

historical reality of the receding past, who has left behind only the posthumous influence of His teaching and example. This is not, however, the common faith of the Christian Church, the faith that was once delivered to the saints ; and for the belief that Christ is a present gracious and mighty reality there is not only the experience of a multitude of Christians whom He has saved and blessed, but this experience can, the writer holds, be confirmed by a reasonable argument. If Christ personally is the Revealer of God and the Redeemer of men, as He offered Himself to men in the historical reality of His earthly life, it is reasonable that His personal presence and influence should not be confined to one age and one people, but should be universal and permanent. An appreciation of His significance and value to mankind, adequate to the historical reality, seems to involve as an inevitable conclusion such permanence and universality of His personal presence and influence. We have no such exclusive knowledge of the spiritual realm in which He dwells with us as need render incredible this conviction regarding Him. Such reasons can be given for the conviction, when assailed, but it springs not from reasoning. It is an experience such as Paul's that encourages the venture of faith by which a man can gain the experience for himself.

(6) While the Crucifixion in time preceded the Resurrection, yet in Paul's experience the Risen Lord came before the Crucified Saviour. It was the certainty of the rising again from the dead of the Messiah that made tolerable for Paul the fact of the death on the Cross. This was also the path followed by the Apostolic Church. Because God had approved Jesus of Nazareth, not only by "miracles, wonders and signs," but supremely by raising Him up from the dead, it was made manifest that, although He was "crucified and slain by wicked hands," yet He was "delivered" to such a death "by the determinate counsel and fore-

knowledge of God " (Acts ii. 22-24). How was this divine necessity for the death of the Messiah to be explained ? This approach to the Cross by way of the Empty Grave has not had the place in the testimony and influence of the Christian Church since that it ought to have. Too often have men been asked to accept a plan of salvation or a theory of Atonement as the first step in drawing near to Christ, and so a stumbling-block has been laid in the path of many. The historical reality of Jesus as continued in the spiritual presence and influence of the Christ, one and the same with Him, may surely be so presented in the testimony and influence of the Church that He will call forth the soul's trust, love, and obedience ; and when He is so known, not only will the necessity of in some measure understanding His death be felt, but there will be a possibility of understanding such as apart from this knowledge would not exist.

(7) The need for such explanation of the Cross was felt by the Apostolic Church generally ; but Paul's personal experience as a Pharisee, his varied learning as a scribe, his critical controversy with the Judaisers both fitted and forced him to give a fuller and clearer *exposition of the Cross* than has been given by any other apostolic writer. In this has he conferred a benefit, or inflicted an offence on the Christian Church ? There are scholars and thinkers in the Christian Church who hold that the simplicity of the Gospel of Jesus needs saving from the perversions of Paul's theology. The Parable of the Prodigal Son is the Christian creed ; the Sermon on the Mount is the Christian code ; and the Lord's Prayer is the Christian ritual ; and what more do we need ? This is the opinion stated at its baldest. But even those who would not go quite so far are very doubtful whether Paul's view of the atonement can have any claim for our acceptance to-day. This challenge of the worth of Paul's exposition of the Cross must be met by a twofold argument.

It must be shown on the one hand that the servant does not contradict the Master, and on the other that Paul is not dealing merely with the abstract conceptions of the Rabbinic or any other schools, but with the moral and religious realities of the soul of man in relation to God.

(i) Jesus does not formulate a theory of the atonement, and to force any theory on His words is to do violence to them. But, if it can be shown that He does assign a saving efficacy to His death, and if His experience does suggest that for Him His death was not merely a martyrdom, then His sacrifice does offer a problem for which a solution may be sought. The attempt to seek a solution does not itself deserve condemnation, although its adequacy needs to be tested. If Jesus conceived His vocation in accordance with the prophecy (Isaiah liii.) of the suffering servant of Jehovah, if He regarded the giving of His life as a ransom for many, if He desired His death to be remembered as the sacrifice of the new covenant, if the foretaste of the desolation of His Cross, and not any fear of physical dissolution merely, was His agony in Gethsemane, if He the Son of God even for a moment felt Himself forsaken by His Father, He Himself regarded His death as more than martyrdom, and connected it in some way with the forgiveness of sin, the redemption which He offered to mankind. If it be asked, why did Jesus not give the exposition Himself, it may be answered. For the reality of His sacrifice the limitation of His knowledge was necessary ; He must walk by faith, and not sight ; He must be able to conceive the possibility of the removal of the cup, and must learn its necessity not through a demonstration of the mind, but by the obedience of love. But even if Jesus had much to communicate, the Gospels show that His disciples were both intellectually and morally unfit as yet to receive any such self-disclosure. The general terms in which the predictions of the Passion are given at



least suggest that the disciples did not care to remember all that Jesus taught them on this theme.

(ii.) Some solution of the problem thus forced upon us was necessary. Did Paul give the solution in such a form as has permanent and universal value? We need not attempt to vindicate the validity for all time and all men of all the arguments Paul uses; he had to fight the Judaisers with their own weapons, he had to show that the Christian believer was freed from the Jewish law by reasonings that would appeal to those for whom the law was supreme in authority for thought and life. If the exposition in Romans i.-v. takes a forensic form, it was because Paul was seeking to prove that Christ had secured for the believer in Him emancipation from, because He had rendered satisfaction to the august authority of the law. That this legal standpoint is not exhaustive or final, Paul himself recognises when, in order to ward off antinomianism, which he admits as a possible inference from the previous exposition of the atonement, he falls back on the standpoint of a personal experience of the personal influence on the believer of Christ Himself. When we are dealing with the exposition of the Cross given by Paul it is unjust to him to confine our regard to the statement that the Judaistic controversy forced upon him, and to ignore the completion of the doctrine which his own personal experience afforded. It is not suggested that the first statement was merely an accommodation on the part of Paul; as a Jew, a scribe, a Pharisee, he himself needed to see in Christ's death this vindication of the law in order to get emancipation from it; but we may surely hold that it is the second statement that is more vital for us.

(8) If we are not concerned as was Paul or the Judaisers about the vindication of the Jewish law in order to secure our emancipation from it, yet there belongs permanently and universally to mankind the moral and religious problem:

how shall a man be good so as to please God ? While it cannot be said that in all religions God is conceived as holy, and so there is the religious conception of sin as distrust of, and disobedience to God ; yet it may surely be affirmed that the highest development both of religion and morality depends on their being brought into closest mutual relations. God must be thought of as moral perfection, and man's duty and destiny must be regarded as the effort for, and attainment of moral perfection. We may prefer to speak of the will rather than the law of God for man, as emphasising that the relation is personal, but if the will be a uniform and permanent will, not arbitrary or variable, these characteristics are better expressed by the use of the term law. On the one hand, there is a moral order, and, if God be holy, we must think of Him as maintaining that moral order. On the other hand, if man is made for fellowship with and likeness to God, his sin, his distrust of, and disobedience to God, is a disturbance of that moral order, and surely involves an estrangement from the holy God whose will that moral order expresses. God cannot be indifferent to man's attitude to His will, and His relation to man cannot remain unaffected thereby ; while He has pleasure in man's conformity, can we doubt or deny His displeasure with man's transgression ? In Christ God approaches man in grace, and offers forgiveness of sin, that is, the restoration of the relation to Himself sin has disturbed. But if this forgiveness were offered without any indication of God's judgment on the sin He forgives, and without any recognition on man's part that sin deserves this judgment, would the moral order be maintained, and the holiness of God's will be made manifest ? As far as the writer himself is concerned, his own conscience not only demands that he shall in penitence judge the sin in himself, but it cannot find any satisfaction in a forgiveness from God which does not also express God's judgment on sin. That judgment might

be expressed in the continuance of the penalty of sin on mankind, or, as Paul puts it with a justifiable anthropomorphism, if God be personal, by allowing mankind to remain under His wrath. If, however, the revelation of wrath is to give place to the revelation of grace, surely the moral equivalent, and far more of such a retributive order as expressing God's judgment is the sacrifice of Christ in His Cross. God in Christ Himself suffers with and for man sin's doom in submission to death, not merely as physical dissolution, but with the accompanying darkness and desolation of soul with which the consciousness of sin invests death. Thus is God's moral order maintained, His holy will affirmed even in the grace that brings forgiveness. To-day we may find it needful to express the truth in other terms than Paul used ; but to the writer at least Paul's exposition of the Cross appears as a necessary truth for Christian faith.

(9) As Paul held that the death of Christ was for all men, and the life of Christ can be in all men, he realised that human faith in divine grace is the sole condition of salvation. He himself had been saved not by the works of the law, but by faith alone in the Crucified and Risen Saviour and Lord. The Jewish law had not only condemned, but even provoked sin in him, and had been not a help, but rather a hindrance to his salvation. This salvation was not by means of, but apart from the Jewish law. Hence acceptance of this law could not be made a condition of receiving the Christian salvation. When we have made the fullest allowance for the influence of Paul's Roman citizenship in explaining his universalism, his claim that the Gospel was for Jew and Gentile alike, when even we have recognised his statesmanship in his keen perception that a Church to embrace Jew and Gentile could not be reared on the narrow basis of circumcision and observance of the Jewish law, yet the source of his conviction that the Jewish law must not be

imposed on the Gentile believers was in his own experience. It was his experience of Christ and his exposition of the Cross that led him to his expansion of the Church to include Gentile as well as Jew. It is true that Paul's work in this respect was prepared for by others. While Jesus confined His ministry to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel," yet His welcome of Gentile faith in the Roman centurion (Matt. viii. 10), the Syrophœnician mother (xv. 28) and the inquiring Greeks (John xii. 23), and His references to the Samaritans (Luke x. 30-37, xvii. 18) show that He was not bound by Jewish exclusiveness. There is His express statement that "the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth," and their places will be taken by many who "shall come from the east and the west" (Matt. viii. 11, 12). In the parable of the Great Supper (Luke xiv. 16-24) there is also the suggestion of this wider ministry of the Gospel. Whether the Great Commission in Matthew xxviii. 18-20 be a post-resurrection utterance of Christ or not, it at least expresses the consciousness of the Church of a world-wide mission. In Stephen's speech the note of universalism is struck (Acts vii.). The admission of Cornelius was an opening of the door to the Gentiles (x. 47), but it was regarded as an exceptional case, a justification of which Peter was required to offer (xi. 3). The preaching to the Greeks at Antioch (ver. 20) was a more significant departure in the policy of the Apostolic Church. Yet who can doubt that the genius of Paul was necessary not only to the extension of the Church among the Gentiles, but also to the emancipation of the Christian Church from the bondage of Judaism ? As far as the human agency of the divine purpose goes, it was Paul who changed a Jewish sect into a world-wide religion, although the promise and potency of such universality was in the divine-human Founder of the Christian Church. In *Ephesians* he reveals the large and lofty ideal of the one body of Christ, which inspired both his labours and struggles.

(10) This is a service to the Christian Church of which this age should be specially appreciative. We are now engaged in a world-wide enterprise, in the pursuit of which we are recognising the influence on religious life and thought of racial peculiarities, national characteristics, historical associations. The cry is for a Christianity adaptable to the genius and ethos of different peoples. We are told that we must not take our Occidental Christ to the Orient ; we must not impose our English type of piety on the Hindu or Chinaman ; we are to leave the native church free to develop in accordance with the distinctive features of each people. What is this but an echo of Paul's plea for the freedom of the Gentile from the Jewish yoke ? So far is the Gospel of Paul from imposing any bondage on the mind and soul of man, that in it lies the charter of moral and spiritual liberty. We are having visions of one Church of Christ on earth, not uniformity, but a unity-in-difference ; and Paul too had that vision. His outlook was actually not world-wide as ours to-day can be ; but in principle his universalism was as absolute as ours can ever hope to become. After centuries of enslavement to narrower views and aims, the best minds of to-day are recovering Paul's ideal of the Christian Church. This universalism, of which the churches still fall so far short, was not accidental, but essential to Paul's Gospel. So far from being out of date that Gospel is still rich in promise for the coming days, and future growth will depend on our apprehending Christ, His Cross, His Church as did Paul.

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