

a belief is rather a confession of the bankruptcy of a moral order, a confession that it will only work with motives which are not moral at all but material, because, however they be spiritualised, they still work upon the self in the same way as material advantage.

Only an order of love which is at once self-sacrifice and self-realisation, which does not work by promises but is full of promise in all its working, which has, as it were, not a foot of earth in it which has not the whole infinite heaven above it, will avail. It can say, For great is your reward in heaven, only because its heaven will be nothing but its own perfect rule.

Here we see the true succour of morality by religion. "Nothing," as has been said, "should be done for religion, but everything with religion." It is a succour in which mere morality should rejoice to lose itself, because it has found the love which is more than the fulfilling of its law.

When that is seen again, religion may once more become, not what it is for many even professedly religious people, a part of life's play, but what it ought to be, the heart of life's business. Then the lives which without it are both self-indulgent and miserable, would at once become both austere and blessed.

JOHN OMAN.

### *IS THE TEACHING OF JESUS AN INTERIMSETHIK ? <sup>1</sup>*

THE strict eschatologist holds that the form and the contents of the teaching of Jesus were determined by a belief in the imminent passing away of the world-order, which was to give place immediately to the apocalyptic Kingdom of

<sup>1</sup> A paper read at Leiden, at the Fourth International Congress for the History of Religions.

God. This view is defined in the convenient phrase *Interimsethik*. It is well to remind ourselves what it implies. In a certain sense the ethics of every religious teacher are eschatological, i.e., they assume that man has a spiritual nature, the full possibilities of which will only be realised in some future sphere and in some other life. They recognise that man is mortal, and that he is being tested and trained during the comparatively brief period of his earthly life in order that he may grow fit for his place in a future Kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup> The parable of the Rich Fool is strongly eschatological in this wider sense. But normally such a view, though it does not regard the world as eternal, does look upon it as being for practical purposes the more or less abiding home of the human race. The sphere of the individual's training is found in a social environment which is expected to remain substantially the same from age to age, though it varies within certain fixed limits and is capable of improvement. This environment brings with it responsibilities to our fellow-men, and to the future of the race, which are an essential factor in every ethical problem.

Now on the *Interimsethik* theory not only is the period of probation shortened for the individual, but also for the race as a whole, with the result that family and social responsibilities are eliminated, since the race under its present conditions has no future. A very clear statement of the implications of this view is given by Felix d'Alviella in his recently published *Évolution du Dogme Catholique*. "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. What then is the object of preoccupation with the future, of exposing oneself constantly to sin by having anything to do with the desires and

<sup>1</sup> In view of the somewhat shameless persistency with which the eschatologist commends his hypothesis as emphasising the "otherworldliness" of Christianity, it may be pointed out that this feature is dependent, not on any expectation of the immediate "end of the world," but on a belief in the immortality of the individual.

outlook of the world ? ”<sup>1</sup> The teaching of Jesus is “ anti-famiale et anti-sociale,”<sup>2</sup> because it supposes the uselessness of the family and society on account of the imminent transformation of the world by the act of God. “ The religious moral teaching of Paul is as little practical, and takes as little account of the necessities of life, as that of Jesus and the Twelve,” because the Kingdom is at hand. “ There is no place to reorganise society, or to issue a religious code, moral or political ; in this order of ideas Paul goes even further than Jesus and the Twelve ; he does not wish existing laws to be maintained ; since they have not made men better, they are superfluous, even a danger and a hindrance to the work of salvation.”<sup>3</sup>

That is to say, when we call the teaching of Jesus an *Interimsethik*, we imply that either the principles of that teaching, or its application, or both, would have been quite other than they are, had He not believed in the immediate end of the existing world-order. It is not merely a question of the length of the interval ; a new factor of fundamental importance has been introduced, leading to a radically different view of human life, its meaning and relationships and responsibilities.

Now one of the grounds on which this theory is recommended is somewhat paradoxical. We are told that in this way the teaching of Jesus acquires an absolute validity. “ That which is eternal in the words of Jesus is due to the very fact that they are based on an eschatological world-view, and contain the expression of a mind for which the contemporary world with its historical and social circumstances no longer had any existence. They are appropriate, therefore, to any world, for in every world they raise the man who dares to meet their challenge, and does not turn and twist them into meaninglessness, above his world and

<sup>1</sup> P. 32.<sup>2</sup> P. 33.<sup>3</sup> P. 202.

his time, making him inwardly free, so that he is fitted to be, in his own world and in his own time, a simple channel of the power of Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

In the same way Dr. Lake<sup>2</sup> suggests that such a system, by placing ethical problems in isolation—even unnatural isolation,—will be an absolute system, independent of circumstances. Now what do we mean by "absolute ethics" ? We may mean general, broad principles, abstracted from the concrete details of their application—"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,"—but the moment you come to close quarters with details "absolute ethics" becomes an impossibility. For ethics is concerned with character as manifested in conduct, and the fitness of conduct is relative to circumstances. Martineau, in the opening paragraphs of his *Types of Ethical Theory*, emphasises this point. "The fitness [of actions] must depend not simply on the internal springs whence they issue, but also on external application to the sphere of their display. The feeling suitable to a certain imaginary universe may be quite out of place in this." Conditions of life affect duties ; perfect character depends on man's position in the scheme of things, his possibilities and end.

Now you can regard man as a social animal, endowed with an inheritance from the past, and having responsibilities to the future, mediated through family and social relationships, or you may regard him, as *Interimsethik* would do, as divested of all these, and as an individual with a few months to secure his own salvation. But I see no reason for labelling this latter view "absolute," with the implication that it is eternal and capable of application in every age. On the contrary, it is *relative* to a supposed situation, as for example St. Paul's command, in 1 Corinthians vii. 25 ff., not to marry, so

<sup>1</sup> Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. p. 400.

<sup>2</sup> *Earlier Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 443.

far from being absolute, is entirely dependent on his view of the future. The fact that the situation is admittedly misconceived seems an inadequate reason for regarding the teaching based on it as bearing the stamp of universal validity. If it be true that the teaching of Jesus arose from a false view of the future, enabling Him to eliminate all those responsibilities which constitute the real core of ethical problems, the conclusion surely is that it ceases to be applicable, except to the minority which, from time to time, is able to persuade itself that the Kingdom is at hand in the apocalyptic sense. It would be the ethics of an "imaginary universe," and we could find little use for it in the world as it is.

We must now ask how far the teaching of Jesus does, in fact, bear the marks of an *Interimsethik*. The curious thing is that in the whole of the New Testament there seems to be only one avowed and unambiguous example of such teaching, and even that is disputed by some. I refer once more to 1 Corinthians vii. There St. Paul does base his view of marriage and of the Christian's relation to worldly affairs on the shortness of the time, and the passing away of the fashion of the world.<sup>1</sup> But he expressly excludes the idea that he is here dependent on the teaching of Christ,<sup>2</sup> and nowhere in the Gospels do we find a real parallel. "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Waiving the question whether the Kingdom is in fact here used in its strictly apocalyptic sense, we cannot quote this as a true example of *Interimsethik*, because the contents of the command are in no way determined by the belief in the shortness of the interval. It may be that this supplies the motive, but the injunction itself, "Repent," might come equally well from the mouth of a teacher who expected the continuance of the world-order. The same is true of the preaching of the

<sup>1</sup> See especially vv. 26, 29-31.

<sup>2</sup> v. 25.

Baptist. There the apocalyptic motive is quite clear, but the contents of his ethical teaching are commonplace, "be charitable," "do your duty in your state of life."

Once more, there is of course much that is eschatological in the wider, ambiguous sense, already referred to, e.g., sayings such as "Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth," the ethical injunctions based on the need of watchfulness, the parables of the Talents and the Pounds. These are quite compatible with a long perspective for the race; they need only imply that the individual has not here an abiding city, and that some day he must give an account for his actions. And what is required in most of these cases is the conscientious performance of the ordinary duties of life as it is, not some special behaviour dictated by the needs of a unique situation.

It is, however, from the Sermon on the Mount that the examples of *Interimsethik* are usually drawn.<sup>1</sup> Here we are met with a somewhat curious feature. It is true that there are certain references to the eschatological motive; it appears in the Beatitudes; it is assumed that the disciples wish to enter into the Kingdom; and we hear of the thought of reward and punishment "in that day." But nowhere is there any stress laid on the shortness of the time. Jesus Himself never suggests that the basis of His startling commands or of His reinterpretation of the old law is to be found in the immediate passing away of the world, and the consequent elimination of the ordinary responsibilities of life. He gives no hint that the turning of the other cheek is a principle applicable only to a passing temporary crisis. This supposed motive is not stated where we might most expect to find it. He does not say "Take no thought for the morrow, for no morrow with earthly needs and responsibilities will ever come"; nor does He say "Give away your money, or

<sup>1</sup> Schweitzer, *The Quest*, p. 352.

your coat, because you will have no further use for them." In the same way in a different context, He does not suggest, as He might well have done on the eschatological theory, that the question of paying tribute to Caesar has lost its importance, since all earthly kingdoms are shortly to vanish away.

The conclusion which follows is interesting. Where the eschatological motive, with its stress on the shortness of the time, is prominent, the contents of the teaching are commonplace, and in no way affected by this idea. On the other hand, where the contents of the teaching might be regarded as determined by the eschatological outlook the eschatological motive is conspicuously absent. Never do we find both the motive and the contents avowedly eschatological, as they are in 1 Corinthians vii. And surely, if the teaching of Jesus were essentially an *Interimsethik*, we should expect to find at least two or three quite unambiguous examples in which the contents and the motive were brought together.

It will, however, be replied that whether the eschatological motive is clearly stated or not, the contents of the teaching do, in fact, imply quite unmistakably that the ordinary conditions of life are regarded as no longer holding good. Johannes Weiss<sup>1</sup> has, of course, expanded this view at some length, and he has been followed by Schweitzer and others. It is urged that only on this supposition can we explain Christ's attitude towards wealth, family and social life, His commands to give to all, to resist not evil, to forgive enemies, together with the ignoring of political and aesthetic interests. The ulterior effects of the conduct He requires may be put aside; the teaching is not meant for men living under normal conditions. It is for a temporary crisis, where,

<sup>1</sup> *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* (2nd edition): see especially pp. 134-154.

as in war, the considerations which hold good in ordinary life are suspended.<sup>1</sup> The supreme need is that the disciple, by obedience to these otherwise extravagant and impossible demands, shall secure his place in the coming Kingdom. Compared with this, nothing else now counts, and here is the sole motive for obedience. According to Weiss, just as in the case of Jesus Himself, His readiness to love His enemies was mainly a proof of His detachment from the world, so the commands to the disciples to do the same are addressed to men who have here no abiding city, but seek the Kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup> "We are to do good to those who hate us, not so much in order to help them, but much more in order to prove that we ourselves are free from enmity and selfishness. Certainly prayer for enemies may benefit them, but in the foreground stands simply care for our own soul, which shows by such prayers that it bears a charm against hatred and bitterness."<sup>3</sup> So with regard to the command to resist not evil, "there is no suggestion that the enemy is to be shamed and reformed by patient long-suffering; that idea is quite alien. The whole stress lies on the readiness to suffer wrong." It is true that he admits<sup>4</sup> that at other times Jesus does speak more as a preacher and reformer than as the herald of the Kingdom, and that He sometimes attempts to improve and help the world, as though it might be expected to continue. But with regard to this admission, as with regard to all others which he is forced to make of the existence of other moods in the thought of Jesus, he urges that it does not represent His real mind. This is to be found rather in despair of the world and in an insistent constraining of the individual to secure his own salvation while he may.

It has, of course, often been urged (e.g., by Lecky) against Christian philanthropy as actually practised, that it is utilised simply and solely for the giver's own spiritual benefit ;

<sup>1</sup> P. 139.

<sup>2</sup> P. 149.

<sup>3</sup> P. 150.

<sup>4</sup> P. 137.



but it is surprising to find the claim that this represents the mind of Christ. Love, patience, and forgiveness become simply an enlightened form of selfishness. It happens to be, as it were, one of the rules of the game for saving one's soul that these things must be done ; they are commanded, not because they are good in themselves, or because they make the world a better place to live in, but because they represent the escape-ladder by which the individual may save himself from the impending conflagration.

Can it be seriously urged that this represents the teaching of Christ ? Reward is prominent in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, but it comes as a complete surprise to the recipients, who have performed their acts of love simply from the inner promptings of their heart, not in order to secure their salvation before the brief time of trial is ended. So in the parables of the Pounds and Talents the final recompense is an *ἐπιγγυμένον τι* for duty done for duty's sake. The law that only in losing life do we find it excludes the idea that good things can be done consciously and primarily from an enlightened selfishness. The motive for acts of love is "for my sake and the Gospel's." Or again, in the Sermon on the Mount itself, the central motive is the desire to become perfect, to be true children of the Heavenly Father. It may be said that this is only another way of describing entrance into the Kingdom, since it is the sons of God, the perfect, who alone will share in it. True, but in this case we are a long way from an apocalyptic view of the Kingdom. It has become something inward and spiritual, a state of character and a relationship to God, which is quite independent of outward conditions and miraculous manifestations of the divine sovereignty. The reward is to be, not to have.

It is further implied by Christ that the object of the Christian's acts of love is to make the world better. For that is

clearly the purpose of the Father to Whom he is to be like ; He wills the happiness of His creatures here and now, making His sun to shine on them, feeding them and caring for their present needs. The characteristic description of Christ Himself is that He had compassion on the multitudes ; He wished to make them happier, and He certainly commanded His followers to love and forgive their enemies because such conduct was better for the enemies,<sup>1</sup> and made the world a better place to live in. Nowhere does He share the despair of the world, and of the possibility of saving the mass of mankind, which is an integral element of apocalyptic teaching ; and in the command to pray for one's oppressors He sets Himself in direct opposition to the eschatological temper which gloated over their coming destruction. There is, in fact, nothing in this class of sayings which can be regarded as essentially eschatological.

Nor, again, do the hard sayings which deal with family ties or riches demand such an interpretation, though they might perhaps admit it. They may well be eschatological only in the wider sense, as setting up a new standard of values and putting worldly interests and ties in their proper relation to the spiritual and eternal. Taking the teaching as a whole, there is nothing to show that Christ intended to eliminate these subordinate interests altogether, or implied their immediate disappearance. As we have already pointed out, there is no hint that the forsaking of family or the hating of father is based on the view that there will be no further call for family ties. When the young ruler is bidden to sell all that he has, he is not told that the reason is that in a few

<sup>1</sup> See Matt. xviii. 15, "thou hast gained thy brother." As Schweitzer (*o.c.* p. 369 n. 1) defends the authenticity of the passage, the eschatologists can hardly object to our appeal to it. In the remarkable section on forgiveness in the *Testaments of the xii. Patriarchs* (Gad vi.), Dr. Charles finds the object of forgiveness, both there and in the Gospel parallels, to be "the restoring of the offender to communion with us."

weeks his riches will in any case be useless. Indeed, such an idea waters down the demand for self-sacrifice. It is not difficult for one under sentence of death to be very generous in the disposal of his property. A command such as "let the dead bury their dead," or a warning such as that given to those who look back after putting their hand to the plough, is not referred to any temporary necessity, but is the vivid expression of principles applicable to the world as we know it. It may be old-fashioned, but I venture to submit that the true key to the paradoxes of the Gospel is to be found in the one-sided emphasis and the bold vividness of metaphor which are characteristic of oriental forms of speech.

To sum up : we have said nothing of the considerable mass of teaching, found especially in the Lucan parables, which is quite clearly non-eschatological, but have confined our attention to the typical passages which are claimed as representing an *Interimsethik*. We have tried to show that the whole theory misconceives the sphere of ethical conduct. The formation of character is not something which can be worked out in the abstract, but takes place within the limits and under the conditions of God-given relationships and responsibilities. To eliminate these by supposing that the world is to disappear immediately would be to alter the whole problem of ethics, and to introduce a wrong factor, which would vitiate any teaching based on it. We have no right to label such teaching as absolute and of universal validity.

Further, there is no real evidence in the Gospels for the theory in question. Where the eschatological motive is emphasised, the contents of the teaching are colourless ; where, on the other hand, the teaching is paradoxical, and is supposed to be determined by the eschatological standpoint, that standpoint is in fact in no way prominent in

the sayings themselves, but has to be read into them from other passages.

Lastly, the theory gives a low and unworthy colouring to the teaching of Jesus, since it represents Him as laying the whole stress on the self-centred desire of the individual for his own salvation, and as caring little or nothing for the effect of good actions on others and the world as a whole. We cannot indeed exclude from ethics the thought of reward, but it is psychologically false to regard it as the primary and consciously-realised motive of the life of self-sacrifice. If for no other reason, we should be bound to reject the *Interimsethik* theory on account of its essential selfishness, and we may fairly appeal to the impression made by the life and teaching of Jesus as a whole as a proof that self-interest, however enlightened and far-seeing, is not the true expression of His inmost mind.

No one will deny that there is much in the teaching of Jesus which is neither easily understood nor lightly put into practice. But we do not make such passages more intelligible by referring them to doubtful motives which are not expressed in the context, nor shall we encourage mankind to apply them to life as we know it by basing them on an admittedly mistaken view of the world and its future.

C. W. EMMET.

### ST. PAUL AND THE MYSTERY-RELIGIONS.

#### VI. ST. PAUL AND THE CENTRAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE MYSTERY-RELIGIONS.

IN the light of the evidence we have tried to exhibit in the preceding articles, it is not difficult to make a rough statement of the chief aims of the Mystery-Religions. They may be said to offer salvation (*σωτηρία*) to those who have