

Dr. Söderblom points out that in his opposition to Herrmann's 'one-sided objectivity' Von Hügel has been misled by some of Herrmann's expressions. The Ritschian professor would not use the word 'mysticism' in Von Hügel's sense, but his religion is a genuine form of Christian mysticism. 'Von Hügel blames Herrmann for his positive objectivity which ascribes exclusive importance to external history. But he is rather open to the objection that in his conception of

piety he manifests a tendency to separate Christ from history, and to insist so energetically on His being eternally present that there is some danger lest Christianity should lose its characteristic of being an historical religion.' In Von Hügel's mysticism Dr. Söderblom thinks 'there is scarcely sufficient room for the full significance of Christ. . . . He has not the clear vision of the secret of the religious and moral significance of Jesus as a reality established by its historical actuality.'

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF ST. JOHN.

JOHN VI. 35.

'I am the bread of life.'

1. 'I AM the bread of life.' The words sprang directly out of the circumstances under which they were spoken. About the time of the Passover, which perhaps He could not keep at Jerusalem, the Lord had fed five thousand men in the wilderness with five loaves and two small fishes. The multitude with hasty and undisciplined zeal fancied that they saw in this miracle the coming fulfilment of their own wild hopes, and sought to take Jesus by force to make Him a king. When they were foiled in this design, some still followed Him to Capernaum, but only to learn there that they had utterly mistaken the import of Christ's work.

'Ye seek me,' He said, 'not because ye saw signs—not because ye perceived that the satisfying of the hunger of the body was an intelligible parable of the satisfying of the hunger of the soul—but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled': because you looked to Me to satisfy mere bodily, earthly, temporal wants: because you brought down the meaning of that one typical work to the level of your own dull souls instead of using it as a help towards loftier efforts: because you still rest in the outward, the sensuous, the transitory, all of which I am come to reveal in their true character as symbols, pledges, sacraments of things spiritual and eternal.

True it is, such is the general force of the words which follow, if we may venture to paraphrase them, true it is that there is room for your labour even now: true it is, as you plead, that Moses

gave your fathers manna by the word of God not for one meal only, but for forty years in the wilderness. True it is, as you argue, that the greater Moses will give to his people bread from heaven, more copious and more enduring than that perishable food. But while this is so, you fatally misunderstand the work, the type, the food. The work—strange paradox—is faith: the type is the faint figure of a celestial pattern: the food is not for the passing relief of a chosen race, but for the abiding life of the world. You seek something from Me, but if you knew the gift of God, you would seek Me: 'I am the bread of life.'¹

2. There is no single figure which can be made to express all that Jesus Christ is in His relation to man. So diverse and so subtle are these relations, belonging as they do to the mysterious sphere of the spiritual, that many images are needed to present the truth in its fulness. Hence in the New Testament we find Christ calling Himself by many different titles, and using many figures to convey to men the sense of all He had come to be to them. Now He is the light of the world, and now the door of the sheep, and again the shepherd himself, the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth, and the life, the true vine, and here the bread of life. All these He is at once, and they each convey to us, according to our many-sided needs, truths which make Christ real and accessible.

3. The words, in the original Greek, come upon us with an extraordinary emphasis. Here is the declaration of a Divine fact. Jesus in His own

¹ B. F. Westcott, *The Revelation of the Father*, 33.

Person makes a deliberate announcement about Himself, and with a style and manner which remind us of God speaking to the Israelites of old.

It was the fact of Jesus as the bread of life which alone made possible the primitive Church with all its simplicities of thought and purpose. Sustained by that food—the food of the saints—men and women went forth to suffer and to die. Their belief was not merely an appropriate part of a carefully constructed system of philosophy; it had its root in the reality of things. When Jesus proclaims Himself to be the bread of life—in words which we cannot even conceive the most original and powerful religious teacher using of his own person—He is not afraid to appeal to experience, the experience of life, the experience of history. It is by experience that all facts must be tested; and it is so here. ‘I am!—how does experience meet that incredible challenge? In one of the most beautiful of the stories that cluster about his name, St. Francis comes, worn and weary, to a town with one of his brethren, and they beg their bread for the love of God. ‘When they had done their begging they met together to eat in a place without the city, where was a fair fountain and a fine, broad stone; upon the which each set the alms that he had begged.’ And St. Francis, seeing the pieces of bread and the stone and the fountain, could not contain himself for joy, but kept on crying over and over again: ‘O brother, we are not worthy of such vast treasure! ‘He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.’¹

I.

HOW IS JESUS THE BREAD OF LIFE?

1. As food satisfies cravings which nothing else can satisfy, so also does Christ. We know what it is to be hungry or thirsty. We know that these feelings would become very strong and alarming if they were not satisfied. Now nothing will satisfy them but food. Though you were to sing the sweetest music to a hungry man, you would not relieve him. Though you were to take a thirsty man and show him the most beautiful landscape which eyes ever saw, you would not thereby quench his thirst. The hungry man would still say, ‘Oh, give me bread to eat!’ The thirsty man would still say, ‘Oh, give me water to drink!’ Nothing else in the whole world but food of some kind would effect the object. In spite of everything besides, the cravings would continue and their urgency increase. In like manner there are cravings in us which Christ alone can satisfy.

Nothing is commoner than for men to look upon Christ, or, shall we say, upon religion, as a

¹ S. A. Alexander, *The Saints' Appeal*, 30.

luxury, and not a necessity. Christ is a puzzle, a phenomenon, a curiosity, a rarity in human history to be accounted for, an ornament to be admired, the greatest perhaps of the great, the successor of Plato, the contemporary of Seneca, the forerunner of others equally great. Is it not quite within the truth to say that in the estimation of many He is anything but indispensable? But Jesus Christ is not a phenomenon, He is bread; He is not a luxury, He is a necessity; He is living bread sent down from heaven to impart to us that life which alone is worth the name.

The infinite variety of human religions, stretching from man's deepest degradation to his loftiest dignity, find their point of union here; they all in some way, at some point, express this. ‘Show us the Father,’ Philip said, ‘and it sufficeth us.’ He spoke greater things than he knew. Humanity spoke in his words. He voiced the cries, the aspirations, the mistakes, of many generations. He voiced our hungry hearts.

The famished raven's hoarser cry
Finds out Thine ear;
My soul is famished, and I die
Unless Thou hear!²

When G. J. Romanes died in 1894, he left behind him a series of notes which he had prepared for use in a projected work. These were afterwards published, and amongst them is the following.

‘I know from experience the intellectual distractions of scientific research, philosophical speculation, and artistic pleasures, but am also well aware that even when all are taken together and well sweetened to taste, in respect of consequent reputation, means, social position, etc., the whole concoction is but as high confectionery to a starving man. He may cheat himself for a time into the belief that he is nourishing himself by denying his natural appetite; but soon finds he was made for some altogether different kind of food, even though of much less tastefulness as far as the palate is concerned. There is a vacuum in the soul of man which nothing can fill save faith in God.’

2. More particularly, Christ as bread suggests the idea of nutriment. Bread is eaten; it becomes part of us, it is wrought into the very fibre of our being. It means support, sustenance, renewal, repair. There is a wasting process going on every hour in every part of our frame. Tissues get worn out, blood gets used up, energy is constantly being drawn upon, and were the drain continued with no counteracting agency to make up the loss and repair the waste, the body would faint unto death. One main function of food is to replace this constant waste. The food we eat is by the processes of nature turned into nutriment

² J. M. E. Ross, *The Self-Portraiture of Jesus*, 69.

for the varied needs of the body; it is made into fresh blood and carried every moment to the very tips of our fingers, repairing the waste. A similar process goes on in the region of the spiritual. There is a wearing down of our spiritual energy. Sin is like fever; it burns up our very life, consumes it as with fire and brings us to destruction. Sense clamours so loudly for our attention that the spirit is starved and neglected. Love grows cold, faith loses its energy, and will its resoluteness. Unless there be some counteracting agency, the result will be further decay and death. When Christ proclaims Himself the bread of life, He means that He will be to us this source of inward nutriment, redeeming our lives from destruction, feeding our souls with bread that will nourish them and keep them healthy, nay, that will not only repair the waste of sin, but build us up and strengthen us to do all His will.

How easily do we forget that this higher life needs nourishment: that like all life, higher or lower, it is derived and therefore dependent, having no inward source of nutriment of its own, undergoing a constant process of decay unless that is counteracted by a power that redeems and renews! Christ is bread for this higher life. We must go out of ourselves for it. The camel in the desert lives on the hump of his own fat: but only for a time. It will not last. It must go done, and then comes death. So we have no life in ourselves that will last us: it will go done. It is in Christ we must find the materials that will nourish the soul. ‘I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.’¹

3. In the third place, as food strengthens and invigorates the body for labour, so Christ strengthens and invigorates the soul for duty. If a man is to work, and to work well, he must have sufficient supplies of daily food. Withhold bread from him, which with the blessing of God is his strength, or give it to him in scanty morsels, and he will become feeble, languid, spiritless—his brawny arm will become weak as that of a child, his legs will tremble beneath him, and the work which you expected of him will not be done. In like manner Christ is necessary for the continued strength and vigour of our souls. Were we separated from Him we might continue in one sense to live, but we should cease to live unto God; we might continue to be active in some kinds of pursuit, but we should cease to be active in contending against sin, and in working out our

¹ D. Fairweather, *Bound in the Spirit*, 243.

own salvation. The Divine life in the soul is sustained in health and strength and vigour from one source only, and that source is Jesus. Our energy for that which is truly good in the sight of God is just what we draw from Him, and nothing more.

In Christ there is made available for us that Divine supply which is the strength and life of the soul. It has all been brought together in Him, been made tangible, and laid ready to our hand. The nutritive energies which are required for the support of our bodily life are scattered all through nature—in the humours of the earth, in the showers of heaven, in the quickening warmth of summer suns; but they must be concentrated in the golden ears of the autumn cornfield, and finally in the bread we eat, if they are to pass into us and to minister to our sustenance. And so the sustaining energies of the Divine life must come together in Christ before they can be present to us in a form in which we can lay hold of them, and find in them the food which makes glad the heart of man.²

‘Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead
Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green,
And the pale weaver, through his windows seen
In Spitalfields, look'd thrice dispirited.

I met a preacher there I knew, and said :
‘Ill and o'erwork'd, how fare you in this scene?’—
‘Bravely!’ said he; ‘for I of late have been
Much cheer'd with thoughts of Christ, *the living bread.*’

O human soul ! as long as thou canst so
Set up a mark of everlasting light,
Above the howling senses' ebb and flow,

To cheer thee, and to right thee if thou roam—
Not with lost toil thou labourest through the night !
Thou mak'st the heaven thou hop'st indeed thy home.³

II.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR CHRIST?

1. *It means unselfishness.*—The bread does not stand upon the table to exhibit itself or to glorify itself. The corn does not grow upon the field that men may admire its beauty and speak words in its praise. The end of their existence is fulfilled only in proportion as the corn and the bread are taken, broken, bruised, consumed: bread not eaten is not bread, but only mouldy lumber! So His ministry was then and was to be for ever in the secret places of men's souls—a ministry of unselfishness, a ministry of nourishment, a ministry of self-communication. So He, the Good Samaritan,

² A. Martin, *Winning the Soul*, 105.

³ Matthew Arnold.

gave Himself to repair the wasting life of humanity, and to quicken those who were dying of hunger.

Herein lies the deepest meaning of Paul's fine phrase, *the philanthropy of God*. We have our small philanthropies—our loaves for the poor, our crumbs of comfort for the sad and solitary, our orthodox schemes of relief for temporal or spiritual poverty. But how small a distance we are willing to go in the direction of real sacrifice, of personal trouble, of pain and toil and self-renouncement! We have paid agents to bear the cross for us. This is the glory of the philanthropy of God—the feature of it which puts most of our philanthropies to shame—that it cost Him all that He could give and all that He could bear.¹

2. It means death.—It surely is not without significance that in the discourse in which His theme is Himself as the bread of man's life our Lord should hint so frequently, and not obscurely, at His death. His flesh is to be 'given' for the life of the world. It is to be broken before men can eat it. His 'flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed.' Evidently He means that

¹ J. M. E. Ross, *The Self-Portraiture of Jesus*, 72.

it is only through sacrifice and pain and death that the life which He brings, and is, is to be made available for man's hunger and need.

God sharing with us to the uttermost; God proving that His will is our righteousness; God bearing our sorrows and our sins; God coming into our human race, and becoming a part of its history—all this is seen in the Cross of Christ; but it is also seen that absolute love for men and absolute submission to God were the moving forces of Christ's life. He was obedient even unto death. This was *His* life, and by the Cross He made it ours. The Cross subdues our hearts to Him, and gives us to feel that self-sacrifice is the true life of man.

So the grapes must be trodden in the winefat, so the thyme must be bruised if you would get its richest perfume. It is a law from which even Christ was not exempt. It is broken bread we eat: it is in this great sacrifice, in this obedience unto death, in this suffering for, and bearing of, our sin that Christ becomes the bread of life. He makes us feel that this spirit of giving to the uttermost is the true life of men.²

² D. Fairweather, *Bound in the Spirit*, 246.

What were the Churches of Galatia?

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III.

IV. THE WESTERN REGION AND ITS CHURCHES.—Geographically considered, St. Paul's course in Ac 13⁴⁹–14⁷ is as follows. After the startlingly rapid progress of the gospel described in the previous verses (on which see *Cities of St. Paul*, p. 298 ff.), 'the word of the Lord was spread abroad through the whole region (*χώρα*), of which Antioch was the principal city. Such was the course also at a later date in Ephesus and the entire province Asia (19^{8–10}); and these two cases may be taken as typical. From the principal city the news spread to the limits of the province or the region, whose inhabitants habitually resorted to the city for the many purposes of Roman administration, such as festivals (an attraction that exerted a very powerful influence), the decision of suits, and all

the many interests presented by a metropolis to the whole region of which it was the centre (*Cities of St. Paul*, p. 273). That is the reason why Paul came to prefer more and more to work from a great centre, as he gained experience.

The analogy of Ephesus and Asia (19^{8–10}) shows that the region round Antioch over which the Word was spread was wider than the mere lands that belonged to the city. It goes without saying that the city lands were within the circle of Pauline influence: those lands belonged to, and were cultivated by, the Antiochians: to affect Antioch (13⁴⁴) implied in itself an influence extending over the lands and properties of the city. In 13⁴⁹ a country is meant over which in its entirety the influence of Pauline preaching was spread abroad: this verb (*διεφέρετο*)