

Jesus and Paul

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The subject of this paper is one which nowadays is commonly treated within the context of existential hermeneutics. The writer has never learned to think in this context, and is conscious that his treatment of this or any other New Testament subject may be thought to betray over-simplification or downright naïveté. So be it.

I. CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE

‘Paul’, wrote Albert Schweitzer, ‘shares with Jesus the eschatological world-view and the eschatological expectation, with all that these imply. The only difference is the hour in the world-clock in the two cases. To use another figure, both are looking towards the same mountain range, but whereas Jesus sees it as lying before Him, Paul already stands upon it and its first slopes are already behind him’ (*The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, ET, 1931, p. 113). Without some such appreciation of the eschatological factor, it will be difficult to discern the true relationship between Jesus and Paul.

In the ministry of Jesus, eschatology is in process of inauguration. The Kingdom of God arrived with His ministry, but its powers were not unleashed in their fulness. Until He underwent the ‘baptism’ of His passion, He was conscious of restraint. But with the passion and triumph of the Son of Man the restraint would be removed and, as He told His hearers on one occasion, some of them would witness the advent of the Kingdom of God ‘with power’ in their present lifetime.

For Paul the Kingdom’s advent with power has taken place. The power which God exerted in raising Jesus from the dead is now at work in the followers of Jesus, conveyed to them by His indwelling Spirit; by that same indwelling Spirit the love of God, demonstrated supremely in the self-giving death of Christ for His people’s sins, is poured out in their hearts. The perspective has inevitably changed, because the death and resurrection of Jesus, which were future events during His earthly ministry, are now past events, or rather parts of one comprehensive saving event, by which the irresistible advance of the cause of God has been released in the world. Eschatology has thereby been inaugurated; what remains to be done before the consummation has mainly the nature of mopping-up operations after the decisive victory which has already been won. Hostile forces, already disabled, have to be destroyed; with the destruction of death, the last of these forces, the resurrection age will be consummated, although its blessings are enjoyed here and now through the Spirit by those who have experienced faith-union with Christ. For them the age to come has dawned, although for others it may still be future. ‘Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come’ (2 Cor. 5: 17).

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The change of perspective of which we are aware as we move from Jesus to Paul is, then, a change for which the words of Jesus have prepared us. Absolutely, it is a change which can be

dated in terms of world-history, around AD 30; empirically, it is a change which takes place whenever a man or woman comes to be 'in Christ', as had happened to Paul himself. And when the change takes place thus empirically, it revolutionizes one's whole outlook. 'From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though time once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer' (2 Cor. 5: 16).

These words of 2 Corinthians 5: 16 have played a crucial part in much discussion of Paul's relation and attitude to Jesus. What is meant by regarding Christ 'from a human point of view'—'after the flesh', as *kata sarka* is literally rendered by our older versions?

One interpretation of the words, not so commonly expressed today as in earlier generations, takes them to mean 'that Paul had known Christ, as men know one another, that is, had seen Him with his eyes'. So Johannes Weiss put it, and he went on: 'Indeed, the expression implies more than this; it signifies the impression made not only by outward appearance, but by personality, the impression received by direct personal acquaintance' (*Paul and Jesus*, ET, 1909, pp. 47f.). His conclusion was that Paul had most probably seen and heard Jesus in Jerusalem during Holy Week, and that it is this kind of 'knowledge' that Paul is now disparaging in comparison with the new knowledge of Him that he has *kata pneuma*.

Whether Paul ever did see or hear Jesus before the crucifixion is not in question here. Perhaps he did; if W. C. van Unnik's thesis (*Tarsus or Jerusalem?* ET, 1962) be accepted, it is quite probable that he did. But that there is any reference to such seeing or hearing in 2 Corinthians 5: 16 is extremely doubtful. It is hardly going too far to say with R. Bultmann, 'that he (Paul) even saw Jesus and was impressed by him is... to be read out of 2 Cor. 5: 16 only by fantasy' (*Existence and Faith*, 1964, p. 133). On the other hand, Professor Bultmann's own interpretation of this text can be read out of it only if it first be read into it. For him, the knowledge of Christ 'after the flesh' which Paul depreciates is much the same thing as an interest in the 'Jesus of history'. 'We must go back behind the *kerygma*', says Bultmann, 'using it as a source in order to reconstruct a "historical Jesus" with his "messianic consciousness", his "inner life" or his "heroism". That would be precisely the *Christos kata sarka* who belongs to, the past. It is not the historical Jesus, but Jesus Christ the preached one, who is the Lord' (*Glaaben und Verstehen* I, 1961, p. 208). Similarly E. Brunner could affirm that 'Jesus of Nazareth, the rabbi, the so-called historical Jesus, was, an object of no interest for the early Christians and it is of no interest today for those who have preserved some understanding of what Christian faith means' (*The Word and the World*, ET, 1931, pp. 87f. We can understand the point that Bultmann and Brunner are making, although—at least in the extreme form in which Brunner makes it—we may not accept it; but it is not the point that Paul makes. Still less is Paul concerned to disparage the knowledge of Jesus enjoyed by the Twelve by virtue of their companionship with Him during His ministry in comparison with his own present knowledge of Jesus in the Spirit (cf. S. G. F. Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church*, 1951, pp. 56f. Whatever differences there might be between him and the Twelve, they, like him, were *en Christō*; they, like him, possessed the Spirit, as Paul himself would be the first to assert. The contrast which Paul is making is one between his former attitude to Christ (as to the world in general) and his present attitude to Christ (as to the world in general) now that he is 'in Christ'. The point is brought out excellently by the New English Bible: 'With us therefore worldly standards have ceased to count in our estimate of any man; even if once they counted in our understanding of Christ, they do so now no longer.'

Even so, the precise meaning of these words demands further attention: when Paul speaks of his former knowledge of 'Christ after the flesh' is he referring to his former conception of the Messiah, which has been radically altered now that he has come to recognize the Messiah in Jesus; or is he referring to his former hostility to Jesus and His followers, which has now been replaced by apostolic devotion to Jesus and brotherly love to His followers? Both the immediate context of 2 Corinthians 5, and the wider context of Pauline usage, suggest that the latter alternative is the proper one. It is the person, not the office, that Paul has in mind. Once

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upon a time, as he said to the younger Agrippa, he thought it his duty 'to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth' (Acts 26: 9); now that his eyes were enlightened, he knew it his duty 'to bring about the obedience of faith... among all the nations' for the sake of that very name (Rom. 1: 5). What God had wrought in the saving act of Christ became effective by the Spirit a few years later in Paul's life when the risen Christ appeared to him, and changed his entire perspective. To this resurrection appearance he appealed in confirmation of his claim to be an apostle (1 Cor. 9: 1); to it, as the occasion when it pleased God to reveal His Son in him, he traced his call and empowerment to be Christ's ambassador among the Gentiles (Gal. 1: 15f.).

II PAUL AND THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

But what of Paul's knowledge of, or interest in, the earthly life and teaching of the One whose death and resurrection had brought him into a new creation? Christ the risen Lord he knew, for he had seen Him in resurrection and experienced His resurrection power. Christ crucified he both knew and portrayed vividly in his preaching (Gal. 3: 1; *cf.* 1 Cor. 2: 2). Whether he was the better able to do this because he was, like Peter, 'a witness of the sufferings of Christ' (1 Pet. 5: 1) we cannot say for sure; he nowhere suggests that he was a witness in this sense, but if he was, he learned from his conversion onwards to give those sufferings a fundamentally different significance from that which he attached to them in the days when Christ's being hanged on a gibbet was sufficient proof to him that He had died under the curse of God (*cf.* Gal. 3: 13). Now Christ's death for His people's sins, His burial and His rising on the third day—all in accordance with prophetic Scripture—constituted for him, as for the Twelve, the basis of the good news which he and they proclaimed (1 Cor. 15: 1-11).

In 1 Corinthians 15: 3 the record of this complex of saving events is said to be something which Paul received by *paradosis*. The account of Christ's appearing to him personally 'last of all' was not *paradosis* but personal testimony; what precedes it is *paradosis*. The details of resurrection appearances granted to others would be received by Paul from one or more of those others, and we are not left to speculate who his informants might be. Among those others to whom Christ is said to have appeared in resurrection, two are expressly named: Peter and James. It is no mere coincidence that the same two men are also expressly named in Paul's account of his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. 'I went up to Jerusalem', he says, '*historēsai Kēphan...* but I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother' (Gal. 1: 18f.). It is hardly too much to say, seeing that Peter and James were the only two leaders of the Jerusalem church that he met during this fortnight's stay in the city in the third year after his conversion, that it was then that he received from them the story of the risen Lord's appearance to the one and to the other, of which he makes summary mention in I Corinthians 15: 5, 7.

The phrase *historēsai Kēphan* (Gal. 1: 18) has been translated 'to see Peter' (AV), 'to visit Cephas' (RV, RSV), 'to get to know Cephas' (NEB). Of these the last is the most accurate, but perhaps more than this is implied. Paul wished not only to make Peter's acquaintance but also (and this would account for his choice of this particular verb) to consult Peter, to make inquiry of him concerning the details of the gospel *paradosis* (cf. G. D. Kilpatrick in *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of T. W. Manson*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins, 1959, pp. 144 ff.; see also W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, 1964, pp. 453ff.). To distinguish between Paul's understanding of the gospel as something he received by unmediated revelation and his understanding of the gospel as something he received by tradition from those who were in Christ before him is not easy; but the distinction is a real one. He went to Jerusalem to acquire information from Peter because it was now necessary that he should have this information, and no-one was better qualified to give it to him than Peter. Information acquired in this way formed part of the *paradosis* which he delivered to his converts and expected them to maintain (cf. 1 Cor. 11: 2; 2 Thes. 2: 15); its ultimate authority was the Lord Himself (cf. O. Cullmann, 'The Tradition', in *The Early Church*, ET, 1956, pp. 59ff.), and it embraced not only the resurrection appearances but the account of what Jesus did and said 'on the night when he was betrayed' (1 Cor. 11: 23ff.).

Yet, however much information of this sort Paul may have acquired from Peter

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and James (or, on other occasions, from colleagues of theirs), he does not have much to say in his extant writings about the works, or even the words, of Jesus before His death. We should not, indeed, minimize what he does say in this regard: Jesus, for Paul, is no docetic figure but a real man of woman born (Gal. 4: 4), a member of the nation of Israel who lived under the law (Rom. 9: 5; Gal. 4: 4), a descendant of David (Rom. 1: 3), as the Messiah was for the most part expected to be, who died by crucifixion (Gal. 3: 1, etc.)—and although crucifixion was well known to be a Roman, not a Jewish, mode of execution, it is Jews who are made primarily responsible for the death of Jesus in 1 Thessalonians 2: 15. Paul knows of the apostles of Jesus, and of His brothers; he knows that some of them were married (1 Cor. 9: 5)—an incidental agreement with the Gospel story of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Mk. 1: 30). He quotes sayings of Jesus on occasion, and when he does so, he quotes them as putting an end to all controversy—His prohibition of divorce, for example (1 Cor. 7: 10f.). His ruling that 'those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel' (1 Cor. 9: 14; cf. 1 Tim. 5: 18; Lk. 10:7), His words (already alluded to) at the institution of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11: 24f.), and possibly the 'word of the Lord' of 1 Thessalonians 4: 15. It is conceivable that this last 'word', about the order in which dead and living believers will be called at the Parousia, is a post-resurrection utterance; even so, it is noteworthy that 'Paul shows no readiness to invent or adapt *verba Christi* to meet new occasions not envisaged in the setting of Christ's earlier ministry.

Apart from more or less direct quotations of words of Jesus, we can observe how closely Paul's ethical teaching in particular follows Jesus' teaching as it was later recorded in the canonical Gospels. For Paul, as for Jesus, love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13: 8-10; cf. Mk. 10: 17-22; 12: 28-34); that Saul of Tarsus was the wealthy enquirer of Mark 10: 17 or the scribe of Mark 12 28 is a pleasant fancy belonging to the realm of romance and not of biblical exegesis, but Saul of Tarsus learned full 'Well the lesson taught by Jesus to these two men. Indeed, the whole of the 'ethical' section of the Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 12: 1 - 15: 7) has only to be compared with the Sermon on the Mount for us to see how thoroughly the

apostle was imbued with his Lord's teaching. Moreover, one of Paul's principle arguments in his ethical instruction is the character and example of Christ. And the character of Christ which Paul presents as an example in his letters is completely in agreement with the character of Christ portrayed in the Gospels. Paul's appeal to 'the meekness and gentleness of Christ' (2 Cor. 10: 1) echoes the Gospel portrayal of Him who was 'gentle and lowly in heart' (Mt. 11: 29). The self-denying Christ of the Gospels is the Christ who, according to Paul, 'did not please himself' (Rom. 15: 3); and, as the Christ of the Gospels calls on His followers to deny themselves (Mk. 8: 34), so Paul insists that the followers of Christ must, like their Master, refrain from pleasing themselves (Rom. 15: 1), 'just as I try', he says elsewhere, 'to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of the many, that they may be saved' (1 Cor, 10: 33), No wonder that, leaving said this, he adds immediately: 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ' (1 Cor. 11: 1). The Christ of the Gospels, who said to His disciples, 'I am among you as one who serves' (Lk. 22: 27), and suited the action to the words by washing their feet (Jn. 13: 4ff.), is the Christ who, according to Paul, took 'the form of a slave' (Phil. 2: 7). In a word, when Paul wishes to commend to his readers the sum total of those graces which adorn the Christ of the Gospels, he does so by telling them to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 13: 14).

To this it may be replied in some quarters that the character of Jesus in the Gospels is a reconstruction based on the ethical ideal of the apostolic teaching, replacing (for apologetic reasons) an earlier and more historical, though almost entirely obliterated, picture of someone much more like a Zealot leader. With this argument it is impossible to deal here; reference may be made to some remarks passed on its improbability in my paper 'History and the Gospel' (*Faith and Thought*, 93, No.3, Summer 1964, pp. 121ff., especially pp. 139ff.¹).

III PAUL THE INTERPRETER OF JESUS

We have to acknowledge nevertheless that in Paul's Epistles there is a remarkable absence of reference to details of Christ's ministry. Whereas in the First Epistle of Peter Jesus' patient and un-

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complaining behaviour in the face of injustice and ill-treatment is presented as an example for Christians to follow (even though the language is considerably influenced by Isaiah 53), Paul is more prone in similar circumstances to present the example of Christ's condescension and self-humiliation in becoming man: for him the *imitatio Christi* is mainly a matter, in B. B. Warfield's phrase, of 'imitating the Incarnation'.

It may be said, and with some truth, that Paul's readers had already heard and believed the story of Jesus, and did not need to be told it again. In Acts 13: 23ff. Paul is represented as following up his account of Old Testament history and prophecy with a reference to the ministry of John the Baptist, represented elsewhere in the New Testament as the initial phase of the kerygma; and this may well be in keeping with Paul's practice. But the principle reason for the lack of allusion to the events of Jesus' ministry may quite simply be that Paul was not an eyewitness of these events, and preferred to confine himself to those matters of which he could speak at first hand.

¹ http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ft/history-and-the-gospel_bruce.pdf

Paul's relation to Jesus (in addition to his personal incorporation, with all his fellow-believers, 'in Christ') may be established more securely at a deeper level than that represented by such allusions as can be picked up throughout his letters to the life and teaching of Jesus. If (as the present writer is fully convinced) Paul's claim to 'have the mind of Christ' (1 Cor. 2: 16) is well founded, then we may confidently turn to the letters of Paul to find the significance of the Jesus of history unfolded. To that significance Jesus Himself pointed when He spoke of the divine Kingdom which was both present and imminent; what was imminent when He spoke had become an accomplished fact by the time Paul wrote, and in expounding the implications of this accomplished fact Paul unfolds the significance of Jesus. Some people who talk as if the significance of the historical Jesus is unrelated to anything that happened after His death overlook the fact that the significance of any outstanding figure of history would not adequately be brought out if the sequel to his life and death were strictly excluded from the reckoning. From Jesus' own teaching we should gather that the inauguration of the Kingdom and the vindication of the Son of Man would make plain features of His works and words which at the time presented a mystery; Paul, writing from the perspective of that inauguration and vindication, makes the mystery plain.

The recent work by Eberhard Jüngel, *Paulus and Jesus* (Tübingen, 1962), works out this thesis with special reference to Paul's doctrine of justification; the sub-title calls the work 'an inquiry into the more precise formulation of the question of the origin of Christology'. Jüngel is a pupil of Ernst Fuchs, a distinguished member of the Bultmann school, and he pays tributes to Bultmann by endorsing the judgment that 'in the past generation of New Testament scholars no-one, apart from Schlatter, has done so much as Bultmann for the recovery of the Reformers' doctrine of justification'. His procedure is to examine first the outlines of Paul's doctrine of justification, then the outlines of the message of Jesus, and lastly the relation between the two. 'The eschatological character both of Jesus' proclamation and of Paul's doctrine of justification enables us to make a positive comparison of the two lines of teaching one with the other': on this score he is at one with Albert Schweitzer, although he is far from accepting Schweitzer's attitude to New Testament eschatology.

Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God is studied in the parables; Jüngel insists repeatedly that in the parables the Kingdom of God comes to expression, and that the hearers' response to the parables is their response to the Kingdom of God. Jesus' parabolic teaching is more than mere teaching; it is a *Sprachereignis*, a 'speech-event', in the sense, that the parabolic teaching is itself an event confronting the bearer and challenging him to say 'Yes' to the demand of the Kingdom of God. With Fuchs, Jüngel sees in the parables Jesus' Christological testimony to Himself, albeit in veiled form. During the ministry, Jesus' conduct and attitude supplied a sufficient commentary for understanding the parables; later, the church felt it necessary to supply its own verbal commentary. In the 'Son of man' sayings Jüngel discerns the same eschatological note as in the parables. It is this eschatological note which he hears sounding in Paul's teaching on justification and providing the link between Paul and Jesus. 'Christ is the end of the law for every believer' (Rom. 10: 4) because in Him the *eschaton* has arrived; Christ as the end of the law is accordingly the ground of men's justification before God. (He interprets Paul's

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telos in the sense of *eschaton*.) In the preaching of Jesus and the teaching of Paul he finds the same relation between eschatology and history, the same emphasis on the end of the law, the

same demand for faith—the faith that works by love. The difference lies simply in this, that the *eschaton* which for Jesus lay in the near future is present for Paul.

One misses here the giving of its proper place to Paul's doctrine of the coming glory, of which the present bestowal of the Spirit is the earnest; but Jüngel's study is a welcome sign of the direction in which some of the most active theological thought in Germany is moving.

What a scholar in the Lutheran tradition should concentrate in this regard on Paul's teaching on justification by faith and its links with the ministry of Jesus is natural; but similar conclusions could be reached if the same kind of attention were directed towards other central motifs of Paul's teaching. His portrayal of Jesus as the Wisdom of God, for example, and as the Last Adam could be shown both to develop aspects of the words and works of Jesus and to display more clearly what is implied in those aspects. Such studies would underline the truth of the statement with which Professor W. G. Kümmel concluded his presidential address to the Society for New Testament Studies in 1963: 'We cannot choose between Jesus and Paul; all that we can do is in Paul's witness to encounter Jesus Himself, who is the ground and the truth of this witness' (*New Testament Studies*, 10, 1963-64, p. 181).

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