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978-0-521-08979-1 - St Paul and the Church of the Gentiles

Wilfred L. Knox

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BY

WILFRED L. KNOX

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PRAESIDI SOCIIS ET SCHOLARIBUS  
COLLEGII SANCTAE ET  
INDIVIDUAE TRINITATIS  
IN ACADEMIA OXONIENSI:  
NEC NON  
CUSTODI SOCIIS ET SCHOLARIBUS  
AULAE MARIAE DE VALENTIA  
IN ACADEMIA CANTABRIGIENSI:  
DOMUUM VENERABILIIUM  
QUARUM ALTERA NUTRIVIT ALTERA ADSCIVIT

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## P R E F A C E

ST PAUL's letters are an attempt to express in terms of the theology of his day an ultimate fact of his experience. He was "in Christ" or Christ was "in him". The fact of his experience may have been no more than an illusion; but for him it was a matter of immediate certainty. It followed from this that nothing else mattered: even the venerable form of Semitic religion out of which the Pharisees were laboriously constructing an edifice of ethical monotheism was by comparison with this merely a service of weak and beggarly elements. It also followed that the truth could be expressed in any terms which served to bring home to others the truth which had been revealed to him.

His writings, which are the earliest attempt to formulate a system of Christian theology, can only be understood if they are interpreted in the light of the conventional language of Hellenistic theology in which he expounded them to the Greek-speaking world. Otherwise the meaning they were intended to convey will be lost; we shall instead read into them a preconceived system of our own. On the other hand, the study of his language may seem to relegate his writings to the general level of the thought and religion of the world of his day, and so fail to do justice to the titanic force of his personal religion. I am acutely conscious that I have failed to do justice to the difference in quality between primitive Christianity, as it finds expression in St Paul, and the creeds and cults of his contemporaries. But it is impossible to do justice to the full intensity of his knowledge of God in Christ Jesus; his own Epistles convey the fullness of his faith more adequately than any paraphrase can hope to do. But it is only in relation to the world of thought in which he lived and preached that we can understand his Epistles.

Professor E. R. Goodenough's *By Light, Light* did not come into my hands until this book had almost reached its final shape. It will be obvious to anyone who has read his work and passes from it to the present book that we differ entirely as to the whole meaning of Philo's work and view of life. I am quite clear that his attempt to read a "Light-mystery" religion into Philo's writings entirely misconceives the whole aim of Philo's work. He writes of the "passionate desire of the Hellenistic man to experience emotionally the concepts he has learned from Greek rationalism". The opposite seems to me to be the case; the passionate desire of the Hellenistic man, in so far as he cared for these things, was to find a philosophic basis which would justify him in continuing to practise the form of religion which attracted him or

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## PREFACE

which he had inherited. Chrysippus had shown how this could be done: but often the “passionate desire” was little more than a mild interest in such things. Philo’s object was to justify Judaism in terms of contemporary thought, and to read into it as much of the conventional theology of the Hellenistic world as he could drag in by hook or by crook. His desire was partly due to the need of countering anti-Semitic propaganda; but it was enhanced by the fact that Judaism was far more of a missionary religion than most contemporary cults. The fact that Philo in the closing sections of *De Mund. Op.* 61 (170 *seqq.*, M. 1. 41) summarises the value of a cosmogony which is based on the *Timaeus* and Posidonius in terms of purely conventional Judaism which ignores alike the Logos and the divine pattern, seems a decisive proof that he did not really care about it; in the same way his “powers” are merely the Stoic manifestations of the one God in the figures of pagan religion; if rabbinical Judaism accepted them so easily as “attributes” of God, there was no reason why Philo should not do the same (cf. below, p. 50, for the origin of the idea). I am happy to find myself entirely in agreement with Professor A. D. Nock’s review in *Gnomon* 13. 3. 156 *seqq.* (March 1937) on this point. I have refrained from detailed controversy, which would extend this book to an unconscionable length.

My thanks are due to Mr H. M. Loewe, Reader in Rabbinics in the University of Cambridge, for his assistance in the study of the Hebrew language and the literature of Judaism; my debt to him is so large that I shall not attempt to express it. Naturally I am alone responsible for any inferences I may have drawn from that literature. To Professor A. D. Nock of Harvard University I owe my deepest thanks for his unflinching kindness in helping me, whether in conversation or by correspondence. The references in the index to his published works represent a very small fraction of what I have learnt from him. I can only hope that he will forgive me if at any point I have put forward as my own suggestions which I have borrowed from him without remembering that I have borrowed them.

It was my privilege to attend the late Professor Burkitt’s Seminar during the last year of his life; to sit at the feet of so great a teacher even for so short a time was an education in itself. Since then his work has been continued by Professor Dodd; to him and to the members of the Seminar my thanks are due for all I have learnt from them.

WILFRED L. KNOX

*November 1938*

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#### ABBREVIATIONS, ETC.

- Ap. and Ps.* *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, ed. Charles.
- Apocr. N.T.* *The Apocryphal New Testament*, translated by M. R. James.
- Conversion.* *Conversion*, by A. D. Nock.
- Dox. Gr.* *Doxographi Graeci*, ed. H. Diels.
- E.R.E.* Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*.
- G.ŷ.V.* *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christ*, by E. Schürer.
- H.z.N.T.* *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. H. Lietzmann.
- ŷ.T.S.* *Journal of Theological Studies*.
- Judaism.* *Judaism*, by G. Foot Moore.
- Kyrios.* *Kyrios als Gottesname*, by Graf W. von Baudissin.
- Orpheus.* *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, by W. K. C. Guthrie.
- Papp. Mag. Gr.* *Papyri Magicae Graecae*, ed. Preisendanz.
- Rel. Or.* *Les Religions Orientales dans le Paganisme Romain*, by F. Cumont (4th ed. 1929).
- Str.-B.* *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, by H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck.
- T.W.z.N.T.* *Theologische Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. G. Kittel.
- Urspr. u. Anf.* *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums*, by E. Meyer.
- v. Arn.* *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. Hans von Arnim.
- Voc. Gr. N.T.* *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, by Moulton and Milligan.

References to Philo are given with initials (or abbreviations) of the titles in Cohn-Wendland's edition; the number of the paragraph is given after the titles, followed in brackets by the number of the section in Cohn-Wendland and the volume and page of Mangey's text.

References to Josephus are given by the book, chapter and paragraph of the conventional text, followed by the number of the section in Niese.

References to Origen are taken from the edition of Lommatzsch.

References to Mandean documents are given from Lidzbarski's translation, the number of the chapter or section being followed by the page and line of his version.

In a few passages I have referred to my earlier book *St Paul and the Church of Jerusalem*, described as *Jerusalem*.