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Charles A. Anderson Scott

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

ST PAUL was a Jew, who in circumstances well known to readers of the New Testament was led to recognise in Jesus of Nazareth who had been crucified, the Messiah of his race, now risen from the dead and glorified: who at once yielded himself to Him as the unseen Master of his soul: and for thirty years afterwards lived a life of religious fellowship with Him, and of consecrated devotion to His cause. He began at once to preach the truth which he had persecuted. Concerning his experiences, his activities and his preaching during the first fifteen years after his conversion we have practically no information. Then he suddenly becomes known to us, known to us as a man and known as a teacher with a fullness and an intimacy to which ancient history provides only one or two parallels. We know him through his letters, ten of them. They cover a period of some ten years. With one exception, which is addressed to an individual, they are written to communities of people who were already Christians. Most of them had heard the Gospel from Paul's lips. With one or possibly two exceptions these letters are prompted by his knowledge of particular problems of Christian thought and life which he knew to be perplexing these communities. To set forth Christianity as he would do to unconverted people, whether Jews or heathen, is definitely not his business in these letters; much that is fundamental in either theology or ethics he takes for granted or alludes to as already known. He writes not primarily as a theologian, not even as an evangelist, but as a friend and a pastor,

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as one to whom the faithfulness of his converts and their progress 'in the Gospel' was a matter of life and death¹.

But St Paul writes also as a thinker, as one who is not satisfied to register or enforce merely isolated facts or truths: he must needs see them in their relation to one another, in their relation to earlier events and ideas, in their relation to 'the whole counsel of God.' He is not a 'theologian' in the technical or modern sense of the word: he was not enough of a philosopher to be that. Yet neither is he a dreamer, indifferent to history and to reason, satisfied with emotion, sentiment or ecstasy. He seeks to commend his Gospel to rational and reasoning men, and though probably the last thing that would occur to him would be that he had a system of thought which would one day be called 'Paulinism,' he had a conception of Christianity which he called 'my Gospel.'

St Paul's purpose in these letters is mainly to explain and commend the application of his Gospel, Christianity as he conceives it, in reference to specific problems which had arisen in the contact of Christian with non-Christian thought and practice, especially Jewish; to illustrate its place in the Divine plan for human salvation, and to show its application to life, individual and social. It is in doing so that he gives us the opportunity of discovering what Christianity means for him. But before examining this in detail there are certain general questions which call for consideration. (1) In view of the fact that Paul, presumably a man in early middle life when we first meet him, was more or less familiar with two worlds of thought, the Jewish and the Hellenistic, which of these supplied the dominating factor in his mind, and what was the proportion of its influence to that of the other? (2) What were the sources from which he drew material for thought and

¹ 1 Thess. iii. 8: 'now we live if ye stand fast in the Lord.'

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illustration? (3) What was the most general and comprehensive aspect in which Christianity appealed to him?

St Paul was a Jew, but he was a Hellenistic Jew, that is to say, although he was born and brought up in a Jewish home, that home itself was outside the Holy Land. It was in Tarsus, in the midst of an atmosphere of Greek thought and culture. He spoke and wrote the Greek language: he was probably not unfamiliar with Greek literature; he was at home in Greek life. He was thus peculiarly fitted to be the mediator to the Greek world of a faith which had been cradled in Judaism. In studying his mind it is important to remember both factors in his intellectual history, even more important, if it were possible, to estimate in what proportion he was influenced by the one or the other.

The first impression produced by a perusal of his letters is clear and strong, namely, that it is the Jewish element which predominates, and that very greatly; that the Hellenistic element, so far as it is present at all, is not central but superficial. Those who come to his letters with a fair acquaintance with the Old Testament have no sense of passing from one intellectual atmosphere to another. The idiom of his thought is Hebrew. And this first impression is confirmed by an examination in detail. There are indeed traces of Greek culture or of what might be called Hellenistic consciousness in the letters: but they are singularly few. Paul is proud to be 'a Tarsian, citizen of a distinguished city' (Ac. xxi. 39); he appreciates the dignity and the privileges of his Roman citizenship; he quotes a phrase or two from Greek writers.

It is possible, however, to attach too much significance to Paul's early years in Tarsus¹. The position of

¹ That Paul 'must have been affected' by contact with mystery-cults in Tarsus and elsewhere is often said, but by no means necessary. We have a case to the contrary in Origen. 'On verra qu'il est caractéristique

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a Jewish family in such a city was not really analogous to that of a family of any other race. Probably the strongest thing in the consciousness of such a family would be the sense of difference, of separateness, of occupying a higher plane religiously and ethically than the Gentiles round about. All the outward expressions of family life, the common meals, the festivals, the study of the Law, the worship of the Synagogue, would tend to preserve and foster this separateness. Even under modern circumstances it is characteristic of many Jewish homes that they retain the Jewish atmosphere with little modification from without. And there is good reason to believe that Paul's home was one of this type. Only so can we account for his pride of race, his close familiarity with the Scriptures, his passionate love for Israel. And it must have been in fulfilment of the family ambition as well as in accordance with his own choice that he left Tarsus to go to Jerusalem, there to be trained in the school of Gamaliel¹, to become 'a Pharisee of the Pharisees.'

The evidence of the Epistles in general points in the same direction. References to features of Greek life are on the whole perfunctory: those to the characteristics of Judaism are enthusiastic. To the former belong allusions to the games, to processes of law, possibly some echoes of the vocabulary of the mystery-cults. Such references are not surprising in one who as the missionary of a new faith was singularly sensitive to what was in the minds of those to whom he wrote. Our

de notre théologien qu'il est fort peu préoccupé des religions syncrétistes, des mystères, des cultes orientaux. Nous y voyons l'une des grandes influences du temps. Origène les ignore' (de Faye, *Origène*, 1924, p. 13). And Origen, unlike Paul, was brought up in a Hellenistic atmosphere.

¹ No significance need be attached to the reported fact that in one branch of 'the school of Gamaliel' the pupils studied 'the wisdom of the Greeks.' If St Paul had taken 'the modern side' we should find much more evidence of the fact in his Epistles.

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surprise is rather that he does not show himself more keenly alive to the tenets of popular philosophy and the character of the popular religion. Many of those to whom he wrote had of course been Gentiles, and yet, though he frequently stresses the difference between Gentile and Christian standards of conduct, he shows little or no interest in comparing Christian with Greek thought. In fact, the traces of Greek influence cannot be said even to approximate, either in number or in character, to the marks of Jewish tradition. There is no ground in general for the assertion that the Hellenistic factor had come to outweigh the Jewish in Paul's consciousness, or for tracing to the influence of that factor anything in his teaching which can be paralleled in Greek philosophy or in Greek popular religion. On the contrary, these general considerations leave the impression that Paul remained *au fond* a Jew, carrying into his new interpretations of life and of providence conceptions and principles which were peculiarly the property of Judaism, and definitely strange to Hellenism¹.

And this is confirmed when we come to consider these principles in detail.

(i) We note Paul's pride of race, so persistent and so strong as to be inconsistent with anything that could be called cosmopolitanism. No man in whom the Hellenistic element had got the upper hand could have written of himself as Paul does towards the end of his life. 'If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law a Pharisee' (Phil. iii. 4-5; cp. 2 Cor. xi. 22; Ro. xi. 1). Moreover, this pride of race was rooted in his religious conscious-

¹ So Eduard Meyer, *Ursprung des Christentums*, III. 315: 'But if Paul thus... stood in relation to the culture of the world, nevertheless inwardly he remained through and through a Jew.'

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ness, and connected with the ultimate goal of his religious hope. It was to Israel as the people of God that he belonged, to Israel privileged above all other peoples in that they had 'the Sonship, the Shekinah, the Covenants, the Divine Legislation, the Worship and the Promises' (Ro. ix. 4). For the sake of these his kinsmen according to the flesh Paul proclaimed himself willing even to be accursed from Christ (Ro. ix. 3). And it is very significant that the salvation which he anticipated for the Gentiles was not any salvation independent of the Jews. Indeed, the salvation of the Gentiles is expressed in terms of their ingrafting into 'the old olive tree.' The new tree into which both are to be grafted is the old Israel 'renewed.' By Paul even the salvation of the Gentiles is looked on as a means to an end—namely, that 'all Israel shall be saved' (Ro. xi. 26).

Take away St Paul's knowledge of Christ and his faith in Christ and what is left is not a cosmopolitan, or an eclectic, or a Hellenist of any kind, but a Jew of the noblest type, with a passionate devotion to all that was best and purest in the Jewish religion.

(ii) It is of great significance that St Paul was and remained to the end an uncompromising monotheist. This fact alone puts a gulf between him and the easy-going polytheism of the Hellenistic world. For him monotheism was not merely a theoretic proposition, but the universal postulate of his thinking. Even his devotion to, and adoration of, Jesus Christ did nothing to infringe or modify it, or to withdraw attention from the One God. The Epistles to the Thessalonians in particular bear copious evidence of what can best be described as the God-consciousness which conditioned all his thinking. It is God whose minister he is, the Gospel of God which he preaches, God who has called the brethren into his own kingdom and glory. And

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when men are converted to Christianity they 'turn...to serve the living and true God.' This one God was for him the ultimate source of all Christian experience and His glory the final goal of the whole process of redemption.

It is in consistency with this uncompromising monotheism that Paul emphasises, as he does, the 'subordination' of the Son to the Father. Even the Lord Christ whom Paul exalted so high, 'belongs to God' in the same way as redeemed man 'belongs to Christ' (1 Cor. iii. 23); and as 'the head of every man is Christ,' so 'the head of Christ is God' (1 Cor. xi. 3), while the consummation of all things is to be the handing over of the Kingdom by Christ to 'his God and Father,' and His own subjection, 'that God may be all in all' (1 Cor. xv. 24, 28). Nothing could more vividly illustrate the convinced monotheism of the Apostle than the way in which he all but bestows on Christ the name of God and yet refrains from doing so¹. Paul gave to Christ everything that men give to God alone, except the name; he becomes perhaps the first illustration of the truth that 'the reality of the Creeds lies in that surrender of the soul which precedes their articulate utterance.'²

(iii) But it was not only in his monotheism that Paul showed himself heir to Judaism and not to Greek thought; it was also in that he assumed God to be knowable, and to have character, and character which had been ascertained. And that character (apart from the further revelation of it which had come through Jesus Christ) was no other than that which had been made known through the prophetic schools of Israel. God was 'the Lord merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and trans-

¹ See further, p. 273.

² W. Manson, *The Incarnate Glory*, 1925, p. 73.

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gression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty' (Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7). Righteousness which was a synthesis of mercy and of holiness, that was the character of God.

Pupils in Greek or Oriental schools of thought had the choice between an Absolute Being whose Deity was bound up with His inscrutableness and unapproachableness, and the members of a syncretistic Pantheon, some of whom might represent types of single qualities but to none of whom was assigned 'character' like that of Jehovah. Learners in Paul's school, on the other hand, were introduced to a God all whose purposes and actions were in accordance with holiness, righteousness, mercy and truth. And the new world of thought with which Paul sought to make them familiar was one in which these principles might be seen at work. They found indeed their highest illustration in the salvation which he preached. Paul might have found it difficult, even as we do, to produce proof texts for his statement that 'the Gospel of God' had been promised 'of old by his prophets in the holy Scriptures' (Ro. i. 2). Yet he was justified in the conviction that the Christian message with which he was entrusted was the fulfilment of an age-long process the outline of which had been disclosed in the Old Testament; it was indeed ultimately the outcome of the character of God as it had been revealed to Paul's Jewish fore-fathers.

(iv) It is for this reason, that God for St Paul is the God who had been made known through the prophets, that the Old Testament provides his one quarry for illustration and religious vocabulary. And that not only when his argument is expressly directed to Jews. A critic of his methods, viewing the large Gentile element in his audience, and even making all due allowance for considerable acquaintance with the Jewish Scriptures on the part of those who were 'God-fearers,' might not

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unjustly question the wisdom of this habitual reference to the Old Testament, and the absence of any serious or sustained attempt to relate the new message to the current thought of the Hellenic world. Had Paul's mind been captured by, or even seriously influenced by, that non-Jewish world of thought, neither his style nor his method of argument would be what it is. In his presentation of the Gospel he starts from Jewish postulates, assumes the validity of the Jewish Scriptures and operates with Jewish argument and illustration¹.

(v) The ideal which the Apostle set himself to realise was not a new cult, indeed it was not a cult at all, although it involved a cultus. It was a Society, a society of men in whom the age-long purpose of God was at last fulfilled, and was being fulfilled. It was a society of men, that is, who having been redeemed, reconciled, consecrated, found perfect self-expression and perfect satisfaction in doing the will of God. And even so it was not entirely a new society. It was felt by St Paul to be in continuity with the ancient society of God's People. Its very existence involved the disclosure of the 'mystery,' the secret purpose which had been at work behind all the history of Israel (Eph. iii. 9). The People in whose experience and through whose teachers God had made Himself known was still Paul's people, still God's People. They have not been repudiated by God (Ro. xi. 2). Their privileges have not been annulled (Ro. ix. 4). These privileges rather have been and are being turned to good account by a remnant, a section of that People, 'Israel according to faith,' those namely who found upon faith in Christ. It had been and was a mark of the hopeless state of the Gentiles that they were 'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.' The wonder of their new opportunity is not that they form a new

¹ Cp. Edwyn Bevan, *The Hellenistic Age*, p. 104: 'Christianity has remained always essentially Hebraic.'

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Society which they invite Israel to join, but that it is open to them to be incorporated in an existing Society, the spiritual Israel, as 'partakers of the same inheritance, members of the same body, sharers in the same status' (Eph. iii. 6). In spite of all the newness of the Christian facts, the Christian experience and the Christian hope, Paul was acutely conscious of the continuity between the 'Church in the Wilderness' and the 'Church of Christ.' Even the privileges and experiences of the new Age were most clearly expressed in terms of the experiences and promises of the old. The saving righteousness of God 'apart from the Law,' which was now being manifested, was that to which witness had been borne by the Law and the Prophets (Ro. iii. 21).

Now, these are the principles which define the field within which St Paul's mind works. The conception of God as One and of God as revealed character is central to his thinking; a primary place is occupied by the conception of the new message as prepared for by the old dispensation and issuing out of it, and also by the conception of Israel as the object and channel of God's favour to men, ideally embodied in the ideal Society. And these, which are central principles with him, are wholly absent from Hellenistic or Oriental thought. Compared with these the elements in his thinking to which parallels have been found in non-Jewish literature, in Greek religion or in pagan mysteries, are obviously secondary. They belong to the surface rather than to the core of his thought and teaching. It is highly probable that these elements themselves are to be accounted for without appeal to extra-Jewish influences; but even if it could be proved that they, or some of them, were derived from non-Jewish sources that would not alter the fact that the core and marrow of his teaching is continuous with, and finds its basis in, the teaching of the Old Testament.