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# NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING IN THE LIGHT OF ST PAUL'S

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Εἴτε οὖν ἐγὼ εἴτε ἐκεῖνο  
οὕτως κηρύσσομεν

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## PREFACE

MANY are the works on New Testament Theology, and on particular doctrines, and on the doctrines of particular writers. But it needs more careful reading than most students have time for to gain from them a general grasp of the development of Christian thought. In the following pages, which contain an expansion of lectures delivered in Dublin to Divinity students and others, a method is followed which the writer believes has never been applied systematically to the New Testament as a whole. As the motion of objects at a distance can be more easily observed by noting their positions relative to a fixed mark, so the teaching contained in the several writings is noted in relation to St Paul's. The analogy will not strictly hold, because St Paul moved himself. But he has allowed us to know him so well that this method offers the best criterion for placing the other teachers of the Church in the general movement. And although St Paul's own doctrine is not dealt with as a whole, we gain incidentally a wonderful impression of his uniqueness and spiritual power.

A. H. MCNEILE.

DUBLIN.

*F. of the Conversion of St Paul, 1923.*

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## INTRODUCTION

THE Introduction to the present writer's manual on St Paul opens with the words 'The Christianity of to-day is broadly speaking the Christianity of St Paul.' And the extent to which that is true is the measure of the apostle's greatness. The value of a man's life work is always to be gauged by its abiding effects upon others. But when this test is applied to him and to Jesus Christ there is discovered an essential difference between them. The effects of the apostle's life are the effects of his teaching, reinforced by his character; those of the Lord's life are wrought by the imparting of His character through His permanent spiritual presence, reinforced by His teaching. Christianity *is Christ*; the Christian Body is the growing expression of Himself; and no other human being has ever borne, or can ever bear, the same relation to any movement, organization or society. And it is because St Paul was the principal exponent of this truth that his work holds the first place in the apostolic presentation of our religion. But as it takes all sorts to make a world, so it takes all sorts of teachers to expound a world-religion. *πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως*, 'in many parts and by many methods,' is as true of man's grasp of God's message to us in His Son as it was of His self-revelation to the fathers in the prophets; indeed the order of the words in Heb. i. 1, by which the adverbs stand at the opening of the sentence, may have been intended to express that truth. It is abundantly illustrated in the New Testament, as the following pages shew. They contain a study of the writings

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which come from other pens than St Paul's,—not, of course, a study of them in detail, but of the main elements of their teaching; and an attempt is made to examine their Christian doctrine in the light of his, using his as a norm by which to determine the place which they respectively occupy in the Christianity of the New Testament.

This is far from being merely academic. It is of great practical importance to achieve even the slightest advance along the road towards the wholeness of truth. We tend, each of us, to be Pauline, Jacobean, Johannine and so on according to temperament and past influences; and it is always worth while to study with special care minds that are constituted differently from our own, on the look out for anything of correction or addition that they can supply to us.

Three reasons may be noted for St Paul's paramount position in the Christian thought of to-day. The first is the simple and prosaic fact that the Pauline epistles, with the Pastorals, are more than one-third as long again as the other epistles with the Apocalypse. The Bible, for the most part, is not studied; it is only heard as read in Church services; and therefore congregations hear St Paul's teaching more often than that of any other writer. Secondly, St Paul impresses himself by a tumultuous force of character. The ear is so filled with his trumpet tones that it is difficult to listen to any other music. But thirdly, he had passed through a spiritual experience which was for him a violent crisis, which determined his entire outlook on the Person and work of Christ and man's relations with Him. That crisis must have been, in some degree, repeated in the case of large numbers of the early Christians who took the difficult



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and dangerous step of passing over to Christianity from either Judaism or paganism. It was natural, therefore, that his teaching and influence found a ready response; indeed the majority of Christians up to the time of his death must have been converted by him or his immediate delegates. And to this day the evangelical doctrine of salvation meets the deepest and most urgent need of human life. Whenever anyone reaches the point of feeling the burden of sin, of realizing that he needs a complete transformation of his being, and yet knows by bitter experience that he cannot by himself leap the great gulf fixed between sin and newness of life, there is one who needs the special contribution to Christian thought made by St Paul. It is for those in whom Rom. vii. 14–24 finds a real echo. God, of His free grace and love, effected (potentially) by the death and resurrection of His Son the glad translation of sinners, all implicated hereditarily in the sin of Adam, into the divine kingdom, with all that that involves of pardon and peace, ‘justification,’ and spiritual power for progressive ‘sanctification’; and each man can, by ‘faith,’ appropriate the saving work of Christ, and make real and kinetic for himself that infinite store of potential energy, and by God’s continued free grace obtain the living, working power of the Spirit to walk as one translated. That, in a sentence, is the Pauline gospel; and it is one of the chiefest of the world’s spiritual treasures.

And yet St Paul himself said ‘I count not myself yet to have grasped [what I am aiming at].’ That is as true of his intellectual and intuitive grasp of the things of God as of his attainment to the Christian ideal of character. He said and wrote, of course, much more than we possess; but his extant epistles are so many-sided and alive that

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it is difficult not to feel that, as regards his Christian doctrine, we practically have before us the whole man. If other of his epistles could be discovered it is unlikely that they would add anything of serious import to his presentation of Christianity. And that presentation omits elements which we cannot omit without loss. The other writers bring forth from their treasures things new and old,—new truths or aspects of truths which he did not bequeath to them, and old truths which the Church had already learnt from him, but which they expressed differently. And subsequent generations of Christians to this day, guided by the Holy Spirit, have continued the process.

In one respect he had no imitators in the New Testament literature that we possess. We know of no one whose pen supported him in his fight for the liberty of Gentiles from the yoke of Jewish ordinances. It was that fight which made him lay his peculiar stress on the depravity of human nature, and the helplessness of man's unaided will, and therefore on the gratuitous gift of God in the 'justification' of those who had faith in Christ. The battle which led him to place 'grace' and 'works' in sharp opposition was won by him. Other writers had different battles to fight, as he himself had in his later epistles. He remained, in the Church's estimation, 'the apostle' *par excellence*, but this particular contribution to Christian thought did not exercise much influence in the next three centuries. It needed a teacher in close spiritual kinship with the apostle, and confronted with difficulties which seemed to him analogous to his, to bring to the front again the necessity of 'grace' as opposed to 'works.' St Paul was 're-discovered' by Augustine. He also experienced a volcanic spiritual crisis, after long kicking against the

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pricks. And he also was roused to combat by what he felt to be a mistaken trust in works and in the freedom of the human will. The Judaism of the 1st century, as it appeared to St Paul, found its counterpart in the Pelagianism of the 5th, as it appeared to Augustine. The apostle, who was a Roman citizen from birth, had caught something of the Roman systematizing spirit, and he worked out the logical implications of much previous Jewish thought. The bishop, who spoke and thought in the Latin of Africa, systematized with Latin accuracy much previous patristic thought, and did so, as regards the doctrine of grace, on a strictly Pauline basis. Broadly speaking, in the intervening centuries, what may, for want of a better term, be called the Johannine aspects of Christian doctrine—what God is, what Christ is, what the Holy Spirit is—were more in evidence than the Pauline aspects—what man is, and what Christ has done for him. Theology and Christology absorbed men's interests rather than anthropology and soteriology. And when the nature of man was discussed, a non-Pauline emphasis was often laid on his *ἀντρεξουσίου*, freedom of will, voluntary self-determination<sup>1</sup>. This emphasis was partly due, in the earlier years, to the necessity of opposing pagan ideas of Fate, but also from an appreciation of the truth enunciated by Origen, its principal advocate, that 'if you destroy the voluntariness of virtue, you have destroyed its very essence' (c. Cels. iv. 3). This fact, thoroughly recognized during the three centuries after the New Testament, when logically, but unduly, pressed, led to the Pelagianism which Augustine combats with St Paul's epistles, especially *Romans* and *Galatians*, as his weapons, always logically, and sometimes unduly, pressing the apostle's language.

<sup>1</sup> See Moxon, *The Doctrine of Sin*, pp. 17–48.

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But the system of Augustine was of such range and complexity that he was not successful in making it entirely coherent. Hence the most opposite extremes of later doctrine claimed his support. Scholasticism, which was little more than a Christianizing of Aristotle, drew men away from the study of the New Testament. There were commentaries, and commentaries upon the commentaries. As a result, the distinctively Pauline side of Augustine's system fell increasingly out of sight. On the other hand his doctrine of the Church, resting upon all that he inherited from Cyprian, and developed under the stress of the fall of imperial Rome, and in the struggle with Donatism, became the quarry from which were drawn the stones for the edifice of Roman Catholicism in the period preceding the Reformation<sup>1</sup>. The time, therefore, came when the need again began to be felt of emphasizing those aspects of Pauline teaching which had become discredited. St Paul, reflected in Augustine, was once more re-discovered by Luther. The monk of Erfurt, no less than the Pharisee of Tarsus and the lecturer in rhetoric at Milan, passed through a spiritual crisis, from which he emerged a new creature, and which burnt in upon his soul the need of divine grace. Thus the Christianity of St Paul, re-moulded in the course of its history by two strong thinkers, reached modern Europe as an evangelical doctrine of salvation. Without a message of salvation the Christian religion would not be alive to-day; but in the form in which they presented it, it was very far from exhausting the teaching of St Paul, not to speak of the rest of the New Testament.

<sup>1</sup> Augustine did not, indeed, create them all; many of them were scattered loosely in patristic writings, but he shaped and combined them, inconsistent though some of them were into his own amazing edifice.

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To study St Paul's teaching, therefore, by itself, is to study only a section, though a large and important section, of New Testament Christianity. The other writings, while they include, on the one hand, additions that were made in development of Pauline doctrine, include also, on the other hand, that of which the Pauline doctrine was itself a development, and without reference to which the full value of his work cannot be measured. The study of both makes it evident that 'pre-Pauline' and 'post-Pauline' are not chronological terms. It is probable that every book in the New Testament that is not from the apostle's pen appeared, in its present form, after his death, though much of the materials of the Gospels was no doubt being shaped and collected during his lifetime; and his influence on the writers is frequently strong and marked. But they were influenced by him in very unequal degrees; and some of them present earlier elements which are, for the most part, clearly discernible. For our purpose, therefore, dates are a matter comparatively unimportant; and the writings can be studied with the principal object of tracing growth.

But the growth of what? It is not merely the growth of the understanding and interpretation of the teaching and claims of Jesus, but rather of the understanding and interpretation of what He *was*, what He and His claims meant to the world, and His relation to God. The former has been called the Gospel of Jesus, the latter the Gospel about Jesus. But neither is, by itself, the whole of Christianity, as some would have us think. The question What is Christianity? is not fully answered by saying The teaching and doings of Jesus, nor by saying The doctrine of the New Testament writers or of the Creeds. It must include both what He said and did, and also what He was, and is still being, realized to be. It was

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only at a comparatively late date that men were led to understand how vital were His teaching and claims and character and life. The result was the compilation of the Gospel records. But for the first disciples the experience of living with Him during His ministry remained a penetrating influence which rendered possible the conception of what He was and meant for the world—but a conception which could reach its fullness only after His death and exaltation. We study, then, His teaching, claims, character, and life, not as the elementary beginnings of a system of thought which is called Christianity, but as the fundamental and permanent basis on which a Christianity could be reared, an undying seed which could grow, and is still growing.

The following outline indicates the nature of our material:

1. *The teaching of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels*, naturally, comes first. We shall consider the main elements in His prophetic teaching, in His dealing—as the Israelite prophets dealt—with the popular morals and the popular eschatology. It was a proclamation of good tidings which in its nature was revolutionary because it transcended the limits of the privileged classes, and which included teaching on the true meaning of sonship to God, and on true allegiance to the divine sovereignty about to be revealed in its final consummation. His first disciples, who had heard all this from His lips, taught the new-born Church the impressions which had been stamped upon their minds. The spiritual revolution spread, and its principles formed the starting-point of new developments, so that St Paul, who was the prime mover in the developments, even if he had not known a single word of the actual preaching of Jesus, could work upon inherited

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material. His revolutionary universalism, together with his conceptions of sonship and of the divine kingdom, may be ascribed to his creative genius, but it was not a creation *ex nihilo*, but rather a creative evolution from the germ planted by the Lord, ἀρχὴν λαβοῦσα λαλεῖσθαι διὰ τοῦ κυρίου.

But sonship is revealed in a Son, and sovereignty in a Sovereign. The ethics and eschatology of Jesus are inseparably bound up with the claims of His own self-consciousness in relation to both. To these must be added His teaching on the Spirit of God and the Wisdom of God, which He knew Himself to possess. And the thoughts of divine Sonship and Messiahship, divine Spirit and Wisdom, were, again, germs capable of great expansion. To the disciples His Death and Resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit, were the opening of a new world of ideas. His claims seemed for the first time to spring out from the obscurity of enigma, to be magnified in the radiant certitude of experienced facts. Here was a further wealth of material for the 'master-builder,' and, as before, whether he knew our Lord's words or not, he erected his edifice of doctrine on *Him*.

Thus an examination of the principal elements in the teaching of Jesus is indispensable for appraising the value of St Paul's. From that starting-point we shall go on to determine the place which other teachers occupied in respect to him.

2. The writer who stands nearest to the ethical teaching of our Lord, and furthest from St Paul's point of view, is the author of the *Epistle of St James*. It is the only writing in the New Testament in which an echo of the apostle's struggle with Judaizers is heard. His battle-cry 'Faith and not Works' has the appearance of being directly

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opposed by this writer, who asks 'Can faith save him? 'Was not Abraham our father justified by works?' If the epistle was written at the early date which has often been assigned to it, the opposition must have come, on the contrary, from St Paul. The divergence between them calls for investigation, which points the way to an understanding of the true inwardness of the epistle.

This writing stands by itself as a purely ethical appeal. Pfeiderer<sup>1</sup> is quite justified in saying 'It is certain that, with James as its pioneer, Christianity would never have become a universal religion, nor indeed a religion at all, distinct from Judaism.' What will chiefly concern us in the other writings falls broadly under four heads: the Nature of Christ, the 'plan of salvation,' the doctrine of the Spirit, and eschatology. The chapters are not arranged under these heads, but they include most of the subjects to be dealt with.

3. Christian doctrine in the *Acts* is mostly expressed in the speeches which the author (whether St Luke or not) attributes to St Peter and St Paul. But the teaching in both belongs to a less developed stage of thought than that in the Pauline epistles. It is probable that the author had not moved far from the doctrinal position of the first disciples; so that while he expresses his own view throughout, he represents not inaccurately the early apostolic doctrine. The facts which are taught of the earthly life of Jesus, the Nature and functions of the exalted Christ, the bearing of the Old Testament on these, the eschatology, and the conception of the divine Spirit, will pass under review in comparison with St Paul's treatment of the same subjects, and the Hebraic character of the

<sup>1</sup> *The Influence of the Apostle Paul on the development of Christianity*, p. 169.



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author's thoughts will be noted. On the other hand he ascribes to St Paul a universalism which is his own, and is even larger and more generous than that in the epistles.

4. We move nearer to St Paul in 1 *Peter*; but it will be seen that, in spite of similarities with *Romans*, it does not on the whole reach the doctrinal position of the apostle. The writer (very possibly St Peter) had a Hebraic cast of mind, which shews itself in his doctrine of God, and in his conception of the relations of Christians to Israel, which in turn shapes his teaching on Salvation, together with that on the great themes of Faith, Grace, Holiness, Righteousness, Sin, the nature of man, and of the Spirit, on all of which St Paul's epistles represent a further stage of reflexion.

5. The next three writings doctrinally form a group, being Jewish in their eschatology, but Pauline in their Christology.

The *Apocalypse* is deeply Hebraic in language and in its use of the Old Testament, and distinctively Jewish in the eschatology which is its main theme. The writer's doctrine of God is cast in a somewhat Hebrew mould, while, on the other hand his Christology is thoroughly Pauline. But his thoughts on Salvation are determined by the dominating influence of his eschatology,—the Parousia, the Millennium, the Second Resurrection, and the Judgment.

6. The short *Epistle of St Jude* stands in much the same category, deeply influenced by Jewish eschatology, but Pauline in Christology though not in language.

7. With it, and partly based upon it, may be coupled the late writing 2 *Peter*, the two main objects of which are to keep alive the fading expectation of the Parousia, and to uphold Christian orthodoxy by denouncing anti-nomian heretics who denied that Christ would come.

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8. The nearest approach to an echo of St Paul is found in the *Pastoral Epistles*. But the writer, confronted with different difficulties of a later date, found it necessary to 'underline' certain truths about God, and Jesus Christ, and the Law, which St Paul had no occasion to emphasize.

9. Hitherto the adjectives 'Hebraic' and 'Pauline' have covered most of the varieties of New Testament teaching. But in the *Epistle to the Hebrews* a wholly new element makes its appearance which may be described as 'Alexandrian.' Large use is made in the epistle of the thought of the fulfilment of the Old Testament, but it is fulfilment in a very different sense from that in the synoptic Gospels and the Acts. It is more akin to the idea of Israel in 1 *Peter*, but is conceived in the spirit of Plato. The Christology, as such, is in line with St Paul's, but the bulk of the teaching about Christ is concerned with His priestly work by death and exaltation rather than with the rescue from the power of sin wrought by His death and resurrection. And since a Priest is a Representative of his people, an emphasis, which is entirely absent from St Paul's doctrine, is laid on Christ's real humanity. On the other hand, while the writer, from his new point of view, makes a contribution to Christian thought of profound value, he is so much dependent, for his dialectic, upon the Old Testament, and especially the Levitical portions of it, that he hardly rises to St Paul's living and burning experience of life in Christ—growth in sanctification, carried on in the Spirit, and by Faith.

10. The building upon Christ the Foundation has been growing; but in the *Fourth Gospel* the coping stone is laid. The evangelist tries to re-state the fundamentals of Christianity in such a way as to commend them to the world of Hellenism. He makes use of Jewish thought,

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but opposes the Jews. With St Paul he sees 'the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,' the light which had shone in the spiritual experience of the Church for more than half a century; but he sees it not only in the face of the risen Christ, but of Jesus of Nazareth in His human life in Palestine. He relates what He was then, to express the radiant truth of what Christians know Him to be now.

II. Lastly, 1 *John* touches, more humanly and immediately, the personal life of Christians, their attitude towards God and man, and thus comes, in some respects, nearer to the thought of St Paul. It is the aftermath of the Fourth Gospel, and contains a twofold appeal, for a right belief in Christ, and for the moral life which can be lived only by abiding in Him.