

## REVIEWS

### NEW LIGHT ON THE SON OF MAN PROBLEM

SEVERAL readers have written to say that my review of von Harnack's *Marcion* in the November number of THEOLOGY was just what they wanted. Emboldened by their encouragement, I now propose to give an account of a recent book which may or may not be important—I have no means of testing its arguments. But it is certainly desirable that English students should know that such books are being written. The book in question is Reitzenstein's work dealing with the Persian doctrine of salvation (*Das Iranische Erlösungsmysterium*, Bonn, 1921). The author is one of the most brilliant living investigators in the field of ancient comparative religion. Like many German specialists he is exceedingly bold, and his conclusions are probably wrong in many directions. But the wonderful ingenuity of his speculations makes him a most stimulating writer. His earlier book on Hellenistic Mystery Religions has had a considerable influence, and recent studies of the early documents of Egyptian monasticism, which he considers to be made up largely of Pythagorean and similar material, will have to be taken seriously.

The new book is exceedingly bad from a technical standpoint. The author apparently collects material and writes a book from it concurrently. It is a task of great difficulty to follow the argument, and I cannot be sure that I do him justice. He assumes that the reader is conversant with the problems of Mandæan religion, to say nothing of Manichæanism. For our purpose it will be best to prefix a brief description of these two religions, before going on to the book itself and the important conclusions which may possibly be drawn from it.\*

Recent discoveries in Central Asia have added a number of Persian, middle-Turkish, and Chinese manuscripts to the authorities already existing for Mani and his teachings. They are, however, exceptionally difficult and apparently only confirm what was known already. Mani was born about A.D. 216, and the origin of his doctrines may be assigned to 250 or thereabouts, in Babylonia. The country was then part of the Parthian empire, and Zoroastrianism was the established religion; in Mani's eyes it was corrupt. He taught that there was a series of revelations promulgated by Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, and lastly himself. His system was essentially Gnostic,

\* The two following paragraphs are based upon the articles on the Manichæan and Mandæan religions in the *Enc. Rel. and Ethics*, by Professor A. A. Bevan and W. Brandt respectively.

but Iranian features were more pronounced than in other Gnostic systems. For our present purposes we mention only a doctrine that the king of the paradises of light produced a being called the Primal Man to contend against Satan. Satan prevailed, but the heavenly powers rescued Primal Man. Then followed creation. Scholars hitherto do not seem to have regarded this doctrine as of central importance.

The Mandæans still existed in Mesopotamia a few years ago, and are interesting as a living relic of a Gnostic sect with Jewish and Christian affinities. Their sacred book is called the *Genza*, and is written in a form of Aramaic which developed in lower Babylonia. This book is a working over of borrowed material and must be used with great caution. "It cannot be doubted that these documents of the *Genza* which speak authoritatively of Mandæan thought and sentiment were composed prior to Mohammed's day." Some elements possibly date back to a time before John the Baptist and the Gospel. Mandæans believe in the Great Life, who called into existence the Second Life, who in his turn created the world. A Manda d'hayyé ("messenger of life," from which word the title of the sect was derived) was created; his task was to see that the First Life was worshipped upon the earth. The first to be deluded by the wicked ones was the son of the first man; and Manda d'hayyé, or his representatives (Hibil, Sital, Enos—i.e., Abel, Seth, Enosh), must appear to fortify and maintain mankind in the true faith. The Mandæan Enos rests on an identification or fusion of the Old Testament Enosh (Gen. iv. 26) with the Son of Man (Bar-Enash) of Dan. vii. 13. Enos is a rival to Jesus, and dwells in a cloud, with which may be compared the cloud of the Transfiguration and Ascension narratives. The Jewish elements in Mandæanism came in not from the Old Testament directly but from Aramaic sources, including some of a Gnostic character. In comparison with Manichæanism the system is secondary. Both are indebted, however, to the same Parsi sources. From palæographic evidence it appears that none of the literature can be earlier than the first century A.D.

Most Christian scholars accept the position that later Judaism was strongly affected by Persian influences, but this cannot be taken as certain. M. Gaster, in the article "Parsiism in Judaism" in Hastings' *Encyclopædia*, maintains that the Jews scattered throughout the Babylonian Empire far more probably influenced the promoters of Zoroastrianism. Any influence there may have been the other way round was confined to the Midrashim, the popular beliefs. In any case, the dates of Zoroastrian literature are uncertain.

Without this brief sketch of the existing opinions of scholars we might be tempted to give Reitzenstein's theories more credence than they deserve at this stage. But he claims to have evidence at his disposal which was not before earlier investigators, in the shape of Manichæan fragments from Central Asia unpublished as yet owing to the difficulties of the time. He starts from one of these, a liturgical hymn arranged in the form of call and response, which is clearly of Iranian origin, and from which the later accretions can be separated. The God-spirit is asleep and drunk, imprisoned in matter. This spirit is the world-soul—the idea is collective. A messenger is sent to arouse him. This is the Primal Man. Addressing him the bound spirit says: "From the light and of the gods am I, and I have become a stranger to thee; enemies have fallen upon me; by them have I been led down to the dead." A number of similar passages are quoted. The author proceeds to trace this idea of an imprisoned world-soul rescued by a divine being termed Primal Man, or Enos, through the primitive strata of Manichæan and Mandæan literature and in parallel documents, especially the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch, the Hymn of the Soul in the Acts of Thomas, and the Odes of Solomon. The whole complex of ideas is traced to an Iranian belief in a Primal Man which was transplanted to Babylonian soil and there influenced Judaism and ultimately Christianity. Ideas in St. Paul which were formerly thought to be Hellenic are now seen to be Jewish. But they are not organically part of Judaism, to which the belief in immortality in close connection with a divine being "Man" is strange, and are ultimately Iranian. "This *Man* is in Persian the renewer of the world, bearer of God's message and power, the Saviour for the whole race, but at the same time the *saved*, who is allowed to return to heaven as a first being of light, a god, and at the same time the ideal representative of souls, the great soul." This is not a Messianic idea such as arises in many peoples: it goes far beyond national hopes. Ordinary designations are avoided and secret ones take their place. The part played by Son of Man (*i.e.*, "Man") in Jewish eschatology cannot be explained from Judaism itself. The difficulties in the way of supposing these ideas to have come from Judaism into the Manichæan and Mandæan religions are insuperable. Many other eschatological traits, especially in Enoch and Esdras, are of Iranian origin.

We now summarize the really important part of the book, drawing also upon Reitzenstein's recent article on the same subject in the *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*. Bousset (*Kyrios Christos*, p. 10) had already seen that Son of Man meant a transcendental Messiah, and therefore concluded

that it must spring from the early Church and could not have been a designation used by Jesus of Himself. In this he is wrong. The two titles of Messiah and Son of Man are already in Enoch; they coalesce in Christianity. But they spring from different circles. "It is thoroughly intelligible to me that Barnasha was really the self-designation of Jesus, and that from the belief in the Barnasha belief in the Christos Jesus as the Barnasha exalted to God has arisen. I could not conceive how the Barnasha-confession could arise out of the Christ belief, and the story of Peter's confession (Mark viii. 27; Matt. xvi. 13), so important for the original gospel, would be meaningless and even as an invocation unintelligible. I should like to go further. With Wellhausen I can only understand the belief of the disciples in the Risen [Lord], if the Living [Lord] had already been for them not a mere man but something higher."

This, then, seems to be the author's position. The disciples, as a result of the Baptist's predictions, their own experiences, and the explicit claim of Jesus shown by His assuming the eschatological title, accepted Him as a divine Being appearing on earth to save. The significance of St. Peter's confession was other than is commonly assumed. "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" The answer shows that according to the popular view He was a prophet *redivivus*. "But who say ye that I am?" "Thou art the Christ." Starting from a belief, naturally to a large extent formless, in a heavenly Man such as was expected in neighbouring countries and had been depicted in the popular eschatological literature, St. Peter crystallizes the thoughts of the disciples' hearts and confesses that Jesus is also the Messianic king foretold by the prophets.

Such is the thesis. I make three comments upon it.

1. The book cannot be regarded as more than a scouting expedition in an unknown country. In so far as the argument rests upon Reitzenstein's conviction that Manichæan and Mandæan sources, which themselves cannot be earlier than the third century A.D., contain elements of a system far anterior to this date, it is hazardous and subjective in the extreme. But it can truly be claimed that modern research tends to make the beginnings of Gnosticism pre-Christian. It may well be that future investigation may support Reitzenstein's theory; on the evidence before us it cannot be more than a brilliant guess. And in any case the bearing of the non-Jewish evidence upon New Testament problems is exaggerated greatly.

2. But even a wrong or disproportionately developed theory is useful, if only as a working hypothesis. Let each reader look at the passages in which "Son of Man" occurs and ask himself their meaning if the theory were proved true.

3. It is well to be reminded that theology is in a state of flux. The current continues to flow away from the liberal humanitarian Jesus, as depicted by nineteenth-century scholars. Schweitzer used eschatology as the key to unlock all problems. Reitzenstein goes further, and sees Jesus consciously fitting Himself into a mythological framework, and playing the central part in a drama of cosmic significance which re-enacted the heavenly drama of the first ages. He approaches the problem from a purely "philological"\* standpoint. There is nothing in the book to show that he even envisages the problem whether or not Jesus was justified in claiming to be the heavenly Man. But the very fact that such a book can be written is of immense importance to us in England just now. Current attempts to bring Christology into line with modern thought are clearly hopeless. The thought which is accepted as the standard is already becoming old-fashioned. God forbid that we should grasp at Reitzenstein's theory and use it as a prop, likely to break in our hands, of the Church's traditional faith! But let it at least teach us to suspend our judgment and move very slowly indeed, if at all, in our Christology.

In two important respects Reitzenstein's book justifies a conservative position. Whatever view Our Lord held of His mission and personality He held from the beginning of the gospel record; there is no evidence of any psychological development of Messianic consciousness, so dear to modern writers, during the ministry. And the Hellenistic Church, in worshipping Jesus as Lord, made no advance beyond the standpoint of the earliest days of the Church at Jerusalem.

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#### SOME MODERN SETTINGS OF THE OFFICE FOR THE HOLY COMMUNION.

##### (A) TO BE SUNG BY THE CHOIR.

1. In the key of C, by John Ireland. Novello.
2. In the key of D, by E. C. Bairstow. Novello.
3. In the key of A, by Harold Rhodes. Novello.
4. In the Phrygian or Third Mode, by Charles Wood. Faith Press.
5. In the Phrygian or Third Mode, by Henry Ley. Faith Press.

1. Mr. Ireland's service should be a great boon to church choirs. It is not difficult, it is extremely effective when sung

\* He uses this word by contrast with "theological," but in a sense rather wider than is usual in English.