

St. Paul's Apostolic Consciousness and the Interpretation of the Epistles.

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WERNLE has with insight observed that 'unless the apostolic element in his experience receives due recognition, there can be no understanding of Paul.'¹ I wish to apply this criterion to various aspects of the interpretation of the Epistles.

First of all, it may be said to *determine the category under which, as documents, they are to be placed.* Let us readily admit that the numerous papyrus-letters unearthed during the past two decades have, at many points, illumined Paul's language and formal usage. Unsuspected *nuances* of meaning have been revealed in apparently commonplace terms. Probably it is true that these priceless New Testament documents have been exhibited in far more intimate relation with popular speech and everyday life than was once imagined. But the recent discoveries are apt to affect the balance both of literary and of spiritual judgment even in the case of well-trained scholars. To prove that the letters of Paul are real 'letters,' personal correspondence called forth by certain well-marked situations, and not 'epistles' in the technical sense—a definite literary *genre* having in view a reading public—is far from reducing them to the level of mere expressions of momentary feeling, suited to meet a passing need. Some of us are growing weary of Deissmann's laborious reiteration of the thesis that here we have essentially non-literary documents, which scorn all that is genuinely doctrinal.²

A reaction was inevitable from the traditional view of the Pauline Epistles as handbooks of systematic theology intended to be normative for the Christian Church. But Deissmann's position is due to pedantry of thought and of terminology. Literature is not to be tested by canons of rhetoric, or a stereotyped tradition. Noble thoughts nobly expressed constitute literature, although they may not disdain to use as their instruments phrases and constructions which bear the stamp of the market-place rather than the lecture-hall. And

¹ *Einführung in d. theologische Studium*, p. 181.

² *E.g. Paulus*, p. 5.

passages like 1 Co 9¹⁰⁻²² show how lofty energy of thought and feeling utters itself spontaneously in rhythmical forms, in which art has the power of concealing itself.

Still less does the content of the Epistles permit the analogy of dull and illiterate papyri. We may call Paul's letters 'occasional,' in so far as they are prompted by a given situation. But Paul knew, just as we know, that he was dealing with eternal truth, and his themes transform the whole character of the scheme within which he enshrines them. Take, *e.g.*, an element which has been strongly emphasized in Deissmann's unflagging comparisons between Paul's letters and those preserved in papyri, the opening address. Here is a typical example of the latter: 'Isias to Hephæstion her brother greeting. If you are well, and things in general are going right, it would be in accordance with my constant prayers to the gods. I myself am in good health . . . and so are all at home, making mention of you continually.'³ Set beside this one of Paul's salutations, *e.g.* 1 Co 1¹⁰: 'Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God . . . to the church of God which is in Corinth, consecrated in Christ Jesus, called to be God's people . . . grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always in your case, because of the grace of God given you in Christ Jesus; that in everything you were enriched in him, in all utterance and all knowledge, which is a confirmation of the testimony to Christ which we bore among you, so that you lack no spiritual gift while you eagerly await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.' The formal points of contact are obvious, but far more so is the contrast. Paul has expanded the current epistolary formulæ on Christian lines. But the process has transformed the Letter into an inherently different type of document. It is not merely an ordinary 'letter,' with Christian life and experience as its chief subject. It is something more. And the clue to its real

³ See Milligan, *Greek Papyri*, p. 9.

nature lies in what may be called its sign-manual. For all the letters of Paul begin with his claim to apostleship.¹ It is as an apostle and because he is an apostle that he writes. That standpoint imparts to his communication the note of authority, which he intends to be overheard throughout. It is the divinely commissioned ambassador of Christ who addresses the Christian community.

Perhaps it is irrelevant to discuss the question whether Paul expected his letters to be circulated over a wide area. Nor can we surmise to what extent he meant them to be regulative beyond their immediate destination. Certainly his instruction to the Colossian Church to exchange letters with Laodicea points in that direction. In any case, wherever they penetrate, they cannot be regarded as casual correspondence. Rather do they come, clothed with power, the power of the Spirit bestowed on their author for his apostolic vocation. So that, after all, the traditional view, which erred on the side of dogmatic fixity and the notion of a doctrinal standard, probably lies as close to Paul's outlook as that which is now in favour, of purely personal communications, not to be taken too objectively, and claiming no permanent validity. At all events, the truth must be looked for between the two extremes.

A firm grasp of the facts seems to render nugatory discussions of the scope of the Pauline 'we,' as, e.g., in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. In these Epistles as it is, the 'we' passes over constantly into 'I' (1 Th 2¹⁸ 3¹. 5²⁷, 2 Th 2¹. 5 3¹⁷). But, apart from that, the right to counsel, warn, and command, claimed by the 'we,' is not something vague. It belongs to the apostolic vantage-ground. Hence it may be assumed that in all his letters, whether 'we' or 'I' be used, it is the authoritative voice of the Apostle that is heard.

With a view to our further discussion, let us recollect how *Paul magnifies his office*. In Ro 11¹³ we have an unambiguous statement: 'To you Gentiles I say this: in virtue of my personal apostleship to the Gentiles, I magnify my office, with the hope of rousing my own race and saving some of them.' Similarly, in rebutting the pretensions of Judaizing opponents at Corinth, he

¹ Those to the Thessalonians and Philippians are not exceptions, although the term *ἀπόστολος* is not used in the address, for throughout the apostolic note sounds clearly (e.g. 1 Th 2¹. 6. 13 4¹. 2 5²⁷, 2 Th 2¹⁴. 15 3^{off.}, Ph 1⁷. 20. 24 2¹². 16 3¹⁷).

exclaims: 'If any one is sure that he belongs to Christ, let him on second thoughts carefully reflect that I belong to Christ just as he does. For if I glory rather to excess over that authority of mine which the Lord gave me to build you up and not to pull you down, I shall not feel ashamed of it' (2 Co 10⁷. 8). The full significance of his position comes out in a further warning to the Corinthian Church: 'If I come back, I shall not spare you. That will prove to you that I am a spokesman of Christ. It is no weak Christ you have to do with, but a Christ of power. He was crucified indeed in weakness, but he lives by the power of God. Therefore, although I am weak as he was, you will find that I am alive as he is, by the power of God' (2 Co 13². 4: chiefly Moffatt's trans.). Finally, when he enumerates the various functions which belong to the Body of Christ, he declares without qualification: 'Different people God appointed in the church, in the first rank apostles' (1 Co 12²⁸). And among these, without hesitation, he takes his place: 'Am not I free? Am not I an apostle? Have not I seen Jesus our Lord?' (1 Co 9¹).

The concluding sentence of our last quotation reminds us of the definite experience which lies behind his high claim. But before we touch upon its significance, it ought to be noted that Paul uses the term 'apostle' in a very restricted sense. So far as I am able to estimate the fragmentary evidence, it seems to suggest that he applied the designation (1) to the Twelve (Gal 1¹⁷, 1 Co 9⁵, 1 Co 15⁵⁻⁷); (2) to the brothers of Jesus, notably to James (Gal 1¹⁹ 2⁹, 1 Co 9⁵); (3) to his esteemed fellow-worker, Barnabas (1 Co 9⁶; cf. Gal 2⁹). Some scholars suppose that in 1 Th 2⁶, where he refers to the authority 'which we might have claimed as apostles of Christ,' he includes his companions Silvanus and Timotheus. But, curiously enough, he does not use the title 'apostle' in the address where he mentions Silvanus and Timotheus. Moreover, it has been already pointed out that in 1 Th 'we' really stands for 'I.' That is corroborated by the fact that in 1 Co 1¹ and Col 1¹ he clearly distinguishes between himself as 'an apostle of Jesus Christ' and 'Timotheus, our brother.' There is an ambiguous passage, Ro 16⁷, in which some have found a more elastic use of 'apostle.' In it he salutes 'Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and fellow-captives, men of note among the apostles (*ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις*), who were Christians before me.' Does the

description mean that these men were notable apostles themselves, or persons well known to and highly esteemed by the apostles? The latter interpretation is favoured by the reference to their early conversion. Gifford (*Speaker's Comm.*, ad loc.) adduces valuable evidence to show that it accords far better with the common usage of *ἐπίσημος*, and it is certainly much more congruous with Paul's general standpoint.

It is needless to dwell on the supreme crisis in Paul's life, to which he invariably traces back his apostleship. Only one or two points call for emphasis. The opening sentence of Romans is characteristic of his own attitude: 'Paul . . . called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.' The description is interpreted by Gal 1. There he spares no pains to show that his gospel was a direct commission from the living Lord (1¹²): that the very purpose of this extraordinary revelation was his apostolic vocation to the heathen world (1¹⁰): that that vocation was entirely independent of human advice or assistance (1^{11, 17}): that a Divine plan lay behind it (1¹⁵). Paul's reference to the Divine plan is evidently associated with Jeremiah's account of his prophetic 'call' (Jer 1^{1ff.}). And, allowing for the different stage of development in the history of God's self-manifestation to men, the actual experience is no doubt of the same type, and equally inexplicable on the lines of a merely pathological analysis. As regards one remarkable feature, we have a glimpse of its psychological effect, in the case both of the prophet and of the apostle. Jeremiah exclaims: 'O Lord, thou hast enticed me, and I was enticed: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed. . . . For as often as I speak, I cry out . . . And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain' (Jer 20⁷⁻⁹). Paul's self-revelation presents an exact parallel: 'If I preach the gospel, it is not a matter to boast of, for constraint is laid upon me. Yes, woe to me, if I refuse to preach the gospel: for if I do it of my own accord, I get a reward. But to do it against my inclination means that a sacred service has been put into my hands' (1 Co 9^{16, 17}). In both cases, an irresistible pressure of the Divine will lies at the heart of the special vocation.

Hence Paul is not his own master in this matter of his apostolate. 'Not that I am personally

qualified to form any judgment by myself: my qualifications come from God, and he has further qualified me to be the minister of a new covenant' (2 Co 3^{5, 6}, Moffatt). The position inspires him with unwavering confidence: 'I am not as the many who trade with the message of God, but with all purity of motive as commissioned by God I speak in his presence in Christ' (2 Co 2¹⁷). In view of these facts, the common Old Testament designation of a prophet as a 'man of God' may be accurately applied to Paul. Only, as Wernle suggestively notes, an apostle who is fundamentally a prophet, 'an apostolate based on revelation,' is 'a great leap in history.'¹

These considerations furnish the background for many of the most extraordinary paragraphs in the Epistles. Let us first examine some of those which assert the Apostle's *personal rectitude*. In 2 Co 6^{3ff.} (Moffatt), he declares: 'I put no obstacle in the path of any, so that my ministry may not be discredited; I prove myself at all points a true minister of God, by great endurance, by suffering, by troubles, by calamities, by lashes, by imprisonment; mobbed, toiling, sleepless, starving; with innocence, insight, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, unaffected love, true words, the power of God.' These are amazing claims, put forward with all calmness and earnestness. No doubt, in trying to estimate them, we must take into account the calumnies to which Paul was being exposed at Corinth, and the necessity of a bold self-defence. But the context in which they occur establishes beyond doubt that it is in view of his divinely-given vocation and commission that he dares to speak with such confidence. 'God entrusted me,' he says, a few sentences earlier, 'with the message of his reconciliation. So I am an envoy for Christ, God appealing by me' (5^{19, 20} M.). And then he introduces our passage with the words: 'I appeal to you too, as a worker with God, do not receive the grace of God in vain' (6¹ M.). He is conscious of no arrogance or presumption in his assertions. He has had no credit in entering upon his high calling. 'I am the very least of the apostles, unfit to bear the name of apostle, since I persecuted the church of God. But by God's grace I am what I am. The grace he showed me did not go for nothing: no, I have done far more work than all of them—though it was not I but God's grace at my side' (1 Co 15^{9, 10} M.). To be chosen and

¹ *Anfänge*, p. 100.

equipped by God to be the medium of His redeeming Gospel is no small dignity. The man who is so honoured has a right to expect that the Providence which has thus singled him out will preserve him unscathed for his arduous enterprise. Here it is obvious that Paul's personal conception of election, as contrasted with that of the election of Israel, inherited as a traditional doctrine, is bound up with his apostolic consciousness. If he has been set apart for so high a function, he has virtually the pledge that God will be with him to the end. For all this inspiring and unlooked-for experience is God's doing. Thus he can call himself a 'worker along with God.'

From the same standpoint we must approach his remarkable appeal to his own behaviour during the mission at Thessalonica. 'You recollect,' he says, 'our hard labour and toil, how we worked at our trade night and day, when we preached the gospel to you, so as not to be a burden to any of you. You are our witnesses, and so is God, to our behaviour among you believers, how pious and upright and blameless it was, how we treated each of you as a father his children' (1 Th 2^{9ff.} M.). Here again the context reveals the spirit in which these words are spoken. For the paragraph opens with the assertion: 'The appeal we make does not spring from any delusion or from impure motives—it does not work by cunning; no, God has attested our fitness to be entrusted with the gospel, and so we tell the gospel not to satisfy men but to satisfy the God who tests our hearts' (2³⁻⁴ M.). The direction of his thought shows plainly enough that he has not wrapped himself up in a robe of self-complacency. It is to God he stands or falls, and it is because God has been pleased to use him as an instrument that he is able to remain loyal and fulfil his task worthily.

Scarcely to be distinguished from the attitude we have been reviewing are the claims he continually makes to *spiritual insight and power*. The origin and significance of his spiritual insight are distinctly set forth in 1 Co 2. His treatment of the question in that chapter is prompted by the contempt felt by a section of the Church at Corinth for his manner and method of preaching. They contrasted the simplicity of his utterance and his direct appeal to the crucified Redeemer with the rhetorical skill and philosophical arguments of his brother-missionary, Apollos. 'True,' says the Apostle, 'I did not come to proclaim to you the

testimony of God with any elaborate words or wisdom. But I am ready to probe the depths of spiritual thought with those who are mature. That requires the gift of the Spirit. Now we have received the Spirit—not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit that comes from God, that we might understand the gracious revelation of God to us. The "spiritual" (πνευματικός) man can fathom everything, although no one can fathom him. Well, we possess the mind of Christ' (2^{1. 6. 11b. 12. 15. 16b}). With this conviction of spiritual grasp, Paul feels entitled to pronounce judgment on intricate questions of conduct: e.g., 'I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that there is nothing in itself unclean' (Ro 14¹⁴). And he can trust to the insight of any 'spiritual' man to corroborate his judgment: 'If any one presumes to be a prophet or spiritual man let him clearly recognize that what I write to you is the commandment of the Lord' (1 Co 14³⁷). Much has been written on the tremendous prerogatives assigned by Paul to the 'spiritual man,'¹ and the perils involved in such a conception. I cannot help thinking that here, just as in his treatment of life under the Law, he generalizes from his own incomparable experience. The 'we' of 1 Co 2 really means 'I.' And the 'spiritual man' is an ideal he has conceived under the influence of his own apostolic vocation. We know the extraordinary self-consciousness which was created by that vocation and all that he felt it to involve. The gift of the Spirit of God was its sustaining power. And that gift had wrought wonders in Paul's spiritual life. But the Spirit was possible for all believers. Is it surprising that he should associate with its possession heights of attainment which really depended on a unique faith and a unique realization of the Divine working in the individual?

But spiritual understanding has as its correlative *spiritual power*. And when Paul appeals to the actual results of his ministry, its apostolic basis stands invariably in the foreground. To begin with, as Christ's chosen ambassador, set apart by God, he is entitled to expect great things: e.g., Ro 15²⁰: 'I know that when I come to you I shall come with the fulness of the blessing of Christ.' His expectations have not been disappointed. The testimony of witnesses is available: 'My utterance and my preaching did not

¹ See, e.g., Reitzenstein, *Die hellenist. Mysterienreligionen*, pp. 164 ff.

depend on specious arguments of wisdom: they were authenticated by the Spirit and its power' (1 Co 2⁴); 'You had all the miracles that mark an apostle done for you fully and patiently—miracles, wonders, and deeds of power' (2 Co 12¹² M.). We may notice, in passing, the place given to his apostolic consciousness. Such testimony he can use to prepare the way for a mission in hitherto unvisited fields: 'I have some reason to boast in Christ Jesus of my work for God: for I should not venture to speak of these things, unless Christ had accomplished them through me in order to win the obedience of the heathen, by word and deed, by the power of doing signs and marvels, by the power of the Holy Spirit: so that from Jerusalem right round to Illyricum I have fully set forth the gospel of Christ' (Ro 15¹⁷). Here we get a glimpse into the very texture of his missionary experience. He is but the tool in the hands of the great Master-workman, Christ. It is because Christ has endowed him for his special task that his labours have borne such abundant fruit.

It is from the point of view of a plenipotentiary of Christ that he affirms *his right to the service and obedience of men*, and emphasizes the value of such service for those who have rendered it. If we ignore this governing attitude of his in reading over, e.g., the long list of greetings in Ro 16, we fall into the error of ascribing to the Apostle a certain measure of egotism. For the honourable mention given to these Christian men and women seems to depend on the extent of their co-operation in Paul's missionary labours. But when we recognize how completely he identifies himself with his work, and both with Christ, whose bondsman he is, our angle of vision is at once altered, and we come to realize that the honour of Christ is the paramount consideration for His servant. 'We are subordinates of Christ'—that is his watchword—but at the same time 'stewards of the mysteries of God' (1 Co 4¹). Hence he can reckon service done to himself as a sacrifice offered to his Lord. 'Value men like that,' he writes to the Philippians regarding their delegate, Epaphroditus, 'for he nearly died in the service of Christ by risking his life to make up for the services you were not here to render me' (Phil 2³⁰ M.). In the same letter he describes their generosity to himself, in semi-humorous phraseology, as 'interest that accumulates in this way to your divine credit' (4¹⁷ M.). And it is not egotism but concern for the cause of

Christ which prompts his utterance in 1 Co 11²: 'I praise you because in all things you remember me and keep the traditions which I handed on to you.'

The closing words of this quotation remind us of his definite claim, as one armed with spiritual authority, to *their unhesitating obedience*. Sometimes this is expressed in terms of extraordinary solemnity: 'For I, although absent in person, have been present in spirit, and, as present, I have already pronounced judgment on the evil-doer in the name of the Lord Jesus: when you met in council my spirit was there, armed with the might of our Lord Jesus; and my sentence is that such an offender be delivered over to Satan to have his flesh destroyed, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord' (1 Co 5⁸). Sometimes it is simply stated as a point about which there can be no discussion: 'If any one refuses to obey my orders in this letter, mark that man, stop associating with him: that will make him ashamed' (2 Th 3¹⁴). But Paul's Letters reveal anything rather than the desire to tyrannize over his converts in things spiritual. Far more frequently he uses the appeal of devoted affection (e.g. Gal 4^{12ff.} 19^{ff.}, 1 Co 1^{10ff.} 4^{14ff.}, 2 Co 5^{11ff.} 10^{1f.} 11^{1f.}, Phil 2^{1ff.}, Col 3^{12ff.} et al.). Only in crises of peculiar peril, and in moments when the tremendous issues at stake almost overwhelm him, does he exercise that authority which he feels to be his last resort. How he shrinks from such a course is made plain in the following sentence, written to a Church some of whose members had been shamefully disloyal: 'I am writing thus to you in absence, so that when I do come, I may not have to deal sharply with you: I have the Lord's authority for that, but he gave it to me for building you up, not for demolishing you' (2 Co 13¹⁰ M.). Yet who can deny that, in the environment in which Paul had to discharge his office, with its amazing ferment of competing religions, and its multitudes of restless minds and restless hearts ready to clutch at any *nostrum* which professed to bring them into touch with the Divine, it was of inestimable value that the great pioneer of Christianity should take an unwavering stand on a foundation of which his personal experience of Christ had made him sure. Amid the noisy cries of conflicting opinions and the shallow solutions of deep problems of the soul, it counted for much that there was one man who could say: 'For me it is a very small matter to be criticised by you or by any human judgment.'

Yet he adds: 'While I am not conscious of blame, that gives me no food for self-justification: my critic is the Lord' (1 Co 4³).

We need not therefore be surprised to find that the Apostle makes his own Christian life a criterion for that of his converts. In his recent work, *Paulus im Lichte der heutigen Heiden-Mission*, pp. 210-212, J. Warneck instructively observes that the convert newly won from heathenism requires a pattern to imitate in his daily life. The example of Jesus Christ towers high above him. He needs something nearer his own level, and he instinctively turns to the missionary who has been his spiritual father. Probably this parallel from the modern mission-field sheds real light on the attitude of Paul, and due weight must be assigned to it. It seems to fall into line with the Apostle's arresting words in 1 Co 4^{14ff}: 'Not by way of custom do I write this, but to admonish you as my dear children. For though you may have thousands of instructors in your Christian life, you have not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I begat you through the gospel. I entreat you, therefore, become imitators of me.' But, after all, the crucial expression here is 'in Christ Jesus.' That is the platform from which he speaks. Indeed, his complete standpoint is disclosed in 1 Co 11¹: 'Become imitators of me as I in turn am of Christ.' The conviction that he represents Christ to them in virtue of his definite vocation is presupposed in all his exhortations to copy him as their pattern (e.g. Ph 3¹⁷ 4⁹).

I have tried to bring out by means of illustrations from the Epistles the paramount influence of Paul's consciousness of his apostleship as a direct com-

mission from Christ and an authoritative representation of Him. Perhaps these find their climax in the amazing utterance of Col 1²⁴: 'I am suffering now on your behalf, but I rejoice in that; nay, I would make up in my own person the full sum of what Christ has to suffer on behalf of the church, his body.' But we must never lose sight of Paul's invariable emphasis on the subordination of his own position. That is revealed with special clearness when he makes a sharp distinction between injunctions of Jesus handed down in the Christian community and personal recommendations of his own. Thus, in 1 Co 7²⁵, in reply to a question regarding virgins, he says: 'I have no commandment of the Lord to give you, but I offer my own opinion, as one whom, through the mercy of the Lord, you may trust.' Similarly, in v.¹⁰, he states the ordinance of Jesus concerning divorce; but in the case of mixed marriages, which had never been brought before Jesus, he gives his personal advice (v.¹²), emphasizing the fact that it does not possess the authority of the Master. Thus the man who is so confident of his own apprehension of Christ that he can pronounce an anathema on any one who dares to preach a different type of gospel (Gal 1²), confesses himself as proud to boast of his weakness, for it is in the hour of supreme helplessness that he is able fully to realize the sufficiency of the exalted Christ (2 Co 12⁹). And the solemn protest against further vexation with which he closes his letter to the Galatians is not based on his own unique position and gifts. His most sacred privilege is that he bears on his body 'the brand of Jesus' ownership' (Gal 6¹⁷).

A Quotation from Judith in the Pauline Epistles.

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SOME time since, when the controversy over the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews had been re-opened by a daring hypothesis of Professor Harnack, who maintained that the Epistle was due to the joint literary effort of Aquila and Priscilla (with Priscilla as the predominant partner), it fell to my lot to reply to an objection which had been made in some quarters, to the effect that the hypothesis of an even partial feminine authorship

was negated by the absence of the names of certain famous women from the roll of the Heroes of Faith in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle. How was it possible that Priscilla could have inserted Barak and omitted Deborah, or that the author or authoress of a document which has so many military reminiscences and glorifies so many warrior saints, could have omitted the name of Judith? I was able to show that it was a mistake