

THE SAVING TRUTH AS IT IS IN JESUS

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The historical view of the Old Testament has vastly increased its value as a book of witness to the nature and end of religion and revelation. So long as it lay at the mercy of dogma, forbidden to speak its own tongue, it could but give back to the interpreter what he had first instructed it to say. But once seen historically, as we are beginning to see it, it becomes the book of mediation between the Savior and the universal religious need and consciousness of our race. It clears the road through history to Christ and prepares us to think with him, a more difficult work than thinking about him. Jesus was a man of one book. Nothing but the historical study of the Old Testament can inform us regarding the mould in which he cast his thought.

We have seen that the question, What is Revelation? is the hinge on which everything turns. Revelation is the vital breath of religion. And it is religion alone that can assure us regarding our kith and kin in the universe, free us from our most searching and disintegrating fears, and secure our hold on life. But without revelation, the unseen reality and power lie passive, waiting for human action and purpose. In that case religion at its best becomes identical with philosophy. The very name philosophy tells the story. It is the love of wisdom, the ennobling search for truth. But if we are to enter into enduring life, something more than the search for truth is necessary. The infinite reality that embraces truth must be known as friendly and active. We must be enabled to say with the Book of Wisdom (1:6), the creative force and mind is a truth that loveth man. St. Paul puts it even more clearly when he describes the people who have been redeemed as "having come to know God or rather to be known of God" (Gal. 4:9). Revelation is religion's last word.

We have seen that revelation is not confined to the Scriptures. It is a universal process. All forms of final and satisfying experience

have a share in it. Whenever we touch to the quick a reality large enough to include both our knowledge and our ignorance, there is revelation. In every growth of science revelation comes to meet reason. Electricity discloses itself within light. Within electricity radium blooms forth. The mind of the reverent student is besieged and invaded by immeasurable reality. Again, in every deep experience of the beautiful, there is revelation. When we come into the presence of a supremely beautiful object like the Yellowstone Cañon, we may for a moment, if we are fresh from college, air our information regarding the modern theory of knowledge, the contribution our own mind and eye make to the beautiful. But only for a moment. Then we are caught up out of ourselves into the wonder and majesty of the universe.

Revelation is not a book. It cannot be a book. No book, however divine, can exhaust revelation. The office and function of a book or literature supremely divine is to attest the quality and the method of revelation, to bear trustworthy and convincing witness to the logic of the real life.

We have seen what the content of revelation in its higher forms must be. It is the holy personality, the creative unity of God. Revelation redeems reason. The redeemed mind is placed as Moses was, in a cleft of the rock (Exod. 33:22). Our ignorance of God is inseparable from our knowledge of him. We moderns have become familiar with agnosticism. Both the name and the thing have been created by the doctrine of infallibility. But the doctrine of infallibility is no part of the scriptural conception of revelation. It has been imposed upon it, does not grow out of it. In the scriptural conception, our immense ignorance of God is part and parcel of our saving knowledge concerning him. Systematic infallibleism necessarily creates dogmatic agnosticism. But wherever the living God discloses himself in the midst of mankind's deepest activities, there is reverent agnosticism found inside the joyous certainty of revelation.

The Old Testament has also taught us where to look for the mould that divine revelation makes use of. Our decisive question stands, What is the divine reality? Where shall we find it? and when we have found it, how shall we know that we know it? The answer of the Old Testament runs thus: The saving unity of God is revealed

within the law and hope of the Chosen Nation. The creative unity of God discloses itself as the ground and root of that faith in the moral order which is hidden within the nation's life and shines out through the crises of its experience.

The unit of thought and feeling for the men of the Old Testament is not the individual soul in the modern sense. That soul has a history. The elements that have gone into the history are the separation of the Christian church from the heathen state, the triumph of monasticism in the church, the growth of the doctrine of biblical and ecclesiastical infallibility, and the evolution of Protestant individualism. But we are not to forget that the Old Testament in its growth knows nothing whatever about infallibility and the entire body of ideas that travels in its train. The center of the Old Testament is the holiness and the creative unity of God viewed as the content of revelation; and the messianic ideal, that is to say, the hope and integrity of the chosen nation, is the mould wherein the content is cast.

All this is summed up by saying that the divine revelation unifies religion and ethics. The task of unifying those two forces, bringing them together and keeping them together, is the supreme task for those who walk in the ways of the Spirit. The history of religion shows that it is extremely easy to break connection between them. From two directions come the forces that separate them. On the external side we find ritual conformity substituted for moral values. Wallace, in his book on Russia, illustrates this point by the story of a pious Russian churchman who murdered a poor country butcher. There was never a twinge of conscience over the murder. But having eaten some of the butcher's meat and bethinking himself, all too late, that a law of the church forbade meat-eating on that day, he was filled with horror. On the internal side, the whole history of religious mysticism is in evidence. The soul within us, wearied by things temporal, hears that "music in the heart" whereof *Pilgrim's Progress* speaks, and the music "leaves us homesick till we follow it to heaven." We become absentees from the large moral issues of history.

The separation of religion and morality—that is the bane of religion. An entry in Gladstone's diary runs—"There is one proposition that the experience of life burns into my soul: it is this, that a man should beware of letting his religion spoil his morality." Every

religious controversy, every theological debate burns that self-same proposition into the souls of those who, with some measure of self-knowledge, take part in the strife. Courtesy, equity, mental rectitude—how easily are they pushed to the wall.

Now the glory of Hebrew prophetism is that it makes the being and will of God inseparable from the law of the nation. Religion and morality—morality taken in the largest personal and corporate sense—are unified. Be it remembered, as we read the following passages, that it takes our two words “righteousness” and “justice” to translate the one prophetic term for “righteousness.”

Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? (Isa. 58:5, 6).

O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord. Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of lambs, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6:5-8).

The life of the nation is not to be separated from the life of the saint.

Our Lord was not only a man of one book. In the deepest sense he was a man of one idea. The messianic ideal, the hope of his nation, was the staple of all his thinking and the mould of all his thought. The greatness of the patrimony which he inherited is clearly seen when we compare him with Gautama, the founder of Buddhism. They are profoundly alike in that the reality of the inner life is all in all to them both, and in that both of them make gentleness the revelation of strength. But the difference between them is equally profound. Gautama had no national hope, no messianic ideal, to inherit. With him the reality of the mystic annihilated the reality of history. But Jesus, thanks to the messianic ideal, founded a religion which has a tremendous grip on history.

The immensity of our Lord's achievement in adding to his patrimony is clearly seen when we compare him with Mohammed, the founder of the other "world religion." Mohammed founded a military monotheism. He glorified the sword, making it a missionary instrument of the Divine unity. But Jesus, while making the messianic ideal the staple of his thinking, carried it out of politics. By the sheer power of character he broke its entangling alliance with force. "Render unto Cæsar the things that be Cæsar's and unto God the things that be God's." "Put up thy sword into its sheath," was his word to Peter. "My kingdom is not of this world," was his word to Pilate.

Jesus, by the power of sinless goodness, put the messianic ideal beyond the reach of the fighting zealot, the Pharisaic apocalypticist and the Essenic monk. By his life, wherein the full power of the divine and the irresistible appeal of the human were perfectly blended, he made the "Kingdom of God," God's right of way in history, a human reality. We may apply to him Cicero's well-known words about Socrates: "He caused philosophy to descend out of heaven upon the earth and to enter the cities and homes of men." Even so, Jesus brought the supreme ideal out of the clouds. With conscious authority he could say (Luke 17:21): "The Kingdom of God is in your midst."

He did this by translating the supreme ideal into terms of elemental human fellowship. Samaritans, religious outcasts beyond the pale of Judaism; the social outcasts of Israel, the publican and the sinner—all came within the pale of his sympathy and service. Fellowship, fellowship rooted as deep as the Fatherhood of God—this was his answer to the final question, What means the Kingdom of God? Emerson said, Hitch your wagon to a star. A much harder task is to persuade the star to hitch itself to the wagon. But Jesus brought the divine into intimate and indissoluble relationship with the human.

Prophetic monotheism, as we have seen, is the highest form of mental and moral concentration. Jesus consummates monotheism. The Kingdom of God is realized in fellowship. The divine becomes inseparable from the human.

Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20).

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me (Matt. 25:31-45).

In the deep of fellowship and nowhere else may God be known as he is. Man's need of God and his need of his fellow-man are fused into a single glorifying want. The law of the higher life is laid down in the Beatitudes—"Blessed are the poor [the folk who are deeply conscious of the supreme human need, the need of perfect fellowship] for to them belongs the Kingdom of God." Clear self-knowledge is attainable only through devotion to this sovereign ideal. The noble saying of the Book of Proverbs, "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all his innermost parts," is carried on into the saying (Luke 21:19) "In steadfast loyalty to the Kingdom of God ye shall possess yourselves." The knowledge of God and the knowledge of man are one knowledge. Revelation and fellowship are inseparable.

It is in the interest of impassioned morality, the morality of perfect fellowship, that our Lord criticizes the Old Testament. The Jewish church had canonized the books constituting the Old Testament and thereby laid the solid foundations of the Christian's Bible. When

the Old Testament canon had been substantially completed, the Jewish church proceeded to anticipate, to a considerable degree, the later ecclesiastical doctrine of scriptural infallibility. It is true that the Jewish doctrine was not clear or systematic. Yet its tendency was certain. The Holy Scriptures or, to be more exact, the core of Scripture constituted by the Books of Moses, was set up as a final revelation of the will of God. Whenever the text of this law or Torah came into conflict with later feeling or ideals, the Jewish Bible-scholars or exegetes got over the difficulty by means of exegetical devices similar to those long established in the Christian church. Even if they had to go as far as undoing the historical character and method of the divine revelation, they clung to the conception that the Torah was a final and complete and infallible book.

In our opening study we noted the company in which the prophetic idea of revelation travels. The mind and teaching of the Savior puts the logic of prophetism in the light of broad day. There is but one law for the higher life. It is the divine unity imparting coherence, spiritual value, and moralizing power to human consciousness. There is but one force that can save man, lift him to his true stature. It is the grace and power of the living God, making himself at home in the daily affairs of men, in business and in politics. There is but one task worthy of the life-long devotion of those who are being made in the divine image; it is the expression of the divine unity in terms of human unity and fellowship. Every person who is redeemed must needs be a prophet, because nothing but the full power and presence of the living God can make him competent for his task.

It is in the interest of this prophetic passion for morality informed by religion that the Savior criticizes the Jewish Torah. He does not imitate the ecclesiastical interpreter who, in the service of the idea of scriptural infallibility, by exegetical devices, steals a march on the plain meaning of the text. With complete authority (Matt. 7:28) he makes a direct attack on the moral finality of the Torah. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21-48), he turns the light of the Kingdom of God, the ideal of perfect fellowship, on the infallible Bible of the Jewish church and finds it wanting.

But Jewish ecclesiasticism did what ecclesiasticism in all ages is prone to do. Orthodoxy or right thinking about the mystery of the

divine life within humanity is one of the world's ennobling and necessary ideals. Orthodoxy, however, is not an end. It is a means to an end. The end is splendid morality. Now morality cannot be splendid and compelling unless it have a soul of magnificence in it. Moral magnificence is born when the redeemed man joins together, in an inseparable whole, the corporate ideal of the Kingdom of God and the personal ideal of saintliness. Our Lord made morality once for all magnificent by realizing monotheism, by revealing the divine unity in terms of human fellowship. But Jewish orthodoxy tended to make monotheism a credal rather than a creative and vitalizing truth, turning the means into an end. Jesus, therefore, was criticizing the ecclesiasticism of all ages when he said (Matt. 23:23): "Ye tithe mint and anise and cummin and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, judgment and mercy and faith."

Therefore, just as we noted the train of truths with which prophetic monotheism travels, so must we note carefully the train wherewith the doctrine of infallibility travels. Prophetism has ceased. Into its place has come an infallible book. To interpret it and apply it to life there has arisen a great corporation of teachers whose traditions are regarded as an indispensable mediator between the divine book and the minds of the laity. When living prophetism comes to life again in John the Baptist and the Savior, Jewish ecclesiasticism does what ecclesiasticism is always prone to do. It builds the sepulchers of the prophets (Matt. 23:29). The live prophet!—him it despises or condemns to death. And why not? The dead prophet is a store of credit for the ecclesiastic to capitalize. But the living prophet turns the fierce light of moral passion upon the ecclesiastic's grand air of finality. The infallible churchman cannot keep house with him.

When once we go to the root of the doctrine of infallibility in all its forms, we see that it is necessarily accompanied by moral skepticism. By this we do not mean skepticism regarding the moral perfection of the individual. On the contrary, the doctrine of infallibility is, in the fullest sense, friendly to that passion for personal perfection which constitutes the saint. But on the high ground of prophetism there is no such thing as personal apart from social and corporate morality. Now our Lord completes the logic of prophetism when

he says, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness and justice, for God shall feed them full." The beatific vision, as he reveals it, is not the beatific vision of the monk and the mystic, but "Blessed are they on whom single-minded devotion to the ideal of fellowship has bestowed purity of heart, for they shall see God." The doctrine of infallibility is irreconcilable with prophetism as the Hebrew prophets disclosed its laws and aims, and as Jesus embodied and fulfilled it. Invariably, to apply Gladstone's thought, it makes religion unhelpful if not injurious to a magnificent morality. And too often it covers up moral bankruptcy with religious enrichment.

We have defined religion as the consciousness of divine backing whereby man, assured of his kinship to the unseen powers, secures his footing and finds heart's ease. We have defined prophetic religion as that form of spiritual confidence which expresses itself in certitude concerning the moral quality and end of the nation's history. How, then, in order to complete our body of working definitions, shall we define Christianity? The essence of our religion may be expressed in the following propositions: (1) We cannot truly know the true God except in the deep of human fellowship. (2) We cannot sound the depths of fellowship unless God reveals himself to us. (3) The divine self-revelation, in process wheresoever men labor to high ends, is summed up and clarified in the Savior, Jesus Christ. (4) The supreme, the saving assent from which all the moral decisions of life take form and color, is the act of assent called faith—a sovereign belief in the Kingdom of God. (5) Through the power of the divine and human life in Christ, we believe mightily in the ideal and obligation of perfect fellowship. God helping us, we can believe in nothing else.

In the light of these definitions and propositions the Christian conception of saving truth must shape itself. Saving truth is manifold in form and degree. When, after a severe and long-continued stress, with nerves on edge and our working will severely strained, we find refuge and quietude in some lovely countryside, Nature saves us by taking us out of ourselves. Nature's unanxious beauty delivers us from our nerves and makes us whole. To a great nation, in a death-grapple with forces that threaten its being, a decisive victory brings home the saving truth of national integrity and dignity. Washington

at Valley Forge infused his own being and steadfastness into the American army and saved the revolutionary cause. Salvation is as varied as the fundamental needs of human nature.

But our ultimate need, our "glorifying want," is perfect fellowship with one another. Such fellowship is impossible apart from the clear knowledge of God. We are saved when the knowledge of the divine unity is revealed and published in our hearts with compelling appeal. We touch a power that infinitely transcends us, yet is irresistibly intimate with us. Our being is inspired and informed by the illimitable being of God. "All things are ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (I Cor. 3:23). We are made certain and secure of our spiritual and moral perfection. This certitude, however, does not come to us in spiritual isolation. Cicero, speaking for the state and its law, said, One man is no man. That proposition is even more true on the highest level of religion. One man is no man. The single soul cannot be saved as a single soul. It is only when, through the power and grace of the God and Father of Jesus Christ, we devote and dedicate ourselves to the Savior's proposition, The Kingdom of God is at hand, that we can be truly saved.

Christ and the prophets together give us the principles we must apply to the problem of authority. Authority is the expression of certitude. For example, the authority of the public schools imposes the fire-drill on our children, because of the public conviction that it is necessary to their safety. Every traditional plan of scriptural and ecclesiastical authority must be subjected to this test. Is it necessary to human fellowship? Does it bring the Kingdom of God down out of the clouds? Does it make human unity a perfect and complete obligation? If it does not, we will cashier it.