

The Jesus-Paul Controversy.¹

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THREE years ago there appeared a little book on Paul, by the late Professor Wrede, giving, in the compass of some hundred pages, a masterly characterization of the personality, activity, religion, and historical significance of the great Apostle. The book, which has just been translated into English, is brilliantly written and full of suggestion even for those who are far from agreeing with the author's standpoint; but what gave it its immediate fame was less, perhaps, its intrinsic merits than the extreme position it took up. According to Wrede, Paul has no claim to be considered a disciple of Jesus. His gospel is not the gospel of Jesus, but another and different gospel. When he speaks of Christ, the figure before his mind is not that of the historical Jesus; the heavenly Christ, whom alone he knows, has little or nothing in common with the man of Galilee. Wrede goes so far as to assert that Paul stands further from Jesus than Jesus Himself from the noblest representatives of Jewish piety.

Such a position is not in all respects new. Even in Paul's own day there was talk of 'another gospel.' For modern scholarship the contrast between the preaching of the Master and that of His great Apostle has long been a commonplace. Bauer, Holsten, Weizsäcker, Pfeleiderer, Weinel, Wernle, all make Paul to a very large extent independent of Jesus, and regard him as the second founder of Christianity. At the same time they do not deny that he was dominated by Jesus' influence, and that of all the apostles he was the one who understood Him best. Where Wrede goes beyond these writers is in completely separating Master and Apostle, and in sharpening

the difference between them into sheer opposition.

Wrede's book raises issues of the gravest character. The question of the relation of Paul to Jesus, even from a merely historical point of view, is second to none in interest and importance. But the scientific interest is overshadowed by the practical. Down the whole history of the Church, the ideas of Paul have been regarded as embodying the very essence of the Christian religion. It has been round points in his theology that all the great doctrinal controversies have raged. Wrede brings us face to face with the question, whether our formulated Christianity has any title to claim Christ for its founder. The cry 'Back to Christ,' which has been heard for a generation, is heard afresh in his book, and in more peremptory tones. And this involves the further question as to the nature of the Christian religion. Is our Christian religion based on a speculative construction or interpretation of Christ's Person and work? or is it the religion which Christ taught in His words and embodied in His life? Speculative theology is summoned to prove its right to a central place in our Christian faith.

It was inevitable that conclusions so revolutionary and subversive as those of Wrede should call out wide and emphatic protest. Kaftan was first in the field. He was followed by Kölbing, Weinel, Meyer, and Jülicher. Here it must be said that all these, with the exception of Kaftan, belong to a school of theology that is emphatically liberal; and even Kaftan would hardly be considered a conservative amongst us. In their criticism of Wrede they make concessions that to many will seem to amount to a surrender of the fort. The champions of traditional views will have their own answer; only, so far as this controversy has gone, they have not been much in evidence.

None of Wrede's critics, not even Kaftan, deny that between the teaching of Jesus and that of His Apostle there are real and important differences. It lies on the surface that the second is not a mere republication of the first. From these differences I select the most important.

¹ 1. 'Paulus.' Professor D. W. Wrede, Breslau. *Religionsgeschichtliche Volksbücher*.

2. *Die Entstehung der Paulinischen Christologie*. Dr. Martin Brückner.

3. *Jesus und Paulus*. D. J. Kaftan.

4. *Die geistige Einwirkung der Person Jesu auf Paulus*. D. Paul Kölbing.

5. *Die Grundgedanken der paulinischen Theologie*. Dr. Carl Clemens.

6. *Paulus und Jesus*. D. Adolf Jülicher.

7. *Wer hat das Christentum begründet, Jesus oder Paulus?* Arnold Meyer.

1. Paul was a theologian, and what he gives us is a speculative construction of high complexity. He moves among a multitude of elaborated and defined conceptions; and these conceptions are not left in isolation, but connected with each other and built into a system. He has a philosophy of creation, of human nature, of sin, death, and salvation, of Christ and human history, of the whole counsel of God. Everywhere reflexion is at work. His theology, as Meyer says, has affinities with the later gnostic systems, though lifted to an immeasurable height above them by its moral earnestness and the intrinsic value of its thoughts. Turning to the teaching of Jesus, we find nothing that can be called, in the strict sense of the word, theology. The conceptions with which Jesus works are few, simple and weighty; and He never attempts to give them logical precision or to connect them into a system. He has no doctrine of God, the Messiah, or sin. He is content to take sin as a fact, without asking how it arose or why man is under its power. His gospel involves no theory on such subjects. In the production of His thoughts, system with its inferences and presuppositions plays no part. From direct spiritual vision He derives the truths He utters, and these truths appeal to the receptive heart as self-evident. This is to state the contrast in its most general form. It is necessary to follow it into details.

2. There is a radical difference between Jesus and Paul with respect to their conception of the process by which man's salvation is accomplished. Paul's gospel is the gospel of a redemption achieved once for all on the cross. In and by His death Christ destroyed the hostile powers—the law, sin seated in the flesh, death—that held man in hopeless bondage. He delivered us from the curse of the law by bearing, as our representative, its penalty, and from the dominion of sin by carrying out on our sinful flesh, as represented in His own body, a sentence of execution. How He vanquished death is not made so clear. Sometimes it might appear as if it fell with the law, at other times as if Christ's resurrection involved that of all believers, and still again there is an appeal to the bare fact that Christ must reign, and therefore the last foe be trampled under foot. This destruction of the evil powers that hold man in bondage is an objective fact, belongs to a particular moment in history, and is entirely

independent of what happens subsequently in the souls of believers. How this objective redemption becomes effective in the case of the individual is a question that belongs to Paul's doctrine of faith. If Jesus' gospel is to be described as a gospel of redemption, the word must be understood in a different sense. There is nothing in it that corresponds with the objective redemption of Paul. Of a deliverance from the curse of the law through a vicarious satisfaction of its claims, or from the sinful flesh through a death sentence carried out upon it in a particular historical event, Jesus knows nothing. His gospel is one of redemption only in the sense that it proclaims the holy love of God that seeks the sinful, forgives their sin, and restores them to fellowship. God is always near to forgive and to help; and there is no other redemption (if we leave out of account the apocalyptic catastrophe) than that which comes through the response of the heart in obedience and trust. This difference involves others; for the Pauline doctrine of redemption has several presuppositions.

3. Among its presuppositions is a doctrine of sin. According to Paul, all men are involved in sin through Adam's transgression; and their subjection to it is so absolute that, though they may know the good and even sigh after it, they are powerless to achieve it. So much his redemption doctrine requires; when he allows to men more than this, it is when he forgets his theory. Still further, he connects sin in the closest way with man's fleshly nature, and he regards human mortality as sin's penal consequence. No trace of all this is to be discovered in the teaching of Jesus. Jesus has no doctrine of sin's origin, or of its seat, or of its connexion with death. He has no doctrine of human depravity. Nowhere does He bring human life under a doctrinal scheme. He takes men as He finds them, seeing the evil in them and condemning it, seeing also the good and welcoming it. If He will call none good, in the absolute sense, save One, He knows of such as are merciful and pure in heart. The many follow the broad road, but all can repent and enter the strait gate.

4. A second presupposition of Paul's doctrine of redemption is his doctrine of the Law. In this doctrine the Law is narrowed down to the two elements of commandment and recompense; being separated from the Spirit, and made to

exclude every idea of mercy. God's purpose in giving the law was not to lead men to righteousness, but to conclude them under sin, and so prepare the way for the new era of grace. The law was thus of no more than temporary validity; but since it had certain rights, not altogether easy to define, it could be annulled only after these rights had been satisfied by a vicarious, or, more strictly, a representative death. For such ideas one will search the teaching of Jesus in vain. The Law for Jesus was the permanent expression of God's righteous will. He indeed criticised it as elaborated in Judaism, and even as formulated in Scripture; but He had no thought of abolishing, only of purifying and deepening it. Nowhere does He betray any sense of a conflict of claims between law and grace, or of the necessity for an atonement before grace can begin its reign. To all who come to Him in penitence He declares forgiveness, and that without a hint of a coming event apart from which the forgiveness would not be valid. If He attaches a condition to it, it is that a man must show towards others the same mercy which he looks for from God.

5. There is nothing in the teaching of Jesus of the sacramental element, which has a distinct, if not a very prominent, place in the theology of the Apostle.

6. In Jesus' teaching there is nothing that can be called Christology. That He believed Himself to be the Messiah, and allowed His disciples to think of Him as such, is held by the majority of scholars, if denied by some, and by Wrede in particular. We are met, however, by the difficulty of determining the meaning which He read into the term. The Messiah of Jewish expectation He certainly could not think Himself to be, and Schweitzer's book has shown us the dangers of attributing to Him too unreservedly the apocalyptic conception. The very fact that He left the idea undefined is sufficient proof that He taught no doctrine on the subject. In any case, He never made the recognition of His Messianic dignity a condition of discipleship. This dignity was not the basis of His proclamation; His doctrine of God, of righteousness, of sin and salvation is presented in complete independence of any idea as to His personal place in the scheme of Divine Providence. The faith He asked for was not faith in Himself as Messiah, but faith in God, or in Himself as identified with God's cause. In the

Pauline theology, on the other hand, Christology occupies the central place. Paul's gospel is the story of a pre-existent, heavenly Being who, for man's salvation, assumed our nature, atoned by His death for our sins, rose from the dead and ascended to God's right hand, to intercede for His people, and, as the Spirit, to work in their hearts the fruits of faith and love. His doctrine of redemption is bound up with his conception of Christ's superhuman origin and dignity.

7. Jesus knows no other condition of salvation than the keeping of God's commandments. 'This do and thou shalt live,' that is His answer to the rich young ruler; and it is a typical answer. His appeal is always to the will, its form always that of the categorical imperative. When He speaks of faith it is in the sense of trust in God. Turning to Paul we find that the primary requirement is not moral doing, but faith in the sense of belief. To be saved a man must affirm and accept the redemption message. In appearance at least, Paul has shifted the centre of gravity from the will in the direction of the intellect.

Other points of difference might be added. Paul's rabbinical method of dealing with Scripture, his doctrine of predestination and of the Church, his mysticism, his conception of a spiritual body, his philosophy of history, are all elements which have little or nothing to correspond with them in the teaching of his Master.

That these differences exist would be admitted by many who would be far from drawing from them Wrede's conclusions. They are implied, for example, in the common assertion that Christ came, not so much to preach the gospel, as that there might be a gospel to preach. The more conservative scholars, it is true, would not make the admission without some reservations. In the teaching of Jesus they would find at least the germinal thoughts which appear in a more developed form in the Pauline system. In support of this view, they would appeal to certain sayings in the Synoptic Gospels, such as the ransom passage, and that beginning 'No man knoweth the Son but the Father,' and, above all, to the self-witness of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. But this bridge between Jesus and Paul has, in the opinion of the vast majority of scholars, been broken down. Even the one or two theological sayings in the Synoptists are suspected of having been coloured by the faith of the primitive Church.

The contrast between Jesus and His great Apostle is left in all its sharpness. Paul's gospel of the incarnate Son of God who was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification is, as compared with the gospel of Jesus, something new. None of Wrede's critics, not even Kaftan, questions this, though they may differ with respect to details.

The first question to be considered is as to the origin of those elements which are peculiar to Paul's theology. Whence did the Apostle derive them? In his own account of the matter (Gal 1^{2ff.}) he expressly denies indebtedness to tradition for his gospel. He received his gospel not from men, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. The risen and glorified Christ revealed it to him inwardly. But how are we to understand this assertion? Not, Wrede says, in the sense that his ideas were the product of his mind or phantasy working under the impulse of the Spirit. The splendid assurance and enthusiasm of his faith would be unintelligible, did we suppose it had no firmer basis than an inward illumination. It can be shown, Wrede thinks, that nearly all his conceptions were taken over bodily from Jewish theology. The predicates he applies to Christ had already been applied to the Jewish Messiah. In the moment of his conversion, when Jesus met him in the glory of His risen life, he identified

Jesus with the Christ of his Jewish faith, and transferred to Him all the predicates of that Christ. His dependence on contemporary thought is no less apparent in his doctrine of redemption. The idea of salvation as a redemption from hostile superhuman powers was in the air alike in Judaism and in paganism. At the centre of the deeper pagan faiths there is always a heaven-born hero, who descends to earth to do battle with man's demonic foes, and returns to heaven laden with the spoils of victory. So also the atoning efficacy of a bloody victim was no unfamiliar idea to the religious world of Paul's day. It is the same with his doctrine of the two ages and of predestination, with his conception of the consequences of Adam's fall and of salvation as life, immortality, glory, with his eschatology with the Messiah at the centre, and with his ethical pessimism. They were nothing new to the educated Jew. Wrede will hardly allow any place to Paul's religious experience as a factor in the formation of his theology. All attempts to reconstruct the experience of his conversion, and from that to deduce the main lines of his theology, he rejects as having no solid foundation. Everything is explained on the hypothesis of borrowing.

(To be concluded.)

The Call of Faith.

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STUDY of abstract questions, such as the investigation of the great problems of theology and philosophy demand, is apt to prove very depressing; for we soon find ourselves involved in intellectual difficulties of various kinds, and the probability of attaining satisfactory knowledge of anything except material things, or any full and final solution of the great problems of life, seems quite out of the question.

Wearied and benumbed, we wonder if God and immortality, good and evil, freewill and eternal life, have any existence at all: we wonder if they are

'By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed . . . and he went out, not knowing whither he went . . . for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.'—Heb. xi. 8, 10.

ought else but fantastic illusions which by turns dazzle and torment us.

Now when we get to this stage there is a tendency for us to do one of two things.

1. The first is this. It is to reason with ourselves in this wise. Life is a hopeless mystery. Nothing is real except the sensations of present pleasure or pain, and the knowledge by which the former can be obtained and the latter avoided. Act, therefore, so as to obtain the maximum of the one and the minimum of the other, and count yourself a fool if at the end of life you cannot feel