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ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO
THE EPHESIANS: A
PRACTICAL EXPOSITION

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PREFACE

The favourable reception accorded to an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount has encouraged me to attempt another practical explanation of a portion of the New Testament, in the interest of such readers as are intelligent indeed, but neither are nor hope to become critical scholars. An immense deal has been done of late to assist New Testament scholarship, but while the studies of the scholar make progress, the ordinary Christian 'reading of the Bible' is, I fear, at best at a standstill. This little book then is intended to make one of St. Paul's epistles as intelligible as may be to the ordinary reader, and so to enable him to make a practical religious use of it, 'to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest' it.

The method pursued, in the main, has been to let each section of the epistle be preceded by an analysis or paraphrase of the teaching it contains, in which it is hoped that no element in

the teaching is left unnoticed, and followed by such further explanations of particular phrases, or practical reflections, as seem to be needed.

I have avoided as far as possible all discussion of rival views, and given simply what are, in my judgement, the best explanations.

I have ventured to dedicate this book to the President of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, because (see app. note D, p. 264) that society represents surely a brave attempt to realize some of the chief practical lessons which this epistle is intended to enforce.

CHARLES GORE.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY,

Christmas, 1897.

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

Introduction

Introduction

There are two great rivers of Europe which, in their course, offer a not uninstrusive analogy to the Church of God. The Rhine and the Rhone both take their rise from mountain glaciers, and for the first hundred or hundred and fifty miles from their sources they run turbid as glacier streams always are, and for the most part turbulent as mountain torrents. Then they enter the great lakes of Constance and Geneva. There, as in vast settling-vats, they deposit all the discolouring elements which have hitherto defiled their waters, so that when they re-emerge from the western ends of the lakes to run their courses in central and southern Europe their waters have a translucent purity altogether delightful to contemplate. After this the two rivers have very different destinies, but either from fouler affluents or from the commercial activity upon their surfaces or along their banks they lose the purity which characterized their second birth, and become as foul as ever they were among their earlier mountain fastnesses; till after all vicissitudes they lose themselves to north or south in the vast and cleansing sea.

The history of these rivers offers, I say, a remarkable parallel to the history of the Church of God. For that too takes its rude

and rough beginnings high up in wild and remote fastnesses of our human history. Such books of the Old Testament as those of Judges and Samuel and Kings represent the turbid and turbulent running of this human nature of ours, divinely directed indeed, but still unpurified and unregenerate. But in the great lake of the humanity of Jesus all its acquired pollution is cut off. In Him, virgin-born, our manhood is seen as indeed the pure mirror of the divine glory; and when at Pentecost the Church of God issues anew, by a second birth of that glorified manhood, for its second course in this world, it issues unmixed with alien influences, substantially pure and unsullied. After a time its history gains in complexity but its character loses in purity, so that there are epochs of the history of the Church when its moral level is possibly not higher than that which is represented in the roughest books of the Old Testament: and through the whole of its later history the Church is strangely fused with the world again, until they issue both together into eternity.

Men from all parts of the world visit Constance and Geneva, and delight to look at the two famous rivers issuing pure and abundant from the quiet lakes. An analogous pleasure belongs to the study of such books of the New Testament as the Acts of the Apostles and St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, which give us respectively the fortunes and the theory of the Church at its origin. Later epochs of Church history have possibly more richly diversified interests – such as the period of the Councils, or the Middle Ages, or the Reformation. But the interest of

the earliest Church unmixed with the world, its principles fresh, its inspirations strong, its native hue free from discolouring elements, preoccupies us with a fascination which is unrivalled. The divine society is young and inexperienced, but what it is and is meant to be we can see there better than anywhere else. We return, when our minds are aching and our eyes are dim with the complexity and obscurity of our latter-day problem, to learn insight and simplicity again at those pure sources.

And to the Christian believer these books are not only documents of great historical importance as illustrative of a unique period: they also represent to us in different forms the highest level of that action of the divine Spirit upon the mind of man which we call inspiration. St. Paul for instance, in this Epistle to the Ephesians claims, as we shall find, to be an 'inspired' man, a recipient of divine revelation, and makes a similar claim for the apostles and prophets generally. 'By revelation,' he says, 'God made known unto me the mystery (or divine secret), as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ; which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.' Inspiration is a term not easily susceptible of definition. We are inclined in our generation to recognize its limits more frankly than has been done in the past, and its compatibility even with positive error on subjects which are

matter of ordinary human inquiry and not of divine revelation^[1]; but its positive meaning in the region of divine revelation – in what concerns God's moral will, purpose, character and being, and the consequent moral and spiritual significance of our human life – ought not to be less apparent to us than formerly. Thus when we call a writer of the New Testament 'inspired' we must mean at least this: that the same divine Spirit who put the message of God in the hearts of the prophets of old, and who worked His perfect work without let and hindrance in the manhood of Christ, is here so working upon the will and imagination, the memory and intelligence, of one of Christ's commissioned witnesses as that he shall interpret and not misinterpret the mind and person of his Master. Practically, an inspired writer of the New Testament means a writer under whom we can put ourselves to school to 'learn Christ' with whole-hearted confidence and faith. This, of course, gives an additional reason of the most cogent force why we should continually recur to the sacred books of the New Testament. If Christianity is to be deterred from a fatal return to nature – that is to the religious or irreligious tendencies of mankind when left to itself – or if it is to be recalled when it has lapsed, this can only be by an appeal to Scripture constantly reiterated and pressed home. There is for

¹ The Committee of the Conference of Bishops at Lambeth, 1897, in a report commended by the bishops as a body to the 'consideration of all Christian people,' write: 'Your committee do not hold that a true view of Holy Scripture forecloses any legitimate question about the literary character or literal accuracy of different parts or statements of the Old Testament.'

ever the testing-ground alike of doctrine, of moral character, and of ecclesiastical tendency; there is the only perfect image of the mind of Christ.

The Epistle to the Ephesians gives us St. Paul's gospel of the Catholic Church. So far from being a man of one idea, St. Paul fascinates and sometimes bewilders us by the intricacy and variety of his thoughts; but like the innumerable leaves and twigs of some finely-grown tree which emerge, all of them, through branches and boughs, out of one great trunk, strong and straight, and one deep and firmly-set root, so it is with the infinitely various topics and suggestions of St. Paul. They run back into a few dominant thoughts, which in their turn have one trunk-line of developement and one root. The root is the conviction, finally smitten into the soul of St. Paul at the moment of his conversion on the road to Damascus, that Jesus is the Christ; and the trunk-line of development is that which is involved in St. Paul's special commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, that is to say, the principle that the Christ is the saviour of Gentiles as of Jews and on an equal basis – or in other words, that the Christian church is catholic.

When St. Paul acknowledged that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, this of course meant that he remained no less than formerly an adherent of the Jewish faith, and that he 'worshipped' without any breach of continuity, 'the God of his fathers.' So he is fond of insisting^[2]. Thus to him the Church of Christ is

² Acts xxiv 14; xxvi. 6, 7, 22, 23; 2 Tim i. 3.

still 'the commonwealth of Israel,' God's ancient church, though reconstructed^[3]. For the religion of Israel had had for its main motive the hope of the Christ. All that St. Paul now believed was that this hope had been realized, and realized to the shame of Israel in One whom they had rejected and crucified. But if to believe that Jesus was the Christ involved no breach with the religion of Israel, yet it did involve the recognition that it had been reconstituted on a new basis, and in a way that suggested to existing Israelites nothing less than a revolution. The church of God had, in St. Paul's present belief, widened out from being the church of one nation into being a catholic society, a society for all mankind.

If St. Paul's epistles are taken in those groups into which they naturally divide themselves, we find that in the first group, that of the two epistles to the Thessalonians, all his favourite topics are present as it were in the germ, but nothing that is specially characteristic of him is yet developed. The free admission of the Gentiles into the Church is, with the accompanying hostility of the Jews, assumed^[4], but not much insisted upon; but in the interval between these epistles and that to the Galatians the subject had gained fresh and poignant interest. A party of Christians having their centre at Jerusalem had been trying – in spite of the decision of the apostolic council at Jerusalem – to reimpose upon the consciences of Gentile Christians, and

³ Eph. ii. 12-19.

⁴ 1 Thess. ii. 14-16.

with especial success in the Galatian province, the obligation of circumcision; or in other words had been trying to make it evident that the Church of God was as much as ever the people of the Jews, and that Gentiles could only become Christians by becoming also Jewish proselytes pledged to keep the law of Moses. In view of this attempt St. Paul re-embarks upon his great campaign for the catholicity of the Church, and in his epistles of the second group^[5] (especially those to the Galatians and the Romans) the catholicity of Christianity is vindicated controversially upon the basis of the principle of *justification by faith, not by works of the law*.

The meaning and real importance of this doctrine ought not to be hard for us to understand. To be justified means to be accepted or acquitted by God. The Judaizers – that is the Christian representatives of the narrower religious spirit of Israel – held that, as God's covenant was with the Jews only, so men could obtain acceptance simply by the observance of that Mosaic law which was to the Jew at once the expression of the divine selection of his race, and the grounds of his arrogant contempt for all who had not 'Abraham to their father^[6].' But St. Paul had made trial of that theory, and had found it wanting. The observance of the law and the glorying in Jewish privileges had brought him no peace with God: had in fact served only to produce and deepen a sense of inner alienation from God and

⁵ Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans.

⁶ See [app. note C](#), p. 257.

conviction of sin. Thus in acknowledging the messiahship of that Jesus whom the chosen people had rejected and surrendered to be crucified, he was abandoning utterly and for ever the standing-ground of Jewish pride: he was acknowledging that the only divine function of the law was to convince men of sin, and of their need of pardon and salvation: he was taking his stand as a sinner among the Gentiles, and humbly welcoming the unmerited boon of pardon and acceptance from the hand of the divine mercy in Christ Jesus. When St. Paul in familiar arguments, from the witness of the Old Testament itself, and from the moral experience of men, convicts the law of inadequacy as an instrument of justification, his reasoning is full of a strong feeling and conviction bred of his own experiences. The true means of justification, he has come to perceive, is faith, that is, the simple acceptance of the divine favour freely offered, and this is something that belongs to no special race, but to all men as such. For all men everywhere, to whom the light comes, can know that they are sinners in the sight of God, and can accept simply from the hand of the divine bounty the unmerited boon of forgiveness and acceptance in Christ. Thus, if faith and faith alone is that whereby men are justified or commended to God, then at once the catholic basis of the reconstituted Church is secured. All men can belong to it who can feel their need and hear the Gospel and take God at His word. This is the great principle vindicated in the compressed and fiery arguments of the Epistle to the Galatians, and then subsequently developed in the calmer

and orderly procedure of the Epistle to the Romans.

But in the next group of epistles, written out of that captivity at Rome the record of which closes the Acts of the Apostles, the same doctrine of the catholicity of the Church is developed from a different point of view. Now it is the thought of the person of Christ which has come to occupy the foreground. All along St. Paul had believed that Christ was the Son of God, the divine mediator of creation, who in these latter days had for our sakes humbled Himself to be made man^[7]. But this thought of Christ's person is elaborated and brought into prominence in the third group of epistles^[8], especially in the Epistle to the Colossians. A tendency derived from Jewish sources was manifesting itself among some of the Asiatic Christians to exalt angelic beings, conceived probably as representing divine attributes and powers, into objects of religious worship^[9]. There is a certain spurious humility which has in many ages, and not least in the Christian Church, led men to shrink from direct approach to the high and holy God and to resort to lower mediators, as more suitable to their defiled condition and weakness. This sort of spurious humility was already detected by St. Paul, in company with other Judaizing and falsely ascetic tendencies, as a peril of the Asiatic churches, and especially of the Colossians.

⁷ Acts ix. 20; 1 Cor. viii. 6; Rom. ix. 5; 2 Cor. viii. 9; Gal. iv. 4.

⁸ Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon.

⁹ Col. ii. 18: 'by a voluntary humility (or 'taking delight in humility') and worshipping of the angels.'

But he will make no terms with it. Christ he teaches is the only and the universal mediator, the one and only reconciler of all things to the Father. And He is this because of the position that belongs to His person in the universe as a whole. He, as the Father's image or counterpart, is His unique agent in all the work of creation. All created things whatever, from the lowest to the highest, seen or unseen, be they thrones or dominions or principalities or powers, are the work of His hand. All were created through Him and have Him for their end or goal, and He is the sustaining life of the whole universe in all its parts. 'In Him all things consist' or have their unity in a system. And because He occupies this position in the whole universe, therefore a similar position and sovereignty belong to Him in the spiritual kingdom of redemption. There too He is, through His manhood and His sacrificial death upon the cross, the unique author of the reconciliation with God. He is by His spirit the inherent life of the redeemed, and the goal of all their perfecting. There is, in fact, no divine quality, or attribute, or activity of God towards His creatures which is not His. In Him it pleased the Father that all the fulness of divine attributes and offices should dwell, and in Him as Son of God made man dwells all this fulness bodily. The divine attributes, that is, are not committed to a number of different mediators. They exist and are exercised in Him and in Him alone. It follows therefore as a matter of course from this position of Christ in the universe and in the church that the redemption effected by Him must be universal in range and must

extend equally and impartially to all. There 'cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian and Scythian, bond and free, but Christ is all and in all.'

Thus in the Epistle to the Colossians^[10] the doctrine of the catholicity of Christianity is again vindicated controversially, and logically based upon the catholic character of Christ and upon His universal function in creation and redemption; and in the contemporary Epistle to the Ephesians, without note of controversy, the doctrine of the catholic church, the brotherhood of all men in Christ, the doctrine which is, we may truly say, the culmination of all St. Paul's teaching, is allowed to develop itself in all its glory on the assumed basis of that teaching about Christ's person which had made any narrower idea of the church already seem incongruous and impossible. In the earlier dispensation in which the covenant of God was with one people, St. Paul can see only a preparatory process through which the eternal purpose of God could at last be realized, and out of which His eternal secret could at last be disclosed. That purpose so long kept secret, and now revealed, is to gather together all nations and classes of men into the one Church of God, one organized body, one brotherhood in which all men are to find their salvation, and through which is to be realized an even wider purpose for the whole universe. In this doctrine of the catholic church St. Paul finds the expression of all the length and breadth and height and depth of the divine love. Its length, for it represents an age-long

¹⁰ See i. 13-20; ii. 2, 3, 9-23; iii. 11. Cf. i. 27-28.

purpose slowly worked out; its breadth, for it is a society of all men and for the whole universe; its depth, for God has reached a hand of mercy down to the lowest gulfs of sin and alienation from God; its height, for in this society men are carried up into nothing less than union with God, to no lower seat than the heavenly places in Christ.

I have spoken of St. Paul's great arguments for the catholicity of the Gospel as two. The first appears mainly as a polemic against the idea of justification by works of the law. The second as a positive argument about the person of Christ and the results which flow from the right appreciation of it. But in fact there is a necessary connexion between the two. The narrow Judaism of the Galatian reactionaries did in fact logically involve a narrow and therefore a false conception of the person of Christ. As Dr. Hort expresses it^[1], 'to accept Jesus as the Christ without any adequate enlargement of what was included in the Messiahship could hardly fail to involve either limitation of His nature to the human sphere, or at most a counting Him among the angels.' This logical connexion was in fact verified in history. The Judaizers of the earliest period of Christian history who insisted on circumcision for all Christians pass into the Ebionites of the second century who rejected the Church's doctrine of the person of Christ, as the eternal Son of God. And conversely it would be scarcely possible to accept the doctrine of the universal Christ, both divine and human, as St. Paul developes it, without

¹¹ Hort, *Judaistic Christianity* (Macmillan, 1894), p. 125.

perceiving that men must be made acceptable to Him and to His Father by something deeper and wider than any particular set of observances or 'works.' The relation therefore between the argument of St. Paul's epistles to the Galatians and the Romans on the one side, and that of his epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians on the other is one of unity rather than of contrast.

The relation of these two groups of epistles may be expressed also in another way. The argument of the earlier epistles is directed towards the Judaizers. Its purpose is to vindicate the right of the Gentiles to an equal place and position with the Jews in the kingdom of God. But at the time of the later group this right had been secured. On the basis of their acknowledged title the ingress of Gentiles into the churches of Asia had been even alarmingly rapid. Now it is time for St. Paul to address himself to these emancipated Gentiles and to exhort them in their turn not to relapse into unworthy and narrow conceptions of their redeemer, or into conduct unworthy of their new position: they must 'walk worthily of the vocation wherewith they are called.'

Our present political situation in England offers an analogy which may bring home to us the position of the Gentile Christians and the function of the Epistle to the Ephesians. The time is past for us when there is any necessity to contend that a vote should be given to all responsible men. So far at least as the male population is concerned, the title of the citizen to the vote has been substantially acknowledged; but the time is by no means past when the newly enfranchised citizens need to be stimulated

to realize what their enfranchisement carries with it of privilege and responsibility. And we may express this by saying that if our English political Epistle to the Galatians has been written and has done its work, our Epistle to the Ephesians is still surely very much needed.

It is very strange, or at least would be strange if we were not acquainted with the historical circumstances that have accounted for it, that St. Paul has been, out of all proportion to the facts of the case, identified in popular estimation with only the earlier of the two great arguments described above, with that which has given the basis to Protestantism, and not that which is, in fact, the charter of the Catholic Church.

We are all familiar with the fact that St. Paul taught the doctrine of justification by faith, and insisted therefore on the necessity and privilege of personal acceptance on the part of each individual of the promises of God in Christ. We all know how, when this aspect of things has been ignored and overridden – when an almost Jewish doctrine of the merit of good works^[12] has been current in Christendom – it has afforded a pretext for a Protestant reaction of the most individualistic kind, of the kind which pays no regard to outward unity or catholic authority. But certainly in St. Paul's own teaching there is nothing individualistic in justifying faith. It is that by which man wins admittance into the body of Christ; and the body of Christ is an organized society, a catholic brotherhood. Salvation, as we

¹² Cf. [app. note C](#), p. 257.

shall see, is as much social or ecclesiastical as it is individual; and perhaps there is nothing more wanted to correct our ideas of what St. Paul understood by justifying faith than an impartial study of the Epistle to the Ephesians. It is true that this great epistle only freely developes thoughts which were already unmistakably in St. Paul's mind when he wrote his epistles to the Corinthians, and even those to the Thessalonians. Already the social organization of the Church is a prominent topic, and the ethics of Christianity are social ethics. But now, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, the idea of the Church has become the dominant idea, and the ethical teaching can be justly characterized in no other way than as a Christian socialism.

But it is time to examine somewhat more closely the circumstances under which St. Paul wrote this epistle and their bearing upon its contents. It was written by him during that imprisonment at Rome^[13] the record of which brings to an end the Acts of the Apostles. He can therefore put into his appeals all the force which naturally belongs to one who has sacrificed himself for his principles. 'I, Paul,' he writes, 'the prisoner of Jesus Christ, on behalf of you Gentiles.' He speaks of himself as 'an ambassador in a chain' bound, as he was no doubt, to the soldier which kept him. But the fact that he is a prisoner does not occupy a great place in his mind. In part this is because his imprisonment was not of a highly restrictive character. The Acts conclude by telling us that he was allowed to dwell in his own hired dwelling and to receive all that came to him without let or hindrance to his preaching. And the tone of the 'epistles of the first captivity' is cheerful as to the present and hopeful for the future^[14]. But it is more important to notice that the thought of being in prison is apparently swallowed up in St. Paul's imagination by other considerations. For, in the first place, St. Paul was, under whatever restraints, at Rome. He had reached his goal – a new centre of evangelization which was also the centre

¹³ Cf. Hort, *Prolegomena to Romans and Ephesians* (Macmillan, 1895), p. 100.

¹⁴ Col. iv. 2-4; Philemon 22; Phil. i. 12-14.

of the world. Step by step the centre of Christian evangelization had passed toward Rome as its goal. From Jerusalem, which told unmistakably that 'the salvation was of the Jews,' it had moved to Antioch, where in a Greek city Jew met Gentile on equal terms. From Antioch, under St. Paul's leadership, it had passed to Corinth and Ephesus. These were indeed thoroughly Gentile cities, and leading cities of the Empire, but they were provincial. No imperial movement could rest satisfied till it established itself at the centre of the great imperial organization – till it had got to Rome.

If we are to understand at all adequately the world in which St. Paul wrote, the thought of the Roman Empire and of the unity which it was giving the world must be clearly before our minds: and it will not be a digression if we pause to dwell upon it at this point when we are considering the significance of St. Paul's situation as at once a prisoner and an evangelist in the great capital.

The Roman Empire brought the world, that is the whole of the known world which was thought worth considering, into a great unity of government. What had once been independent kingdoms had now become provinces of the empire, and the whole of the Roman policy was directed towards drawing closer the unity, and educating the provinces in Roman ideas^[15].

If we seek to define Roman unity a little more closely the following elements will be found perhaps the most important

¹⁵ Ramsay, *Paul the Traveller* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1895), pp. 130 ff.

for our purpose. (1) It was a unity of government strongly centralized at Rome in the person of the emperor. The letters of a provincial governor like Pliny to his master Trajan at Rome reveal to us how even trivial matters, such as the formation of a guild of firemen in Pliny's province of Bithynia, were referred up to the emperor. Roman government was in fact personal and centralized in a very complete sense, and had the uniformity which accompanies such a condition. (2) This centralized personal government is, of course, only possible where there is a well-organized system of inter-communication between the widely-separated parts of a great empire. And there was this to an amazing extent in the Roman empire. We find evidence of it in the great roads representing a highly developed system of travelling. 'It is not too much to say that travelling was more highly developed and the dividing power of distance was weaker under the Empire than at any time before or since until we come down to the present century.' This is what gives such a modern and cosmopolitan flavour to the lives of men of the Empire as unlike one another in other respects as Strabo and Jerome. We find the evidence of such a system of inter-communication also, and not less impressively, in the multiplied proofs afforded to us that every movement of thought in the Empire must needs pass to Rome and establish itself there. The rapid arrival of all oriental tendencies or beliefs at Rome was, of course, what from the point of view of conservative Romans meant the destruction of all that they valued in character and

ideals. 'The Orontes had poured itself into the Tiber.' But it was none the less a fact of the utmost significance for the world's progress. (3) The unity of the Empire depended largely on the use which was made of Greek civilization and Greek language. The Empire may be rightly described, if we are considering its eastern half, as Greek no less than Roman from the first. Everywhere it was the Greek language which was the instrument of Roman government, and Greek civilization, tempered by somewhat barbarous Roman 'games,' which was put into competition with local customs whether social or religious^[16]. (4) Lastly, to a very real extent the Empire was aiming at the establishment of a universal religion. Independent local gods and local cults suited well enough a number of independent little tribes and kingdoms, but it was felt instinctively that the one empire involved also one religion, and with more or less of deliberate intention the one religion was provided in the worship of the emperor, or, perhaps we should say, of the Empire.

This worship of the emperor has been among us a very byword for what is monstrous and unintelligible. It bewilders us when we hear of something like it in our own Indian empire. And yet a little imagination ought to show us that where a pure monotheism has not taught men the moral purity and personal character of God – where religion is either pantheism, the deification of the one life, or idolatry, the deification of separate forms of life – the worship of the imperial authority is intelligible enough. Here

¹⁶ Ramsay, *l. c.* p. 132.

was a vast power, universal in its range, mostly beneficent, and yet awful in its limitless and arbitrary power of chastisement; what should it be but divine, like nature, and an object to be appealed to, propitiated, worshipped? At any rate the cultus of the emperor spread in the Roman world, and particularly in the Asiatic provinces. It could ally itself with the current pantheistic philosophy and also with popular local cults: for it was tolerant of all and could embrace them all, or in some cases it could identify itself with them – the emperor being regarded as a special manifestation of the local god. And it made itself popular through games – wild beast shows and gladiatorial contests – which it was the business of its high priests or presidents to provide or to organize. Thus it was that the Roman world came to be organized by provinces for the purposes of the imperial religion, and the provincial presidents, whom we hear of in the Acts as 'Asiarchs' or 'chiefs of Asia,' and from other sources as existing in the other provinces – Galatarchs, Bithyniarchs, Syriarchs, and so on – were also the high priests of the worship of the Caesars, by which it was sought to make religion, like everything else, contribute to cement imperial unity^[17].

Now there can be no doubt at all, if we look back from the fourth or fifth centuries of our era, to how vast an extent this Roman unity had been made an engine for the propagation of the Church. And the Christians – the Spanish poet Prudentius,

¹⁷ See Mommsen, *Provinces of Roman Empire* (Eng. trans.), i. 344 ff.; Lightfoot, *Ign. and Polyc.* iii. pp. 404 ff.

for instance, or Pope Leo the Great^[18] – betray a strong consciousness of the place held by the empire in the divine preparation for Christ. For long periods the Roman authority was tolerant of Christianity and suffered its propagation to go on in peace; and at the times when it became alarmed at its subversive tendencies, and turned to become its persecutor, still the Church could not be prevented from using the imperial organization, its roads and its means of communication. Again, every step in the progress of the Greek language facilitated the spread of the new religion, the propagation of which was through Greek; and conversely Christianity became an instrument for spreading the use of this language which previously was making but a poor struggle against the languages of Asia Minor; for it is apparently a simple mistake to suppose that even the apostles were miraculously dispensed from the difficulties of acquiring new languages, and were enabled to speak all languages as it were by instinct. Even the imperial religion provided a framework to facilitate the organization of that still more imperial religion which it found indeed absolutely incompatible with its prerogatives, but in which it might have found an efficient substitute to accomplish its own best ends. Thus the early Christian apologist Tatian pleads that Christianity alone could supply what was manifestly needed for a united world, a universal moral law and a universal gratuitous education or

¹⁸ App. note A, p. 251.

philosophy, open to rich and poor, men and women, alike^[19]. So strong in fact was in many respects the affinity of the Empire and the Church that the apologists are not infrequently able to claim, and that plausibly, that if the Roman authorities were ready to recognize it, they would find in the Church their most efficient ally.

And there is no doubt that all this tendency to use the empire as the ally and instrument of the Church began with St. Paul. The closer St. Paul's evangelistic travels are examined the more apparent does it become that he, the apostle who was also the Roman citizen, was by the very force of circumstances, but also probably deliberately, working the Church on the lines of the empire. 'The classification adopted in Paul's own letters of the churches which he founded, is according to provinces – Achaia, Macedonia, Asia, and Galatia; the same fact is clearly visible in the narrative of Acts. It guides and inspires the expressions from the time when the apostle landed at Perga. At every step any one who knows the country recognizes that the Roman division is implied^[20].' Nor can we fail to be struck with the regularity with which St. Paul, wherever he mentions the Empire, takes it on its best side and represents it as a divine institution whose officers are God's ministers for justice and order and peace^[21]. It is from this point of view alone that he will have Christians think of it

¹⁹ Tatian, *Ad Graecos*, 28, 32.

²⁰ Ramsay, *l. c.* p. 135.

²¹ Rom. xiii. 1-7; cf. ii. Thess. ii. 6.

and pray for it^[22]. There is the confidence of the true son of the empire in his 'I appeal unto Caesar^[23].'

Further than this, when St. Paul is addressing himself to Gentiles who had received no leavening of Jewish monotheism, it is most striking how he throws himself back on those common philosophical and religious ideas which were permeating the thought of the Empire. 'The popular philosophy inclined towards pantheism, the popular religion was polytheistic, but Paul starts from the simplest platform common to both. There exists something in the way of a divine nature which the religious try to please and the philosophers try to understand^[24].' Close parallels to St. Paul's language in his two recorded speeches at Lystra and at Athens, can be found in the writings of the contemporary Stoic philosopher Seneca^[25], and in the so-called 'Letters of Heracleitus' written by some philosophic student nearly contemporary with St. Paul at Ephesus^[26]. In exposing the folly of idolaters he was only doing what a contemporary philosopher was doing also, and repeating ideas which he might have learnt almost as readily in the schools of his native city Tarsus – which Strabo speaks of as the most philosophical place in the world, and the place where philosophy was most of all an

²² 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

²³ Acts xxv. 12.

²⁴ Ramsay, *l. c.* p. 147.

²⁵ Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 'St. Paul and Seneca,' pp. 287 ff.

²⁶ [See app. note B](#), p. 253.

indigenous plant^[27] – as at the feet of Gamaliel in Jerusalem. Certainly Paul the apostle to the Gentiles was also Saul of Tarsus and the citizen of the Roman Empire in whose mind the idea and sentiment of the empire lay already side by side with the idea of the catholic church.

Such a statement as has just been given of the relation of the Roman organization to the Church is undoubtedly true. And it is also indisputable that St. Paul was in fact the pioneer in using the empire for the purposes of the Church. But it is more questionable to what extent the idea of the empire as the handmaid of the Church was consciously and deliberately, or only unconsciously or instinctively, present to his mind; and in particular it is questionable how far the peculiar exaltation of the epistles of the first captivity is due to St. Paul's realization that in getting to Rome, the capital and centre of the Empire, he had reached a goal which was also a fresh and unique starting-point for the evangelization of the world.

To some extent this must certainly have been the case^[28].

²⁷ 'The zeal of its inhabitants for philosophy and general culture is such that they have surpassed even Athens and Alexandria and all other cities where schools of philosophy can be mentioned. And its pre-eminence in this respect is so great because there the students are all townspeople, and strangers do not readily settle there.' Strabo, xiv. v. 13. I do not suppose that St. Paul received any formal education in Greek schools at Tarsus. But I think we must assume that at some period St. Paul had sufficient contact with Gentile educated opinion, whether at Tarsus or elsewhere, to be acquainted with widely-spread religious and philosophical tendencies.

²⁸ Cf. Hort, *Christian Ecclesia*, p. 143.

While he is at Ephesus^[29] preaching, he already has Rome in view, and a sense of unaccomplished purpose till he has visited it, 'I must also see Rome.' When a little later he writes to the Romans, the name of Rome is a name both of attraction and of awe. He is eager to go to Rome, but he seems to fear it at the same time. So much as in him lies, he is ready to preach the gospel to them also that are at Rome. Even in face of all that that imperial name means, he is not ashamed of the Gospel^[30].

Later the divine vision at Jerusalem assures him that, as he has borne witness concerning Christ at Jerusalem, so he must bear witness also at Rome^[31]. The confidence of this divine purpose mingles with and reinforces the confidence of the Roman citizen in his appeal to Caesar. The sense of the divine hand upon him to take him to Rome is strengthened by another vision amid the terrors of the sea voyage^[32]. At his first contact with the Roman brethren 'he thanked God and took courage^[33].' This sense of thankfulness and encouragement pervades the whole of the first captivity so far as it is represented in his letters. He had reached the goal of his labours and a fresh starting-point for a wide-spreading activity.

Certainly no one can mistake the glow of enthusiasm

²⁹ Acts xix. 21.

³⁰ Rom. i. 15, 16.

³¹ Acts xxiii. 11.

³² Acts xxvii. 24.

³³ Acts xxviii. 15.

which pervades the epistles of the first captivity generally, but especially the Epistle to the Ephesians. It is conspicuously, and beyond all the other epistles, rapturous and uplifted. And this is not due – as is the cheerful thankfulness of the Epistle to the Philippians, at least in part – to the specially intimate relations of St. Paul to the congregations he was addressing, or to the specially satisfactory character of their Christian life. On the contrary, St. Paul perceived that the Asiatic churches, and especially Ephesus, were threatened by very ominous perils. 'Very grievous wolves were entering in, not sparing the flock; and among themselves men were arising, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them^[34].' St. Paul's rapturous tone must be accounted for by causes independent of the Ephesian or Asiatic Christians in particular. Among these causes, as we have just seen, must be reckoned the fact, the significance of which we have been dwelling upon, that St. Paul had now reached Rome, the centre of the Gentile world. But it must also be remembered that St. Paul had seen a great conflict fought out and won for the catholicity of Christianity, and that now for the first time there was a pause and freedom to take advantage of it.

A great conflict had been fought and won. The backbone of the earlier Jewish opposition to the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles on equal terms had been broken. They had in fact swept into the Church in increasing numbers. Their rights were recognized and their position uncontested. There is now,

³⁴ Acts xx. 29, 30.

in the comparative quiet of the 'hired house' where St. Paul was confined, a period of pause in which he can fitly sum up the results which have been won, and let the full meaning of the catholic brotherhood be freely unfolded. It is time to pass from the rudiments of the Christian gospel, the vindication of its most elementary principles and liberties, the 'milk for babes,' to expound the spiritual wisdom of the full-grown Christian manhood, the 'solid meat for them of riper years.'

It is this sense of pause in conflict and free expansion in view of a vast opportunity, which in great part at least interprets the glow and glory of St. Paul's epistle.

The Epistle to the Ephesians might, so far as its contents are concerned, have been addressed to any of the predominantly Gentile churches; but to none more fitly than to Ephesus and to the churches of Asia, where the progress of Gentile Christianity had been so rapid, and where St. Paul's ministry had been so unusually prolonged. Let us attempt to answer the questions – what was Ephesus? what was the history, and what were the circumstances of the Ephesian church?

Ephesus had a double importance as a Greek and as an Asiatic city. A colony of Ionians from Athens had early settled on some hills which rose out of a fertile plain near the mouth of the Cayster. This was the origin of the Greek city of Ephesus. Its position gave it admirable commercial advantages. It became the greatest mart of exchange^[35] between East and West in Asia Minor, and though its commerce was threatened by the filling up of its harbour, it had not decayed in St. Paul's time.

Among Greek cities it also occupied a not inconspicuous place in the history of art, and at an earlier period of philosophy also. Here was one of the chief homes of the Homeric tradition; hence in the person of Callinus the Greek elegy is reputed to

³⁵ Among other articles of commerce, tents made in Ephesus had a special reputation, and St. Paul and Aquila had special opportunities there for the exercise of their trade. Acts xx. 34.

have had its origin, and in the person of Hipponax the satire. It was the home of Heracleitus, one of the greatest of the early philosophers, and of Apelles and Parrhasius, the masters of painting^[36].

And the greatest artists in sculpture – Phidias and Polycletus, Scopas and Praxiteles – had adorned with their works the temple of Artemis, which, in itself one of the wonders of the world, the masterpiece of Ionic architecture, became also, like some great Christian cathedral, a very museum of sculpture and painting.

If Greek artists built and decorated the temple of Artemis, they attempted no doubt to represent the goddess under the form which her Greek name suggested, the beautiful huntress-goddess; but the Greeks never in fact succeeded in affecting the thoroughly Asiatic and oriental character of a worship which had nothing Greek about it except the name. The interest of Ephesus as an Asiatic city centred about that ancient worship which had its home in the plain below the Greek settlement. It was there before the Greeks came, it held its own throughout and in spite of all Greek and Roman influences; all through the history of Ephesus it gave its main character to the city – the noted home of superstition and sorcery.

The Artemis of Ephesus was, as Jerome remarks^[37], not the huntress-goddess with her bow, but the many-breasted symbol of the productive and nutritive powers of nature, the mother of

³⁶ Strabo. xiv. 1, 25.

³⁷ Migne, *P. L.* xxvi. 441.

all life, free and untamed like the wild beasts who accompanied her. The grotesque and archaic idol believed to have fallen down from heaven was a stiff, erect mummy covered with many breasts and symbols of wild beasts. Her worship was organized by a hierarchy of eunuch priests – called by a Persian name Megabyzi – and 'consecrated' virgins. It was associated, like other worships of the same divinity called indifferently Artemis or Cybele or Ma, with ideals of life which from the point of view of any fixed moral order, Roman or Greek no less than Jewish or Christian, was lawless and immoral.

It is very well known how the Asiatic nature-worships flooded the Roman empire, and even at Rome itself became by far more popular than the traditional state religion. And among these Asiatic worships none was more popular than the worship of Artemis of Ephesus, whose temple was the wonder of the world, and who not only was worshipped publicly at Ephesus, but was the object of a cult both public and private in widely-separated parts of the empire. Such a temple and such a worship would naturally collect a base and corrupt population; but what would in any case have been bad was rendered worse by the fact that the area round the temple was an asylum of refuge from the law, and that, as the area of 'sanctuary' was extended at different times, the collection of criminals became greater and greater. It had reached a point where it threatened the safety of the city, and not long before St. Paul's time the Emperor Augustus had found it necessary to curtail the area. The history of our own

Westminster is enough to assure us that a religious asylum brings social degradation in its train.

Such was the commercial and religious importance of the beautiful, wealthy, effeminate, superstitious, and most immoral city which became for three years the centre of St. Paul's ministry. On his second missionary journey St. Paul was making his way to Asia, and no doubt to Ephesus, when he with his companions were hindered by the Holy Ghost and turned across the Hellespont to Macedonia^[38]. On his return to Syria, he could not be satisfied without at least setting foot in Ephesus and making a beginning of preaching there in the synagogue^[39]; but he was hastening back to Jerusalem, and, with a promise of return, left his work there to Priscilla and Aquila. On his third missionary journey Ephesus was the centre of his prolonged work. It was accordingly the only city of the first rank which, so far as any trustworthy evidence goes, had as the founder of its Church in the strictest sense – that is, as the first gatherer of converts as well as organizer of institutions – either St. Paul or any other apostle^[40].

St. Paul's first activity on arriving at Ephesus illustrates the stress he laid on the gift of the Holy Ghost as the central characteristic of Christianity. He was brought in contact with the twelve imperfect disciples who had been baptized only with John

³⁸ Acts xvi. 6-10.

³⁹ Acts xviii. 19.

⁴⁰ Hort, *Prolegomena*, p. 83.

the Baptist's baptism, and had not so much as heard whether the Holy Ghost was given. St. Paul baptized them anew with Christian baptism, and bestowed upon them the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of his hands^[41]. Then it is recorded how he began his preaching as usual with the Jews in the synagogue. The Jews of Asia Minor were regarded by the Jews of Jerusalem as corrupted and Hellenized^[42]. But at any rate they exhibited the same antagonism to the preaching of Christianity as their stricter brethren. Thus St. Paul, when he had given them their chance, abandoned their synagogue and established himself in the lecture-room of Tyrannus, where he taught for two years and more^[43]. And this became the centre of an evangelization which, even if St. Paul himself did not visit other Asiatic towns, yet spread by the agency of his companions over the whole of the Roman province of Asia – to the churches of the Lycus, Colossae, Laodicea, Hierapolis, and probably to the rest of the 'seven churches' to which St. John wrote in his Apocalypse.

Ephesus was full of superstitions of all sorts as would be expected, and St. Paul's miracles were such as would not unnaturally have led the magicians to regard him as a greater master in their own craft. So among others the Jewish chief

⁴¹ Acts xix. 1-7.

⁴² Ramsay, *l. c.* p. 143.

⁴³ 'From the fifth to the tenth hour' (11 a.m. to 4 p.m.), an early addition to the text of the Acts tells us; i. e. after work hours, when the school would naturally be vacant and St. Paul would have finished his manual labour at tent-making. Ramsay, *l. c.* p. 276.

priest Sceva's seven sons began to use the central name of Paul's preaching as a new and most efficient formula for exorcism. 'We adjure thee by Jesus whom Paul preaches.' But it is frequently noticeable that St. Paul refused to allow himself to use superstition as a handmaid of religion. The providential disaster which befell these exorcists gave St. Paul an opportunity of striking an effective blow where it was most needed against exorcism and magic. The Christian converts came and confessed their participation in the black arts, and burnt their books of incantations, in spite of their value. The whole transaction must have impressed vividly in the minds of the Ephesians the contrast between Christianity and superstition.

St. Paul had already encountered opposition as well as success at Ephesus, for when, writing from Ephesus, he speaks to the Corinthians^[44] of having 'fought with beasts' there, the reference is probably to what had befallen him in the earlier part of his residence through the plots of the Jews; that long Epistle to the Corinthians can hardly have been written *after* the famous tumult recorded in the Acts. But that tumult, raised by the manufacturers of the silver shrines of Artemis, was of course the most important persecution which befell St. Paul at Ephesus. The narrative of it^[45] is exceedingly instructive. We notice the friendliness of the Asiarchs, i.e. the presidents of the provincial 'union' and priests of the imperial worship, and the opinion of the town clerk,

⁴⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 32.

⁴⁵ Acts xix. 23 ff.

that St. Paul must be acquitted of any insults to the religious beliefs of the Ephesians^[46]. Christianity had not, it appears, yet excited the antipathy of the religious or civil authorities of the Empire, but it had begun to threaten the pockets of those who were concerned in supplying the needs of the worshippers who thronged to the great temple at Ephesus. We need not inquire exactly how the little silver shrines of Artemis were used; but they were much sought after, and their production gave occupation to an important trade. The trade was threatened by the spread of Christianity. The philosophers despised indeed the idolatrous rites, but they despised also the people who practised them, and had no hope or idea of converting them^[47]. St. Paul was the first teacher at Ephesus who touched the fears of the idol makers by bringing a pure religion to the hearts of the ordinary people. Hence the tumult against the teachers of the new religion, raised not by the civil or religious authorities of Ephesus, but simply by the trade interest.

As soon as it was over St. Paul left Ephesus not to return there again. But on his way back to Jerusalem he came not to Ephesus but to Miletus, and sending for the Ephesian presbyters thither, he made them a farewell speech^[48], which is in conspicuous

⁴⁶ Prof. Ramsay asserts that instead of 'robbers of temples' (Acts xix. 37), we should translate 'disloyal to the established government.' *l. c.* p. 282. But the word is used in the former sense in special connexion with Ephesus by Strabo, xiv. 1, 22, and Pseudo-Heracleitus, *Ep.* 7, p. 64 (Bernays).

⁴⁷ See [app. note B](#), p. 253, on the contemporary 'letters of Heracleitus.'

⁴⁸ Acts xx. 17 ff.

harmony with the features of his later Epistle to the Ephesians. Already the doctrines of a divine purpose or counsel now revealed, of the Church in general as the object of the divine self-sacrifice and love, and of the Holy Ghost as accomplishing her sanctification and developing her structure, appear to be prominent in his mind, and to have become familiar topics with the Ephesian Christians. 'I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God. Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock, in the which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops, to feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood... And now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified.' These words from St. Paul's speech to the Ephesian presbyters are in remarkable affinity with the teaching of our epistle.

V

We have been assuming that this epistle was addressed to Ephesus, but there are reasons to believe that it was not addressed to Ephesus only, but rather generally to the churches of the Roman province of Asia, of which Ephesus was the chief. The reasons for thinking this are partly internal to the epistle. St. Paul's personal relations to individual Ephesian Christians must have been many and close, and we know his habit of introducing personal allusions and greetings into his epistles; but the so-called Epistle to the Ephesians is destitute of them altogether, contrasting in this respect even with the Epistle to the Colossians, written at the same time to a church which St. Paul himself never visited. This would be a most inexplicable fact if the Epistle to the Ephesians were really a letter to this one particular church. More than this, St. Paul speaks in several passages in a way which implies that he and those he wrote to were dependent on what they had heard for mutual knowledge – 'having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus that is among you' – 'if so be ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given me to youward.' Such language is much more natural if he is writing to others besides the Ephesians. And this evidence internal to the substance of the epistle coincides with evidence of the manuscripts. Very early manuscripts, some of those which remain to us and some which are reported to us by

primitive scholars, omit the words 'in Ephesus' from St. Paul's opening greeting 'To the saints and faithful brethren which are [in Ephesus].' This fact, coupled with the absence of personal reminiscences in the epistle, has suggested the idea that it was in fact a circular letter to the saints and faithful brethren at a number of churches of the Roman province of Asia, and that where the words 'in Ephesus' stand in our text, there was perhaps a blank left in the epistle as St. Paul dictated it, which was intended to be filled up in each church where it was read. This is a view which has to a certain extent a special interest for us in Westminster because, if it was first suggested by the Genevan commentator Beza, it was elaborated by Archbishop Ussher, who is identified with our Abbey by residence and by the memorable record of his entombment in our abbey church with Anglican rites by the command of Cromwell. It follows naturally from such a view that when St. Paul writes to the Colossians and bids them send their letter to Laodicea, and read that which comes from Laodicea^[49], the letter which they should expect from Laodicea would be none other than the so-called Epistle to the Ephesians which was to be read by them as well as the other Asiatic Christians.

⁴⁹ Col. iv. 16.

Enough perhaps has now been said to give a general idea of the conditions under which this great epistle was written; and the topics of the epistle have been already indicated. Its central theme is that of the great catholic society, the renovated Israel, the Church of God. In this catholic brotherhood St. Paul sees the realization of an age-long purpose of God, the fulfilment of a long-secret counsel, now at last disclosed to His chosen prophets. He sees nothing incongruous in finding in the yet young and limited societies of Christian disciples the consummation of the divine purpose for the world, for these societies represent the breaking down of all barriers and the bringing of all men to unity with one another through a recovered unity with God, through Christ and in His Spirit. Therefore the work which the Church is to accomplish is nothing less than a universal work, a work not even limited to humanity; it is the bringing back of all things visible or invisible into that unity which lies in God's original purpose of creation. St. Paul long ago had spoken to the Corinthians of a spiritual wisdom which they were not yet ready to listen to. But now St. Paul seems to feel – for reasons which we have tried in part to interpret – that the time has come when all the depth and richness of the divine secret may be spoken out. No wonder that the subject stirs his imagination and gives to his whole tone an uplifting and a glory without parallel in his other

writings. And yet it would be altogether false to attach to this epistle any associations such as are commonly connected with flights of imagination or the language of rhapsody. For the epistle has the most direct bearing on matters of practical life. If St. Paul glorifies the Christian ideal it is in order that all that weight of glory may be brought to bear upon the Asiatic Christians to force them to see that their personal and social conduct must have a purity, a liberality, a wisdom, a love, a power, commensurate with the greatness of those motives which are acting upon them in their new Christian state.

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

CHAPTER I. 1-2

Salutation

Salutation

St. Paul begins this, in common with his other epistles, with a brief salutation to a particular church or group of churches, in which is expressed in summary the authority he has for writing to them, the light in which he regards them, and the central wish for them which he has in his heart.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here, then, we have three compressed thoughts.

1. The particular person Paul writes this letter because he is not only a believer in Christ but also an 'apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God.' The word apostle is a more or less general word for a delegate, as when St. Paul speaks

of the 'apostles (or messengers) of the churches'^[50];' but by an apostle in its highest sense, 'an apostle of Jesus Christ,' St. Paul meant one of those, originally twelve in number, who had received personally from the risen Christ a particular commission to represent Him to the world. This particular and personal commission he claimed to have received, in common with the twelve, though later than they – at the time of his conversion. 'Am I not an apostle?' he cries. 'Have I not seen Jesus our Lord'^[51]?' 'He appeared to me also as unto one born out of due time'^[52].' 'In nothing was I behind the very chiefest apostles'^[53].' And as his claim to the apostolate was challenged by his Judaizing opponents he had to insist upon it, to insist that it is not a commission from or through Peter and the other apostles, or dependent upon them for its exercise, but a direct commission, like theirs, from the Head of the Church Himself. He is, he writes to the Galatians, 'Paul, an apostle, not from men, nor (like those subsequently ordained by himself or the other apostles, like a Timothy, or a Titus, or like the later clergy) through man,' but directly through, as well as from, the risen Jesus whom his eyes had seen, and His eternal Father'^[54].

It is surely a consolation to us of the Church of England, who

⁵⁰ 2 Cor. viii. 23.

⁵¹ 1 Cor. ix. 1.

⁵² 1 Cor. xv. 8.

⁵³ 2 Cor. xii. 11.

⁵⁴ Gal. i. 1.

belong to a church subject to constant attack on the score of apostolic character, to remember that St. Paul's apostolate was attacked with some excuse, and that he had to spend a great deal of effort in vindicating it, and was in no way ashamed of doing so, because he perceived that a certain aspect of the life and truth of the Church was bound up with its recognition.

2. And he writes to the Asiatic Christians as 'saints' and 'faithful in Christ Jesus.' 'Saint' does not mean primarily what we understand by it – one pre-eminent in moral excellence; but rather one consecrated or dedicated to the service and use of God. The idea of consecration was common in all religions, and frequently, as in the Asiatic worships at Ephesus and elsewhere, carried with it associations quite the opposite of those which we assign to holiness. But the special characteristic of the Old Testament religion had been the righteous and holy character which it ascribed to Jehovah. Consecration to Him, therefore, is seen to require personal holiness, and this requirement is only deepened in meaning under the Gospel. But still 'the saints' means primarily the 'consecrated ones'; and all Christians are therefore saints – 'called as saints' rather than 'called to be saints,' in virtue of their belonging to the consecrated body into which they were baptized; saints who because of their consecration are therefore bound to live holily^[55]. 'The saints' in the Acts of the

⁵⁵ Tertullian, *de An.* 39, rightly interprets 1 Cor. vii. 14, 'now are they [the children of whose parents one was a Christian] holy,' as meaning, now are they already consecrated and marked out for baptismal sanctification by the prerogative of their birth.

Apostles^[56] is simply a synonym for the Church. St. Paul then writes to the Asiatic Christians as 'consecrated' and 'faithful in Christ Jesus,' i. e. believing members incorporated by baptism; and he writes to them for no other purpose than to make them understand what is implied in their common consecration and common faith.

3. And his good wishes for them he sums up in the terms 'Grace and peace in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' Grace is that free and unmerited favour or good-will of God towards man which takes shape in a continuous outflow of the very riches of God's inmost being and spirit into the life of man through Christ; and peace of heart, Godward and manward, 'central peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation' is that by the possession and bestowal of which Christianity best gives assurance of its divine origin.

We notice that these divine gifts are ascribed to 'God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' St. Paul does not generally call Christ by the title God, partly, no doubt, from long engrained habit of language, but partly also because nothing was more important than that no language should be used in the first propagation of Christianity which could give excuse for confusing the Christian belief in the threefold Name with the worship of many gods. But, from the first, Christ, in St. Paul's language, is exalted as Lord into a simply divine supremacy, and associated most intimately with all the most exclusively divine

⁵⁶ Acts ix. 13, 33.

operations in the world without, and in the heart of man within. Moreover, St. Paul refuses absolutely to tolerate any association of other, however exalted, beings with Christ in lordship or mediatorship, all created beings whatever being simply the work of His hands^[57]. There remains, therefore, no room to question that St. Paul believed Christ to be strictly divine: to be Himself no creature, no highest archangel, but one who, with the Holy Spirit alone, is truly proper and essential to the divine being; and it affords us, therefore, no manner of surprise that from time to time St. Paul actually calls Christ God, as in the Epistle to the Romans 'who is over all, God blessed for ever^[58],' and probably in the Epistle to Titus 'our great God and saviour Jesus Christ^[59].'

⁵⁷ Cf. 1 Cor. viii. 6; Col. i. 16.

⁵⁸ Rom. ix. 5.

⁵⁹ Tit. ii. 13.

DIVISION I. CHAPTERS I. 3-IV. 17

§ I. CHAPTER i. 3-14

St. Paul's leading thoughts

St. Paul's leading thoughts

Before we read the opening paragraph of St. Paul's letter we had better review the great thoughts which are prominent in his mind as he writes. My ambition is to make my readers feel that ideas which, because they have become Christian commonplaces or because they have been blackened by controversy, have by this time a ring of unreality about them, or of theological remoteness, or of controversial bitterness, are in fact, if we will 'consider them anew,' ideas the most important, the most practical, and the most closely adapted to the moral needs of the plain man.

i

St. Paul writes to the Christians as 'in Christ,' 'in the beloved,' 'blessed with all spiritual benediction in the heavenly places in Christ,' 'adopted as sons through Jesus Christ.' We are all of

us perfectly familiar with the idea of Christ as, so to speak, a personal and individual redeemer, as the holy and righteous one, the beloved and accepted Son, who is risen from the dead and exalted to supreme sovereignty in heaven. But popular theology has not been quite so familiar with the idea that Christ was and is all this in our manhood, not simply because He was God as well as man (true as this is); but because as man He was anointed with the Holy Spirit of God: that it was in the power of that Spirit that He lived His life of holiness and wrought His miracles of power: that it was in the power of that Spirit that He taught and suffered and died and was glorified. Nor has popular Christianity been familiar with the resulting truth: that by that divine Spirit which possessed Him as man, the life of Christ is extended beyond Himself to take in those who believe in Him, and make them members of 'the church which is his body.' Yet, in fact, this extension is implied even in the name Christ. The king Messiah, the Christ of the Old Testament, is but the central figure of a whole kingdom associated with Him, and all the characteristic phrases for Christ in the New Testament express the same idea. He is the 'first-born among many brethren^[60]'; He is the 'first fruits^[61]' of a great harvest; He is the 'head of the body^[62]'; He is the 'bridegroom' inseparable from 'the bride^[63]'; He is the second

⁶⁰ Rom. viii. 29.

⁶¹ 1 Cor. xv. 23.

⁶² Eph. iv. 15, 16.

⁶³ Eph. v. 32; Rev. xxi. 9.

Adam, that is, head of a new humanity^[64]. Thus if the heavens closed around the ascending Christ, and hid Him from view, they opened again around the descending Spirit, descending into the heart of the Christian society to perpetuate Christ's life and presence there. This historical ascent and descent only embody in unmistakable facts the truth that the life-giving Spirit, who made the manhood of Christ so satisfying to our moral aspirations, is also and with the same reality, though not with the same perfection or freedom, living and working in that great society which He founded to represent Him on earth. Because this society is possessed by the Spirit, therefore it lives in the same life as Christ, it and all its individual members are 'in Christ.' In one place, indeed, St. Paul includes the Church, the body, with its head under the one name 'the Christ^[65].'

Life in Christ

It is because the Church thus shares Christ's life that it is already spoken of as sharing His exaltation. We 'sit together in the heavenly places with Christ' for no other reason than because, though we are on earth, our life is bound up invisibly but in living reality with the life of the glorified Christ, and we have in Him free access into the courts of heaven. For this reason again, as the fulness of the divine attributes dwells in the glorified Christ – all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, so the same fulness is attributed, ideally at least, to the Church too. It too is 'the fulness

⁶⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 45; Rom. v. 12-19.

⁶⁵ 1 Cor. xii. 12.

of him that filleth all in all.' To St. Paul's mind there is one true human life in which men are one with one another because they are at one with God. That true human life is Christ's life, which He once lived on earth, and which He is at present living in the glory of God, and which is fulfilled with all the completeness of the divine life itself. But that true human life is also shared by each and every member of His Church, without exception, without reference to race or learning, or wealth, or sex, or age.

I have said that this is ideally the case. This identification of Christ with the Church, that is to say, is not yet fully realized. The Church is not yet glorified, not yet morally perfected nor full grown in the divine attributes. Its particular members may be living deceitful and dishonourable lives. This is to say in other words that God's work in 'redemption of his own possession,' His acquirement of a people to Himself, is not yet complete. The purchase-money is paid, but it has not yet taken full effect. But redemption is an accomplished fact in the sense that all the conditions of the final success are already there. The ideal may be freely realized in every Christian because he has received the 'earnest' or pledge of the Spirit, the pledge, that is, of all that is to be accomplished in him. And this Spirit was received by each Christian at a particular and assignable moment. We know what stress St. Paul laid at Ephesus on proper Christian baptism and the laying on of hands which followed it^[66]. By baptism men were spoken of as incorporated into Christ. With the laying on

⁶⁶ Acts xix. 1-7.

of hands was associated the bestowal of the Spirit. Henceforth a Christian had no need to ask for the Spirit as if He were not already bestowed upon him; he had only to bring into practical use spiritual forces and powers which the divine bounty had already put at his disposal.

If we compare this set of ideas with those that have been current in our popular theology, we shall find that the main difference lies in this, that here the stress is laid on the work of Christ *in* man by His Spirit, while the theology which has been popular among us has laid the stress rather on the 'vicarious' work of Christ outside us and *for* us, by making a propitiation for our sins. Now in fact this latter doctrine is an unmistakable part of St. Paul's teaching in this epistle and elsewhere. And all the mistakes to which it has led are due to its not having been kept in proper relation to the set of ideas which I have just been endeavouring to expound. 'Christ for us,' the sacrifice of propitiation has been separated from 'Christ in us,' our new life; whereas really the sacrifice was but a necessary removal of an obstacle, preliminary to the new life.

It was a necessary preliminary that Christ should put us on a fresh basis, should enable us to break from our past and make a fresh start in the divine acceptance. This He did by making atonement for our sins, offering as a propitiatory sacrifice His life, even to the shedding of His blood, that the Father might be enabled to forgive our sins. This transaction is always represented in the New Testament as being the act of the Father as well as

of the Son, for the divine persons are not separable – neither an act by which the Son forces the unwilling hand of the Father, nor an act in which the Father lays an undeserved burden upon an unwilling Son – and the idea of propitiation seems to St. Paul, as indeed it has seemed to men generally, a thoroughly natural idea. Only in one place does he make any suggestion as to why such a preliminary sacrifice of propitiation was necessary. There^[67] he seems to find the moral necessity for it in the fact that through long ages God's 'forbearance' had left men to work through their own resources and so to find out their need of Him. 'He suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.' He 'winked at' or 'overlooked times of ignorance.' He 'passed over sins^[68].' This was part of His educative process. One result of it, however, was a lowering of the moral ideas entertained of the divine character. Thus God's righteousness, which means holiness and compassion combined, needed to be declared especially at that crisis of the divine dealings when God was coming out towards men, whom He had educated by His seeming absence to feel their need of Him, with the offer of His love. The free bounty of His mercy must not be misunderstood as if it were indifference or laxity about moral wickedness. Thus the proclamation of His compassion must be associated with something which would make unmistakable the severity of His holiness and His moral claim. This twofold end is what Christ accomplishes. Thus if He

⁶⁷ Rom. iii. 24-26. I have tried to develop St. Paul's hint.

⁶⁸ Rom. iii. 25; Acts xiv. 16; Acts xvii. 30.

is the revealer of the compassion of the Father, He also vindicates the divine character by a great act of moral reparation, made in man's name and on man's behalf, to the divine holiness which our sins have ignored and outraged. This great act of reparation is consummated in the bloodshedding of the Christ. The sacrifice of consummate obedience is carried to its extreme point and accepted in its perfection. God in Christ receives from man, and that publicly, a perfect reparation: an acknowledgement without fault or drawback: a perfect sacrifice. Now God can forgive the sins of men freely and without moral risk, if they come to Him in the name of Christ. To come to God in the name of Christ means, of course, to come in conscious moral identification of one's self with Christ, with His Spirit and His motives. The faith which simply accepts the bounty of forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice, must pass necessarily into the faith which corresponds obediently with the divine love. Thus the purpose of the atonement is never expressed as being that we should be let off punishment, or simply that we should be forgiven, but rather that, being forgiven, we should be united to Christ in His life^[69]. The propitiation which Christ offered is only the removal of a preliminary obstacle to our fellowship with Him in the life of God. The work of Christ 'for us' has no meaning or efficacy till it has begun to pass into the work of Christ 'in us' by His assimilating Spirit. It was only as baptized into Christ and sharing

⁶⁹ The earliest and simplest expression of the matter is that in St. Paul's earliest epistle (1 Thess. v. 10), Christ 'died for us ... that we should live together with him.'

His Spirit that Christians could accept the forgiveness of their sins through the shedding of Christ's blood. The sacrament of new life is also the sacrament of absolution, and the washing away of sins. Nothing in fact can be plainer in this Epistle to the Ephesians than that 'the redemption through Christ's blood, even the forgiveness of trespasses^[70]' was only a preliminary removal of obstacles to that fellowship with God in Christ by His Spirit which is the secret of the Church.

ii

Predestination

St. Paul's mind is full of the idea of predestination. He delights to contemplate the eternal purpose of God as lying behind what seems to us the painfully slow method by which divine results are actually won. What age-long processes have been necessary both among the Jews and among the Gentiles before this young church, this divine society of man with God has become possible! What slow working through 'times of ignorance,' what infinite delay in the divine forbearance – as we should now say, what age-long processes of developement! But St. Paul is quite certain that the result is no afterthought, no accident of the moment; but that from end to end of the universe there reaches a method of the divine wisdom, and that here in the catholic church it has arrived at an issue. 'God chose us in Christ

⁷⁰ Eph. i. 7; cf. ii. 13 ff.

before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blemish (as spotless victims) before him in love: having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself.' 'Fore-ordained to be a heritage according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will.' So he asseverates and repeats and insists. There are, we may say, two ideas commonly associated with predestination which St. Paul gives us no warrant for asserting. The one is the predestination of individuals to eternal loss or destruction. That God should create any single individual with the intention of eternally destroying or punishing him is a horrible idea, and, without prying into mysteries, we may say boldly that there is no warrant for it in the Old or New Testaments. God is indeed represented as predestinating men, like Jacob and Esau, to a higher or lower place in the order of the world or the church. There are 'vessels' made by the divine potter to purposes of 'honour,' and 'vessels' made to purposes (comparatively) of 'dishonour'^[71]: there are more honourable and less honourable limbs of the body^[72]. But this does not prejudice the eternal prospects of those who in this world hold the less advantageous posts. With God is no respect of persons. Again God is represented as predestinating men to moral hardness of heart where such hardness is a judgement on previous wilfulness. Thus men may be predestined to temporary rejection of God, as in St. Paul's mind the majority of the

⁷¹ Rom. ix. 21.

⁷² 1 Cor. xii. 22 ff.

contemporary Jews were. That was their judgement, and their punishment^[73]. It was however not God's first intention for them nor His last. Those chapters of St. Paul^[74] which contain the most terrible things about the present reprobation of the Jews contain also the most emphatic repudiation of the idea that moral reprobation was God's first idea for them, or His last. 'The gifts and calling of God,' that is, His good gifts and calling, says St. Paul, speaking of the now 'reprobate' Jews, are 'without repentance^[75].' God's present reprobation of them is only a process towards a fresh opportunity. 'God hath shut up all into disobedience that he might have mercy upon all^[76].' Men may baffle the original divine purpose, and that, so far as their own blessedness is concerned, even finally: they may become finally 'reprobate': but the divine purpose for them at its root remains a purpose for good. 'God will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth^[77].'

And once again, the idea of a predestination for good, taking effect necessarily and irrespective of men's co-operation, is an idea which has been intruded unjustifiably into St. Paul's thought. It exalts his whole being to consider that he is co-operating with

⁷³ Cf. St. Matt. xiii. 13-15; St. John xii. 39, 40. We are not (Rom. ix. 17) told *why* Pharaoh was brought out on the stage of history as an example of God's hardening judgement. But no doubt there was a moral reason.

⁷⁴ Rom. ix-xi.

⁷⁵ Rom. xi. 29.

⁷⁶ Rom. xi. 33.

⁷⁷ 1 Tim. ii. 4.

God, and that the conditions under which he lives represent a divine purpose with which he is called to work. It is this which makes him feel it is worth while working: it is this which nerves and sustains him in all sufferings, and enlarges his horizon in all restraints: but he never suggests that it does not lie within the mysterious power of his own will to withdraw himself from co-operation with God. It is at least conceivable to him that he should himself be rejected^[78]. In that famous list of external forces which he feels are unable to tear him from the grasp of the divine love, his own will is not included^[79], nor could be included without gross inconsistency.

Beyond all question there is here one problem which remains for all time unsolved and insoluble – the relation of divine fore-knowledge^[80] to human freedom. If we men are free to choose, how can it be, or can it really be the case at all, that God knows beforehand actually how each individual will behave in each particular case? This is a problem which we cannot fathom any more than we can fathom any of the problems which require for their solution an experience of what an absolute and eternal consciousness can mean. But the problem belongs to metaphysics. It inheres in the idea of eternity and God. The Bible

⁷⁸ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

⁷⁹ Rom. viii. 38, 39

⁸⁰ I am using the word here not in its Bible sense, for in the Bible God is said to 'know' men in the sense of fixing His choice or approval upon them; and to 'foreknow' is therefore to approve or choose beforehand, as suitable instruments for a divine purpose. I am using the word in its ordinary sense.

neither creates it nor solves it. We may say it does not touch it.

Certainly when St. Paul dwells upon the thought of divine predestination he dwells upon it in order to emphasize that, through all the vicissitudes of the world's history, a divine purpose runs; and especially that God works out His universal purposes through specially selected agents 'his elect,' on whom His choice rests for special ends in accordance with an eternal design and intention. And the sense of co-operating with an eternal purpose of God inspires and strengthens him. For God will not drop His work by the way. Whom He did foreknow or mark out beforehand for His divine purposes, them He also foreordained or predestinated to sonship, and in due time called into the number of His elect, and justified them, that is, pardoned their sins and gave them a new standing-ground in Christ, and glorified or will glorify them by the gradual operation of His grace^[81]. The steps or moments of the divine action recognized in the Epistle to the Romans are practically the same as those alluded to in the Epistle to the Ephesians. There also is the eternal choice, and the predestination to sonship, and at a particular time the call into the Church, and the justification or remission of sins through the blood of Christ, and the gradual promotion through sanctification to glory. And the moral fruit of contemplating God's eternal purpose for His elect, and the stages of His work upon them, is to be cheerful confidence of a right sort. God will not drop them by the way, nor the work which they are 'called'

⁸¹ Rom. viii. 28-30.

to accomplish. 'God who hath begun a good work will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ^[82].' Wherever St. Paul recognizes a movement towards good in the single soul or in the world, he knows that it is no accidental or passing phase: it has its roots in the eternal will, and unless we resist it in wilful obstinacy, the eternal will shall at last carry it on to perfection. 'There shall never be one lost good.'

It is not out of place to notice in this connexion how closely akin is St. Paul's thought to the modern philosophy of evolution. Only to St. Paul the slow process of cosmic or human evolution is in no kind of opposition to the idea of divine design.

iii

The elect

This predestinated body, the Church, is what in another word St. Paul calls the 'elect' or 'chosen.' The idea of election has had a very false turn given to it, partly through mistakes which have been already alluded to, partly because the idea of election has been separated from another idea with which in the Bible it is most closely associated, the idea of a universal purpose to which the elect minister. No thought can be more prominent in the Old Testament than the thought that some men out of multitudes have been chosen by God to be in a special relation of intimacy with Him. 'You only have I known, O Israel, of all the families

⁸² Phil. i. 6.

of the earth.' But this election to special knowledge of God, and special spiritual opportunity, carries with it a corresponding responsibility. It is no piece of favouritism on God's part. The greater our opportunity the more is required of us. 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I visit upon you all your iniquities^[83].' The fact is that the principle of inequality in capacity and opportunity runs through the whole world both in individuals and in societies. A great genius or a great nation has special privileges and opportunities, but also, in the sight of God who judges men according to their opportunities, special responsibilities. But also (and this is by far the most important point) the special vocation of every elect individual or body is for the sake of others^[84]. It is God's method to work through the few upon the many. That is the law of ministry which binds all the world of strong and weak, of rich and poor, of learned and ignorant, into one. Thus Abraham had been chosen alone, but it was that, through his seed, all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Israel was exclusively the people of God, but it was in order that all nations should learn from them at last the word of God. The apostles were the first 'elect' in Christ with a little Jewish company. 'We' – so St. Paul speaks of the Jewish Christians – 'we who had before hoped in Christ.' But it was to show the way to all the Gentiles ('ye also, who have heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation,') who were

⁸³ Amos iii. 2.

⁸⁴ On the Jewish idea of election, cf. [app. note C](#), p. 261.

also to constitute 'God's own possession' and His 'heritage.' The purpose to be realized is a universal one: it is the re-union of man with man, as such, by being all together reunited to God in one body. And this idea is to have application even beyond the bounds of humanity. Unity is the principle of all things as God created the world. 'In Christ,' St. Paul writes to the Colossians, 'all things consist' or 'hold together in one system'^[85]. It is only sin, whether in man or in the dimly-known spiritual world which lies beyond, which has spoiled this unity, and in separating the creatures from God has separated them from one another. And the Church of the reconciliation is God's elect body to represent a divine purpose of restoration far wider than itself – extending in fact to all creation. It is the divine purpose, with a view to 'a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up' or 'bring together again in unity' all things in Christ; the things in the heaven, the dim spiritual forces of which we have only glimpses, and the things upon the earth which we know so much better.

This great and rich idea of the election of the Church as a special body to fulfil a universal purpose of recovery, cannot be expressed better than in the very ancient prayer which forms part of the paschal ceremonies of the Latin liturgy. 'O God of unchangeable power and eternal light, look favourably on Thy whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery, and by the tranquil operation of Thy perpetual providence, carry out the work of man's salvation; and let the whole world feel and see

⁸⁵ Col. i. 1.

that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and all things are returning to perfection through Him, from whom they took their origin, even through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

iv

The divine secret disclosed

This universal reconciliation through a catholic church was God's eternal purpose, but it was kept secret from the ages and the generations, only at last to be disclosed to His apostles and prophets. The word 'mystery' in the New Testament means mostly a divine secret which has now been disclosed. Just as the secret of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, i.e. the purpose of God in the then order of the world, was imparted to Daniel, so now the great disclosure of the divine mystery or secret has been made, primarily indeed to apostles and prophets, but through them to the whole body of the faithful. The faithful must of course begin by receiving that simplest spiritual nourishment which is milk for babes. They are to welcome the divine forgiveness of their sins in Christ, and the gift of new life through Him in their baptism and the laying-on of hands. They are to be taught the rudimentary truths and moral lessons which are the first principles of the oracles of Christ. But they are not to stop with this. They are, and they are all of them without exception^[86], intended to grow

⁸⁶ Col. i. 28.

up to the full apprehension of the wisdom of the 'perfect' or perfectly initiated. They are to dwell upon the divine secret, now revealed, of God's purpose for the universe through the church till their whole heart and intellect and imagination is enlightened and enriched by it.

V

It is all of grace

And is the greatness of this exaltation and knowledge vouchsafed to the Church to be a renewed occasion of pride – that spiritual pride, the fatal results of which had already become apparent through the rejection of the Jews? No: unless through a complete mistake, the very opposite must be the result. The strength of human pride, as St. Paul had seen long ago, lay in the idea that man could have merit of his own, face to face with God: could have good works which were his own and not God's, and which gave him a claim upon God. That Jewish doctrine of merit⁸⁷

⁸⁷ See [app. note C](#), p. 257.

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