

The Princeton Theological Review

OCTOBER, 1924

THE PERSON OF CHRIST IN RECENT RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

The high claims of Jesus in our historical sources and the claim of Christianity to finality or to be the absolute religion have proved a difficulty to all modern types of religious philosophy which reject the claim of the New Testament to be a supernatural revelation and which cannot accept the New Testament doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son of God.

In point of fact all attempts to give a philosophical basis for Christianity which could do justice to its historical element, to the central place of the Person of Jesus, and to the finality of Christianity, apart from Christian supernaturalism, have failed.

We agree with Karl Heim¹ when he says that the attempts to bridge the gulf between the eternal and the historical, and to see in Jesus the central object of religion and in Christianity the final religion, have been along two lines. One is the Hegelian which by a process of logic attempts to see the fulness of the Divine Idea in the form of a popular representation (*Vorstellung*) in historical Christianity. But in the last analysis we have only the *Idea* of Divine Sonship and Saviourhood. Its full and final realization in Jesus is not done justice to, and can never be reached along this high *a priori* road. Just why these ideas could not be realized in many mediators, the Hegelian philosophy of religion can never show. And Heim is right in saying that Hegel was the last great religious philosopher who attempted to deduce from a philosophical system the New Testament idea that there is

¹ "Zu meinem Versuch einer neuen religionsphilosophischen Grundlegung der Dogmatik" (*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, N. F. Jahrgang 4. Heft 6. 1924).

that this uniqueness of His relation to God found expression in the category of Messiahship which he accepted for Himself at the baptism, but at first kept secret and designated enigmatically by the use of the term "Son of Man," until the category was applied to Him definitely by Peter at Caesarea Philippi. But if in such matters the book is not distinctive, the extreme lengths to which it carries both the rationalizing method in dealing with the miracles and the minimizing exegesis of Jesus' recorded words make it (in view of the author's well-known gifts of thought and expression) an interesting representative of certain tendencies of the present day. It looks as though the circle were being completed—as though the naturalistic "quest of the historical Jesus" were returning to the rationalizing method which so aroused the scorn of Strauss and the great exponents of the mythical theory. Another tendency is also manifest in the present book—namely the anti-historical and anti-intellectual trend of Modernism, especially in America. Dr. Barton says, in connection with the question of miracles (p. 34):

"It is all important that each one form in his or her mind an image of Jesus against a background that will make him seem most real. It is only thus that his life—the most holy and powerful life for good that has ever been lived in the world—can have real influence upon us. As we live at a time when one theory of the world is passing away and another is taking its place, each one must make his mental picture in accordance with what seems to him reality. Only so can he find Jesus a real Saviour—One who is able to help him in the actual difficulties in which he finds himself."

Here we have subjectivism and pragmatism in an extreme form. Jesus is to be pictured, according to Dr. Barton, not as He is, but as He will seem most real to us, and be most in accord with our theory of the world and our notion of what will give us help! Our protest against such pragmatism is two-fold. In the first place, we are opposed to it for its own sake—we do not believe that the search for objective truth ought to be given up. And in the second place we are opposed to it because it does not even accomplish the end toward which it strives. The truth is that pragmatism is a very impractical thing. If we fashion a Jesus in accordance with our preconceived ideas and our notions of what is good for us, such a Jesus can give us only what we have already; He is a Jesus that we make for ourselves. Very different is the Jesus of the New Testament. We believe that Jesus of Nazareth ought to be brought near to the "modern mind." But there are two ways of accomplishing that result. Dr. Barton seeks to accomplish it by conforming Jesus to the modern mind. But might not another method be chosen—might not the modern mind be conformed to Jesus?

Princeton.

J. GRESHAM MACHEN.

The Character of Paul. By CHARLES EDWARD JEFFERSON, Pastor of Broadway Tabernacle, New York City. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923. pp. viii, 381.

The distinguished pastor of Broadway Tabernacle is an admirer of

the Apostle Paul; but it may be doubted whether he has ever come into sympathetic contact with the things which Paul himself regarded as most important: he admires Paul but rejects Paul's message. "It is the personality of Paul," says Dr. Jefferson, "and not his theology with which we in these chapters have to do. What Jesus said to men when he faced them in his highest mood was not 'Believe this' or 'Accept that,' but 'Follow me!' And Paul when he was at his highest, did not press upon men a theory of the fall of man, or an exposition of the death of Jesus, but poured out his soul in the fervent exhortation, 'I beseech you be ye imitators of me.' 'Be ye imitators of me, even as also I am of Christ.'" This passage occurs at the beginning of Dr. Jefferson's book (pp. 3 f.), and it gives the keynote for all the rest. The book is not without value as showing the impression made by Paul's character even upon one who does not love the things that Paul loved most. But it is sadly marred by sentimentality. It views the Apostle from the outside without ever penetrating to his heart; it enumerates his virtues without ever delving to their root.

"What the world most needs is not Paulinism, but Paul" (p. 256). This is really the main thesis of Dr. Jefferson's book; it is at the root of the repeated contrasts between Paul's doctrine and his life, between his theory of the meaning of the Cross and his love; it is at the root of the passionate outbursts against critical and exegetical scholarship. But is the thesis true? Is it true that "what the world most needs is not Paulinism, but Paul"? Certainly Paul himself did not think so; certainly Paul never allowed his own personality to cause men to neglect his message. "Was Paul crucified for you?"—these words which characterize Paul's attitude from beginning to end, are an unequivocal repudiation of sentimental admiration both ancient and modern. And they blow down the construction in Dr. Jefferson's book as a breeze from the outer air blows down a house of cards.

"Was Paul crucified for you?" According to Dr. Jefferson, in a sense, he was. According to Dr. Jefferson, in other words, Paul is valuable because of his character and not because of his doctrine—because of what he was and not because of what he said. But very different was the attitude of Paul himself; the true Paul was a man with a message; the true Paul had a message which he held to be true and which alone, he believed, could give salvation to men. Until that fact is rediscovered, it is quite useless for the student to read "everything of importance" published on the question of the genuineness of the Pastoral Epistles within the last fifty years (p. 24); it is quite useless for him to live with Paul almost constantly for thirty years (as Dr. Jefferson says that he has done, p. v.); it is quite useless for him to make one of the Pauline Epistles a special study every summer for thirteen summers (*loc. cit.*). Such diligent study will no doubt bring to light interesting facts about Paul; it will no doubt reveal, as it has revealed to Dr. Jefferson, many noble traits of Paul's character. But it will leave Paul himself forever unknown, until the central fact is discovered that Paul's whole life was based upon his message—upon

that message of the Cross which Dr. Jefferson rejects. Yet how can a man help discovering that fact? How can one read the first chapter of Ephesians or the eighth chapter of Romans and then say, as Dr. Jefferson says, that "the Paul who serenely discourses on 'Predestination' and 'Foreordination' is like a God seated in a philosophical Olympus" to whom we cannot come near (p. 99); how can one possibly read the second chapter of Galatians or the fifth chapter of II Corinthians and then say that "it is the man Paul, and not his interpretation of the fall of man, or the death of Jesus, who is to give us strength and hope in wrestling with our problems and fighting our battles" (p. 68)? We confess that it is a mystery to us. Even despite the passionate anti-intellectual bias of modern pragmatist skepticism, even despite the lamentable intellectual decadence of our age, we have difficulty in understanding how men can read so much and understand so little. Paul has poured out his very heart before us; he has made himself a living voice in the proclamation of his mighty doctrine. Yet men indulge in sentimental admiration of the messenger, and despise the message; they admire the apostle, and ignore the gospel of salvation which was entrusted to him by his Lord.

It is not worth while to point out what we hold to be the errors of Dr. Jefferson in detail; since that one root error explains and makes inevitable all the rest. At one point Dr. Jefferson says that "it is a mistaken notion that Paul's fundamental doctrine is the doctrine of justification by faith. His cardinal doctrine is the doctrine of salvation by love. . . . Love is deeper than faith and mightier, for love works through faith" (pp. 323 f.). These utterances follow naturally from Dr. Jefferson's real though not explicit rejection of the Pauline gospel; but of course the slightest historical study, whether carried on by friend or by foe of Paulinism, will show that as expository of Paul they are nothing short of absurd. Similar is the error by which "trustfulness" is substituted for "faith" as the heading of one of the chapters (p. 293); that substitution illustrates very well the difference between Modernism and the religion of Paul. Modernism regards faith (falsely equated with "trustfulness") as a quality of man; Paul regarded it as the channel by which the gift of God is received: Modernism is interested in faith itself as an ethical or psychological phenomenon; Paul was interested in the great object of faith, the crucified and risen Lord.

Dr. Jefferson says that "religion is the one hope of the world" (p. 351). But he is wrong. The true hope of the world is not religion but Christianity; the true hope of the world is found not in what Paul was, not even in what Jesus was, but in what Jesus did; not in some quality of "religiousness" (p. 339) in man, but in the redeeming work of Christ which is set forth in the gospel—in the despised "theology"—of Paul.

We are not without admiration for Dr. Jefferson's distinguished ability as a preacher. But we are obliged to say plainly that in our judgment he has here published a very unsatisfactory book. It is not merely that we disagree with him. We disagree also with Wrede and with Bousset and with Johannes Weiss. Indeed we disagree with them

at many points at which we agree heartily with Dr. Jefferson—for example with regard to the genuineness of the Pastoral Epistles and the Lucan authorship of the Book of Acts. But they have at least made a serious effort (however unsuccessful) at an objective treatment of the Epistles of Paul; they have at least tried earnestly to separate the question what they could have wished Paul to be from the question what he actually was, and the question what they would have said from the question what Paul actually said. Hence we have read their works with real stimulation and profit. But in the present book of Dr. Jefferson Paul is modernized and sentimentalized to such an extent that contact with the real Paul seems almost to be lost. The apostle has been treated in many ways—with passionate hostility as well as with the profoundest reverence. But the way of treatment which does him least honor of all is, we are almost constrained to think, the way of sentimental admiration of which the present book of Dr. Jefferson, despite the author's distinguished gifts, is a most distressing example. In this book Dr. Jefferson is typical of his age. But the age is disquieting both to the historian and to the Christian. When will the true Paul be discovered? When will men see what is really so plain? When will the gospel of Paul again be discovered? We cannot say. But when that time comes, men will love the deep things that they now despise, and life will be founded not upon the example of good men—whether Paul or a reconstructed human Jesus—but upon the grace of God made known to men in the blessed "theology" that deals with the Cross.

Princeton.

J. GRESHAM MACHEN.

Let Us Go On: The Secret of Christian Progress in the Epistle of the Hebrews. By the REV. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, M.A., D.D. Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association. Pp. 195.

The book contains "the amplification of Lectures and Readings" given at Oxford, England, and at Moody and several other Bible Institutes as well as Bible Conferences in America. After a short opening chapter dealing with questions of introduction to Hebrews, the author gives us in forty chapters a survey of the contents of the epistle. The aim is not to give us another commentary, but "to concentrate on one of the main themes (if not *the* main theme) of Hebrews, the necessity and conditions of spiritual progress." The author endeavors to show that the "teachings, exhortations and warnings" of Hebrews, which have the purpose of "inciting to possess and enjoy the fullest and highest Christian life" are applicable alike to "the Christian Jews" to whom it was originally addressed and to the believers of today.

The manifest intention of the author is not to give a critical analysis but rather to enable lay Bible students to obtain a working knowledge of the contents of Hebrews. The excellent way in which the work accomplishes this task may be called its main virtue. It supplies the student with a wealth of information. The information is given in such a form that it prompts the student to selfactivity rather than to do all the thinking for him. The plan makes it easy to follow the trend of thought in