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THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST¹

THE FOLLOWING paragraphs were submitted as a basis for the thought of the Conference:

(a) That in free sovereign grace and in absolutely undeserved mercy God has Himself actively intervened in human history to reveal Himself and His purposes to men, and to rescue sinful and otherwise doomed humanity.

(b) That God freely chose first to prepare the way for His full intervention by special dealings with Abraham and his descendants, the ancient Israelites; and then to consummate His purpose by coming Himself into human life in the person of Jesus Christ.

(c) That Jesus Christ, being truly God, became truly Man by birth as an infant of Mary, a virgin; that, though Himself as Man entirely without sin or shortcoming, He bore in His own human body, on our behalf and in our stead, right up to a criminal's death upon the shameful cross, the penalty and curse due to human sin; that He did this in obedience to God's will in order to secure man's salvation.

(d) That God openly showed His acceptance of this finished atoning work by raising Jesus in His human body and nature as Man to enter into the full glory destined for humanity; and that God also enthroned Him as men's high priest and advocate in the place of all power at His own right hand, whence He is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him.

It was recommended that paragraph (a) might be reworded to remove unnecessary tautology. The suggested new reading was as follows:

That in sovereign grace and mercy God has Himself intervened in human history to reveal Himself and His purposes to men and to save them.

It was submitted that the phrase "save them" was more definite than the vague expression "rescue sinful and otherwise doomed humanity". Attention was drawn to the great importance of the word "intervened". This conserves the truth of the initiative and activity of God as well as the particular nature of revelation. Despite the fact that much that Barth and Brunner are suggesting in these days is of doubtful value, there can be no question that their emphasis on the Divine intervention in grace is all-important. It is essential to distinguish between "general" and "special" revelation as against assertions of unbroken continuity suggested by evolutionary philosophy.

Turning to paragraph (b), the reframing of this was offered in the following form:

¹ Notes of a discussion at a meeting of the Tyndale Fellowship in Cambridge.

That God prepared the way for His full intervention by special dealings with a chosen line whom He made the vehicle of His revelation; and then consummated His purpose by coming Himself into human life as the Word in the person of Jesus Christ.

The deletion of the name of "Abraham" and the "ancient Israelites" does not ignore the fact that it was with Abraham and then with Jacob, that the Divine Covenant was more particularly formed; but it is necessary not to overlook the truth that the selective purposes of God for revelation began farther back with the appointment of Seth and then in the line of Noah and Shem. It is of further importance that God's special dealings should not appear to terminate in any way upon Abraham and his descendants, but rather that they should be shown in their instrumental function as a "vehicle" of revelation. The phrase "as the Word" is introduced in order to be more precise and to draw attention to the fact that it was not the Father but the Second Person of the Trinity Who became incarnate. Further, the expression "the Word" is a term harmonious both with Scripture and the context of clause (a). It should be noted that the "Word" is here understood in its full Old Testament Hebraic sense of that which is *spoken*. It is necessary also at this point to insist that we shall preserve the *objective* revelation of God *in Christ* as the "Incarnate Word". Dr. Donald Baillie criticises Barth by saying, "His theology has become so austere a theology of the Word that it is hardly a theology of the 'Word-made-flesh'". With Barth God is still, even in Christ, "*deus absconditus*".

Turning attention to paragraph (c), the new rendering submitted was as follows:

That the Son of God, while remaining truly God, became truly Man by birth from Mary, a virgin; that though Himself as man entirely without sin, He bore in His own human body, on our behalf and in our stead, right up to the death of the Cross, the penalty due to human sin; and that He did this in obedience to God's will in order to secure man's salvation.

It was felt that it might make for clearer statement if part of the paragraph (b) were brought to the beginning of the present one so that the opening sentence might read,

That God consummated His revealing and saving purpose by coming Himself into human life as the Word in the Person of Jesus Christ; that the Son of God . . .

In explanation of some of the modifications, it was suggested that the phrase "Jesus Christ" in the original draft was an anachronism and that "Son of God" should be substituted for this. Further, the word "being", though following the English version of Philippians ii, left its meaning somewhat vague. Kenotic speculations need to be met by the more accurate phrase "while remaining". It is important to note, as Gifford and others have pointed out, that *ἐπαχθον* includes *both* the pre-existent *and* the incarnate state. In discussing the question of the Kenosis Dr. William Temple asked, "What was happening to the rest of the universe during the period of our Lord's earthly life? To say that the Infant Jesus was from His cradle exercising providential care over it all is certainly monstrous; but to deny this, and yet to say that the Creative Word was so self-emptied as to have no being except in the Infant Jesus, is to assert that for a certain period the history of the world was let loose from the control of the Creative Word". Commenting on this, Dr. Baillie says, "It is vain to reply that the question presupposes a crude and false separation of the Persons of the Trinity from each other, or to quote the sound principle: *opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*. For the Kenotic Christology itself presupposes precisely such a separation and could not even be stated without it".

The expression "truly God . . . truly man" is still of great significance. With Brunner, we may still hold to the two "natures" statement of Chalcedon, for by "natures" the Fathers meant not *material substances*, but that which is capable of sustaining experiences (Brunner, *The Mediator*, p. 245). Dr. Donald Baillie regards the present Christological issues as resting between the theories of the "Jesus of History" school and those of recent Form Criticism. We may reap the gains of the "Jesus of History" movement and cry, "No more Docetism": but at the same time we may not set aside the aspect of dogma (Form Critics), for it is more than a religious hero whom we seek in Jesus. Dr. Edwyn Bevan (*Christianity*, p. 239) goes too far in his throwing overboard the rediscoveries of the "Jesus of History", but, as Dr. Baillie says, the real point that Dr. Bevan makes is that the true significance of Jesus consists not so much in His earthly career *as in His having come down from heavenly glory and bliss*. That is to say, unless we begin with the dogmas we cannot see the greatest things about Jesus. This view is also supported by Dr. W. R. Matthews.

Our enthusiasm for the dogmatic construction which faith requires, however, must not lead us into an abandonment of the truly historical. While it is true that the "Jesus of History" cannot *produce* faith, yet faith is not produced independently of the Jesus of History. Peter said, "Thou art the Christ". Jesus replied: "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven". "It is," says Dr. Baillie, "neither ocular nor historical proof, but divine revelation, the '*testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*'. And yet it remains true that the revelation came to Peter as an inward witness to *the Jesus whom he knew in the flesh*, and it comes to us as a witness to *the Jesus whom we know as an historical personality* through the Gospel story" (*God Was In Christ*, p. 51).

Examining the words "without sin" we note that the historical school ("Jesus of History") stresses the reality of our Lord's human temptation. This does not lead us, however, into an acceptance of the *sinfulness* of the human nature He took.

What is meant by the phrase "right up to" the death of the Cross? Are we to understand that our Lord bore this load all through His earthly life? In what sense may it also be said to have been borne eternally in the heart of God? If there is any truth in this latter point then perhaps we need to specify the *peculiar* feature of the *death* of Christ and so say "in our stead *on the Cross*". It would seem that there are certainly two aspects of the atonement, both eternal and historical. But God is not *out* of time: as truly as He was incarnate in Jesus He, too, was crucified in Jesus. It may be that is what Brunner means when he speaks of the atonement as "super-history".

"On our behalf and in our stead." These two phrases preserve the representative as well as the substitutionary aspects of the Atonement. The attention of present-day students should be drawn to the fact that the word "vicarious" is frequently used in a greatly weakened sense by some writers. Thus, though the vocabulary is strongly traditional, the meaning in some cases is far from being so.

What is meant by Christ's bearing "the penalty" due to human sin is still in need of more careful definition. Dr. Vincent Taylor does not seem to have been able to make up his mind on this point. He discusses it a little in *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*. He writes: "In the greatness of His love Christ had made Himself one with sinners and had suffered on their behalf. In

describing this suffering St. Paul comes very near to the idea of substitution. . . . " Some theories of this type are untenable, as, for example, theories of substitution and vicarious punishment . . . The persistence of theories of substitution and of satisfaction in the history of Christian doctrine reveals the immense strength of a felt religious need ". " There does not seem to me to be any good reason why we should hesitate to think of Christ as submitting to the judgment which overtakes human sin " (op. cit., pp. 229, 245, 252). Why is Dr. Taylor so fearful of these things? Dr. G. W. Bromiley in his article in THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY of April 1949, says, " The death of Christ was far more than a gesture of sympathy. It was a voluntary entry into the destructiveness and penalty of sin, by which God, in the Person of His Son, vindicated both His righteousness and His love ".

Many to-day are afraid of what they disparagingly call the " legal " elements that enter into the doctrine of penal satisfaction. This is an unnecessary fear however. The legal concept of atonement harmonises with a legal relation in which *fallen* man stands. The " ethical " relation which some writers feel to be of first importance is the lost ideal which in turn is re-introduced by God's grace. When the ideal ethical relation was lost through the fall, then man came under the relations of legal obligation. It is only by means of the atoning work of Christ that those legal aspects are ended, and in the new sonship of the Gospel the ethical is restored. It would seem that Brunner in *The Mediator*, p. 148, comes near to this point.

Mystical theories of atonement by incarnation lack reality. All the moral influence and psychological theories seem to work on the assumption that there is no special or peculiar work of the Holy Spirit. " No theory of the atonement . . . is adequate which represents the work of Christ as a cosmic act of saving value to humanity apart from its meaning for the individual soul " (Halliday). With this the advocates of a penal view would agree, but find the need met in the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The objective and subjective aspects of the atonement are interrelated. The more objective it is the more subjective it becomes. Its *subjective influence* increases with its *objective value*.

In the final paragraph (*d*), it is a question whether for the sake of emphasis and clarity the phrase " atoning work " should be

altered to "this substitutionary work of satisfaction for sins". The word "atonement" has become vague and used in the weakened sense of reconciliation. A final comment needs to be made that the allusion to the resurrection as if it were but a mere "certificate" of our Lord's efficient work seems altogether inadequate. This subject, however, needs extensive treatment, and must be given elsewhere.

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