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WITNESSES TO CHRIST

I. ST. PAUL

HOWEVER much we admire the impetus given to early Christianity by the missionary labours of St. Paul, it would be unjust to allow the greatness of the work to obscure for us the character of the worker. St. John Chrysostom, having commented on the Pauline writings with a mastery and an eloquence that have never been surpassed and seldom equalled, composed seven panegyrics on the Apostle. The keynote of Chrysostom's admiration is struck in the opening panegyric where he declares that no tongue is adequate to sound the praises of St. Paul. In an enthusiastic passage at the end of the commentary on Romans, he prostrates himself in spirit before the tomb of the Apostle at Rome and eulogizes the remains which guard that city "more powerfully than tower or rampart," In *Epist. ad Rom.*, hom. 32. (PG 60, 679).

No writer in English has written more beautifully about St. Paul than J. H. Newman. Under the caption "St. Paul's characteristic gift," he says: "To him specially was it given to preach to the world, who knew the world: he subdued the heart, who understood the heart. It was his sympathy that was his means of influence: it was his affectionateness which was his title and instrument of empire." In virtue of this gift of sympathy the Apostle was able to spread about his person an aura of fragrance and to exercise on his fellows a kind of magnetic attraction: "For whereas I was free as to all, I made myself the servant of all, that I might gain the more. And I became to the Jews, a Jew, that I might gain the Jews: to them that are under the law, as if I were under the law (whereas myself was not under the law), that I might gain them that were under the law. To them that were without the law, as if I were without the law (whereas I was not without the law of God, but was in the law of Christ), that I might gain them that were without the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak. I became all things to all men, that I might save all" (I Cor. ix, 19-22). Human nature, even in its unregenerate state, was an open book to him. Though he had never been a heathen and was no longer a Jew, yet he was a heathen in imagination and a Jew in the history of the past. Scattered throughout his writings there are specimens of the tender affection which his great heart had for all his kind, and what a mixture of admiring love and plaintive denunciation did the thought of his own race inflict upon him! (Rom. ix, 1-5).

The consciousness of exalted office—dealing in priestly fashion with the Gospel of God—was to him a personal humiliation, for he realized that he himself was weak and one of the sinful race for whom Christ died: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency

may be of the power of God and not of us," II Cor. iv, 7. As a consequence, he used his awful Apostolic power only at the call of duty, rejoicing to exhibit himself on that footing of human weakness which he shared with his hearers and converts. That is why he found himself in a position to conceive such great love of the brethren. After the pattern of Almighty God and in Imitation of Jesus Christ he cherished to a high degree the virtue of compassion, and a character which was impetuous and unyielding by nature became gentle and affectionate under the influence of grace. The affection in which he held his own converts was as tender as it was strong. With the unselfish love of a mother he brought forth the image of Christ in the souls of the Galatians (Gal. iv, 19); with the devoted sympathy of a nurse he cherished the Thessalonians and recaptured the language of infancy in order the better to be understood (I Thess. ii, 7); with the strong solicitude of a father he exhorted and adjured all to walk worthily of the God who called them to his kingdom (Eph. iv, 1). How he rejoiced at the orderly array of the Colossians and grieved at the thought of their being cheated and led astray! (Col. ii, 4-5). "His mind," says Newman, "was like some instrument of music, harp or viol, the strings of which vibrate, though untouched, by the notes which other instruments give forth." How he deplored divisions and abhorred enmities in the Christian body! (I Cor. i, 10-12). These he conceived as an offence against nature, and above all as injurious to the Saviour who died to restore the unity of mankind. Fraternal charity was always in his thoughts, and no man hymned it as well or practised it so assiduously: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have prophecy and should know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing . . . Charity is patient, is kind," etc. (I Cor. xiii). Christian altruism owes its noblest expression to him: "Let each esteem others better than himself; each one not considering the things that are his own, but those that are other men's," (Phil. ii, 3-4); and Christian humanism its motto: "For the rest, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good fame, if there be any virtue, if any praise of discipline: think on these things" (Phil. iv, 8).

Such high and noble sentiments flowed spontaneously from St. Paul's appreciation of the Christian Mystery. His mind worked by intuition and he saw more clearly than others the universal efficacy of the redemption. If salvation is for all men and if in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, it is because the power that works salvation is not the law of Moses but faith in him who "was delivered up for our sins and rose again for our justification" (Rom. iv, 25). The Law of Moses was holy and just and good, but it was powerless to save. And how unequal to the struggle with sin were those who had nothing but that law to help

them Paul explained by a vivid description of the conflict between the higher and the lower self occasioned by the commands of God's positive legislation (Rom. vii, 14-25). In further setting aside the claims of Jewish propaganda he stressed the primacy of the life of grace over external observances, and showed himself more deeply acquainted with the spirit of the Gospel than many of his contemporaries. Christians, therefore, though freed from the Mosaic Law, were not free from all law, for they were subject to the law of the Spirit and had to keep their minds fixed on the things of the Spirit. The freedom of the sons of God is another intuition which appears constantly in his writings. The death of Christ set men free from the tyranny of sin and the grave, and the Christian lives a new life in union with the Risen Christ. In virtue of that union the Christian gives glad and willing service, inspired and borne along by the Holy Spirit. The "slaves of Christ" are the only men who are truly free, for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (II Cor. iii, 17).

"Slave of Christ Jesus" was the title which he himself loved beyond all others. From the time that his eyes were opened after the blinding experience on the road to Damascus, he saw only Jesus. Henceforth faith in the crucified Lord was the power that charged his energies, the star that shaped his course, the wings that gave him flight. In a striking passage in Colossians, he recalls the primacy of Christ with the object of confirming the teaching given to that Church by Epaphras: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the remission of sins; who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for in him were all things created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominations, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and in him. And he is before all, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he may hold the primacy. Because in him it hath well pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell; and through him to reconcile all things to himself, making peace through the blood of his cross, both as to the things that are on earth, and the things that are in heaven" (Col. i, 14-21). What an impression the passage gives of the deep religious life that is centred in Jesus! Existing before the world of men and of angels, present to his followers from the beginning of this life and their goal in the next, Jesus was the object of Paul's heartfelt praise and undying love:

"Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or famine or nakedness or danger or persecution or the sword?" Rom. viii, 35.

"For to me, to live is Christ: and to die is gain (Phil. i, 21).

"With Christ I am nailed to the cross. And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii, 19-20).

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world... From henceforth let no man be troublesome to me; for I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body" (Gal. vi, 14-17).

"If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema" (I Cor. xvi, 22).

To think so magnificently of Jesus, to be wise with that wisdom which is none other than Jesus and him crucified, to be urged on by an enthusiasm and a personal love for Jesus that still burns and inflames across the centuries: all this was granted to Paul, so much so that the phrase "in Christ Jesus" occurs as a refrain in his writings and recapitulates all his thoughts. Old age did not wither nor custom stale the beautiful relationship. From the darkness of a Roman prison he spoke of the light that the Saviour brought, shedding rays of life and immortality through the gospel which he had been appointed to herald, II Tim. i, 10. And though he felt that the end was at hand, he was not put to the blush, because Jesus to whom he had given his confidence was no stranger to him and had the means to keep his pledge safe (II Tim. i, 12). The imagination is busy with the picture of the old man Paul in prison. Did the memories of thirty years of toil in the service of the Lord crowd in upon him? some painful, appeals unheeded, invitations spurned and grace rejected: others consoling, so many of the same mind, cherishing the same bond of charity, and the peace of God watching over their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. One thing is certain: he had fought the good fight, and finished the race, and had redeemed his pledge. He could look forward to the future with calm and serenity: "The Lord hath delivered me from every evil work: and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom, to whom be glory for ever and ever, Amen" (II Tim. iv, 18).

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The above is an extract from a contribution to the forthcoming work: *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*.