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## MODERN APOLOGETICS

### I

THE SUBJECT matter of this essay has been suggested by Canon Richardson's recent book *Christian Apologetics*<sup>1</sup> and also by an article in a composite book called *Revelation*,<sup>2</sup> written by Archbishop William Temple, on which the main idea in Canon Richardson's book is avowedly based.

Canon Richardson considers that the presentation of theology as an independent science is a necessity for present-day apologists. The methodology of theological knowledge must be considered in relation to that of the sciences in general. "Theological knowledge must justify itself at the bar of rational scientific enquiry" (p. 7). He distinguishes between the "natural" sciences and the "human" sciences, and would have us believe that this difference is now better understood than it once was. He insists that the treatment of the natural sciences must be as objective as possible, and that all "value-judgments" must be excluded from it; but he also insists that it is now recognised that it is neither possible nor desirable to exclude "the standpoint of the observer and his personal judgment" from the study and expression of the human sciences, especially from history and theology (p. 11).

The Modern Mind has come to believe that the only kind of knowledge to which the title "scientific" can properly be applied is knowledge which can be "demonstrated", such as mathematics, or which can be shown to be reasonably certain by induction from observed physical facts, or by experiments which can be indefinitely repeated. This is hardly wonderful in an age in which education is becoming more and more specialised and more and more a training for a specific employment rather than the development of the whole personality.

Canon Richardson's attempt to show that theology is a "science" in its own right with its own categories which do not belong to any other science has much to be said for it, but we doubt how far it will convince "scientists who take their

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Apologetics*. By Canon Alan Richardson, D.D. (S.C.M. Press, 1947). Reviewed by Professor G. T. Thomson in THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY for April 1948, pp. 159 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Revelation*. Edited by John Baillie and Hugh Martin. (Faber and Faber, 1937.)

own methods for granted" (p. 8), and who are so ignorant of anything outside their own special field of study, that they cannot conceive that there are any other methods by which truth may be approached, or indeed any other form of truth to be approached. Canon Richardson thinks that some "honest enquirers" may be helped by his book, especially if they realise that it was not primarily meant for them. In this we think he is too modest. His book is likely to be useful to many persons who probably consider themselves to be educated, but who are really ignorant of history and especially of Church history—a type of ignorance which he considers, with good reason, to be prevalent at the present day, not to mention the abysmal ignorance of the content and meaning of the Bible which makes so many "educated" people ready to believe that it is the product of the wishful thinking of a few obscure fanatics.

One of the most valuable parts of Canon Richardson's book consists in its definitions of the terms employed in it. These are scattered through the book, and we think we shall do good service by collecting them here. Apologetics is defined as "the study of the ways and means of defending Christian truth". "It deals with the relationship of the Christian faith to the wider sphere of man's secular knowledge." "It is primarily a study undertaken by Christians for Christians, and, in this respect, it is to be distinguished from the task of apology, since an apology is addressed to non-Christians" (pp. 20 f.).

Frequent use is made of the word "ideology" and a careful account of its origin is given on page 72. Canon Richardson says that its modern use may be best understood by thinking of it as denoting the spectacles through which each one of us looks at life, inasmuch as our view of life is conditioned by our education and environment. He defines it as a "religion-substitute". He rightly protests against the opinion that religion is an "epiphenomenon" of a given social condition, and asks what similar social and economic factors could have produced the same reactions in St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Francis of Assisi, Hooker, Pascal, Joseph Butler and William Temple (p. 71).

In our opinion we could do very well without the word "ideology", which is nothing but a journalistic catch-word, and still better without the word "epiphenomenon", which is an excellent example of a word which seems to wrap up much

wisdom in a little room, but which, as far as we have any proof, corresponds to nothing of the existence of which we have any certainty. A phenomenon is something which affects our senses and which is, therefore, supposed to have some real existence by all but the most sceptical school of philosophy. But an epiphenomenon is a pure figment of a brain which desires to explain away the existence of something which it is unwilling to account for by prevalent and reasonable explanations.

Canon Richardson often makes use of the term "science", sometimes without any qualifying adjective, when he almost certainly means what is more properly called "natural science". He defines "science" as meaning "the study of observable facts, and their systematic classification by means of the available evidence". In a note he says that science is concerned with generalisations which are reached by means of induction, which is the essence of the "scientific method", since the object of science is to acquire knowledge by the observation of things experienced. He also well defines what are loosely called "the Laws of Science" as generalisations of high probability; "Hypotheses" he defines as generalisations of lower probability, and "Theories" as something between the two. "Categories" he defines as "principles of interpretation of a rather broader kind than hypotheses". Thus mechanism is a category of Physical Science; organism of Biological Science; revelation of Theological Science. By his definition of "Laws" of science he escapes the confusion into which many people who are slaves to the terms which they employ often fall when they regard them as immutable decrees by which even the Almighty is bound (p. 40).

On page 15 he says that one of the perplexing questions which confronts Modern Thought "is to show how knowledge is possible outside the sphere of the natural sciences". Surely this perplexity is produced by uncertainty as to what we mean by "knowledge" and "natural science". After all "science" is only the Latin form for what we express in Anglo-Saxon by "knowledge". If we have given it a special connotation, we are deluded by our use of words.

Why should we think that "science" and the "scientific method" are the only path to "knowledge"? If the "Laws" which "Natural Science" enunciates are only "generalisations of high probability", can we be surprised that we find it difficult

to attain to perfect knowledge when we come to deal with the conclusions of the less abstract and more complicated "Human Sciences"? This perplexity is by no means peculiar to Modern Thought. St. Paul was well aware that he only knew in part and was only able to convey this imperfect knowledge to others imperfectly. Bishop Butler's maxim that to us "probability is the very guide of life" has never been outmoded or disproved, and is never likely to be.

When the physical scientist has penetrated into the sphere of electrons, neutrons and protons, he may be able to use them as tools, but he has no knowledge of their real nature. No more futile thought ever entered into the mind of man than the theory that "Science", by which Physical, or, at least, Natural Science is always meant, will some day bring about a state of universal happiness beside which even the Millennium of the visionaries of the early Church will seem a poor thing.

We presume that Mr. Bertrand Russell may be regarded as a competent authority on the nature and probable result of the findings of Physical Science as at present understood, yet he finds in them only a "firm foundation of unyielding despair". This is hardly wonderful when he enumerates among things which "if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand" the propositions that "man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end that they were achieving, that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms" and that "the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins" (*A Free Man's Worship*). It is a sorry result for two thousand years of "scientific" study to have advanced no further than the position taken up by Lucretius, but it is a result which is inevitable, so long as men are obsessed with the presupposition that the only path to knowledge lies through "the scientific method" when understood in the narrowest possible sense, and when it is only applied to the study of observable physical facts and to their systematic classification by means of the available evidence. The relevance of Canon Richardson's definition of "Rationalism" is obvious in this connection. He defines it as the view which considers "truth to be discoverable, or the limits of understanding to be ascertainable, by means of the operation of or the

examination of the human reason alone, apart from 'faith', 'grace', etc." (note on p. 158).

## II

The main object then of Canon Richardson's book is to present Theology as a Science in its own right with its own distinctive categories. It is to be studied in accordance with "scientific" method, and, in his opinion, it will not get a hearing in these days, unless this is done.

By Theology he does not mean the study of comparative religion, but a definitely Christian, or, at least, theistic Theology which involves belief in a God who is neither the product of human reason, or superstition, nor a spirit which may be supposed to be immanent in humanity, nor a power, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness, but a Being who can and does influence the course of history and who manifests His nature by so doing. In such a Science as this he properly finds that the most distinctive and important category is that of Revelation.

Canon Richardson dislikes and discards the old terminology which spoke of "natural religion" and "revealed religion". He, following the example of Archbishop Temple, prefers to speak of a "general revelation" and a "special revelation", the first given in differing degrees to all men and the other only given through the Prophets in the Old Testament and through the Apostles in the New Testament.

This alteration in terminology is commendable, if only because it gets rid of the question-begging word Nature in its attributive form Natural. Many loose thinkers believe that they have got rid of God, if only they may be allowed to talk about "Nature". Lucretius, whose system, when strictly considered, left room for no other cause for the manifold phenomena of the world except an endless fall of innumerable atoms, some of which swerved slightly from the straight and narrow path, could not prevent himself from making many references to *Natura gubernans*, and in this illogical concession he has never lacked imitators.

This classification of revelation as "general" and "special" is quite in accordance with the teaching of St. Paul and the opinion of the Greek Fathers who believed that all that was good in the Pagan world came from God. It does not agree with the

theory of the Deists that Christianity was a "republication" of "natural religion", enforced possibly by clearer proofs and fresh sanctions.

As to the source and nature of "special revelation", Canon Richardson quotes with approval the opinion of Archbishop Temple that revelation is not given to us in the form of propositions written down in a verbally inspired book, and even his declaration that there is no such thing as revealed truth. "There are truths of revelation, that is to say, propositions which express the results of correct thinking concerning revelation; but they are not themselves directly revealed." According to the Archbishop revelation is given in historic events when the prophetic mind is present and able to appreciate and interpret their significance. Revelation results from "the coincidence of event and appreciation". "Its essence is the intercourse of mind and event, not the communication of doctrine distilled from that intercourse." "The essential condition of effectual revelation is the coincidence of divinely controlled event and minds divinely illuminated to read it aright" (p. 145).

Thus the Archbishop quite rightly considers that revelation is grounded in history. This is the objective element in it. It is not merely a subjective matter of the visions and experiences of persons believed to be religious geniuses, as (for example) the author imagined for the Fourth Gospel by many German critics and their French and English followers. Canon Richardson objects to this over-simplification of the source and nature of revelation. He says that to us history can never be objective. We only know what happened through the written and interpreted and, therefore, subjective history of the Biblical record. If we do not accept the Biblical principle of interpretation, we are not likely to accept the Biblical record as true or objective history. By the Biblical principle of interpretation he seems to mean a belief that God cares for His creatures and guides historical events in such a way as seems good to Him and expedient for them.

In this opinion he is doing nothing more than repeating in other words the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the declaration by its author that he who cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

It is admitted that it is important that the truths revealed in

events of history and interpreted by Prophets or Apostles should be correctly formulated, but this formulation in Creeds and systems of dogmatic Theology can obviously only be made after the original revelation has been given.

The history of the Church and the development of its doctrinal system certainly followed this course. The Apostles' Creed consists in part of statements of events which at the time when it was composed were accepted as historical, such as the virgin birth of Christ, His sufferings, death, burial, resurrection on the third day and ascension into heaven. These latter events are dated, inasmuch as they are said to have occurred during the period when Pontius Pilate governed Judea. It also consists of what may be regarded as apostolic interpretations of these events, namely that Jesus Christ is the only Son of God and our Lord and that He is now sitting on the right hand of the Father and will come at the last day to judge both the quick and the dead. It is rather difficult to regard belief in the Holy Ghost as the result of the Apostolic interpretation of any of these events; it seems to be rather the result of religious experience. The same may be said of the doctrine of the Holy Catholic Church, of the Communion of Saints and of the Forgiveness of sins. The doctrine of the resurrection of the body may fairly be regarded as an inspired interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus, assuming that it really was a physical resurrection, and the doctrine of everlasting life may perhaps also be regarded as a corollary of this and of a belief in a God who is almighty and who is the Father of all men. To account for the article which teaches that Christ descended into the world of the dead, if the above-mentioned theory is a complete account of revelation, is not easy.

We are not convinced that the source and nature of "special revelation" are fully described when they are said to be the coincidence of divinely controlled events with minds divinely illuminated to interpret them aright. This definition seems to be true as far as it goes, but it is not complete, as we hope to show later on.

We may note in passing that it does away with Lessing's objection that historical events can have no importance for religion, and with the much more subtle objection of Dean Rashdall: "It is not inconceivable that in the whole course of nature there should be one single exception to such a uniform



mode of action [that is to say the supposed uniformity of the 'laws' of Nature], but it may well be thought morally inconceivable that any spiritually important consequence should be dependent on the belief in a historical event which would be so utterly incapable of establishment by testimony as a supposed solitary exception to an otherwise uniform course of nature" (*Contentio Veritatis*, p. 54).

This definition of "special revelation" also reduces the distinction between the "Jesus of History" and the "Christ of Faith" and that between the "Religion of Jesus" and the "Metaphysics of Paul" to their proper insignificance.

We are further told by Canon Richardson that "the Biblical principle of interpretation . . . gives us the guarantee that the facts recorded in the Bible are broadly historical. It enables us to explain them coherently and rationally, without having to explain them away, and judged by the test of coherence it is more successful than any other interpretation" (p. 147).

This, at first sight, looks like arguing in a circle, but if we understand a belief in a personal and loving God as being the essence of what is here called the Biblical principle of interpretation, we see that we are really starting from first principles, although this is a principle which can only be a consequence of faith in the first instance.

Another path by which Canon Richardson approaches his task of using a scientific method in the study of theology is the excellent principle of passing from the known to the unknown. To use his own words: "The facts of the existence of the Church and her Bible yield a body of knowledge which requires and validates, at the scientific level, certain strictly theological categories, such as that of revelation" (p. 17).

We may say without hesitation that the existence of the Church,<sup>1</sup> by which we mean the existence of a body of persons "who profess and call themselves Christians", and the existence of the Bible are facts of present experience, and, like all facts, demand a reasonable explanation.

We hope that we may also be allowed to assume as a fact the existence among all men, except among those whose minds have been warped by long-continued indulgence in sensuality

<sup>1</sup> Canon Richardson well says: "Christian apologetics as such is not based upon an appeal to Christian religious experience, which must inevitably be private to Christians and incommunicable until faith is aroused; it is based primarily upon the historical and contemporary evidence of Christian existence" (p. 123).

or by deliberate misguidance in youth, of a sense of right and wrong and of a general conviction that what is felt to be right should be practised and what is felt to be wrong should be avoided. More than this we feel we can hardly assume to be self-evident in the present enlightened age (see the admirable treatment of this topic on pp. 124 ff. of Canon Richardson's book). We wish that we could also assume with more confidence that it was generally admitted that members of the Church were manifestly different from other men, and that this difference was for the better and not for the worse. This was the argument to which early apologists for Christianity, such as Origen, appealed with the greatest confidence, and it is far from having lost its cogency even now. In fact where men and women are consistent Christians their behaviour is so far a rebuke to their neighbours that they are frequently charged with hypocrisy, or their virtues are represented as "slave morality" by certain persons who consider themselves to be representatives of the highest attainable philosophy.

It has been found so difficult to account for the existence of the Church and the Bible by what is considered in these circles as a "rational" explanation, that the most desperate attempts have been made to explain it away as the result of a "spontaneous" movement among certain obscure communities in Asia Minor and Rome. People who like this kind of "explanation" will find it set out at large in the works of Strauss and Loisy and more recently in the description of the origin of Christianity by the Bishop of Birmingham who, in a recent broadcast, admitted that he relied on Loisy for some of his theories. He gave it to be understood that Loisy's work *La Naissance du Christianisme* would never have been translated into English or commended by Professor Gilbert Murray, if it had not been of great importance and significance, but he said nothing of the unfavourable reviews that it received, even from papers that cannot be regarded as the organs of a bigoted and out-of-date form of Christianity. It is true that in a correspondence between Dean Inge and Bishop Henson published in the latter's reminiscences it is referred to as the most formidable attack ever made on orthodox Christianity, but it did not appear that even Dean Inge accepted it as a final statement of the facts, still less Bishop Henson.

Canon Richardson now passes it over without any mention at all, together with all books which endeavour to account for

the origin of Christianity in this or similar ways. He also says nothing of the vast structure, of which Loisy's book might be taken as the coping stone, which has been erected on the comparison of the matter contained in the Synoptic Gospels and their supposedly flat contradiction with the Fourth Gospel. At one time this comparison was believed to give a "rational" explanation of the origin of the Church and even to trace the stages of the evolution of its faith. It was supposed to begin with a peasant teacher who taught a pure morality and felt that he was in very close communion with God. He gathered round him certain ignorant men, who may be supposed not even to have been the "Apostles" named in the early legends of the Church. After he was crucified, these men "could not let him go", because they had loved and admired him so much in his life-time, and, it must be added, had been so completely misled by his delusion that he would come again to them as the Messiah.

Consequently they felt that his spirit was present at their reunions, and from this arose, not only the "legend" that he was still alive and could communicate with them, but also a story that his tomb had been found empty and that his bodily form had been seen and even handled by some of his followers. From these modest beginnings these simple men soon came to call him "Lord", to worship him and finally to equate him with the jealous God of Israel with the status of His Only Son.

What is still more remarkable, they succeeded in making sceptical and sometimes educated Greeks believe all this, and it was not long before certain members of the imperial family of Rome joined this sect and sacrificed their lives, the lives of their children and their hopes of succession to the Empire of the world to a groundless superstition.

Finally they produced four accounts of the life of this man which have made countless people, not all ignorant "charcoal-burners", for nearly two thousand years accept their final delusion that he was an incarnation of God and give their lives to His service, and, if necessary, die for Him.

Moreover certain epistles alleged to have been written by a man who was converted a few years after the crucifixion of this peasant and who was an educated Jew, at first bitterly opposed to the new sect, were somehow composed which so deceived the most learned and sceptical men even in Germany that they assigned them to this man without hesitation. These Epistles

stated in unequivocal terms that Jesus had been declared the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead, and much beside which flatly contradicts the simple explanation of the origin of Christianity sketched above. They were also generally believed, even by the most sceptical scholars, to have been written before the Gospels had fixed the imaginary history of the prophet Jesus.

A very acute critical analysis by Loisy and a few other savants of his type is now supposed to have shown that the parts of these Epistles in which Jesus is represented as anything more than a teacher and a false prophet are due to a late "Christian Gnosis", which was so extremely skilful that it deceived the "very elect" of critics, until the last few years. This is supposed to be the work of a Church which started with ignorant men who had nothing to gain by their visions, and less by expanding them in opposition to all the traditions of their race.

Unfortunately few people are clever enough to account for the origin of the Church in this way and fewer still to believe in this account when it is fairly presented to them. There are limits to the credulity of reasonably educated people who take the trouble to think out the implications of novel theories which are offered to their notice.

The great majority of those outside the Church never take the trouble to think that it must have had an origin, and that this origin must be explained in a way consonant with the behaviour of ordinary men and women. If they think of the Church at all, and if it in any way offers an obstacle to the way in which they desire to live, they dismiss it as a hopelessly divided body which is quite incapable of making good its claims to be of divine origin and to be of the utmost importance in the world. That such a view of the Church is possible to people who think at all is not due to the records of its first beginnings, but to the lives of its present members.

### III

We have said that we do not regard the definition of Revelation as consisting in divinely guided events interpreted by divinely inspired Prophets and Apostles as complete. We should be the last to deny the importance of these divinely guided events, or to reduce Christianity to a subjective experience or to the product of the human mind and its aspirations.

The New Testament contains something besides the accounts of certain events and the interpretation of them. It also contains what is alleged to be the teaching of Jesus, and some of this teaching (especially if we may be allowed to assume that the Fourth Gospel contains anything more than "interpretations" of a singularly gifted theologian of the second century of the life of Jesus cast in the form of "propositions" and "put into His mouth") consists of statements about His nature as the Incarnate Son, which can only be reconciled with the supposition that He was a good and sane man, if they are taken to be the utterances of One who speaks to us as such (Heb. i. 2; Matt. v. 22 and elsewhere).

Archbishop Temple says that it is of extreme importance that the revelation of Jesus should have been given to us in His person, and that it is also of extreme importance that He wrote no book (*Revelation*, p. 114).

We may agree to the first of these statements without reservation, and to the second up to a point. He, however, goes on to say, "It is of even greater advantage that there is no single deed or saying of His of which we can be perfectly sure that He said or did precisely this or that. Indeed of His sayings we have no exact reproduction, for presumably He spoke in Aramaic, and our records are in Greek, and all translation makes some difference".

If this is a great advantage, it is difficult to see how we can have any reliable information as to the manner of the birth of Jesus or as to the event which we commonly call the Resurrection. If we pressed this statement to its logical conclusion, it might be made to mean that it is a great advantage to be able to believe that the "Resurrection" was only a feeling prevalent among the disciples that Jesus was present in their assemblies after His death, or even that one of them, when alone, worked himself into a sufficiently ecstatic condition to entertain such a belief and to be able to impart it to his companions. The Archbishop certainly did not hold this view, as is plain from what he wrote elsewhere, but his statement leaves the door open to this explanation of the origin of Christianity in more subtle minds.

The statement that we do not know exactly what Jesus said, because "presumably" He spoke in Aramaic, and we only have a Greek translation of His sayings, is still more questionable. It is as clear as it can be that the translators of the original Aramaic

documents in which the sayings of Jesus were preserved made the Greek version as literal and we may also assume as faithful as possible, even to the complete sacrifice of Greek idiom in certain passages. Dr. Torrey has shown in his *Our Translated Gospels* how few passages there are in which this exact reproduction of the Aramaic idiom makes any doctrinal difference, and how many there are where the recognition of the existence of an Aramaic background clears up obscurities of minor importance. Although there is a superficial truth in the saying *traduttore traditore*, it is too much to say that we do not know with sufficient accuracy what Jesus said, simply because we have His sayings in the kind of translation which we do possess. Could not a Frenchman who knows no English have an accurate translation into his own language of Mr. Churchill's saying, "Never was so much owed by so many to so few?"

The sayings of Jesus were almost always "winged words" of this description. They are not obscure philosophical arguments leading to conclusions which cannot be understood unless the reader has an exact knowledge of the meaning of certain abstract words occurring in the language in which these arguments and conclusions were first formulated. If the sayings of Jesus are to be regarded as inadequately reported because they are reported in a translation, what must be the uncertainty attaching to their meaning when they are reported in a translation of a translation, as they are in all English pulpits, and what will be left that English preachers and teachers can handle with any confidence?

To give only one example, what becomes of the teaching of Jesus about the indissolubility of marriage? This is held by many divines to be unquestionable, in spite of the fact that the record in the First Gospel records that He made one exception to the rule.

The Archbishop has another objection to the "traditional view" that we find "divinely guaranteed truths" in the Bible. This is that "the Bible, accepted as the repository of revelation, consists of so small a portion of the kind of truth in question" (*Revelation*, p. 101). But if any part of it consists of matter of this kind (and it can hardly be contended that there is not a considerable amount of it in the Gospels) why should it not be regarded as part of revelation? Up to this time most people have found it to be a most helpful part and, indeed, an essential

part of the book on which they depend for their knowledge of the origin and nature of the Christian religion.

Even if many critics, among whom the Archbishop is numbered (*Revelation*, p. 91) prefer to say that it is "recorded" that our Lord said, "He that has seen Me has seen the Father" to saying that Jesus said this, or something very like it, and to treat many other "propositions" of this kind as "interpretations" and as not being part of the actual content of His discourses, it is most difficult to understand how such "interpretations" arose as the result of the "divinely guided events" which are recorded in the Gospels. It would seem as if the only events upon which such an interpretation could be founded are the miracles of healing and the resurrection. Miracles of healing might be regarded as manifestations of the character of God, and the man who worked them might be regarded as doing the work of God and therefore like Him in at least one respect. But Jesus was not the only person who was believed by the Jews to have wrought works of healing. There is no record that Elijah claimed that those who had seen him had seen the Father after he had raised the widow's son.

It is true that St. Paul regarded the resurrection as a declaration that He who was raised was the Son of God (Rom. i. 4). No one denies its importance for the origin of the Church, whether he regards it as a divinely guided event of history or an hallucination. But one of the strongest reasons for believing that the resurrection was a divinely guided historical event is that it is presented in the Gospels not as the resurrection of a teacher or even of an original religious genius, but of a being such as the Jesus depicted in *all* the Gospels must have been, supposing that they have preserved a generally truthful record of what He was and what He said. Canon Richardson (*op. cit.*, p. 169) supposes that a person who stands outside the Church might say that it might be true or untrue that a man was raised from the dead in Jerusalem in the first century, but, supposing it to be true, what does it matter to him?

The answer which most people would give to this objection would be to point to the extraordinary story of this man's life as told in the Gospels as well as to the extraordinary effects which belief in the truth of this story and also in the truth of the teaching which He is said to have given produced immediately after His death, as told in the Epistles and in all the subsequent

history of the Church, including the experience of those who now believe in Him.

To rely exclusively on the factual truth of the miracle stories in the Bible, even when they have been interpreted by divinely guided prophets and apostles, seems to us to throw away the strongest proof that exists that the Bible contains a revelation from God. Such a method of apology is a reversion to the method in favour in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which finds its most able exponent in Archdeacon Paley. It has its importance and contains a large element of truth, but it is not the whole truth, as Paley himself admitted in the later chapters of his work. Miracle stories are by no means peculiar to the Bible. They abound in the *Acta Sanctorum* in an embarrassing profusion and are not unknown among modern Roman Catholics and Faith Healers. What is peculiar to the New Testament is a combination of such stories which mainly concern works of mercy and deliverance from suffering and sin with moral teaching given by a teacher who made extraordinary claims for Himself and yet lived such a life that His followers did not regard such claims as unfounded and even looked upon Him as a man who was without sin. (Cf. 1 Pet. ii. 22; John viii. 46; 2 Cor. v. 21; Heb. iv. 15; vii. 26; 1 John iii. 5; and we might add Matt. iii. 14, if it were not probable that certain members of a now rather discredited critical school would reject the historical character of this story as being a "midrash" of the most tendentious description.) Loisy and his like naturally deny in express terms that Jesus was sinless. The Bishop of Birmingham had not made up his mind on this awkward topic in 1927 when he wrote *Should such a Faith Offend?* (p. 54)<sup>1</sup>. Professor Bethune-Baker considered that the fact that Jesus submitted to baptism was equivalent to a sense of sin (*Faith of the Apostles' Creed*, p. 117). Mr. R. G. Griffith, in his time a great light among Modern Churchmen, was "contented to regard our Lord as absolutely sinless, though He did not know this fact Himself" (*Gospel History Examined*, pp. 41f.).

Many critics who would certainly regard themselves as

<sup>1</sup> In *The Rise of Christianity* (1947) he confesses that he worships "Jesus the Christ as divine" (p. vi), and says: "The abiding influence of his teaching rests on the belief, which sways successive generations of men, that Jesus truly knew God, that no misunderstanding marred his certainty, that he was blessed with a purity of heart which enabled him to see God. We may confidently prophesy that, so long as men hold to this belief, Christianity will maintain its authority among them" (p. 134). One infers that Dr. Barnes himself holds to this belief.



“independent” either say very little about the sinlessness of Jesus, or express their belief in it. It is strange that none of them see that the existence of a sinless man is as great a “miracle” as any of the stories about His life to which they object on “scientific” grounds.

We feel that the unwillingness to regard the words of Jesus as containing revealed truth or as being of the nature of “propositions” is a hangover from the days of Schmiedel, when it could be gravely stated as the last word of criticism that there were only three or four sayings of Jesus which could be regarded as authentic. These sayings were of no theological or moral importance, unless a saying can be regarded as theologically and morally important which, when taken out of its context, seems to prove that Jesus was a man exactly like other men, and was perfectly well aware of this fact. Schmiedel does not seem to have been at all disturbed in his conviction that he had reached historic truth by the fact that these sayings were translations from the Aramaic. There were, however, very many able “analytical critics”, able that is to say in their own opinion or in that of their school, who did not go so far as this. They stoutly defended the authenticity of any saying (even if it was a translation) which fitted in with their presuppositions or with the theories that they had formed from the study of part of the Gospel record. The supporters of the “Messianic Secret” theory, for example, accepted the record of the rebukes given to the devils who recognised Jesus as the Son of God and considered that the Gospel of St. Mark was a record of events arranged in the right order, whatever might be said of its author’s excessive preoccupation with “miracles”. Extreme Eschatologists, like Schweitzer, accepted the saying, “Ye shall not have gone round the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come”, as genuine to the very last letter, although it only occurs in that part of the Gospels which most critics of that time considered to be inferior as “history” to everything else in the Synoptists. Persons who held this view naturally accepted as much of the eschatological discourses as suited their purposes and were not at all disturbed by the fact that they were almost certainly translations from the Aramaic, that they only covered a small part of the teaching of Jesus and that when interpreted in an excessively literal sense they deprived much of His other teaching of any meaning.

The insistence on the necessity for a divinely illuminated

Prophet or Apostle to interpret the meaning of the facts of history no doubt contains an element of truth; but it is open to the danger that it may be easily exaggerated until it comes to imply, at least in the case of the Gospel records, that the Evangelists "interpreted" the sayings of Jesus until their record of them bore little likeness to the form in which they were first uttered. Modern Prophets have been busy at this kind of interpretation for a long time. How far they are to be regarded as inspired depends on the taste and fancy of their readers.

To us and to the school of criticism which is again coming to the front it appears to be impossible that the Apostles should have so interpreted the "facts" of the life of Jesus, even if these included some remarkable cures which such simple people regarded as miraculous, and the "resurrection", even if this came to be regarded by them as a physical event, unless there had been something in the teaching of Jesus, mainly given to them alone and recorded as being so given in the Fourth Gospel, which made them believe that they had seen in Him a revelation of the Father and that He was the Word of God made flesh.

According to St. Paul, the Resurrection put God's seal on this teaching. According to the author of the Fourth Gospel it enabled the Twelve to understand teaching which they had not understood when it was given. Some such teaching, whether it was given by Jesus himself or was the result of the "interpretation" of the facts of His life by the Apostles, was certainly the background of the faith of those Churches to which St. Paul wrote, but did not evangelise, of St. Paul himself, of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the writer of the First Epistle attributed to St. John.

It also seems to us that in certain cases there is an antecedent probability that a man's words may be more accurately transmitted to posterity than the facts of his life, even if they are not derived from his own writings. The form in which the teaching of Jesus is represented as being cast is notoriously helpful to the memory, and it was given among people who were accustomed to commit oral teaching to memory.

It does not seem unfair to put the matter in this form: Jesus either said "No man knoweth the Son save the Father; neither doth any know the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him", "He that has seen Me has seen the Father" and "I and my Father are one thing",

or He did not. If He did not say any of these things or anything approximating to them in Aramaic, then they are rather the result of the imagination of some Apostle than of his interpretation of any event in the life of Jesus. His imagination may have been stimulated by "the Spirit of Jesus", but he gives us no hint that this was the process as a result of which he wrote down these words. He presents them bluntly and without ambiguity as part of the teaching of Jesus and seems to expect that they will be accepted as such without hesitation, even when they are "a meteorite from the Johannine heaven" appearing without warning in the Synoptic record.

Leaving the question of verbal inspiration on one side, it seems going much too far to say that revelation is never given in the form of "propositions". Even if it be granted that some kind of parallel can be found to the content and even to the wording of the moral teaching of Jesus in Jewish literature or in the ethical side of Greek philosophy, it cannot be denied that He altered the scale of moral values and by so doing left a mark on the general behaviour of mankind which is not quite effaced yet, in spite of the labours of certain modern prophets. Bishop Lightfoot brought all this out admirably in his essay on St. Paul and Seneca in his edition of the Epistle to the Philippians, which some well satisfied modern "scholars" would do well to read, as an example of what true scholarship and moderation really are.

Canon Richardson has some excellent remarks about the superiority of "special revelation"—which can hardly exclude the teaching of Jesus—to "general revelation" on page 130 of his book.

It seems to us that when an apologetic writer who is trying to commend Christian Theology by the use of "scientific" method objects to revelation being given through "propositions" and seems to think it important to stress his opinion that we do not know exactly what Jesus taught, he has failed to reject completely that type of criticism which claimed to have proved that we knew little more of the teaching of Jesus than we did of the facts of His life. Canon Richardson and Archbishop Temple seem to have rid themselves of bondage to this theory, as far as concerns the facts recorded in the Gospels, even when these facts purport to be miracles. The Archbishop says that he believes that Jesus walked upon the water. This is a miracle with little theological significance and one which can be more easily explained as a

misunderstanding of an ordinary event than the restoration of sight to a man born blind or the raising of Lazarus, which many critics have explained away as parables illustrating the sayings "I am the light of the world" and "I am the resurrection and the life". As we know from the discussion between the Bishop of Birmingham and Canon Richardson on the wireless, it is this kind of acceptance of a miraculous story in isolation from its context which gives away a debating point to the Bishop. Members of the critical school on which he relies will not be appeased by half measures. They are inclined, and we believe rightly, to accept much of the teaching of Jesus, even if they only have it in a translation, as the best primary evidence that we have of His unique character and even, in some sense, of His divinity. They have found more difficulty in explaining away its origin, if it did not come from Him, than they have found in explaining away His miracles. They have never explained where the power came from which enabled His followers to put this teaching into practice and to induce others to do the same; and the more they attribute the source of this teaching to the "Believing Community", the more difficult it becomes to explain why the community not only believed, but acted on its belief in the face of the ridicule and persecution with which it was faced.

In an attempt to account for the belief that was certainly formed about the Person of Jesus in the second century, if we may not say in the first, they have been compelled to date the Epistles of St. Paul, in the form in which we now have them, some time after his death,<sup>1</sup> and to reopen the controversy about the Epistles of St. Ignatius.<sup>2</sup>

If we assign a late date to the Third Gospel, as these critics do, it cannot be denied that its author professed to have made a careful investigation into the traditions of the generation preceding his own which was fully contemporary with Jesus. He wrote for a man who was not ignorant of the main outlines of Christian teaching and who had presumably been instructed by people older than himself, not to give him fresh and revolutionary information, but to give him certainty as to the things in which he had been instructed. He may have been a propagandist of the school of Dr. Goebbels, but it is hard to discover what his motive was for undertaking, or professing to undertake, such

<sup>1</sup> See E. W. Barnes, *The Rise of Christianity*, pp. 217-45.

<sup>2</sup> Barnes, *op. cit.*, pp. 260-4.

investigations and for writing such a book. It is also difficult to explain how he produced a book which Renan called "the most beautiful book in the world" under such conditions.

It seems as certain as anything in past history can be that the writers of the Gospels had everything to lose from a worldly point of view and nothing to gain by writing as they did. It may be freely admitted that they were men of differing temperaments, that they wrote for different readers and that they had a purpose in sifting their materials. But what purpose they could have had in either reporting their own imaginations or even their own interpretations as facts no one has so far been able to explain. Even the motive of edification is not easy to understand when edification led to an increase in the numbers of the Church, and to be a member of the Church was often the quickest way to the amphitheatre or the gardens of Nero. If they believed that they were telling the truth and that truth was more precious than life, their conduct is intelligible, but not otherwise.

#### IV

To sum up, we believe that the existence of the Church may be explained by the supposition that there is a God who cares for His creatures and who can and does influence the course of history in ways which the physical sciences have not yet learnt to account for, and probably never will.

This supposition involves an act of faith, and it is probable that our mental and moral condition is such that such an act of faith will not only be always necessary in this life, but also an essential means of attaining the end for which we were created. If this act of faith can be made, the supposition that the facts recorded in the Gospels are "broadly historical" easily follows, and also the supposition that they were rightly interpreted by the Apostles who were divinely guided to interpret them as they did. We feel, however, that this explanation of the origin of the Church needs confirmation from the belief that the record of the teaching of Jesus is also "broadly historical", even if it consists of "propositions" and has been handed down to us in a translation.

We are not sure that what Canon Richardson calls "the unreflective mind of to-day" (p. 174) will be won over by his

arguments. He describes the causes which have produced it excellently on this page of his book and elsewhere. He laments the general ignorance of history and of the application to the study of history of methods which are only properly applicable to the study of the physical sciences. There is no doubt that he has here put his finger on one cause of our present discontents. But he rather spoils his case by noting on page 163 of his book that Jesus does not appeal to a number of "eminently spiritual, rational and moral people in such a way as to lead them to believe in Him as the Son of God". He adds that "Mr. Aldous Huxley, Lord Russell and Mr. Gandhi are doubtless more rational, more spiritual and more ethically perceptive than are many Christians, but yet they do not perceive the truth about Jesus as Christians see it". This list of "spiritual and ethically perceptive persons" might easily be increased by the addition of a number of names of well-known, if ill-informed, opponents of Christianity, some of which will easily occur to our readers.

Surely the word "Christian" is used in two quite different senses in the sentence quoted above. Canon Richardson accounts for the fact that Jesus does not appeal to such people by "the hard fact of election" (p. 164). This is almost hyper-Calvinism!

Canon Richardson's book will not appeal to simple people, or be understood by them. It will not appeal to those who are satisfied that their idea of what is meant by knowledge and the method by which it is to be approached is the only conception that can appeal to a "Thinker".

When Canon Richardson begins to argue from the known (the existence of the Church and its faith) to the unknown, or less well known (the history of its origin), he is on sound ground.

The most interesting thing about this book is that it is a learned and valuable product of a school of modern writers who have convinced themselves that "Modernism" leads nowhere, and who show a desire to return to the old paths and walk therein. It is not long since the Modern Churchmen's Union was apparently trying to see if it was possible to remain a Christian, while admitting at least the possibility that Jesus never existed. Now the importance of a historic basis for the Christian faith is once more being stoutly asserted, and a historic basis which does not depend on the admission that a great teacher lived in the first century whose followers seriously perverted his message and

the story of his life in their ignorant fanaticism, but on the assertion that the Founder of Christianity was Himself its chief corner stone. We are afraid that it will take a long time for the arguments contained in this and similar books to filter down to the level of those who have gained a smattering of what they think is Modern Thought from novelists, playwrights and certain ecclesiastics who are under the mistaken impression that they are up to date.

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