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LOVE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS:

A STUDY ON THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON LANGUAGE.

WE have endeavoured to show in former papers that Christian writers, in making use of the Greek language, the noblest and most subtle instrument of human speech ever invented, repudiated, not without deliberate purpose, certain terms which involved, or might seem to involve, the acceptance of unworthy Pagan ideals and aims; and at the same time appropriated to Christian use other terms which conveyed the expression of that which was best and purest in pre-Christian thought.

But more than this was needed. A further step had to be taken in the literature of the gospel. Christianity had literally revealed a new life, and required a fresh vocabulary to express the new conditions. Words, therefore, came into use which were, in some cases, absolutely new inventions, in others so charged with fresh meaning as to be equivalent to new words.

Of these words *ἀγάπη* (love or charity) is the pre-eminent example. *Ἀγάπη*, which expresses the highest Christian grace, the bond of the Christian Society, the fulfilment of the new law which Christ bequeathed, and which expresses the essence of the Divine nature (1 St. John iv. 8), is not classical in the sense of being found in the extant writings of Greek authors. It is, however, used by the LXX. translators, and may possibly have been a vernacular word long before it took its place in literature.

The use of *ἀγάπη* in the LXX., however, differs widely

from its use in the New Testament. In the LXX. ἀγάπη is used in a sense identical with ἔρως, a word absolutely excluded from the New Testament, and employed in two passages only of the LXX. Old Testament—Proverbs vii. 18 and xxx. 16, in the latter of which there is a clear mistranslation, ἔρως γυναικός, where Aquila and Symmachus render more correctly : ἐποχή μήτρας, *Aq.* ; συνοχή μήτρας, *Sym.* In this sense of ἔρως, or the passion of love, ἀγάπη occurs in 2 Samuel xiii. 15, Jeremiah ii. 2, and frequently in the Song of Songs ; in Ecclesiastes ix. 1 and 6 the sense is neutral.

So far, then, as its antecedents were concerned ἀγάπη could not present an unblemished title for admission into the language of Christians. But if the choice lay between ἀγάπη and ἔρως, there could be no question as to the decision. For it must be remembered that the language of the Song of Songs is capable of, and was very generally interpreted in, a spiritualized sense ; while ἔρως, though idealized by Plato into a very high conception, was so steeped with the worst associations of Pagan life as to render it ill adapted to convey the sublime message of Divine love.

It is true that this scrupulous exclusion of ἔρως did not last, and we shall presently see (*infra*, pp. 324, 325) that the admission of the word is an early example of a process of deterioration in Christian nomenclature.

On the other hand, ἀγάπη, with its literary freshness, its immunity from evil, its suggestion of pure and self-sacrificing affection, rendered it an apt instrument to deliver the supreme message of the gospel.

The word itself indeed, as we have shown, was not classical, but the thought conveyed by it had entered into the purest presentments of Greek life, and is summed up in one of the most beautiful and touching lines in Greek tragedy : οὔτοι συνέχθειν ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφην (*Ant.* 523).

The use of *ἀγάπη* in the New Testament is full of the deepest interest. It occurs twice only in the Synoptic Gospels, but in Luke xi. 42 it is qualified by *τοῦ Θεοῦ*, therefore once only in the sense of "brotherly love"; and then on the lips of Christ when He prophesies the coldness of love in the latter days, *ψυγήσεται ἡ ἀγάπη τῶν πολλῶν*, "The love of the majority shall grow cold" (Matt. xxiv. 12).

In the Fourth Gospel *ἀγάπη* is used several times, especially in chapter xv. In the Epistles of St. John it is found still more frequently; and in the other writings of the New Testament, with the exception of the Epistle General of St. James, few important words occur so often as *ἀγάπη*.

The conclusion from these facts seems to be that in the earlier presentation of the gospel which the Synoptists have given the immense significance of *ἀγάπη* as an element in the Christian life was not fully understood or realized. But as experience of the renewed life, and the continuous prompting of the Holy Spirit, taught the disciples of Christ how deeply and essentially *ἀγάπη* entered into their life, and that this had assuredly been the purpose of the Lord Jesus, the word and thought of love take their rightful and pre-eminent position in the literature and system of Christianity, so that Christianity itself is summed up in *ἀγάπη*. In this view our Lord's words (Matt. xxiv. 12) cited above are strikingly prophetic. When the words were spoken, the Divine Society of which *ἀγάπη* was to be the watchword and guiding principle had not been founded. But our Lord's prediction carries us forward to a time when the Church shall have taken root and flourished, and gathered to itself many adherents, and beyond that to the time when, from some cause known then to Christ alone, the majority of Christians shall have cooled in their enthusiasm and their love, which was so essentially a part of the Christian life that when love grew cold faith died.

This single utterance of Christ prepares us for the place which *ἀγάπη* takes in the Christian life. It is Christ's own word. And henceforth the disciples of Christ become *ἀδελφοὶ ἀγαπητοί*, beloved of God (Rom. i. 7), and of the apostles (1 Cor. x. 14 and *passim*), and of one another (1 Thess. iii. 12; 1 John iii. 11). No one has seen the depth and significance of *ἀγάπη* more clearly or instructively than St. Paul. And in two passages especially of profound teaching (Rom. v. 5-8; 1 Cor. xiii.) the meaning, both in its Divine and human aspect, is impressed for ever on the conscience of mankind. As time went on the power of "love" grew; and in the latest apostolic message St. John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (*ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς*, John xxi. 7), handed down to the Church the Master's legacy of love (John xv. 12), and taught by the highest sanction the absolute necessity of this gift for the spiritual life: "He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love" (*ἀγάπη*, 1 John iv. 8).

The high and sacred position of *ἀγάπη* in Christian nomenclature is sustained by its use in the writings of the subapostolic and succeeding epochs. St. Ignatius speaks of *ἀγάπη* as "the blood of Jesus Christ" (*ἐν ἀγάπῃ δ' ἐστὶν αἷμα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*), as faith is "the flesh of the Lord" (Trall. c. viii.). It is "the way that leads up to God" (*ἡ δὲ ἀγάπη ὁδὸς ἢ ἀναφέρουσα εἰς Θεόν*, *Id. Eph. ix.*). The same father describes the Church of Rome as "having the presidency of love" (*προκαθημένη τῆς ἀγάπης*, *Rom. inscrip.*). Chrysostom speaks of *ἀγάπη* as "the beginning and the end of all excellence" (*ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος ἀρετῆς ἀπάσης*), and as "the impress (*χαρακτήρ*) of the servants of God, the mark of the apostles." With Theophylact *ἀγάπη* is "the head and spring of the upright life" (*τὸ κεφάλαιον καὶ ἡ πηγὴ τοῦ ὀρθοῦ βίου*).

It is, however, to be observed that some of the early Christian writers did not scruple to use *ἔρως*, or "passionate

love," in place of the apostolic *ἀγάπη*. Theodoret, for instance, says: "He who hath received the Divine love (*ὁ τὸν ἔρωτα τὸν θεῖον δεξάμενος*) despises all earthly things." And St. Ignatius (Rom. c. vii.) uses the remarkable expression, *ὁ ἐμὸς ἔρως ἐσταύρωται*, "my love hath been crucified." And although the words have been variously rendered—Origen, for example, interpreting *ὁ ἐμὸς ἔρως* of Christ, while others give the meaning of earthly lust or desire—we note the introduction of the word *ἔρως* into the Christian vocabulary as a mark of decline, and a departure from the apostolic purity of expression.

But the sacred character of *ἀγάπη* has been impaired in other ways besides this admission of *ἔρως* as a synonym.

It was perhaps hardly to be expected that the New Testament standard of meaning could be sustained. But it is a remarkable instance of perverted meaning that through transference to another tongue the sublime conception of Christian love as described by St. Paul should have become narrowed to a signification which that description excludes. Yet so it is. The English "charity," directly representing *caritas*, the Latin equivalent of *ἀγάπη*, has all but lost the attributes of its Greek parentage, and is now used to signify almsgiving, which St. Paul shows to be distinct from *ἀγάπη* (1 Cor. xiii. 3), or else fairness and forbearance in judgment, which corresponds to a part, but a part only, of St. Paul's definition.

It is easy to trace the steps by which "charity" settled into the meaning of "almsgiving," that being, of course, the most obvious and the most recognisable expression of brotherly love. But the loss to the language of Christianity is serious. The result is that Christianity is left without any term to express its highest ideal. When the Revisers sought a rendering for *ἀγάπη*, they were left to choose between "love" and "charity." The former had the objection of a wide and, in many respects, an unsuitable

connotation; the latter possessed the defect of having a divergent meaning imposed by popular use.

The only remedy for the Christian student is either to read and think in the language of the Greek Testament, or to grasp in its fulness the original conception of *ἀγάπη*, and to think or read that into its English equivalent.

It is a striking fact in the history of language and of religious thought that that which happened to *ἀγάπη*, the representative word of Christianity, happened in some measure also to *δικαιοσύνη* (righteousness), the representative word of Judaism. Both words came in the end to denote "almsgiving." As "almsgiving" was the obvious outcome of brotherly love, so it came to be regarded with the Jew as the highest act of righteousness. Familiar evidence of this will be found in the various reading Matthew vi. 1, where, in place of the true reading, *δικαιοσύνην* is found, in the less authoritative MSS., *ἐλεημοσύνην*, a word inserted in all probability as a marginal gloss to explain *δικαιοσύνην*. Jerome has, "Justitiam hoc est eleemosynam." Compare also the parallelism in Psalm cxii. 9: "He hath dispersed, he hath given to the needy; his righteousness endureth for ever." And in Daniel iv. 27: "Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor."

But although, in comparison with *ἀγάπη*, *δικαιοσύνη*, or "righteousness," holds a secondary place in the New Testament as a note of the Christian life, and although it is not, like *ἀγάπη*, a creation of Christianity, it is a word of momentous importance. Apart from revelation its roots went deep into the religious consciousness of mankind, and it introduced both into Judaism and Christianity the purest and most inspiring of moral ideas. The word *δικαιοσύνη* does not occur in the Greek poets, but with Homer justice (*δίκη*) is "the everlasting attribute of Zeus." In Pindar the righteous are the special care of the gods (Nem. x. 54);

and justice is beautifully described as "sister of peace," and both are "golden children of wise Themis" (Ol. xiii. 7). "The unwritten laws of Divine justice are more ancient than the law of living princes, and transcend them," says Antigone (Soph. Antig. 454); and Euripides speaks of justice as "stronger than injustice" (Ion. 1117). The conception rises to a still higher level in the Platonic and Aristotelian systems. The beautiful story of Er, the son of Armenius, with which the *Republic* closes, sets forth better than by formal definition the Platonic view of "righteousness" in terms not unworthy to be compared with the description of judgment in Matthew xxv. With Aristotle justice is "the starting-point of right action and of right desire"; it is "the sum of all other excellencies"; it is "more beautiful than the morning or evening star." It differs from perfect virtue only in a way which makes it superior to virtue; for it is the *use* of virtue. A man cannot be righteous to himself alone. It is goodness that imparts itself (*κοινωνική ἀρετή*, *Pol.* iii., xiii. 3). With such a history and such an alliance of noble and divine thoughts the Hellenic *δικαιοσύνη* had gifts to impart to Judaism as well as gifts to receive. The knowledge of all that *δικαιοσύνη* meant and connoted would incline the Hellenic proselyte to view with favour a religion which was based upon righteousness. And soon he would learn that as an attribute of Jehovah "righteousness" had risen to higher levels than ever in Greek philosophy.

But as with *ἀγάπη*, usage lowered the conception of righteousness, and in the decline of Judaism righteousness came to signify little more than an exact performance of legal requirements, which was often destructive of righteousness in its higher and truer sense.

It was the office of Christianity, then, to define and exemplify *δικαιοσύνη*, the true righteousness. The righteousness of the New Testament goes back to the righteousness of the

Old Testament as its type, but enlarges its scope with the deeper and wider revelation in Christ.

Out of the vast subject here suggested three points may be selected to illustrate the developed idea of righteousness through Christianity.

1. The gradual revelation of a Divine righteousness in the gospel accounts for the power of the gospel and for its effectiveness for salvation. The gospel is a force working for salvation *because* righteousness is revealed in it. This great truth is expressed in Romans i. 17: *δικαιοσύνη γὰρ Θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, καθὼς γέγραπται, ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται*. Here righteousness is regarded as inherent in God and imparted to man. Its condition and starting-point is faith, and in the process of revelation faith grows and deepens (*ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν*). This Divine righteousness, then, is revealed or manifested in the life of a human soul, and in the movements of the world and of society. It is for a Christian the key to history, and the explanation of the deepest mystery of our faith, the atonement through Jesus Christ: *ὃν προέθετο ὁ Θεὸς ἱλαστήριον διὰ πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι, εἰς ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ* (Rom. iii. 25).

2. The important phrase (Rom. iii. 26), *εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν δίκαιον καὶ δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ*, emphasizes and explains *δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ*. It teaches that the righteousness of God is the cause of man's righteousness. To use logical expressions, it is the formal, efficient and final cause of man's righteousness. For Divine and human righteousness are one and the same thing, and human righteousness springs from, and is always aiming at, Divine righteousness. This is a purely Christian truth, and rests upon the mystery of the Incarnation. The expression itself, *εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν δίκαιον καὶ δικαιοῦντα*, does not mean "in order that he should be just and *yet* the justifier"—there is no concessive force in the participle—but "that he should be just

and the justifier," righteous and giver of righteousness. As to *δικαιοῦν*, we take it in its first and literal meaning "to make righteous," rather than in its forensic meaning "to acquit." But, indeed, closely examined, the two meanings coincide. And the difficulty disappears if we remember that all human righteousness is imperfect, and that Divine forgiveness is accorded to incipient, and therefore an imperfect, righteousness; and, secondly, that acquittal of a prisoner by a human judge implies, and is intended to convey, the innocence of the accused person. Acquittal, therefore, by a Divine Judge not only implies, but proves, righteousness the result of forgiveness through the creative power of a merciful God.

3. A third accession of meaning which righteousness has received through the Christian revelation is concerned with the meaning and results of it as an attribute of God in Christ Jesus. As such righteousness is the source and ground of forgiveness of sins. This truth is expressed in 1 John i. 9: *ἐὰν ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, πιστός ἐστὶν καὶ δίκαιος ἵνα ἀφῆ ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας, καὶ καθάρισις ἡμῶν ἀπὸ πάσης ἀδικίας*; "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The use of the particle *ἵνα* with adjectives and nouns is characteristic of St. John's style; comp. John i. 27, *ἄξιός ἵνα κ.τ.λ.*: 1 John iii. 11, *ἡ ἀγγελία . . . ἵνα κ.τ.λ.*: 1 John iv. 21, *τὴν ἐντολὴν ἔχομεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, ἵνα κ.τ.λ.* In these and other passages *ἵνα* expresses both purpose or aim, and result. For in the Hebrew thought where Divine action is concerned, aim and result are identified. The teaching, then, of the words cited above is that the faithfulness (*πίστις*) and righteousness (*δικαιοσύνη*) of God have for aim and result remission of sins and cleansing from all unrighteousness on the condition of confession of sins. Here *δικαιοσύνη* combines in an ascending scale the Greek, and Jewish,

and Christian use of the word. It contains the original Greek sense of due apportionment, the Hebrew sense of the Divine character of righteousness tending to mercy and forgiveness, and the extended Christian sense of forgiveness through Jesus Christ, who is essentially *δίκαιος*, the "Righteous One." 1 John ii. 1: *παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον*, where, as Bishop Westcott says, "the adjective is not a simple epithet, but marks predicatively ("being as He is righteous") that characteristic of the Lord which gives efficacy to His advocacy of Man."

It may be remarked that the rendering of the adjective and noun by "just" and "justice" respectively in place of "righteous" and "righteousness" is, perhaps, inevitable. But the result is a loss to the English reader, and there is always a danger lest the use of the alternative rendering should unconsciously influence the mind by suggesting human analogies which certainly ought not to be pressed.

But verbal dangers of this kind meet the theological student at every turn; and an examination into the history of Christian controversy will show the risk of basing arguments on translated words, or on Greek words which are not found in those passages of the Greek Testament in which the dispute centres.

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