

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

that is according to Semitic ideas the vicarious blood, without which no sacrifice of reconciliation could be complete. In the words of an Arab at Wâdi Wa'leh, *bela fejr¹ dem la yatimm en-nidr*, "without the bursting forth of blood the vow will not be fulfilled." A similar idea is expressed by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (ix. 22b): "Apart from shedding of blood there is no remission." In this case the blood of Christ is shed for Jew and Gentile as a substitute for the blood due from them. Thus Christ through His death becomes "peace," the very term we have already had, "the lamb makes the peace and removes the enmity." Through Him God "whitens the reputation" of Jew and Gentile, through His blood. Through the Cross "the enmity is removed" which existed between Jew and Gentile. Like the crier on the housetop, who makes proclamation regarding the murderer, he proclaims peace, though not to "guests and residents," but to those who had been at variance.

These parallels in thought and expression can hardly be accidental, but seem rather to be an adaptation to the customs connected with reconciliation which must have been well known to the Apostle Paul.

SAMUEL IVES CURTISS.

DIALOGUES ON THE CHRISTIAN PROPHETS.

VI.

Tradition in St. Paul—Rules of the Prophets—The Montanists—A "Charismatic" Ministry—How Prophetic Literature was lost.

Mason. I have been pondering what you said, Riddell, when we met last, about the rules of procedure given by St. Paul to the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. xiv. 29). They seem to me to be important, but they are "overlooked and disregarded," as Bishop Butler would say, by "the generality of the world."

¹ This is a Bedawin form for *fejr*, Kurdish *fejran*.

Riddell. Yes. A question arises here, Mason, and it is this: Can we say whether they were originated by St. Paul or were already in existence before his time? I am inclined to think they were not coined by him. He is in the habit of saying that he "received" things "by tradition." "I deliver to you by tradition that which I received by tradition, that Messiah died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. xv. 3). He actually praises the Corinthians for being generally inclined to hold fast traditions. "Now I praise you because ye remember me in all things, and hold fast the traditions, even as I delivered them to you" (1 Cor. xi. 2). After which praise he proceeds to give further details of reasoning, "But I would have you know." . . . A third reference to tradition occurs in his mention of the Eucharist (1 Cor. xi. 23), "Shall I praise you? In this I praise you not, for I received by tradition, starting from the Lord, that which I delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night of his betrayal." . . . Now if there was a body of tradition which he received about the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, much more likely is it that there was a body of tradition referring to the Prophets, who existed as a class anterior to those events—a body of rules dealing with their procedure, which the Corinthians were imperfectly acquainted with, but which it behoved them to know and to observe. "If any man claimeth to be a prophet, or (otherwise) spiritual, let him further know that the things I write unto you are the commandment of the Lord" (1 Cor. xiv. 38). And who was more fit to give commandment as to the procedure of the Prophets than he who was a Prophet himself? You do not suppose, do you, that St. Paul was a revolutionary person?

M. I rather think that was my opinion, He had much to alter in founding new Churches.

R. Morally, yes, especially at Corinth; but in doctrine and observance he was most careful to maintain the

existing lines. However, there are the rules, and they are simple enough. The most important are :

- (1) That no Prophet is to speak while another Prophet is in a state of ecstasy, receiving his revelation or apocalypse (1 Cor. xiv. 30).
- (2) Prophecies are subject to the discerning criticism of Prophets present in the Church (1 Cor. xiv. 29).
- (3) Prophets are to speak one at a time, not more than three speaking in one congregation (1 Cor. xiv. 31, and compare 29 and 27).

St. Paul does not say definitely that

- (4) No Prophet shall speak while he is in ecstasy himself.

But his meaning appears to be that a solemn silence is enjoined upon the whole congregation while one of the Prophets sits rapt in intense abstraction. He seems to assume the existence of this Rule 4.

M. Why do you lay stress upon this last point ?

R. Because you will find when you read the history of the second century that an interesting fact is connected with it. Some time before the year 155 A.D. the orthodox Miltiades wrote a treatise on the subject "That a Prophet may not speak in ecstasy." The work is not preserved to us entire, but Eusebius has recorded its title and some extracts from it quoted by the writer against the Montanists, whom we are quite justified in identifying with Claudius Apollinaris, Bishop of Comana, commonly called Hierapolis, in central Asia Minor. Now, of course, Miltiades was dealing not with any theoretical fancy, but with existing facts. Therefore there were Prophets of some sort or other remaining in his own time. These were the "Montanist" Prophets, whom Miltiades and his side—perhaps you would like to call them the Church party—considered to be false Prophets.

M. Excuse me, but I have always understood that the Montanists were the followers of one Montanus, a madman

of Asia Minor, who asserted that he was the Holy Ghost. And also I doubt if you are right in speaking of the "side of Miltiades" and "the Church party."

R. Kindly bear in mind that at this time no one knew which side of the Christian Church was eventually destined to prevail, the "Prophetic" side as they claimed to be, or the more organized or Episcopal side. That there were two sides to the Church is perfectly plain to any one who reads the original sources given in Eusebius (4th century). Eusebius was strongly impressed with the formidable character of the Phrygian heresy so-called, and he spares no epithets of his own to denounce it. It was a work of "the enemy of the Church of God, who is ever the hater of good and the lover of evil; who never loses a single chance of plotting against men." He says the Montanists "crept like venomous serpents against Asia and Phrygia." The Church party of the second century talked of "The outrageous and insolent and seductive spirit" of the Montanist Prophets. "The faithful," says Apollinaris, "held many meetings in many places in Asia upon it." There must therefore have been a severe crisis then in Asia Minor, and a remarkable fact is that the Montanists claimed to have tradition on their side. "Their Apostle (they too claimed to have Apostles) claims that the prophetic gift must continue in all the Church until the final coming." This is what I find in Eusebius (*Church History*, v. 17). There were therefore two sides then, and one was the side of Miltiades, but perhaps you are right in declining to call it "the Church party," since both sides equally claimed to represent the Church.

M. But what have you to say of the madman?

R. My dear friend, you really must not believe all that you read about the character of a party when it is said in the bitterness of controversy by its opponents. As to the sanity of Montanus, I am content to ask of my own

contemporaries, Who is quite sane? I am glad to assume your sanity, Mason, as a working hypothesis; though, if you were a Russian—say one of the characters in current Russian novels—I should hesitate to go far beyond the assumption! But as to the universal practice of party writers, whether orthodox or not, whether religious or political or not, we have overwhelming proof—all history is strewn with it—that you must allow for exaggeration, and you must take the statements with a grain of caution, sometimes even a grain of a sense of humour. In theological controversy, as in a Court of Law, the maxim *Audi alteram partem* holds good. It is possible that Montanus was not perfectly sane, according to your idea of sanity. But it is not possible that he should have had a large and powerful following if he, being a Christian (which no one denies), at the same time claimed *to be the Paraklete*, and if the Paraklete is the Holy Ghost. Therefore there is exaggeration here, and it is exaggeration on the part of the orthodox.

M. Which orthodox? the moderns or Eusebius (fourth century), or Apollinaris and Miltiades (second century)?

R. You are quite right to discriminate between the three very different ages. First of all, then, let me say that modern Church historians who say that Montanus claimed to be the Paraklete are guilty of some exaggeration, for they go beyond the words of Eusebius which are these (*C.H.* v. 14): "*Certain people boasted that the Paraklete was Montanus, and the women who succeeded him, Priscilla and Maximilla, as having been Montanus' prophetesses.*" This is not the same as if *Eusebius* had said, "Montanus claimed to be the Holy Ghost"; it is something very different. Next the question arises whether Eusebius exaggerated, and without going so far as to charge him with exaggeration, we may safely say that though deeply read, as Harnack says, he had not the critical faculty of a modern historian but was apt to read his own fourth-century ideas into the

records of the second century. And who among us to-day, without the training of a historian, can venture to say that he can read the records of William the Third's reign without importing into them some of the ideas of Edward the Seventh's? How many of us could read the accounts of what Parliament did in 1798, in 1828, in 1858, and bear in mind the differences of character between the several Parliaments of those years? It is not so easy. Of course we cannot say how much detailed information Eusebius had at his disposal besides the few writings from which he has given us extracts. And therefore we cannot say that he has embroidered his authorities. On the other hand, we may not suppose that he had any trustworthy resources of information outside those authorities, which are as follows: The works of Melito of Sardis, especially "Concerning Prophecy"; the three books of the Anti-Montanist who is doubtless Claudius Apollinaris; the book of Miltiades mentioned already; that of Apollonius; and that of Serapion—this last residing at Antioch in Syria, far away from the centre of Asia Minor. Now we may search the extracts from these writers given by Eusebius, and we shall not find anything to support the statements (1) that Montanus claimed to be the Holy Ghost, nor (2) that the Montanists claimed anything more as a body than to be the successors of the Christian Prophets. We have been led into what seems a digression upon Montanism in connexion with Rules of the Prophets, but it is not really a digression at all; it is simply a progression, a glimpse into the behaviour of the Prophets in the second century. This is an illustration of what Bishop Butler says of "particular persons attending to, comparing and pursuing, intimations scattered up and down, which are overlooked and disregarded by the generality of the world," of "tracing on obscure hints, as it were, dropped us by nature accidentally, or which seem to come into our minds by chance."

M. It is indeed. But I wish you would tell me more about the gift of prophecy in the New Testament. I have always understood that it was an *interim* gift, to be regarded as a thing by itself, as part of the *charismatic* ministry of the Church.

R. My dear fellow, *interim* and *charismatic* are sounding, if not formidable, terms, but they do not assist a historical understanding of the facts. They are quite unhistorical. I have laboured to show you that one thing must be taken with another, as links in a chain, and when possible as cause and effect. Why do you then pick out a link and call it by these names, unless it be that you cannot understand it? Of course you cannot understand it so long as you treat it as a freak of nature, and will not compare it with what precedes and follows it. You note that Bishop Butler, with the eye of a true man of science, says "comparing." Comparison, with its attendant processes, is a note of science. You, on the other hand, begin by assuming that there is no comparison possible. But you are met at the outset by the insuperable difficulty that the Christian *Prophets* bear the same name as the Old Testament Prophets, and claim to be their successors.

M. Where do they claim that?

R. The use of the name is enough to prove that they claimed it, since those who used it knew very well what the old Prophets were. But you could hardly have a clearer proof than 1 Peter i. 10-12, where the Prophets are spoken of as a continuous class inspired by a continuous "spirit of Messiah testifying beforehand and making clear," and also at a later time "seeking out and searching out unto what or what kind of time it pointed." So much for the *interim*. There was no *interim*. Then *charismatic* is a fine mouthful to choke the throat of any plain English reader of the history of the first century. *Charismatic* is a very *interim* term. Its day is past. It was an invention

of a few theologians, and its effect, I must say, is to throw dust in the eyes of those who seek the continuity of history. It is a term drawn in perfect honesty from the *charismata*, or gifts, of the Holy Ghost mentioned in 1 Corinthians, and it explains nothing and assumes nothing except what we find already assumed in the New Testament. But it throws dust in the eyes because it implies an *interim* ministry, which is not fairly called an *interim* ministry, since every ministry must have a connexion with what precedes and what follows it. How else can you maintain the continuity of the Church? What becomes of the One Church if our Church is not the primitive Church, and if the primitive Church is not that of the Psalmist and of the promise to Abraham and his seed? To have three Churches, first the Jewish, and then the Charismatic, and thirdly the early and modern, is rather too much. Better be Vaticanists at once, and put the New Testament on the shelf. *Charismatic* has the effect of throwing the reader off the scent of the Prophets altogether, as if the Charismatic ministry were not the Prophetic ministry, neither more nor less; and as if we were not entitled to follow the chain of prophecy from the Old Testament to the time of Christ, and thence onward to the history of A.D. 70, and even to A.D. 130 or 200. Those who employ the term *charismatic* will certainly admit, if you press them, that the gifts of the Holy Ghost did exist under the Old Testament (Isa. xi. 2), and they will not deny that they are still conveyed by the laying on of hands to-day. Why then single out an *interim* century and mark it as the time of a *charismatic* ministry? The term is misleading.

M. Do you mean then after all intentionally misleading?

R. I will not say so just now. But this I say, that there has been a conspiracy against the Christian Prophets, and I should not be surprised to find one now. Perhaps I

use "conspiracy" in a somewhat legal and unromantic sense, without implying the accessories of disguise, dominoes, darkness and lanterns, but merely the quiet combination of parties against another with a view to his quiet removal. It is all done on the quiet, by some almost unconsciously.

M. Yet I have heard of men legally charged with conspiracy without having dreamed of committing the offence.

R. Tertullian, the Montanist, wrote a large work in six books "Concerning Ecstasy," now lost. I am giving you an instance of what I mean in naming this lost work. Do you think it perished by accident?

M. I really cannot say. Many old books have perished. They all tend that way. But, seriously, you cannot say that the fact of Tertullian's lapse into Montanism caused the destruction of his writings composed after that event, or they would have been reduced by fully half their present number. Why then should it have caused the disappearance of his Montanist work on Ecstasy?

R. Simply because it was an extremely Montanist work, emphasizing precisely (and probably aggravating) the most acute points of difference between him and the orthodox, who were represented by Soter, the Bishop of Rome, and Apollonius of Ephesus, whom I mentioned just now. Jerome (but he was fully 200 years later and we do not know what his knowledge of this point amounted to) tells us that Tertullian devoted a seventh book to the refutation of Apollonius. Most of what we have from his pen is untinted with Montanism; you may read scores of pages together without so much as scenting that association. But when he came to deal with *ecstasy*, which he calls by the common classical Latin word *amentia*, and when he came to defend it at length, you can see what the risk was.

M. What risk?

R. Simply this: an apologist of very great general ability, learning, fervour, and eloquence setting himself

to defend Christianity and absent-mindedness in the same breath! For *amentia* is very nearly *absence of mind*, and that is almost folly. How can serious powers of mind be exerted to defend foolishness? "To the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness"; yes, to the Greek heathens (1 Cor. i. 23). But when you come to reason with Christians, the same Pauline maxim fails to apply, A layman in theology of those times might be forgiven if he said a writer was mad who used so much sense as Tertullian used on behalf of nonsense. How should he know that Tertullian had invented this technical term *amentia* merely to denote *ecstasy*? But it is purely Tertullian's invention. It is unfortunate. He tried to be literal in his translation of the Greek word *ecstasy*, "standing out of one's common sense." The layman would say "A learned theological book on *Nonsense!* I shall not read it."

M. Then perhaps it killed itself instead of falling a victim to a conspiracy.

R. It may be so, but I must put before you the other possibility—the fear on the part of the Church that if these six books on Ecstasy survived they might set ablaze the smouldering fires. The heat of this telling rhetorician of Africa, added to the warmth of an energetic nonconformist influence of about 200 A.D., might have injured the new and growing organization of the Church, at least in Africa and the west. For Africa was where Montanism then lingered. I grant that its historical interest, which was immense, and ought to have caused the preservation of its records, was unknown in that uncritical age. It claimed to be the most conservative force in the Church. As the Athenians said at Samos towards the end of the Peloponnesian War, "Athens has revolted from us," so the Montanists would have said, "The Church has revolted from us." But there was no one to notice or to care for the peculiar historical interest of Montanism. The records of its peculiari-

ties, which, as regards prophecy and ecstasy, were reduced in Tertullian's time and neighbourhood to casual and local manifestations, would be treated as so much lumber, and the average Church organizer would consign them as such to "the flames or to the Adrian Sea." The average man is sometimes a conspirator without knowing it. He is not an Alexandrine librarian, not an Eusebius of Cæsarea. He asks why he should stuff his limited house-room with reams of paper or parchments that nobody wants to read, with accounts

Of old forgotten far-off things
And battles long ago.

And so, it may be, these six or seven books perished. A conspiracy against the Prophets is a matter of degree, and you shall have more instances another time.

M. You imply that people then were as indifferent to the origins of their own faith as the novel-reading British of to-day?

R. I do, but you may add "churchgoing" to the other epithet. They were very fond of devotional romances as well as other devotional books. The second and third centuries indulged in many of these. Some of them are extant, which we could well spare in return for the lost six or seven books of Tertullian on Ecstasy.

M. Such as——?

K. The *Acts of Peter and Paul*, the *Acts of Philip* and others of the Twelve, the *Acts of Barnabas*, the *Apocalypse of Paul*, the *Original Gospel of James*, and many more. Such is life! Such is history—or, rather, romance! The human mind is strangely built, and the old German rhyme hits off its fondness for a bit of *Aberglaube*—that which Goethe calls the Poetry of Life—mixed up with its general tendency towards the truth:

A Bissl Lieb', und a Bissl Treu, Treu',
Und a Bissl Falschheit, das kommt dabei!

E. C. SELWYN.