

## MYTH, MAGIC, AND MORALS

“And what is meant by intellectual honesty? Nothing but a refusal to allow other impulses, such as the love of gain, or of applause, or the desire to promote any other end which is not purely intellectual, to interfere with the operations of the intellect in ascertaining and systematising facts. The decisive superiority of the Copernican theory over the Ptolemaic lies, not in its superior ease in working, but in its greater utility for purposes of system and prophecy. Without it there would have been no prospect of the great advances in astronomical theory which have since been made, or of our greatly increased accuracy in predicting astronomical phenomena. Results of this kind are not to be expected by a thinker who misrepresents his facts, or distorts his theory in the interests of any end which is not purely intellectual.”

—WILLIAM BENETT, *The Ethical Aspects of Evolution*, p. 68.

# MYTH, MAGIC, AND MORALS

A STUDY OF CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

BY

FRED. CORNWALLIS CONYBEARE, M.A.

(LATE FELLOW AND PRAELECTOR OF UNIV. COLL. OXFORD; FELLOW  
OF THE BRITISH ACADEMY; DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY, *honoris causa*,  
OF GIESSEN; OFFICIER D'ACADÉMIE)

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## INTRODUCTION

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OF all the great figures which look down upon us across the gulf and void of time, Jesus of Nazareth is the most gracious and winning of aspect; and, although his memory was soon associated with that policy of craft and exclusiveness, of cruelty and credulity, which in East and West styled itself orthodoxy, nevertheless his name has ever been for the poor and oppressed, for the despised and disinherited of the earth, a bond and symbol of union in peace and charity. It behoves us, then, more than ever in this age, when old faiths are loosening their hold on us, and new superstitions, like Spiritualism, Occultism, and Christian Science, threaten to imprison our minds afresh, to inquire carefully who Jesus of Nazareth was, what were his real aims and ideas, what the means at his command for realising them, how the great institutions connected with his name originated and grew up. This I have tried to do in the following pages, in as simple and straightforward a manner as I could, without ambiguity, but also without sarcasm or mockery. For these qualities of style could only enlist me readers in circles where I would rather not find them, and are in any case inappropriate in such a discussion.

The orthodox reader will probably here exclaim: Then why choose such a title for your book? Can it do otherwise than wound and shock Christian sentiment? I do not think it should do so, and can only entreat such readers to be patient and hear me out; especially if, like most Christians, they can allege no better reason for holding the faith they profess than they can for the colour of their hair being what it is. For it is undeniable that

most people merely inherit their religious beliefs, accepting them without question, and never asking what was the previous history of these opinions before they floated into their minds; nor how they tally with the ascertained results of astronomy, geology, and zoology, of history, anthropology, and other new learning.

I have, then, chosen the words "myth" and "magic" because there is no other way of characterising certain beliefs and practices of the early Church which in this work I have chosen to describe; and they can only offend those who imagine that Christianity is the one religion in the world entitled to respect, and that all other religions are systems of fraud and imbecility. I hold, on the contrary, that every creed and rite, from which men have drawn comfort in their trials and strength to bear their sufferings, should be treated with respect. Let it be the faith of Mahomet or the following of Buddha, the spell of the Malay or the *Consolamentum* of the Cathars of Albi, we must not scoff at anything in which our fellow beings have found a refuge from elemental terrors, and a panacea—none the less real to them because to us imaginary—for the many pains and aches of the flesh.

A myth is a religious narrative that purports to be historically true, but is not; and magic may for our purpose be defined as any rite or religious operation which, in ignorance of true causes, seeks to realise ends, necessary or unnecessary to the well-being of society, by an appeal to occult or supernatural forces, no matter whether the latter be regarded as personal or not.

Let me illustrate my meaning by examples. We all talk of the myth of Danae, and no one to-day believes that Danae really conceived Perseus in a shower of gold poured out by Zeus. I may go further, and say that no one believes nowadays that Danae and Perseus and Zeus were ever real personalities at all. In the same way, those who reject the story of the virgin birth of Christ, as devoid of historical

substance, have every right to call it what it is—namely, a myth. If it be answered that the story of Christ's birth is in the Bible, while that of Danae is not, I should answer that in modern Church Congresses clergymen constantly stand up and declare the contents of the first chapters of Genesis not only to be mythical, but to have been borrowed from older Assyrian myths. Yet Paul attached so much weight to the story of the Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve as to make it the basis of his doctrine of Christ and of Christ's redemption of our race. Here, then, is myth no less in the New than in the Old Testament; and I am by no means the first to find it therein.

It will certainly be also argued that the evidence of the saints of the early Church ought to be accepted by us, because they derived their faith direct, or almost direct, from Jesus Christ. I should reply that, morally gifted as Jesus was above his contemporaries, he nevertheless shared with them the chief superstitions of his age. And I will add, what will be new to those who are not versed in the literature of the early Church, that the Christians of the first three or four centuries, though they renounced the religious uses and rites of the pagan societies among whom they were recruited, were far from renouncing pagan beliefs. They ceased to offer sacrifice to the old gods, but they continued to believe in them. They merely changed their names and titles, and called them wicked demons instead of gods. They continued to believe that Zeus and Apollo, Mars and Venus, Mithras and Cybele, were supernatural beings, gifted with superhuman faculties and knowledge; and the main argument adduced by Christian homilists against sacrificing to the ancient gods was ever this, that they were hungry ghouls clamouring to be fed with the blood and reek of victims slain in their honour. Stop the sacrifices, they argued, and the demons that masquerade as gods will be starved out and reduced to weakness and impotence. Intellectually, then, conversion to Christianity counted for

little, and involved but a slight advance; and yet we are asked to accept blindly "the faith delivered to the saints," as if the latter were infallible authorities. The present Dean of Canterbury has gravely proposed that the English Church should retain or revive, as a norm for modern Anglican belief and usage, whatever was catholic or universally received during the first six centuries; as if, along with much else that is alien to modern thought and manners, that would not include the practice of sacrificing animal victims, for this continued for centuries in Christian shrines, and still flourishes in the churches of Syria and the Caucasus.

I pass on to sacraments. I should be the last to deny that Christians derive from these a great deal of moral comfort and edification. None the less, when a priest undertakes by certain movements of his hands, by use of certain invocations, of certain names and forms of words, which must on no account be varied, to impart to bread and wine, to water, oil, salt, bells, or what not, certain occult qualities and values, which they had not before and could not otherwise gain, he moves in the realm of pure magic. That such rites are attended with exhortations to repentance from sin and purification of the will and character is indeed fortunate, and a matter upon which we may well congratulate those who assist; but it does not alter the character of such ceremonies, and there is no use in not recognising that the atmosphere of a church—where animistic belief is allowed to colour and shape the rite of communion, where the women come fasting and the officiating clergy wear white gloves in handling the elements, where a bit of bread is carried about in procession and exposed or elevated for the adoration of the faithful—is an atmosphere which, if we encountered it among the medicine-men of the Congo, we should not scruple to say was impregnated with a belief in fetish and taboo. If, then, we are too frank and candid to uphold one set of weights and

measures for our own religion, merely because it is ours, and another set for all other faiths, we must avoid circumlocutions, and boldly schedule the survivals or revivals which are to be witnessed in so many of our ritualistic churches, just where they really belong in the scheme of a comparative study of religions—namely, among fetish cults. Now the germs of such a sacramentalism are beyond doubt present in the New Testament, especially in Paul's Epistles.

It will be urged against me that in this book I seldom give references in support of my statements. I have not done so because, in a work intended to be brief and popular, it was impossible. To have done so efficiently would have required a score of volumes of the same size. Behind my book, however, lie twenty years of close study of the Christian literature and rituals of the first five centuries; and I doubt if anyone who has pursued the same course of reading for an equal length of time, and with an open mind, will condemn many of my conclusions.

Some of my readers may also find fault with me for not having discussed methodically and more at length the date and authorship of each Gospel. On the whole, the traditional dating seems to me the most satisfactory. Thus I should set the composition of Mark's Gospel, as we have it, about A.D. 70, of Luke's at any time between 80 and 95, of Matthew's about 100, of John's about 110. I see little difficulty in supposing that the John Mark mentioned in Paul's Epistles drew up some time after Peter's death (as Irenæus affirms) the Gospel named after him; and I am inclined to think that Luke, the companion of Paul, really wrote the third Gospel and the Acts, though there is, of course, much to recommend the counter-hypothesis. The Gospel of Matthew is recognised even by conservative critics to be the work of an unknown writer; and the old view that the Fourth Gospel was written by an apostle and eye-witness is quite exploded.

How far back the Aramaic traditions exploited by Mark may go, we do not know. In estimating their age, however, we must bear in mind that it was not antiquarian or historical interest that led to their being collected and redacted. Had it been so, the world must have waited much longer; for few or none were interested to know about the brief ministry of a Messiah who was expected to come again, and that shortly. The eyes of believers were, up to the end of the first century, fixed on the future and not on the past; and the aim of the second evangelist was rather to prove, as against the Jews who denied it, that Jesus was Messiah and Son of God, than to set on record for posterity the facts of his earthly career. It is, therefore, merely incidentally that he supplies us with an outline of that career. Primarily his work was a party pamphlet. The sayings of Jesus must have been written down at an earlier stage, because they were wanted as a manual of moral teaching. They were rules which every candidate for the kingdom of God, soon to be manifested, had to lay to heart and observe. I should not, therefore, be surprised to learn that the Aramaic text of these sayings was current within a short generation after the death of Jesus.

Of the Epistles of Paul, very few are now disputed by competent critics. I am disposed to accept as authentic all of them, not excepting the ones addressed to Timothy and Titus. For the latter form a group, of which it is difficult to accept one member and not the others. Now it is quite inconceivable that a forger of Pauline Epistles, wishing, if not to honour Paul, at least not to bring him into disrepute, would attribute to his pen the statements that we find in the Second Epistle to Timothy—namely, that all the believers in Asia had “turned away from” him, and that at the very first hearing of his appeal to the Cæsar in Rome “no one took my part, but all forsook me.” “May it not be laid to their account!” he adds, showing how reprehensible he felt their desertion of him to be. A



forger would not thus have gone out of his way to reveal to us that the entire Church of Rome belonged to the Judaizing party of James and John, and that their hatred of the Apostle of the Gentiles continued to be so intense that they abandoned him in his hour of need. I believe no one would ever have disputed the authenticity of this letter if a pagan had written it instead of Paul. If, then, it is authentic, the other two must be accepted also. A tendency set in very early among Christian writers to glose over and obliterate all traces of the quarrel between Paul and the pillars of the Church, which in the Epistle to the Galatians, probably the earliest of the letters of Paul, is so vividly described. In the Acts of the Apostles this tendency is very clearly exhibited, and any forger of Pauline letters would have been dominated by it. The Epistle to the Hebrews has never been seriously attributed to Paul, but it is clearly anterior to A.D. 70, and Tertullian was probably right in attributing it to Barnabas.

I have cited the Book of Revelation as a work of the last decade of the first century. This was the tradition of Irenæus, and the fact that a rescript of Domitian of the year 93 is cited in it verbatim confirms that tradition. This, however, does not preclude us from seeing in it a working up of an earlier document of about the year 68 or 69, to which date Renan assigned it.

It remains to acknowledge my indebtedness to the three greatest Christian scholars of our age—the Abbé Loisy, Prof. Adolf Harnack, and J. Wellhausen. I have here and there cited them by name; but those who are acquainted with their works will recognise their influence in almost every page of my book.

I fear most of my readers will find my first few chapters, in which I set forth the textual problem, stiff reading. If so, I need not be disappointed; for in the field of criticism no results can be worth much which do not involve hard study. Nothing is so contemptible as the facile orthodoxy

which would fain raise no questions, and the exponents of which are accustomed to plead that it is so much simpler to take every statement in the Bible at its face value.

Such exhortations are in vain in the present day, when the dogmatic repose of earlier generations has been widely and ruthlessly disturbed. It cannot be restored. We must face the problems of our age, and adopt the solutions which an enlightened criticism provides. Those who decline to do so, and try to maintain in their minds what has aptly been called a water-tight compartment for their religious convictions, are in danger of ruining themselves as well as their fellows. For a man's character is all of a piece, and we cannot burke awkward questions, thrust our heads into the sand, and practise sophistry and make-believe in so intimate a concern as religious belief, without sooner or later forfeiting all round those qualities of manliness, honesty, and painstaking thoroughness which alone can enable Englishmen in these days of keen competition to hold their own.

F. C. C.

*January 31st, 1909.*

## CHAPTER I.

### PAUL

THE late Master of Balliol, Benjamin Jowett, once wrote to a lady who sought his opinion, that the Gospels are fragments of unknown age, full of incredible things; and few will to-day maintain the narratives, which survived among the Christians, of the life of the founder, Jesus of Nazareth, to be as full, accurate, and authentic as the supposed importance of their subject-matter demands. Of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and many other teachers of antiquity, not to mention great military and political leaders, we can out of the records bequeathed to us construct lifelike pictures, can trace with certainty the gradual development of their minds and characters, and exhibit in detail their careers. Often we have their very letters and writings; and coins and sculptures preserve to us the lineaments of their countenances. Yet of Jesus, whose birth is supposed to have opened a new era, not only for this earth, but for the entire universe, we know all too little; and we have not enough material to write a life of him, in the sense in which we write lives of Julius Cæsar, of Cicero, of Augustus, and of many others who were nearly his contemporaries.

But the Gospels are not the earliest Christian documents which we possess; for the earliest of them—that of Mark—is nearly a generation later than the Epistles of Paul, of which several were written within

a generation of Jesus's death. And this is not all. Paul was in personal relations—often strained, it is true, yet none the less actual—with Peter and John, the immediate disciples of Jesus, and with James, his brother, and first president of the Church of Jerusalem. Anxious to ascertain the facts of Jesus's life, it is to these Epistles that we naturally turn. We do so in vain! Paul had unique opportunities of informing himself about the earthly career of Jesus, of handing on this information to his converts; but of set purpose he declined to do anything of the sort. "*Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more,*"<sup>1</sup> he writes to his flock at Corinth—words which imply that he had probably seen Jesus, and, if not that much, that he anyhow was acquainted with the facts of his life through others who knew him personally. Yet he deprecates such knowledge. If he ever saw Jesus in the flesh, he would fain forget that he did so, and have others forget it also. He attaches no importance to the fact, nor desires others to do so. On one event alone in Jesus's life he lays stress—namely, on his crucifixion. "*The Jews,*" he writes to the same converts, "*ask for signs*"—that is to say, for miracles worked before their eyes; "*the Greeks seek after wisdom*"—that is to say, after a system of ethical philosophy and a rational synthesis of reality. Jesus the Messiah, or Christ, so he hints, could supply neither of these needs. "*We,*" he continues, "*preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling-block, and unto Gentiles foolishness.*"<sup>2</sup> In the real Jesus, in the humble teacher of men, the healer of their souls and bodies, Paul was

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 16.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. i. 23.

not interested. And yet this enthusiast's letters are not wholly barren, but reveal, though quite incidentally, the following facts about Jesus. We learn from them that he was *born of woman*—that is to say, like any other human being; that he was *born of the seed of David*, and was *under the law*—in other words, that he was an orthodox Jew; that he shared with us all the weakness and infirmities of the flesh; that he was *obedient unto death*, and died on the cross suffering as ordinary men suffer and die.

But this earthly life of Jesus, beginning with birth and ending with crucifixion, was, according to Paul, a mere incident in a larger divine life and existence. And at this point it is important to notice that Paul was pre-eminently a man of visions and dreams, prizing what in moments of ecstasy he beheld more highly than waking realities. The crucified Jesus, who had been raised from the dead, not in the corruptible flesh, but with such a spiritual and incorruptible body as, according to Paul, could alone inherit incorruption, had been seen after death by a multitude of his followers, and last of all had appeared and spoken to himself during his journey to Damascus. He even relates how, on this or perhaps some other occasion, he was *caught up into the third heaven, whether in the body or out of the body he knew not*.<sup>1</sup> Thus "*caught up into paradise*," he had "*heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter*." Lest he should *be exalted overmuch by the exceeding greatness of these revelations*, there had been given to him *a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him*. Of this he had prayed to be delivered; but the Lord

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 1 foll.

had appeared to him and said, *My grace is sufficient for thee.*<sup>1</sup> The affliction in question was undoubtedly the epilepsy which often attends such temperaments.

From such incidents as the above we can understand the character of Paul's gospel. He was, like many a later saint, of a temperament naturally ecstatic, and perpetually saw Christ and conversed with him in visions; his words and actions, even his missionary movements, as he is careful to inform us, were inspired and directed not by reflection but "by revelation."

What was the previous history of this enthusiast? He was, so he tells us, a Jew of the Jews, and a Pharisee as well. As such he had, during his early manhood, sought to win the approval of a jealous God by meticulous observance of the taboos and prescriptions of the Mosaic law. At Tarsus, his native place, he learned to talk and write Greek, without, however, forfeiting his own Aramaic dialect, as did most of the Jews when once they were Grecised. In that part of Asia an enormous number of pagans, without adopting all the practices of Judaism, had yet assimilated Jewish monotheism, and his knowledge of this outer fringe of his religion taught Paul later on to remit for his converts the heavy yoke of the Jewish law.

After the death of Jesus, Paul, ever-zealous, whatever party he espoused, threw himself into the persecution of the followers of the new Messiah; yet not for long. Struck with the fortitude with which his victims met their death, he began to entertain misgivings of the righteousness of his cause. Christian Inquisitors have easily stifled such misgivings, if they

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 9.

ever felt them. But Paul was cast in another mould; his scruples, once excited, gathered force in his sensitive conscience, and ripened at last into a vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus, when he heard the voice of the risen Messiah calling to him from heaven: "*Saul, Saul, why kickest thou against the pricks?*" The pricks were those of his own conscience. It is untrue to say that from this crisis Paul emerged a different man, inspired with new ideals. He had already formed or imbibed from others the ideal of a universalist Messiah, perhaps even of a suffering saviour of humanity. This scheme lay ready in his mind; and he fitted it, not without some violence, on to Jesus of Nazareth, whose own teaching and example had so strongly impressed his personal followers. Their faith in their master impressed Paul in turn, and led him, as it were, to appropriate Jesus *nolens volens* as his own, and to superimpose on him all the transcendental rôle and cosmic importance which in previous training he had learned to assign to the expected Messiah. Thus conversion signified for Paul not an acceptance of new principles, but only a new application of old ones.

Let us illustrate this point. There is some uncertainty about the teaching of Jesus; but this much is clear, that he had no message except for his own countrymen, nor ever dreamed of any but Jews sharing in the heavenly kingdom whose near approach he proclaimed. He expressly forbade his disciples to missionise the heathen, or even the Samaritans, who yet in the Pentateuch revered the same sacred books as himself, and were in reality the most genuine Jews of that age. Paul, however, had, from early training, learned to conceive of the coming Messiah or Christ as a heavenly being, the power and wisdom of God,

second only to the divine father, an uncorrupted image of God, an ideal type of humanity, such as was Adam before he clutched at equality with God and fell. The immediate followers of Jesus entertained no such lofty conception of the Messiah. He was to them a man sent from God, who had met with a cruel fate, but was still alive and was to appear again within their generation and restore the kingdom of David. But to Paul he was an ideal and eternal being, who had condescended to quit the right hand of God and to be found on earth in the likeness of sinful flesh, and, as the man Jesus, to die on the cross the death of a malefactor, in order that he might, as a perfect victim, conciliate the wrath of an angry God, and mediate the salvation, not of Jews alone, but of all mankind.

Thus Paul's Christ is an *a priori* construction of his own, owing to the historical man of Nazareth and to those who knew that man and cherished his memory little except the bare name of Jesus. Paul's Jesus is an ideal superhuman Saviour, destined, from the beginning of the world, to play an ecumenic rôle. Raised by the spirit of God from the dead, the saviour has left behind in the grave, together with the flesh now given over to corruption, all his Jewish exclusiveness, all his human traits, even his sex.<sup>1</sup> "*Ye are all,*" writes Paul to the Galatians, "*sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus.....There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female : for ye all are one in Christ Jesus.*" From such a standpoint there could obviously be no reason why Gentiles converted to Messianic Judaism

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iii. 26 foll.



should accept the Jewish law and undergo circumcision, why they should keep sabbaths, or observe the many ritual taboos which hedged in the dinner-table of the Jews and prevented their eating in the company of Gentiles. It was just here that Paul could not fail to come into conflict with Peter and James and John, and other personal followers of Jesus. The latter had indeed known how to interpret in a rational manner the rule of the sabbath, but had never dreamed of repealing it, any more than of repudiating circumcision or the Jewish sacrificial system. His followers, accordingly, could but resent Paul's denial that the law was binding for his converts, his allowing them to participate in the meals of Gentiles, his contempt for taboos in general. They denounced the short cut to salvation which he had invented for Gentiles, and insisted that there was no way into the impending messianic kingdom except through the very works and observance of the law which Paul reckoned unnecessary. The Messiah, they argued, was a Messiah of the Jews alone, not of the Gentiles, for whom the divine promises were never made, and between whom and Jehovah no covenant ever existed. Therefore a Gentile who desired to enter the kingdom must enter it through the narrow gate of Judaism. They asked what right had Paul to cloak his revolt against the law with the name of Jesus, who had, with his own lips, declared that he came not to abolish the law, but to fulfil it. By what right, they asked, did Paul attribute his own dreams and fancies to a Christ whom he had not known, and from whom he had never received any apostolic commission? They scoffed at his revelations, and, in the heat of the

conflict, even went so far as to identify him with the anti-Christ.

The only answer Paul could make was to sneer at the exclusive pretensions of the twelve apostles, and to fall back on his own visions. He had, he argued, anyhow *seen* Christ—namely, the risen Christ—and had been commissioned by him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. It was not Paul that spoke and acted, but the spirit of Christ dwelling within him, and constituting him its vehicle and mouthpiece. Here was a quarrel too deep to be healed until the generation of Palestinian Christians who had really known Jesus should pass away. For the present, thanks to Paul's tact, a truce was patched up, by the terms of which his Gentile converts were to be recognised as brethren if they would eat none but *kosha* meat, and subscribe liberally for the sustenance of the brethren in Jerusalem, who seem to have been much impoverished either by persecution or by their attempts to live communistically, or by both.

Only in Palestine could the Jews of that age practise the law with any strictness ; in the Greek and Latin cities all round the Mediterranean they could not maintain it even among themselves, much less among their converts. Hence what has been termed Judaising Christianity—that is, the Christianity which insisted on circumcision, sabbaths, dietary taboos, and other rules of the Mosaic law—soon perished and was lost to view except within the narrow limits of Palestine. Even there it hardly survived the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The terms of the truce were thus to some extent imposed by hard facts on Peter and John and James.

It has been necessary to dwell so long on an early quarrel which nearly strangled the new religion in its

cradle, because Paul's silence about the historic Jesus is otherwise unintelligible. He was well aware that the horizon of Jesus, like that of any other Galilean prophet of that age, was bounded by an exclusive regard for Judaism and Jewish nationality; that his sympathies had not overstepped these limits; that he had forbidden to his disciples the paths of the Gentiles and the cities of Samaritans; and, knowing as much as he did, he could hardly do otherwise than disparage, both for himself and his flock, all knowledge of Christ "*after the flesh.*" Instead of pondering the real facts of Jesus's life and ministry, he fixes his own gaze and that of his converts on the pattern laid up in heaven. This is why we seek in vain in Paul's letters for details of Jesus's earthly career. It did not interest him; nay, more, it was an awkward and unpleasant topic, which lay too near the accusations from which he had incessantly to defend himself. Quite incidentally, as we have seen, he records, or rather enables us to infer, a few general facts about the life of Jesus; but in general he abstains from mentioning it, and is absorbed in his own hallucinations and transcendental fancies—grandiose, it is true, but sorely baffling our modern curiosity.

And it is not merely the outward events and vicissitudes of Jesus's life, as even unsympathetic Jews must have witnessed them, that failed to touch and interest Paul; he is equally silent about the moral and religious teaching of the Master, and shows no acquaintance with the Sermon on the Mount or with the parables. And this is all the stranger because there are several fairly well-authenticated sayings of Jesus which would have stood him in good stead when he was combating the Judaising apostles.

For example, on one occasion at Antioch, Paul found himself "*resisting Peter to the face.*" The latter had been sitting down at table with Gentile converts, regardless of Mosaic commensal taboos. Before long there arrived spies from Jerusalem sent by James, the brother of Jesus, "*false brethren*"—so Paul calls them—"privily brought in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus." "*And when they came,*" continues Paul, "*Peter [or Cephas] drew back and separated himself, fearing them that were of the circumcision.*" Here, if anywhere, one would expect Paul to appeal to the saying: "*Not that which entereth the mouth defileth the man; but that which proceedeth out of the mouth, this defileth the man.....the things which proceed out of the mouth come forth out of the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, railings; these are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands defileth not the man.*"

Yet, often as Paul recurs in his Epistles to this question of food taboos, he never alleges in defence of the freedom which he claimed in Christ the actual teaching of the latter. The nearest approach is in the Letter to the Romans, xiv. 14: "*I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean of itself.*" But no one familiar with the Pauline style will interpret this as an appeal to special precepts uttered by Jesus and transmitted to Paul by those who listened thereto. On the contrary, in the particular context (Galatians ii.) where he relates this quarrel with Peter and James, he is careful to emphasise the complete independence of his gospel from theirs. His words are these: "*After the space*

*of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem.....by revelation; and I laid before them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles.....But from those who were reputed to be somewhat (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me; God accepteth not man's person)—they, I say, who were of repute, imparted nothing to me..... And when they perceived the grace that was given unto me, James and Cephas [i.e., Peter] and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision; only they would that we should remember the poor; which very thing I was also zealous to do."*

The situation is clear. The real companions of Jesus, James and Peter and John, obedient to their Master's tradition, obstinately refuse themselves to preach the gospel to uncircumcised Gentiles. Paul insists on doing so, and alleges in justification his own special revelations of Jesus. They on their side consent to allow him to go his way, and to disseminate outside the Jewish world the gospel which was his, yet not theirs nor their Master's, on one condition, that he and his converts send plenty of money to support the saints of Jerusalem. The "pillars" of the Church there are clearly anxious to be rid of Paul, and with truly Jewish practicality they name their terms. They will leave him alone with his Gentiles, but he must not forget the backsheesh. Nor did Paul forget it, for in his second Letter to the Corinthians two entire chapters are given up to the topic. In these he employs every art of rhetoric, flattery, and edification, in order to induce his converts to subscribe, and that handsomely. His anxiety about the matter is ever undisguised, and we discern clearly

that in a heavy subsidy, oft repeated, lay his only hope of being able to keep on any sort of terms with the saints of Jerusalem.

Paul elaborated his gospel in the silence and solitude of Arabia. He declined from the very first moment of his conversion to resort to the brethren of Jerusalem and Galilee, in order to learn from their lips what had been their Master's life and teaching. Thus he writes to the Galatians (i. 11): "*For I make known to you, brethren, as touching the gospel which has been preached by me, that it is not after man.*"

This means that he had no human teacher, nor depended on any humanly transmitted reports of who Jesus was and what he taught. So he continues: "*For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, except by way of revelation on the part of Jesus Christ.*"

This indicates that Paul got his gospel through visions and private revelations of his own. It had nothing to do with what the companions and apostles of Jesus remembered of their Master's life and conversations. In the immediate sequel he reminds the Galatians of how he had begun life as an observing Jew, and of how he persecuted the Christians: "*For ye have heard of my manner of life in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God, and made havoc of it; and I advanced in the Jews' religion beyond many of mine own age among my countrymen, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.*"

And then once more he emphasises the fact that his teaching had nothing in common, no connection, with the teaching of the historical Jesus as reported by his direct disciples: "*But when it was the good*

*pleasure of God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I should preach him among the Gentiles ; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood ; neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were Apostles before me ; but I went away into Arabia ; and again I returned unto Damascus."*

The revelation, then, with which he was graced was this, that he was to go and preach the Son of God among the Gentiles—preach, that is to say, not the historical Jesus, but *a priori* messianic conceptions of his own. Had he gone up to Jerusalem and condescended to ascertain from the *flesh and blood* companions of Jesus what manner of man the latter had really been, and what he had taught, he would have learned at the outset that Jesus had reserved the messianic kingdom for conforming Jews alone, and peremptorily forbidden the inclusion of uncircumcised Gentiles, whose idolatry he never once denounced, simply because they and their affairs lay so entirely outside of and beyond his horizon. Paul was aware that his initial revelation conflicted with the traditions of the earthly Jesus, and for that reason avoided Jerusalem and the apostles that were before him. We need not regret that his innate idealism launched him in the way of the larger and more liberal teaching. He had a soul above taboos, and so really had Jesus, who, if he had been a Jew of the Dispersion, and his horizon not confined to Galilee, might equally have cast off the slough of Jewish ceremonialism, and have opened his messianic kingdom to all who had become monotheists.

After three years thus given up to his own lucubrations, Paul did repair to Jerusalem in order to make

the acquaintance of Cephas (Peter), with whom he stayed for the brief space of fifteen days. Paul was, on this occasion, in the midst of those who had followed Jesus, listened to his teaching, and received from him a commission to preach. Yet he makes no secret of how little he felt himself to be in sympathy with them. He tells us that he mixed with them, during that fortnight, as little as possible. "*But other of the apostles,*"<sup>1</sup> he writes, "*saw I none, but only James, the Lord's brother.*" Thus he avoided even the solemn meetings of the brethren for *the breaking of bread and for the prayers* (Acts ii. 42).

And lest such indifference should seem impossible to his converts, he adds: "*Now touching the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.*" We see how morbidly afraid he was lest his converts in Galatia should suppose that he owed any part of his gospel to men of flesh and blood instead of to direct revelation. And he drives the point home by relating that at this time, three years after his conversion, he "*was still unknown by face [i.e., personally] unto the churches of Judæa which were in Christ; but they only heard say, He that once persecuted us now preacheth the faith of which he once made havoc; and they glorified God in me.*" It is clear from the above that Paul rather shunned them than they him. What reason could he have for doing so except this, that he knew them to be out of sympathy with him on vital points?

Fourteen fresh years seem to have elapsed before Paul, according to the passage already quoted, again went up to Jerusalem, always "*by revelation*"; and

<sup>1</sup> Gal. i. 19.



in order "*to lay before*" the leaders of the Jerusalem fellowship "*the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles.*" This gospel he had evolved out of his own inner consciousness, so we are not surprised to learn from the next verse that he only laid it "*privately before them who were of repute.*" It was clearly so remote from the gospel with which the mass of believers were familiar in the very home and diocese of Christ himself that it was expedient not to communicate it to them. We infer that, if he had broached it to them, there would have been such a general outcry against him as would have deprived him of the "*liberty in Jesus Christ*" which he and his converts enjoyed; and he "*would be running*" in the future and "*have run*" in the past "*in vain.*" He relates with much complacency how, in the course of this second visit to Jerusalem, he found nothing to learn even from those "*who were reputed to be pillars of the church.*" They "*imparted nothing*" to him. After so many years it was rather late to try. And how delightfully ironical is Paul at the expense of the older apostles and kinsmen of Jesus! "*Whatsoever,*" he adds, "*they were matters not to me ; God accepteth not man's person.*"

But if Paul succeeded when in Jerusalem in withholding the character of his gospel from the mass of the believers there, he could not prevent Palestinian missionaries from penetrating into Galatia and other districts which he claimed for his own, and there announcing another gospel, more authentic—let us not scruple to own it—than that which he had evolved out of his own ecstatic consciousness, though less attractive to Gentiles, who naturally preferred to believe that the Jesus in whose name Paul appealed to them was just a monotheistic teacher with a special

message for Gentiles. We know exactly what was Paul's attitude to the more genuine exponents of Christian tradition. He has himself set it on record in the same Epistle to the Galatians, ch. i. 6 foll.: "*I marvel that ye are so quickly shifting from him [God or Paul] that called you, by the grace of Christ, unto a different gospel; which is not another, only there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel contrary to that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema [i.e., cursed]. As we have said before, so say I now again, if any man preacheth unto you any gospel other than that which ye received [i.e., from Paul], let him be anathema.*"

From such words as these we can see how sure Paul felt of his own revelations, and how remote it was from his purpose to learn from those who had known Jesus personally. He had his own ideas of what part a Messiah must play in heaven and on earth, and he was not going to abandon them for anyone. Accordingly, he writes triumphantly of the results of his visit after fourteen years to Jerusalem as follows: "*Did we give way so as to submit [to the false brethren privily brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty]? No, not for one hour.*"

Was there, then, no common position and ground, nothing in which Paul could agree with the older disciples? There was indeed such a position; but, characteristically enough, it is no episode or fact belonging to the earthly life and career of Jesus, nothing the cognisance of which can be described as a knowledge of Christ *after the flesh*. He shared with them the belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead and promoted to a first throne in heaven, whence

he would in a brief space return on the clouds of heaven to earth, to judge all men.

In the first Letter to the Corinthians (ch. xv.) Paul enumerates the appearances of the risen Jesus thus :  
*"Now I make known unto you, brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received. ....For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas; then to the twelve; then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep; then he appeared to James; then to all the apostles; and last of all, as unto one born out of due time, he appeared to me also."*

Such testimony as the above stands or falls with a number of other equally well authenticated ghost-stories. That the appearances recorded by Paul were subjective, in the sense that Jesus only appeared to those who already believed in him, is declared to have been the case in the Acts of the Apostles. It is impossible to collate apparitions, and we know not in what guise Jesus appeared to Paul, who had never enjoyed his personal acquaintance, and in whose case, therefore, were absent those psychological materials and conditions of an apparition which were amply present in the case of the others whom he enumerates. However, these considerations are alien to our present purpose, which is to point out how important a part these visions of Christ played in the development of Paul's Christology. It was only too easy to clothe a phantasm with sublimest attributes, to promote it to the dignity of *Power and Wisdom of God*. That the

other apostles already believed at this stage that Jesus *died for our sins* is not likely, for, in the earliest strata of evangelic tradition, we have no trace of such an idea. They may have believed Jesus to be the Messiah, who was to come again; but it would appear from a passage in Paul's Epistle to the Romans (ii. 16) as if his future rôle of judge of the quick and the dead was not yet fixed in their minds.<sup>1</sup> However this may have been, the messianic rôle was a purely human one, which Mohammed's personal followers might equally have assigned to him. On the other hand, the celestial figure which Paul beheld in his dreams, and which spoke to him in the third heaven, was much more than a Messiah of the Jews. It is not too much to say that his apparitions formed the first step in the deification of Jesus, and that they are the basis and beginning of all the transcendental speculations about him which ultimately crystallised into the dogmas and creeds of the Church.

One point more. Paul knew that Jesus died a Jew, sharing the ordinary prejudices of Jews, and excluding uncircumcised Gentiles from the blessings of that future kingdom which he went to prepare in heaven. He believed, however, that in being raised by the spirit from the dead he was, in some mysterious manner, promoted to be the saviour of all mankind,

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ii. 14-16: "For when Gentiles which have not a law do by nature the things of the law, these, having no law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, *according to my gospel*, by Jesus Christ." We may infer that it was only according to Paul's gospel that Jesus Christ was to act as judge of all men, Gentiles as well as Jews. Probably the point is that the genuine apostles regarded Jesus as the destined judge of Jews alone—an idea attested by Matt. xix. 28.

and became a universalist teacher, bearer of a name of power before which all angels and demons, both in heaven and hell, must prostrate themselves. He died a human being, he was raised a divine life-giving and recreative spirit. The real disciples of Jesus enjoyed apparitions enough of him after death, but we do not hear that they invested the figure they saw with the majestic *rôle* and cosmic attributes of the Pauline vision. It is certain they did not, and could not do so; for they had known him in the flesh, and were trammelled by what Paul stigmatised as carnal memories. Had Paul also so known him, his visions could not so lightly have soared into the empyrean. His Christ would have remained a mere human Messiah of the Jews. But in that case Christianity would have fallen stillborn on the world, and have vanished as it began—an obscure sect of messianically-minded Galileans.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE GOSPELS COMPILATIONS

THE New Testament of the Christians contains four Gospels, named respectively *according to* Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,<sup>1</sup> of which the first three as much agree with one another in style and contents as they differ from the fourth. They are party documents, so far as their manifest aim is to show that Jesus was, what the majority of Jews denied him to be, the Messiah ; nevertheless they are, on the whole, transparently sincere documents embodying naïve traditions, mostly collected from the mouths of the people of the districts about which he had wandered and taught, of his wonder-workings, teaching, and death. The fourth Gospel, as we have remarked, contrasts with these three in style and attitude ; it inverts the sequence of the chief events of Jesus's ministry as narrated in them, transforms his teaching beyond all recognition, turns him into the Logos or Divine Reason, and in other respects shows itself to be a religious romance embodying speculations about him, later much than Paul, but of which Paul's ecstatic thinking was the *fons et origo*. This fourth Gospel enshrines, no doubt, many noble thoughts, but is, on the whole, frigid, insincere, and full of exaggerations. We may safely neglect it in any attempt to get back to the earliest traditions of Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> I refer to these in the sequel as Mt, Mc, Lc, Jo.

If the reader will take a red pencil and underline in the Gospels of Mt and Lc all the phrases, sentences, and entire narratives which are in verbal agreement with Mc, he will find very little left of the latter which is not in them; so that, if we had not Mc's gospel preserved to us, we could yet reconstruct nearly the whole of it out of the agreements of the other two. A single example will illustrate this. Let us take Mc ii. 13-17 and confront it with Mt ix. 9-13 on one side and Lc v. 27-32 on the other, italicising in them every word in which they agree with Mc:—

LUKE.	MARK.	MATTHEW.
27. <i>And after this he went forth</i>	13. And he went forth again unto the sea, and all the people came to him, and he was teaching them.	9. And Jesus, <i>as he passed along thence,</i>
and he beheld a <i>customs</i> officer, by name <i>Leveis</i> , sitting at the <i>customs</i> house, and said to him, <i>Follow me.</i>	14. And as he passed along he saw <i>Leveis</i> , the son of <i>Alphæus</i> , sitting at the <i>custom-house</i> , and says to him, <i>Follow me.</i> And he arose and followed him.	saw a man sitting at the <i>customs</i> house, called <i>Matthew</i> , and says to him,
28. <i>And having left everything, he arose and followed him.</i>	15. And it happens that he lies down to eat in his house, and numerous <i>customs</i> officers and sinners lay down with Jesus and with his disciples; for they were numerous and were following him, (16) and scribes of the Pharisees. And, seeing that he ate with <i>customs</i> officers and sinners, they said to his disciples, that with the <i>customs</i> officers and sinners he does	<i>Follow me.</i> And he arose and followed him.
29. And <i>Leveis</i> made a great entertainment for him in his house. And there was a crowd numerous of <i>customs</i> officers and others who were with them lying down to eat.	eat and drink.	10. And it happened, as he was lying down to eat in the house, why lo, numerous <i>customs</i> officers and sinners came and lay down to eat with Jesus and his disciples.
30. And the <i>Pharisees</i> and their scribes grumbled unto his disciples, saying, Wherefore with the <i>customs</i> officers and sinners do ye eat and drink?		11. And the <i>Pharisees</i> seeing said to his disciples, Why with the <i>customs</i> officers and sinners eateth your teacher?
31. And Jesus answered, and spake		

to them, *They have not need that are healthy of a physician, but they that are badly.*

32. *I have not come to call the just, but sinners, to repentance.*

17. And Jesus, having heard, says to them, *They have not need who are strong of a physician, but they that are badly. I came not to call the just, but sinners.*

12. But he, *having heard, said, They have not need who are strong of a physician, but they who are badly.*

13. But go ye on your way and learn what this means ; I will have mercy and not sacrifice. For *I came not to call the just, but sinners.*

The original texts here translated are, of course, Greek ; but the point to be apprehended can be made clear in a literal translation like the above. It is this, that Mt and Lc have merely appropriated the narrative of Mc, altering it and retouching it here and there, as they liked. And there is nothing in all these alterations to show that Mt knew of Lc's text, or *vice versâ*. We infer that they worked independently of each other.

In the present age there is a prejudice against an author who takes another's book, copies it out, and publishes it as his own. We call him a plagiarist, and there is no reviewer but would ridicule him as a literary thief. But in earlier ages, when there was no printing-press, and authors did not expect to make money by their works, there was no such prejudice. A man wrote a book for a small circle of friends, perhaps even for his own private edification. It passed in hand-written copies from reader to reader, and anyone who thought he could improve on what thus fell into his hands, scrupled not to recast and even to re-write. Thus books were made out of books ; and authors, if they did not appropriate the works of others entire, yet never hesitated to borrow incidents, episodes, descriptions of men's appearance and character, and to weave these loans into their own